

Second week – Paper animation

- 1) *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (James Stuart Blackton, 1906, Vitagraph) [excerpt] The first animated drawing recorded on film, the film emulates elements that might have been seen in a contemporary lightning sketch artist's act (drawing faces rapidly, aging them, changing their expressions, etc.) with the artist drawing in chalk on a blackboard. The hand of the artist creating the images is a significant element here and will be a common feature in early animated cartoons. In the section seen, the artist draws a man and a woman and follows their relationship as it develops and declines. Employs same principle as paper animation.
- 2) *Fantasmagorie* (Emile Cohl, 1908, Gaumont) The first fully animated cartoon on film. Once again, the hand of the artist is seen creating the main character, a clown. At one point, the artist "repairs" the damaged clown with paste (here the clown is briefly a cut-out). Cohl drew in black ink on white paper but printed it as a negative to make it look like a chalk drawing. The film is relatively simple in its images but also fairly sophisticated conceptually, playing with levels of reality and displaying a narrative that follows a dreamlike logic. The clown manipulates the objects and living things around him and another character even rips a hole in the image to dispose of feathers he pulls from a woman's large hat in a movie theatre – the first instance of an animated character watching an animated film.
- 3) *Gertie the Dinosaur* (Winsor McCay, 1914, Vitagraph) Based on one or two individual strips from McCay's popular comic strip *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend*, this cartoon was conceived as a Vaudeville act for McCay to tour with as part of his lightning sketch act. He brings out Gertie in his drawing and has her perform, then he enters the image and rides off on her. In a live-action introduction and closing, he makes a wager with other newspaper cartoonists that he can bring a dinosaur to life, then reveals his process again. McCay drew all the images of Gertie and other animals himself and had an assistant retrace the unmoving background details (which can be seen to waver constantly).
- 4) *Sisyphus* (Marcell Jankovics, 1974, Pannonia Film Studio) Based on the Greek myth of Sisyphus, an evil king condemned to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll back down so he has to start over forever. Both the figure and the boulder he is pushing are rendered impressionistically – with little if any real detail – and constantly change with the figure's struggle to move the boulder. This state-sponsored Hungarian film was nominated for an Oscar and much later (2008) used in a GM Superbowl commercial.

- 5) *Commuter* (Michael Patterson, 1981) Rotoscoping – process invented by Max Fleischer to produce more lifelike movement in animated films. It is basically tracing over live-action footage. U. of I. grad Patterson relies here on pencil tracing; the random pencil strokes across the image are a regular feature of his work. Footage from *Commuter* is reused in the 1985 music video he did for “Train of Thought” by the Norwegian synth-pop band A-ha.
- 6) *Special Delivery* (John Weldon and Eunice Macaulay, 1978, National Film Board of Canada) Not clearing the snow off the front steps can lead to serious consequences. Pencil and pastels on paper on a four-inch field: this is approximately a quarter the size of a cel – another way the animator cuts down on his work, by making a smaller image. Spaces are not always entirely colored in; colors appear only at edges of objects to suggest complete color of the object; little or no details on the walls of the rooms here.
- 7) *Crac* (Frederick Back, 1981, Radio Canada) The history and culture of Quebec along with environmental messages are told through the history of a rocking chair made from a forest tree. Pastels on frosted cels where the images are applied to the side of the cel facing the camera (as opposed to cel animation where images are painted onto the side of the cel facing away from the camera). Use of frosted cels allows for some layering of images, but all the artwork is done on the surface of the cels facing the camera, as in paper animation. Oscar winner.

For further or repeat viewings

Special Delivery can be found on the National Film Board of Canada’s web site in their Animation collection. Weldon’s cel animation *Spinnolio* (1977), a wry take on *Pinocchio*, is definitely worth a look, considering all the *Pinocchio* films in recent years.

All the other titles can be found on YouTube.

Frederick Back’s 1987 Oscar-winning film, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, using the same technique as *Crac*, can also be found on YouTube.

YouTube also has copies of *Train of Thought* and Michael Patterson’s 1985 music video of A-ha’s *Take on Me*, also using rotoscoping, which turned the song into a hit and won numerous awards. The video’s climax, with the musician trying to change from rotoscoped to real by crashing into opposite walls in a corridor owes much to a similar climactic scene in the 1980 Oscar-nominated *Altered States*.

YouTube also has Jankovics’ 1977 *The Struggle*, also drawn on paper, which was awarded the Short Film Palm d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, and his feature *The Tragedy of Man* (2011), using different animation techniques, which took him 23 years to complete.