

## Panel E3

Sala delle Colonne 2

### Animation and “Reality”

Henry Melki

#### Beauty and The Beast: A Dynamic Relationship Between 3D Animation and the Adaption to Change



As a relatively new visual storytelling medium (Avila, 2010), digital 3D animation has seen its share of ups and downs. The shutdown of Rhythm and Hues studios in 2013 (Barkan, 2014; Horn, 2014) and the controversy revolving around the mistreatment of animators who worked on the motion picture “Sausage Party” in 2016 (Zakarin, 2016; Silver, 2016), where animators were threatened, suffered health problems and in some occasions weren’t paid, are just a few examples that show how films relying heavily on digital animation are achieved through the blood, sweat and tears of animators. It is arguable that these unfortunate events occurred due to the lack of knowledge on how the 3d digital process actually works.

Digital 3D Animation has been discussed in many publications ranging from articles, conference proceedings and books related to various disciplines. 3D animation is commonly defined as the process with which objects are brought to life by creating the illusion of movement (Wells, 1998). However, academic research on the animation creative process itself has been documented from a general perspective that gives the impression that it is a linear process. Most topics covered in the field involve technical aspects with a detailed focus on the software and tools used, as well as a superficial outline of the production process, which have been discussed mostly by interviewers for magazines, blogs, and television seeking topical information from the practitioners and actors about their projects. Nowadays, the digital animation process goes through a lot of uncertainties and changes which make the process far from linear (Horn, 2014). In a studio, a 3D animated movie is produced through the collaboration between the different talents with different backgrounds and disciplines. The diversity of specialisation can cause communication barriers which are one of many challenges faced at an animation studio. It is difficult to understand the various production challenges involved in completing a 3d animated movie, and how the various mistakes, imperfections, and challenges have been overcome by the creative team on a daily basis. And yet, 3d animated films are being produced and released each year with positive reception from audiences.

Taking into consideration that animation is not only defined by the movements and actions that occur on screen but also by the creative process itself with which the notion verisimilitude (or similar truth and reality) is created and molded into shape with its specific characteristics (Christophers, 2011). This paper investigates the effect of this gap in communication between the diverse talents at an animation studio, by exploring historical creative processes that are built on collaborative effort. Through this historical exploration, this paper proposes that, in a full feature length animated film, animation can be treated as a craft rather than an art form with the purpose of highlighting the pros and cons of the process. By comparing 3D animation to a craft, it is possible to identify similarities. Throughout pre-medieval to medieval times, it was common in different workshops of different crafting disciplines, that the master craftsman will ensure that the knowledge of a specific guild or crafting tradition to be passed on to the new generation through years of

experience and strict set of rules (Morelli, 2014). In addition, it was the patron who paid for the work, whether it was a painting or the pyramids, received the credit for work, symbolizing social status, rather than the craftsmen or the artisan. It was not until circa the 1400s with the start of the renaissance period, that artists (instead of craftsmen or artisans) emerged and started to receive credit and merit for their individual work instead of the sponsor. For example, Filippo Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo De Vinci. In between the two traditions described above, there was a transitional period that featured characteristics of both (Toker, 1985), mainly seen in gothic architecture of the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century which could prove crucial for comparative study between the digital 3D animation creative process and craftsmanship process discussed by Lars Spuybroek (2016) in his analysis of gothic architecture via 19<sup>th</sup> century theories discussed by John Ruskin.

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## Biography

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Henry Melki majored in Computer Graphics and Animation at Notre Dame University (NDU) – Louaize, Lebanon. He focused on Visual Effects during his studies but later changed his focus to character design and modelling after his graduation in summer 2010. In fall 2011, Henry enrolled in the Masters of Arts (MA) program at NDU during which, apart from working as a freelance motion graphics animator, he developed an interest in the Uncanny, and theories on empathy and aesthetics. In 2014, Henry presented his research thesis which focused on character design and the problem of the Uncanny. This thesis became the basis of Henry's interest in believability in animation that helped him develop his PhD proposal which got accepted at Ulster University – Northern Ireland, UK. During his application process, Henry was an instructor in ALBA at the University of Balamand where he taught both undergraduate and masters animation students. Henry is currently residing in Northern Ireland as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year full time PhD student investigating the creative process that leads to believable 3d photorealistic characters with his supervisors Professor Greg Maguire, who served as R&D Supervisor, Character Supervisor and Creature Supervisor at Lucasfilm Animation and at Industrial Light & Magic, and current Pro-vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) Professor Ian Montgomery whose main research interests are in the areas of design theory, knowledge transfer, and design perception.