

## Panel D4

Sala Emiciclo

### Objects, Bodies, Gestures

Deborah Cameron

#### Observation and the Inhabited Character



The process of creating character animation is a multi faceted, collaborative exercise in which the practitioner must maintain an acute observation and analysis of life, from which all other elements will use as their primary source of influence, understand and apply technical skills, and interpret and translate their embodied experience, an event commonly witnessed in other performance activities such as acting and dancing. Rather than using his or her body as the main tool of expression the animator must translate and interpret their objective and subjective observations and experiences through a medium outside of their physical body to express gesture, thought, emotion, and all other aspects that, we as humans, consider to be qualities of a living, breathing entity. These elements, when used successfully, will result in an authentic and believable character performance.

I will be focusing my enquiry on the area of the narrative driven, character based animation genre of filmmaking, which uses classic storytelling techniques as their basis. In such films, the physical and emotional environment and their rules are established, outlining the political, cultural, and socio-economic world in which the characters exist, with their journey within the story arc being clearly defined.

In this paper the discussion around character performance and animation in general, will use the term, “believable and authentic, “ not realistic, which denotes that we, as an audience, must be able to suspend our belief and relate to the character, on an emotional level, as a fully formed entity. The character’s inner thoughts and intent must be communicated outwardly connecting with, and engaging, the observer, thus creating an invested response and a shift within the audience from observer to active and caring participant in the character’s journey. The character’s movement alone will not create this engagement. When intent becomes the catalyst and motivating force for said movement, it is suggested that an internal thought process is taking place and choices are being made, which in turn denotes that an independent intelligent life force is present and the inhabited character is born.

*“For some presumptuous reason, man feels the need to create something of his own that appears to be living, that has inner strength, a vitality, a separate identity – something that speaks out with authority – a creation that gives the illusion of life.”*

(Thomas & Johnston 1981)

For animation, the “action of imparting life”, (Online Etymology Dictionary n.d) to occur, many academic journals discuss the sub heading of character animation from a theorist’s perspective in the field of science and technology, and its subsequent transference into the platform of computer animation and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The technical study of the physicality of movement is undertaken and the application of pre determined behavioural

patterns and gestures are used in the quest to create a convincing life form, yet there is little evidence of primary research being undertaken in the field of animation, analysing the process of creating authenticity in the performance itself and the human element the animator contributes in achieving this.

When the abovementioned behavioural patterns and gestures are singularly used in character performance, authenticity may be lost. It appears that although we understand the intent behind a given gesture, without its origin being derived from direct observation of genuine behaviour we begin to relate to the character as a figure of fantasy whose base existence belongs to another time and place. Despite the huge financial success and mass popularity this approach can achieve, it results in simple and generic characterisations that rely on the use of easily recognised and familiar cliché in gesture and acting. In this situation the individual character is merely used as a conduit to express the required emotion and could be replaced by any number of other entities.

In this paper I will explore the way observation can continue to inform the development of authentic and believable character performance by analysing the work of two animators, Joanna Quinn and Glen Keane, whose work specifically draws on this process. I will question the ease with which borrowed behavioural and gestural patterns have made their way into animation performance and discuss instead the possible alternatives based on the strength of direct observation being the primary research method, with the subsequent secondary areas of acting and the embodied experience of the animator, being the combination of elements required to produce authentic inhabited characters and performance.

## Biography

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Deborah Cameron is a full time lecturer in the Bachelor of Design in Animation lecturing across first and honours years with her areas of specialty being traditional animation principles and 2D character performance, drawing, and storyboard.

Deborah has over twenty-five years experience in the Animation industry, of which fifteen were spent at Walt Disney Studios Australia as a 2D character animator. Upon its closure in 2006, she continued to work independently on-animated features and storyboards for children's television programmes.

The focus of Deborah's research interest comes from the perspective and experience of a practitioner, in the area of animated character performance and the subsequent challenges that the animator faces in trying to achieve a believable and authentic outcome. A specific interest in the participation of observation and analysis of real life situations, study of gesture and the animators embodied experiences, as contributing factors in achieving this are the cornerstone of her research. The limitations of freedom the animator may face, based on creative and production choices, and the widespread use of pre determined behavioural traits and gestures to define characters and performance are influences to be analysed. Her interest in the embodied experience, drawing and the

human form has also led her to begin collaborating with performers of dance in the role of the observer and the observed.

Deborah's aim is to build on the knowledge already present in the area of animated character performance and begin to explore whether an explicit strategy exists in achieving the creation of an inhabited character in an otherwise inanimate object.