

MY IMAGINARY WORLD:
AN ANALYSIS OF STYLES IN POLISH ANIMATION IN TERMS OF
INVENTION AND EXPERIMENTATION.

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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May 2016

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ABSTRACT

MY IMAGINARY WORLD: AN ANALYSIS OF STYLES IN POLISH ANIMATION IN TERMS OF INVENTION AND EXPERIMENTATION

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M.F.A., in Media and Design

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This thesis accompanies my short animation *My Imaginary World*. The paper explores experimentation with animation. The thesis looks at experimental animation; it's meaning and explores whether there is a specific way of carrying out an experiment with animation. It presents various experimental artist from the Polish school of animation, analyzes their working methods and describes how they have influenced the outcome of this project. Lastly a detailed description of the visual project, its functions and displayed are detailed. Creating an animation for the first time, this thesis has helped me take the next step in my artistic journey, presenting a broader understanding of the new technology that I have at hand as an artist.

Keywords: Animation, Experimentation, Illustration, Storytelling.

ÖZET

HAYAL DÜNYAM: POLONYA’NIN DENEYSEL ANIMASYONUNUN YARATICILIĞININ ANALIZI

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Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Tasarım

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Mayıs 2016

Bu tez, *Hayal Dünyam* başlıklı yönettiğim deneysel animasyonu desteklemektedir. Proje bu durumda deneyin ne demek olduğunu araştırıyor ve çeşitli Polonyalı deneysel animatörlerin işlerini tanıtır, kullandıkları yöntemlerinin analizini yapıyor. Son olarak, projenin oluşumunu ve nasıl geliştiğini, hangi teorileri desteklediğini açıklıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Animasyon, Deney, Resim, Hikaye

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis project is to experiment in searching for my own style of animation influenced by the Polish school of experimental animation (the 60 - 80s: Golden Age of Polish Animation) and through the use of Adobe After Effects (in regards to Lev Manovich's publication *The Velvet Revolution*) as a software to explore the possibility of movement in my illustrations, asking myself if this could be the next step in my creative process as an artist.

The outcome of this project is to create an animation using my personal collection of illustrations and visual materials that I have created thus far, generating a visual dictionary for my working process. Then, by selecting images from this visual archive, I will be cutting them up and putting them back together as a form of patchwork collage. Lastly, using Adobe After Effects I will begin experimenting in adding movement to these visuals in order to create my own imaginary world.

It is important to emphasize that this method of working that I have chosen to carry out is not going to generate an experimental animation but rather that I will be experimenting with animation and will bring in different aspects of the structure of experimental animation into my own work. The storytelling approaches that I will be using in my animation and certain aesthetic inspirations will come from Polish experimental animation. Starting with an overview of animation in Poland between the 1960s – 1980s, my research will introduce different approaches to animation (orthodox, developmental and experimental animation) and go on to specific investigations of the structure and devices of experimental animation. Case studies of specific artists: Jan Lenica, Walerian Borowczyk, Julian Józef Antonisz, Mirosław Kijowicz and Józef Robakowski, will be conducted to look at forms of expression through; collage and cut-out animation, nonconventional approaches to composition, escaping the box and musical dynamicity.

An important question theoretically underlying this thesis is: what does it mean to experiment. In attempts to discuss this, I will support the idea that to experiment is to explore the unknown in search of something new and to aid imagination through eliminating contrived solutions. Ideas in this query will be supported by Krasner's concepts in his 2004 book *Motion Graphic Design & Fine Art Animation: Principles and Practice* and P. Wells' 1998 book *Understanding Animation*. I will also determine if the word *experiment* has any connotations that stand in the way of a full understanding of the process in the creative spectrum and question if there is a right way of conducting an animation experiment.

As a contemporary artist I find it important to build bridges between tradition and our contemporary time. An interdependent merging of the two in order to balance innovation with what already exists and is available. It is important to point out that, Polish animation never found its deserving public, therefore, recent attempts have been made to make a portion of the rich body of work by Polish animators available to a broader public. Therefore as an artist I want to bring Polish animation into the spotlight (and integrate the tradition into my personal style).

In explaining why I have chosen experimental animation for the basis of my project I'd like to begin with Maureen Furniss (2012:8) the president of the society for animation, in the introduction to her book *Animation – Art and Industry* she reminds us that,

Bringing objects to life – has fascinated humankind since its earliest days. Throughout the years, animated movement has been employed in religious, scientific, educational, and entertainment contexts to explain everything from the spirit world to the mechanics of mundane objects. Some of the most recognizable icons of modern culture have emerged from animated productions, and some of our greatest works of art have been created using multiple frames that have brought still images to life.

With my own fascination to add movement to my imaginary world – the most important part of me as an artist, I turn to a neglected strand of fine art practice; experimental animation. Hard to categorize because of its vastness in styles, materials and forms of expression, *experimental* is a “broad notion that can be applied to many genres of animated film that break with formal and narrative conventions” (Gizycki, 2014). It is inimitable in the sense that every animation “reflects the unique vision and skills of a single artist, in concept and form, in style and substance” (Furniss,

2012:18) resonating as a vital force in visual communication and fine art. As Krasner suggests in his book *Motion Graphic Design & Fine Art Animation*, animation is a powerful tool in voicing ideas and has “enhanced the landscape of thinking among graphic designers and artists” (Krasner, 2004:xiii). Moreover, Paul Wells in his book *Understanding Animation*, supports the re-emergence of experimental animation by stating that “it seems necessary to reclaim, re-introduce and re-validate animation made with other materials, with different creative impulses and aesthetic interests, outside the context of mass production,” (Wells, 1992:35).

Compared to the animators of the 60s, today’s contemporary artists have much less limitations which has resulted in vast amounts of genres but lack of unity. With the technological revolution and introduction of 3D graphics computer animations have been accepted as a form of expressive medium, they can replicate naturalistic movements frequently better than traditional handmade work. However, even though 3D animation has become the leading practice in commercial animation it is not a perfect medium and have sparked the return of the hand-made movement. Many artist combine computer techniques with painting and graphics, and others even totally refuse using technology and use the most basic tools in their artworks. Therefore, Pikkov (2010:18) suggests that,

Animation has maintained its basic nature, despite technological progress and the appearance of new technical solutions throughout the optical, electronic and digital eras – it is still all about presenting immobile objects in a manner that induces the illusion of motion in viewers’ minds.

Accepting this common desire for mobility in art, I want to break the aesthetic barriers and definitions, as well as alter the specific methods of working in those mediums to achieve DIY film magic and generate unconscious forms of expression to the external stimuli in my environment. There exist many “expressive, technical and commercial possibilities and advantages outside its realm” (Galgas, 2004) and as an artist I propose to carry out a search for this possibilities and promote them through my animation.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Redefining Animation

Stemming from Latin, “*anima* translates as ‘the breath of life’, ‘vital principle’ or ‘soul’” (Pikkov, 2010:15). Ülo Pikkov in his book *Animasophy* states that animation “essentially involves the presentation of still images in a manner that creates an illusion of motion in viewer’s minds” (Pikkov, 2010:14). He then defends the term ‘illusion’ by signifying that when viewing an animation “the audience is actually presented with still images of the puppet, which, when presented in a certain manner, lead to an illusion of motion” (Pikkov, 2010:14). He concludes by informing that the human eye with its ability to retain an after-image for a fraction of a second allows for a perception of motion when the animator creates and lines up still pictures.

This general definition of animation has

Proven insufficient in the description of other kinds of animation, particularly the kinds of animation that have been facilitated by new

technologies, chiefly those images which are computer generated or subject to other kinds of pictorial manipulation (Wells, 1998:10).

In effect, Norman McClaren's view verifies this more accurately when he says that animation is rather the art of movement that is drawn and not drawing movement as "what happens between each frame is more important than what happens in each frame" (Solomon, 1987:11) essentially suggesting that the movement between the frames is the core of animation. To further assist and progress this point animators of the Zagreb School press on the importance of the aesthetics and the philosophy of the craft by suggesting that animation means "to give life and soul to a design, not through the copying but through the transformation of reality" (Holloway, 1972:9). Therefore, in the case of this thesis project, by creating an animation and giving life to my paintings, I want to reveal something in the process which previously could not be achieved; redefine the everyday creating magic effects.

2.2: The History of Polish Animation

The history of the vanguard Polish cinema began as early as in 1930 with various artists developing "their unique film styles and poetics" (Kluszczyński, 1992:1). Following that, during the unfolding of stalinization in the postwar People's Republic of Poland, the country was imposed to reformulate both socially and politically between the years 1949 – 1956. Socialist realism (referred to as "sorealizm" in Polish) was a political, social, and esthetic doctrine dictated by the pro-Soviet communist government that came to power. With this change in the institutional structure, the state ordered that all art was to be contrived in socialist realist style; "using iconic figures to inspire the public and promote nationalist and socialist ideas"

(Loyola Marymount University, 2010). This post-war period “for political reasons, was a most discouraging period for any autonomous artistic practice, including cinema” (Kluszczyński, 1992:2) and the animated films produced “in this period were mainly fables sprinkled with ideological expressions” (Lockwood, 2013). Films created in the socialist Poland could not be created in a capitalist country and vice versa; they had geographically and historically specific contexts.

By the mid-1950s the socialist-realism doctrine was not being enforced as rigorously “and creators explored new topics and means of expression” (Lockwood, 2013). The end of the 1950s revived a shift “towards broadly understood animated film” (Kluszczyński, 1992:2). Even though still greatly restricted in their creativity and with the danger of exclusion from public life, in attempts of refusing to comply, artists were seeking new visions to express their opinions. As Paweł Sitkiewicz suggest in his book *Polska Szkoła Animacji* “film animowany stał się wiarygodnym głosem zza ‘żelaznej kurtyny’, a nawet wizytówka polskiej kultury” (Sitkiewicz, 2011:1) – the animated film became a trustworthy voice from behind the iron curtain and even a business card of Polish culture. Robert Vrielynck called the Polish animator’s a formation of painters and sculptors of the cinema, who stressed the importance of form. In his opinion the Polish school of animation was a school of visual artists (Sitkiewicz, 2011:2). Similarly in 1977 John Halas suggested to name the Polish animators the poets of animation. He admired their expressiveness, originality in expression, imagination, courage and the innovative incorporation of painting and graphic design into the language of animation. Furthermore, because there existed no “before” the artists did not have to fall back on any traditions and the artworks of previous animators.

So in the eyes of someone from the West, what made Polish animation stand out? Giannalberto Bendazzi, a renowned animation historian wrote that it was; the dark colors of the imagery, questions of existentialism and generally a will to ask difficult questions and search for difficult answers, the poetry of pessimism and the melancholic themes (Sitkiewicz, 2011:2). Another film historian Gianni Rondolino suggested that the style emitted a sense of the enclosure of humans in the Universe with borders that could not be known and this was where the strong symbolism, bitterness in the visual aesthetics and the slow tempo of narration came from. Furthermore the American Jean Ann Wright implied that these topics of the individual's existential battles mirrored life in Poland in those times. Before the segregation of experimental and non-experimental animation I am interested in the specific characteristics of the Polish school of animation, generally defined by Sitkiewicz as; a separate sphere of themes (revolving around existentialism or philosophical reflection), a sense of originality in the visual aesthetics, an incline towards a metaphorical representation of the problems of the public, intellectual precision, political contexts, and a pessimistic atmosphere.

This was the beginning of a renewed search for historical identity through artistic expression. The strength of the Polish animations has always been its diversity, which guaranteed individualism. Artists such as “Lenica, Borowczyk, Szczechura, Kucia, Giersz, Rybczyński and Dumala won prestigious awards at world festivals and brought Polish animation into the spotlight” and “the genre became a Polish cultural ambassador, a role previously reserved for the Polish Film School, the Grotowski theatre and the Polish School of Posters” (Staszczyn, 2014).

Recently, the animated film is reliving its well-deserved renaissance in Poland. In the last decade various series of DVDs have been produced with all the great animated masterpieces, special websites have been constructed and even some specific TV channels have been created to showcase these Polish works. As Sitkiewicz puts it, animation is an art form bordering film, reality and the visual arts that may in fact act as a lens through which the attentive viewer may see something that cannot be seen with the naked eye (Sitkiewicz, 2011:1).

2.3: Approaches to Animation

To be able to properly address an animated film it is important to look at it in regards to its modes of construction. In this thesis, I have decided to compare the dominant language of animation that is Disney's art that is termed by Paul Wells in his book *Understanding Animation* as **orthodox animation**, to two other styles classified as **developmental animation** and **experimental animation** that are described in the next pages. Echoing Maureen Furniss' observation "that all forms of animated film have varying degrees of reference either to 'mimesis' (literally, the 'realist' representation) or to 'abstraction' (which abandons realist referents and signifiers in preference to other models of representation)" (Nelmes, 1996:220). However, in spite of such distinctions, animation still remains "a singularly enunciative language, literally announcing its intrinsic difference on-screen from live-action work and other modes of artistic expression" (Nelmes, 1996:221).

2.3.1: Orthodox Animation

Wells in his *Notes Towards a Theory of Animation*, suggests criteria for defining orthodox animation by looking at mass produced cel animations. Backing his claim based on the fact that these animations are the most seen and recognized by mass audiences. Orthodox animation is the dominant discourse of animation born, established from Disney art. It is distributed to general audiences through movie screens and the television, creating an intended audience for these types of animation. Wells further proposes that orthodox animation has colonized the imaginations of viewers because of its availability.

In orthodox animation the importance of “recognizable character models of people and animals” (Jones, 2012) is emphasized along with echoing live action practices and real world conventions. Therefore, these animations may have ‘fantastic’ essentials but still have some logic and continuity, so, even though it may seem extraordinary to the audience “who sees the cartoon as an intrinsically non-realist form but this sense of unreality only operates with regard to the representation of events in a cartoon, and not the ‘realist’ conventions by which it is understood” (Wells, 1998:35). So, most orthodox works use ‘figures’: “identifiable people or animals who correspond to what audiences would understand as an orthodox human being” (Wells, 1998:36).

The continuity of the narrative is specific, there is a clear beginning and end upon a linear structure. It is aided through dialogue as a tool for storytelling. These “verbal dynamics served to support the visual jokes and create a specific kind of ‘noise’”

(Wells, 1998:39). The story is clear and doesn't require deep interpretation from the viewer. From an aesthetic point of view, there is unity in style where the artist is invisible in the piece that he creates. With the “creation and perpetuation of a studio ‘style’ it became more important” (Wells, 1998:39) than the work of those individuals who had created the animation. With rare interest in the actual color and other aesthetic features, orthodox animation “prioritizes its content, concentrating specifically on constructing character, determining comic moments and evolving the self-contained narrative” (Wells, 1998:37).

2.3.2: Developmental Animation

The developmental approach to animation as Wells defines it, mixes traditional aspects of animation with contemporary approaches. Therefore, it “operates as a mode of expression combining or selecting elements of both approaches, representing the aesthetic and philosophic tension between the two apparent extremes” (Wells, 1998:35). Developmental animation could be seen to use “animation in a directly metaphoric way and not working in the realms of the purely abstract” (Wells, 1998:44). As Nelmes (1996) describes it, developmental animation still retains realist representations but pursues having non-linear and non-objective methods.

2.3.3: Experimental Animation

Experimental animation sits upon abstraction, therefore as the viewer we see “rhythm and movement in their own right as opposed to the rhythm and movement of a particular character” (Jones, 2012). Consequently, experimental animation “redefines ‘the body’ or resists using it as an illustrative image” (Wells, 1998:43). Instead it uses

different shapes and forms “liberating the artist to concentrate on the vocabulary he/she is using in itself without the imperative of giving it a specific function or meaning” (Wells, 1998:44). As Moritz observations suggest, “inventing interesting forms, shapes and colors, creating new, imaginative and expressive motions – ‘the absolute creation: the true creation’ as Fischinger termed it – requires the highest mental and spiritual faculties,” (Moritz, 1988:25).

Experimental animation discards the use of dialogue which it substitutes with dynamic musicality. Wells states that “it may be suggested that if music could be visualized it would look like colors and shapes moving through time with differing rhythms, movements and speeds” (Jones, 2012). One begins wondering if “music can make us think of color, can it make us think of movement?” (Katz, 2010). In experimental animations “silence, avant-garde score, unusual sounds and redefined notions of ‘language’ are used to create different kinds of statement” (Wells, 1998:46).

There is non-continuity where the audience is led to interpret the work themselves following the footsteps of the artist. Within experimental animations there is more than one style present and no specific unification with the strong presence of the artist in his own work and often “combines and mixes different modes of animation” (Wells, 1998:45). Therefore, experimental animations “are very personal, meaningful works of art which are meant to be viewed and discussed” (Jones, 2012).

Audience has to be specific; they need to be prepared to be fully consumed into the experience without searching for some linear narratives (that which audiences of orthodox animations have been conditioned to do). Experimental animation has “open structure susceptible to a variety of interpretations” (Kuc, 2015:59). Instead of linear and logical, there is a “prioritization of illogical, irrational and sometimes multiple continuities” (Wells, 1998:43). It could be compared to aspire to a dream-like state as it “is closely related to philosophical and spiritual concerns and seeks to represent inarticulable personal feelings beyond the orthodoxies of language” (Wells, 1998:46).

2.4: Case Studies

With little support from the state, the Polish school of animation owes the most to the stubborn pioneers who transformed their private apartments into studios that later evolved into larger productions. After 1956 Polish animation did not only rely on one style. Still, there were unified stylistic tendencies thanks to which the group of artists began to be perceived as a school. These included; the absence of dialogue and commentary, cutbacks on the fable structure, using music similarly to the function of illustration, substituting reality with metaphors or mental shortcuts, the important role of the visual arts, the slow tempo of narration and the low-cost montage. It also, mirrored the Polish poster art in strong and straightforward associations. The outcome depended on an independent viewer who could take time to digest the piece and in a sense decipher the mystery – synthesize the form and content.

2.4.1: Był sobie raz / Once Upon a Time (1957)

Był sobie raz / Once Upon a Time is a debut short animated color film, created in 1957 by Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk. Produced in Poland by WFD: Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych and Zespół Filmowy "Kadr", it is the story of an oval shape that comes to life when it receives legs in the form of four lines. It then begins walking.



Figure 1. *Był sobie raz*. (1957) Directed by: Jan Lenica & Walerian Borowczyk. [Film still] Poland: Zespół Filmowy "Kadr".

As the shape travels, more and more pieces attach on to it, each time creating a different form. One of the experimental techniques used by Lenica and Borowczyk in *Był sobie raz* is cutout animation. This is "a type of collage animation in which figures are pieced together from found materials" (Krasner, 2004:168). The two artists started the innovative use of collage and "demonstrated that animation can be a means of personal expression, such as graphic design and painting" (Lockwood, 2013). They create a play with form by combining colorful cut out geometrical figures with a

Disney film” (Gizycki, 2014) and the fable plot diverging from the common audience of children and into the world of adults.

An important innovation in the animation *Once Upon a Time* is the lack of a plot which brings it closer to abstraction. The narrative is deliberately weakened to put emphasis on the formal aspect of the piece. The novelty of Lenica and Borowczyk lied in their ability to bring the visual arts to the foreground making it the main attraction of the animation. Through this method they revived the language of visual metaphor of poster art and graphic shortcuts in animation. Furthermore, in the animation there are direct hints towards abstract painting and jazz music. As seen in the animation, the oval shaped character at the end of the story enters an abstract painting finding refuge in it;



Figure 4. *Był sobie raz*. (1957) Directed by: Jan Lenica & Walerian Borowczyk. [Film still] Poland: Zespół Filmowy “Kadr”.

Inspired by Lenica and Borowczyk’s cut out style, I am proposing to use computers with scans of my handmade images instead of found images, that I will digitally compose to take the place of the physically cut materials. I intend to use the medium

as a place for personal expression as I do when I draw and paint, reflecting the importance that Lenica and Borowczyk stressed on the aesthetic surface of the animation. Relying on the images to tell a story I will detach from the fairytale formula that is present in orthodox animations.

2.4.2: Ostry film zaangażowany (1979)

Ostry film zaangażowany is a short animated color movie realized by Julian Józef Antonisz and produced by Studio Filmów Animowanych in Krakow in 1979. It is a form of an animated documentary with elements of absurd humor. It is a pastiche of a television report revealing the reasons for decrease in public attendance at cultural events. The animation reveals that the main cause for this is the shutting down of street kiosks onto which posters advertising these events have been regularly pasted.



Figure 5. *Ostry film zaangażowany* (1979) Directed by: Julian Józef Antonisz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Filmów Animowanych.

The animation is the author's commentary towards the times in which he has to live and create in. The subject matter is serious, however, the artist chose to communicate it in a humorous way. The voice of an old woman sings about the destruction of street kiosks that has led to a decline in culture. Explaining absurdly that a certain woman dug a tunnel, therefore, the kiosks have been closed and one cannot learn of any cultural events in the city. The absurd logic behind the continual sequences is enriched with interesting music. The public and cultural events are simultaneously depicted during the lengthy monologue;



Figure 6. *Ostry film zaangażowany* (1979) Directed by: Julian Józef Antonisz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Filmów Animowanych.

As Arcitenens in *Film 1979* suggests, Antonisz creates the feeling of constant cluster – cluster of thoughts, connotations, objects, people and details. This cluster has no beginning, end or logic creating a sense of watching the world with wide open eyes. The specific technique used by Antonisz in his animation was the non-camera approach. This meant that he gave up the use of a camera, instead each frame was painted, drawn or scratched on to the film roll as seen in *Figure 7*. Antonisz (Fundacja imienia Juliana Antonisza) further explains this way of working in his *The Non Camera Artistic Manifesto*;

The non-camera method allows for immediate visual control, which significantly reduces the production time of the film, and yields superb effects, as it eliminates the whole ballast of film camera, lights, lab processing, as well as other cost-consuming and fussy photographic techniques that permanently deform the original and lead to nothing more than a catalogue reproduction of an artwork, which thus ceases to be authentic and original, and becomes a pathetic photocopy.



Figure 7. *Ostry film zaangażowany* (1979) Directed by: Julian Józef Antonisz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Filmów Animowanych.

As well as composing his own music, Antonisz wrote his own scripts that he then produced himself. Taking the position of not only the artist but also the producer of my own illustration I see this as an important step in finding one's unique voice as a creative. As evident through Antonisz's work, the artist can become the concept provider – not permitting the art world to dictate their work we see the artists transform into proactive professionals. They can no more be stereotyped into a certain craft but rather construct their own identity in the art world through blurring boundaries and crossing over to more than one artistic craft.

Inspired by Antonisz's unique style of illustration, I felt encouraged to adhere to my personal style without compromising in order to conserve the handmade feel and presence of multiple layers of texture in my imagery. I am aiming for authenticity and originality as did Antonisz, through the use of my own illustrations where there is no chance of re-using something that has already been created. Taking the concept of *clutter* from Antonisz, I want to create a clutter of imagery where there is no real logic

present in the animation aiming for more of an audiovisual experience. I carried on this theme of clutter into the exhibition of our M.F.A. projects. By creating a cluttered artist space to display my animation in, I aimed to show the amount of manual work that went into creating a short animated film and juxtapose it with the clean cut animation.



2.4.3: Klatki/Cages (1967)

Klatki/Cages a short film animated by Mirosław Kijowicz in 1967, scripted by H. Jagoszewska and with music by K. Komeda-Trzciński is a story about a prison inmate and the guard. Drawn in a minimalist, black and white style the story touches on subjects of the illusion of power as well as the relationship between the individual and the system, showing the loneliness of humans and their isolation from certain units. Kijowicz asks a simple question: is the one who possess power the free one? The animation *Klatki* develops slowly, allowing time for the audience to interpret all that is happening. *Klatki/Cages* in a straightforward metaphor is the artist's perception of life under the communist regime in Poland. In the beginning the guard allows the prisoner to construct something out of a variety of elements present. As shown below, the prisoner begins building something resembling flowers – a stark contrast to the prison environment; a metaphorical message from the artist.

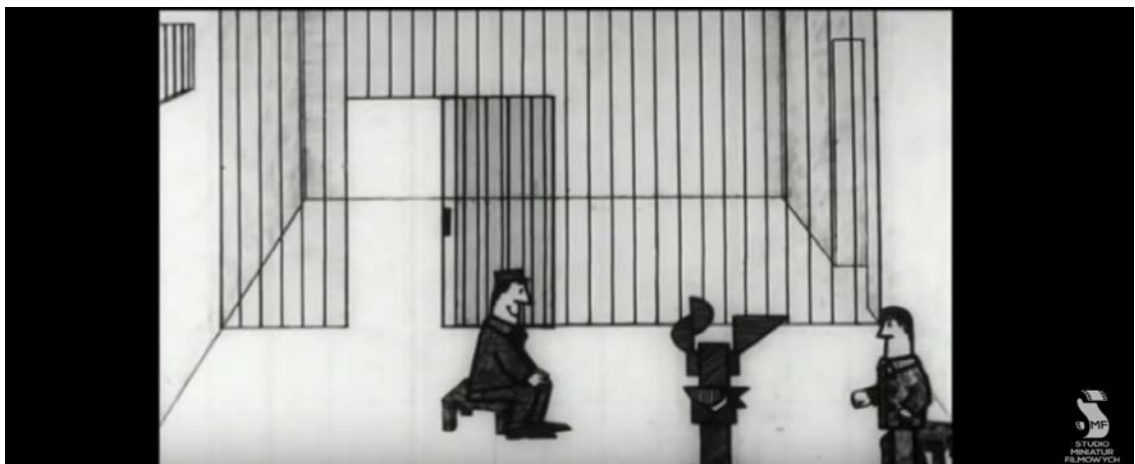


Figure 8. *Klatki* (1967) Directed by: Mirosław Kijowicz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Miniatur Filmowych.

However, realizing his mistake the guard proceeds to destroying any further creativity, freedom of thought and speech that comes from the prisoner:

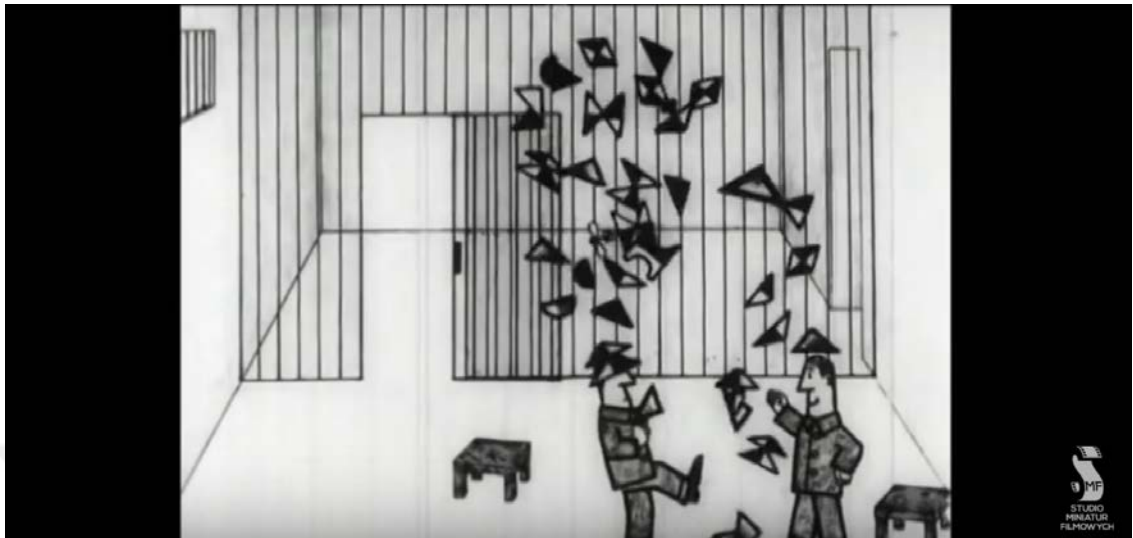


Figure 9. Klatki (1967) Directed by: Miroslaw Kijowicz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Miniatur Filmowych.

After Jan Lenica, Kijowicz too followed the philosophical current in Polish animation. Andrzej Kossakowski ("Polski film animowany 1945-1974", Warszawa 1977), wrote that Kijowicz belonged to the genre of philosophical thoughtfulness where the artist observes the world around him, wondering about the destiny of the ordinary man and searches for philosophical generalizations. Kijowicz's animations are gloomy and full of heavy metaphors that provoke the audience to contemplate.

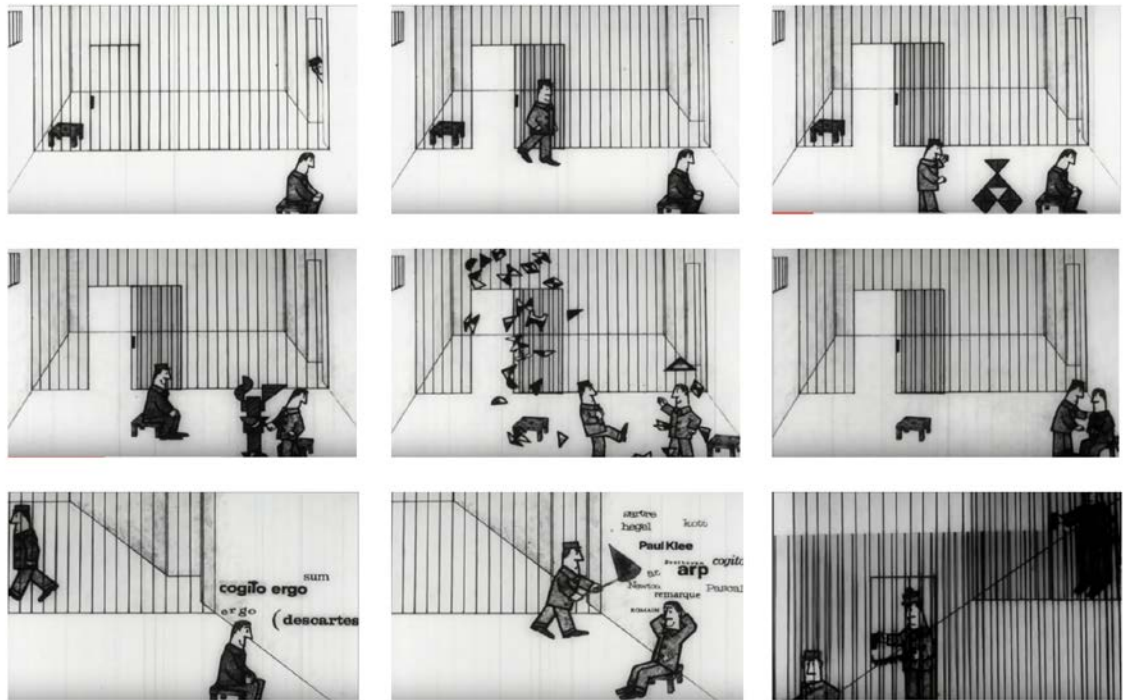


Figure 10. *Klatki* (1967) Directed by: Miroslaw Kijowicz. [Film still] Poland: Studio Miniatur Filmowych.

Even though Miroslaw Kijowicz had an education in art, he did not attach too much meaning to the visual aspect of his films, commenting that he did not make movies to play with form. He proposed that he had three roles; the scenographer, director and the screenwriter. Kijowicz was of the opinion that animated films could easily touch upon subjects of morality, psychology and customs with the artist's interpretation of them. Mostly taking a metaphoric approach in my art, I represent the escape of the individual into the world of imagination. In this world by rejecting space – what we hear and see does not tell us where the animation is happening but that it is a fantastical world where our rules of reality do not apply.

2.4.4: Prostokąt dynamiczny/Dynamic Rectangle (1971)

The short film *Prostokąt dynamiczny* by Józef Robakowski and produced by Warsztat Formy Filmowej in 1971, illustrates the surrender of an intensely red colored rectangle to fluid and changing movements. It is juxtaposed with classical organ music composed by Eugeniusz Rudnik.

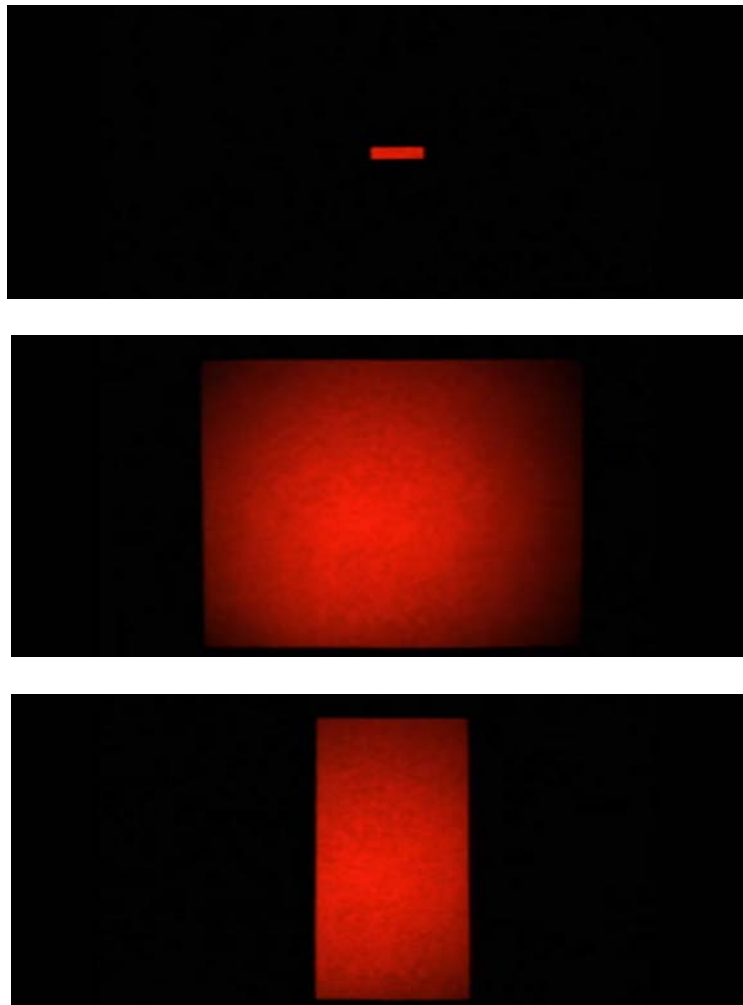


Figure 11, 12, 13. *Prostokąt dynamiczny* (1971) Directed by: Józef Robakowski. [Film still] Poland: Warsztat Formy Filmowej.

The artist separates the image from the sound, creating asynchronicity that gives the audience a non-traditional experience of a film narration where the audio and visual

input cannot be taken in simultaneously. Robakowski in his 1971 manifesto wrote about the *pure film*, indicating that his working process sits upon the elimination of characteristic elements found in literary statements in films. He was interested in “an analysis of new media language, striving to rid film of “alien elements” - anecdote, literary forms, narration - and make its language simpler and information denser” (Sienkiewicz, 2008).

In animated movies relying on imagery and rejecting dialogue, sound is an important message maker it, becomes visual music. In *My Imaginary World* the music blends with the background with some detailed parts of it punctuating aspects of the visual aesthetics. Blending parts where audio rhythm and visual rhythms are synchronizes as well as the asynchronisities. Hoping that by synchronizing music and movement, the already accepted abstraction in music could lead to the acceptance of abstraction in the animated film and to activate the spectator’s imagination and sensual apparatus.

CHAPTER 3

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

3.1: My Imaginary World

The journey of this thesis project began in February 2016, when I had my first solo painting exhibition. Consumed with preparations for this event, I spent most of my time planning and painting. At the end I realized just how much visual material I had acquired through working systematically for many months, and that I wanted to effectively utilize these in my thesis.

My personal work can be described as a place where fantasy and reality merge; magical realism. I have always been interested in creating surreal, dream-like landscapes inhabited by creatures born purely out of my imagination. In these series I have explored generating landscapes from different worlds with no conventions of reality, the characters all hybrids mergings of reality and fantasy. Working with acrylic paint on paper at the back of my head I always had the vision of movement in these paintings, almost seeing them come to life. Consequently, being offered to learn

Adobe After Effects as part of my M.F.A. program, I decided to take the next step in my creative journey.

My first short animated film *My Imaginary World* (found at <https://vimeo.com/165995793>) begins with a variety of characters that I have cut and constructed from my paintings. My initial step was to lay out all the visuals that I had and select the ones with characters that I was interested in using in my animation. As seen in *Figure 14* I handpicked the so-called *actors* for my animated film;



Figure 14. Collage of all my paintings.

Subsequent, I digitally cut out and edited each character using Adobe Photoshop, separating each layers as seen in *Figure 15*. When I had all my characters ready, I

began sketching and brainstorming, to search for a way that I could present these characters.



Figure 15. Animation Process.

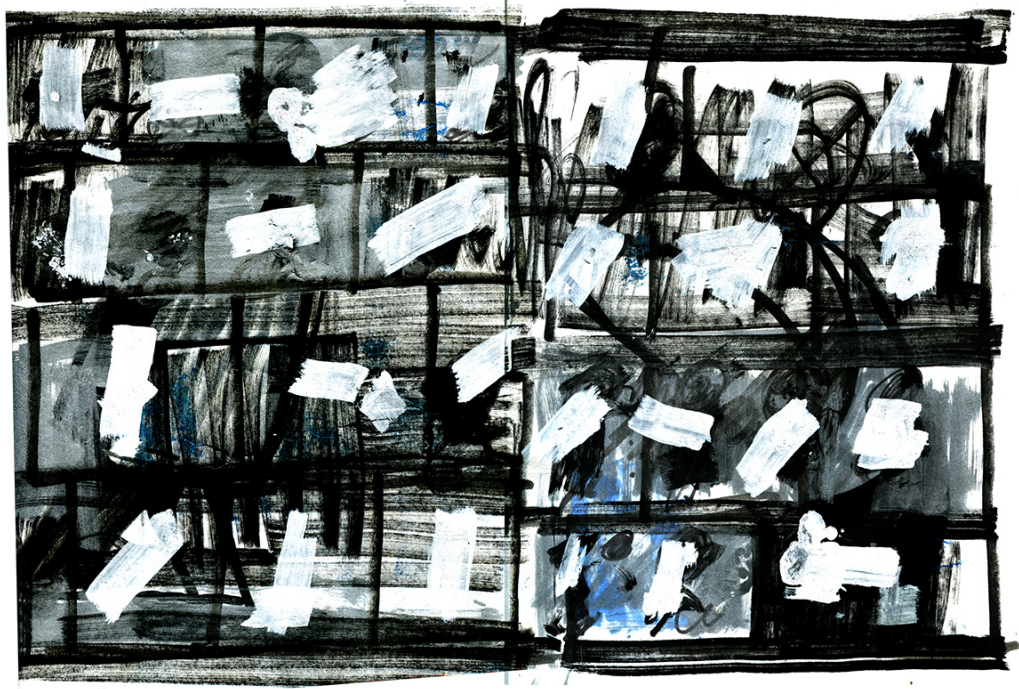


Figure 16. Sketchbook Process 1.

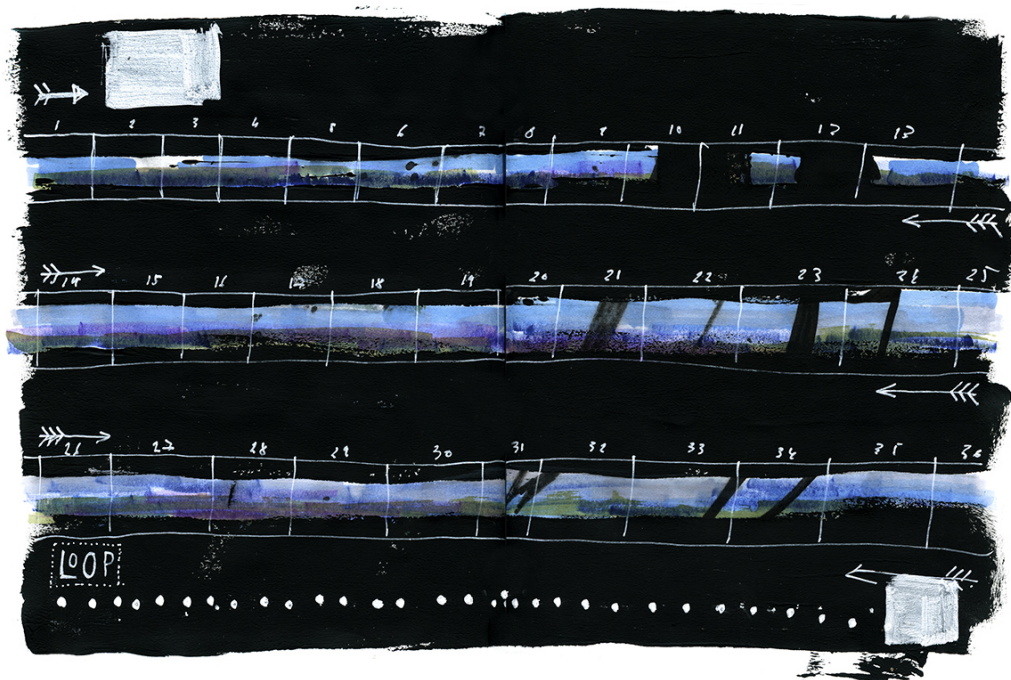


Figure 17. Sketchbook Process 2.

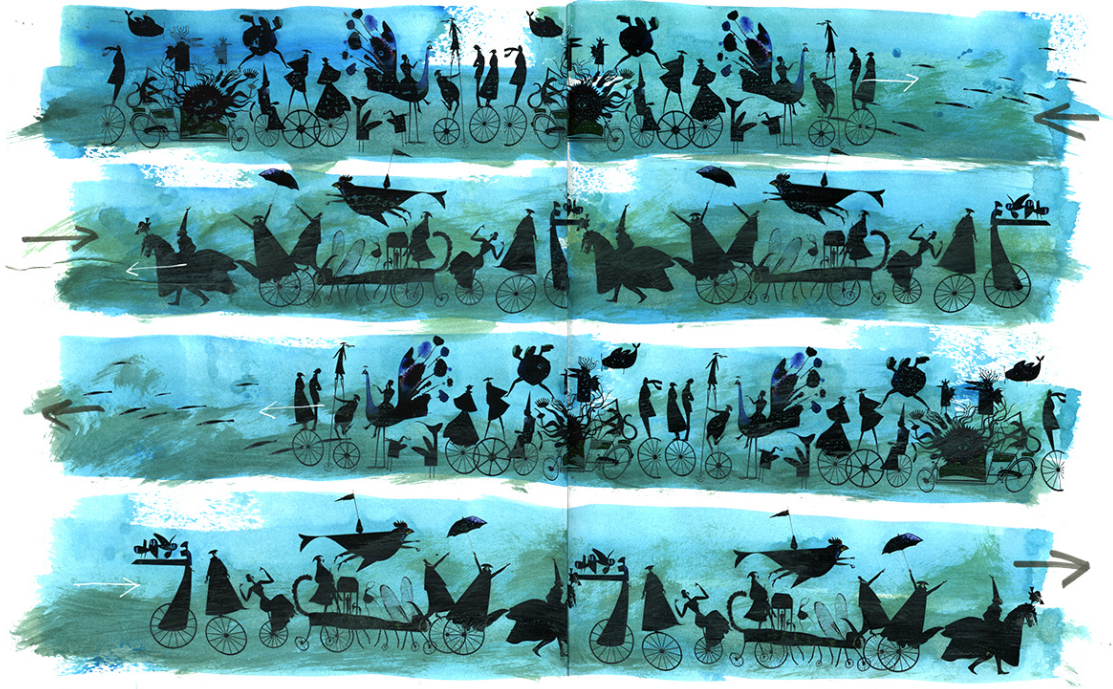


Figure 18. Sketchbook Process 3.



Figure 19. *My Imaginary World* (2016) Directed and produced by: Maria Brzozowska. [Film still].

The creature characters in the animation move in two parallel lines; one row walking to the right and the other to the left. They continue walking in a loop. I have explored movement in a way where not every part of the character moves but where there is a

balance between the static and movement. At the same time the background slowly begins to change as my paintings that I have selected, begin appearing and moving through the screen. These paintings are transparent and give off a ghostly, dreamy aura.



Figure 20. My Imaginary World (2016) Directed and produced by: Maria Brzozowska. [Film still].

The creatures continue looping but now they find themselves walking through the paintings they have escaped. The elements seen are all from my imaginary world that I have created in my work, emphasizing on; structure, texture and color.

All along slow piano music composed by my friend Alessandro Bonifacio accompanies the movements, in a somber manner. The blending of the music and imagery creates a personal feel to the animation, creating a visible and audible space.



Figure 21. *My Imaginary World* (2016) Directed and produced by: Maria Brzozowska. [Film still].

The animation was displayed in the gallery on a Mac screen. However, in order to fully detach the viewer from the environment of the gallery, I created my own space as an artist, emulating the feel of experimentation. To do this I re-create my working desk, with all the tools and sketchbooks that I use, accompanied by the screen with the animation. I wanted to create an interesting contrast between the finished clean animation and the messy work space of an artist. Having two walls on each side and facing the wall, the audience member while sitting in my place will live a more intimate and personal experience of the art work when they are swept into the dream-like world. It is important to emphasize that my process of working has not been based on creating an experimental animation but rather that I have experimented with animation and throughout the process have taken certain aspects of experimental animation into my own work.



Figure 22. My Imaginary World (2016) Exhibition display.

Being a visual artist who works in acrylic paint creating illustration, the transformation into an animator was the hardest technical obstacle to overcome. The change from essentially doing everything with my hands, to working digitally in a software that I was newly introduced to had its challenges. Luckily, having completed my undergraduate at a university that championed self-learning allowed me to solve all my technical problems through research and trial/error.

The ideal audience for my project, first of all would be anyone who has been interested in viewing my paintings and illustrations. As the animation is the next step in my artistic process and is constructed with elements from my own work, my

personal style is clearly evident in it. Now with added movement it would be interesting for the audience to see my painting come alive. Secondly, anyone willing to be engulfed in a visual experience that the animation provides would be an ideal member of the audience. The audience will engage in the artwork by simply entering this imaginary world that I have created in my animation. I hope to take them through an audio visual experience of my work.

3.2: Critical Questions

3.2.1: What does it mean to experiment?

To look at one ‘type’ of animation (experimental in this case) one must remember that different types of animations are not in competition but rather that they should be considered “as parallel pursuits, the way one handles genres of music and literature” (Moritz, 1988). To truly experiment is to explore the unknown, to search for something new, and to risk the unexpected. William Moritz suggests that “animation works best as an abstract form, where it fully demonstrates its intrinsic capability of moving non-representational lines and materials which fall outside the orthodox domains of ‘realist’ constructions and agendas” (Wells, 1998:29). When the elementary components of our visual and auditory understanding of the world around us “routinely and repeatedly broken down, our powers of description shift from being an immediate given to being a self-conscious (and potentially exhausting) activity” (Special Affects, 2013). In such, experimental animation is more connected with the “desire to express profoundly personal, sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, aspects of human thought, feeling and experience” (Wells, 1998:29).

Experimentation opens the door to breaking down restrictions and to re-explore animation with limitless possibilities. Krasner proposes that experimentation aids the imagination by, “opening up your thought processes, broadening your feelings, and eliminating contrived or trendy solutions. It relies on the element of play and embraces the unexpected, allowing accidents to become possibilities” (Krasner, 2004:99). Through this the individual is encouraged to build his/her individuality and “since risk taking is involved, it is not intended to produce mediocrity; rather, its objective is to make life less predictable” (Krasner, 2004:99).

However, the term *experiment* in itself may feel too scientific and in this might bring a sense of “rigidity and limitations of scientific practice” (Special Affects, 2013). This comes from a depleted concept of scientific experimentation, therefore, with expanding the term and taking it away from any scientific references this is overcome and “allows more open and less predictable criteria” (Special Affects, 2013). This switch from scientific to artistic experimentation takes away the pressure of the medium that effects the response of the artist through his work.

The term experimental cannot on the other hand be used as “a catch-all term, a mere opposite of the predictable or the routine” (Special Affects, 2013). It is alluring to define an animated experiment in terms of the uncertainty of the outcome, however, it should be up to the artist how to apply it. There is no absolute uncertainty, therefore we may ask should accidents be allowed for in an “engineered and controlled” (Special Affects, 2013) way. In the article from Special Affects (2013) a view is suggested in which:

Pickering's notion of experimental practice as an improvised dance between experimenter and phenomenon allows us to avoid this problem. Instead of asking how experimental a piece of animation is, we can ask how it is experimental: i.e., where and in what ways. In a certain sense, this means that all animation is experimental—albeit in a way that is not tautological but demands more specific forms of inquiry.

3.2.2: How does one “conduct” an animation experiment?

Expanding on the above question, we cannot approach the word “conduct” too literally. In this case it is more vital to concentrate on the purpose of the experimental animations to challenge the audiences' capability to describe what they see and hear. If the audience doesn't go through this process of describing what they see, the overall impact of the animation may be lost, and there might only be a stimulus response.

As the Special Affects article explains an animated experiment does not permit for a clean cut separation of perception and production. It goes on to two examples of carrying out an animated experiment saying that;

First: Animators work with tools that have a material agency which yields systematic, yet not totally predictable, effects; through a combination of intention, accident, and adjustment, animators experiment with their medium. Second: Viewers perceive a screen presentation that yields unusual effects on their senses, to which the viewers must respond in real time, working toward a conceptual and perceptual “sense” of the film. Both acts amount to a *pas de deux* of intentionality and materiality (or at least, in the case of viewers, the feel of one, since the film is not strictly reacting to them) (Special Affects, 2013).

One way to approach an animated experiments is to see it as a *natural phenomenon* or just like a living thing where as an individual our interaction with them are not pre-determined or predictable.

3.2.3: Moving Image and Hybridity

In my M.F.A. thesis, looking from a technical aspect, I want to analyze how things have changed for today's artists. As my project is an animation I will be specifically taking Adobe After Effects as a software example to illustrate these innovations. Lev Manovich in his article *After Effects/Part I*, calls the Velvet Revolution not necessarily a change in media itself but the transformation of the aesthetics of the produced work, describing it as the "new hybrid visual language of moving images that emerged during the period of 1993-1998" (Manovich, 2006:4). Since its release in 1993, Adobe After Effects has become accessible to all, with its ability to animate and create special effects on personal computers. Alongside its birth the moving image has changed to being just "one element integrated in the media mix that also includes live action, typography, and design" (Manovich, 2006:4).

Evidently, today it is very simple to edit, design and create not only on one software, but transfer jobs across several different software's. These new "metamedium can use all techniques which were previously unique to these different media, or any subset of these techniques" (Manovich, 2006:9) making it possible to "mix any number of visual elements regardless of the media in which they originated and to control each element in the process" (Manovich, 2006:15). This media remixability as Manovich theorizes the term, was something that did not exist during the 1960s and 80s, when

animation was a much more manual and handmade job. The digital revolution within media production led to transformation in animation today in its; techniques, forms, content and functions. Additionally, the active remixing of animation with other media practices has led to a new mode of cultural production in digitally-created animation and a “totally unique form of motion-graphic storytelling of its own right” (Objectivejay, 2009). A huge shift came about from techniques such as *pure film* as described in Józef Robakowski’s case study when “by the end of the decade, the “pure” moving-image media became an exception and hybrid media became the norm.” (Manovich, 2007:1).

This ease of the tools for animation changed a lot; the lower costs of production allowed for an easier entry into the field but also a shift from the traditional artistic capabilities. Furthermore, "digital animation simultaneously embraces both the technically and artistically inclined animator, hence opening up the field to a wider range of skill levels” (Brazdell, 2007). With no requirements for the frame by frame illustrations doors have been opened wider for more experimental approaches to animation. These new tools accompanied by distribution channels such as YouTube “have given rise to new and unique genres emphasizing the social media principles of sharing, remixing, and mashing up” (Objectivejay, 2009).

Still, one may if there is a decrease in the aura of magic emitted by animation when computers easily reproduce handmade animations? Personally, I believe that even a small element of handmade in the final product brings the audience closer to the artist who is more present in his/her work and resists a technological wall separating the

two. Even though digital technologies are ever evolving, in the last few years, there has also been a move towards the hand-made craft returning the human touch in art. It is important to realize that the new generation of artists who have revolutionized the profession have grown up with all the technology; it is a part of reality and the norm, therefore, these artists have “a brave new world of old technologies and traditional working methods to be discovered” (Zeegen, 2007).

In the article *Hand Made* featured on Computer Arts, the reasons for change and a move towards this craft is described as:

Crisp digital solutions and a fashion for super-slick-vector-traced-one-size-fits-all-what-you-see-is-what-you-get images has emerged in recent years. In providing more answers than questions, the computer had removed any element of chance. In the crop of recent digital imagery, there has been little room for risk, for failure or, more importantly, for the hand of the artist to shine through - software had taken over. Originality and individualism had become far less important than cool control over a vector curve (Zeegen, 2007).

Referring to Marshal McLuhan's statement that “We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us” (Zeegen, 2007) it is visible that the digital devices in the past few years have opened new opportunities but in reality they have also taken the artists away from their primal tools. Still, many artists and their work are not shaped by the technology as they step away from the digital and go back to their working tables. This does not mean that digital technology is being taken out of the equation, but rather Milton Glaser's metaphor that “computers are to design as microwave are to cooking” (Zeegen, 2007) is more put into action, meaning that;

Simply reheating ready-meals rather than cooking with fresh ingredients every time can leave the palette craving new tastes and

experiences. Serving up mediocre and mundane dishes day-after-day isn't good for the soul - whereas experimentation is the spice-of-life (Zeegen, 2007).

Still, digital technology plays an important role as it has now become the medium that allows the hand made and the digital work to be put together. The doors to mixing the old and new and an opportunity for a fresh individual personal visual language have been open.



CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

For any artist, looking into the future and new possibilities, is an important aspect of one's creative evolution. As an illustrator and painter bringing movement into my work has always been the next step in enhancing the dream-like imaginary worlds that I have generated with hopes to enhance people's lives by allowing them to see a whole different world. Equally important is finding new and interesting ways to do this. In this thesis, the creativity in storytelling and visual aesthetics of the Polish Golden Era of animation have shaped my techniques in this new medium as I took up experimenting; animation has demonstrated to be an irresistible magic.

As an artist I feel that I already have my unique style that I am developing, therefore, I have not necessarily created a pastiche or paid homage to the Polish experimental animators whose work I have analyzed in my case studies, but rather took certain elements of their working methods and applied them to my own imagery, trying to stay present as an artist in my animation. Thus, my outcome is more of an experiment with animation rather than a piece that could be categorized as experimental

animation. I have taken cutout methods, stylized illustration techniques, storytelling methods and worked on the dynamicity of music. Perceptibly in *My Imaginary World* the backgrounds blur one into the other, they transform and change in color, speed up and slow down again, all this in the spirit of resisting 'story' to create mood, an atmosphere and an experience. Engaging with an audience through the abstraction of the visual language that echoes an anti-rational attitude through the abandonment of dialogue and the blurring of a continuity; the looping creating no certain beginning or end.

The importance of the design process has become evident to me throughout this thesis project. Up keeping scrapbooks and sketchbooks, using sketching as a form of record keeping of my own observations of the world around and inside me, and of idea generation. I have discovered that at some instances, the process of seeking visual solutions became more exciting and creative for me rather than the final outcome. Education myself not only in the use of a completely new software but also taking a strongly intrinsic attitude towards my methods as an artist, I learned to withhold judgment of myself throughout my brainstorming process and allowed my imagination to go crazy yielding exciting new results. I found brainstorming in itself to be a problem-solving and creative journey. Also my images provide a powerful way of stimulating the design process as they opened a door for new ideas when I began placing them in different environments.

With the new technology at hand the barriers between orthodox, developmental and experimental animation are blurred as they merge into one another. Lev Manovich's theory

of remixability shows us the vastness of possibilities that the software's provide us as artist. With the ability to not only work on one software but for numerous to become compatible, the moving image transforms its aesthetics and becomes a hybrid visual language. With the new technologies allowing for a connection between different platforms a new generation of animators working with different tools "in order to both use traditional methods and invent fresh approaches to the animated form" (Nelmes, 1996:214) have risen.

I asked myself can an experiment with animation play with characters since they are attributed to more realistic approaches. I believe that yes, one can use characters in an abstract manner. Since the characters in my animation come from my paintings, they are creations of my imagination and that makes them unique and abstract. Furthermore, there is no real recipe for an experiment with animation other than trying to eliminate trendy solutions, embrace the unexpected and accidents just as a natural phenomenon (a living being) with no pre-determined outcomes. Yes, we may ask a lot of questions, however, as Jeanne Dill puts it in her article *Visualizing Art History: Experimental Animation and Its Mentor, Jules Engel* "for questions having to do with art, in that any attempt to offer definition tends to further confuse, bind, constrict and/or be irrelevant, rather than to clarify meaning" (Dill, 2015). I agree with Dill when she writes that as artists we are more interested in the things that we cannot answer, she emphasizes that "to ask the unanswerable is the beginning of an event ... an event of experimentation and conceptualizing" (Dill, 2015). This has been my journey of making visible the interior life of my imagination. Pikkov summarizes the artistic journey perfectly in his statement;

Human beings are probably the only mammals capable of fantasizing and of symbolic thinking. In order to conceptualize, explain and justify their existence, humans have produced artworks

that frame their presence in the eternal totality of the universe. Every artwork includes a commentary on both itself and its author. By means of art, people explore their own inner cosmos, their bodies and physical perceptual mechanisms. Yet an artwork is not merely a material piece of work; it is also an act of communication – between the author and the audience, and among all authors (Pikkov, 2010, p.39).

As the next step I definitely foresee working further on this animation, and creating new ones. I see a lot of place for improvement in this animation, however, it is important to realize that the journey of this project begins not when I started animating but long before that when I began sketching what I had in my head, creating characters, landscapes, painting them, editing them, framing and exhibiting them. It is a time consuming process and as I graduate I know that this has become part of my routine as an artist and that with time I can develop and improve my skills and find new and interesting ways of introducing my work to the world.

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