

Panel E4

Sala Emiciclo

Animation: Beyond Movement

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The Animated Will: Understanding Thought and Action through Cartoons, Movement and Being in the World



In this paper I explore how animation can help us understand the human faculty of the will and how our sense of mental life is grounded in embodiment and movement. This exploration involves turning to examples of personality animation in animated cartoons, especially the work of Joanna Quinn, to consider how the rebellious spirit of animated characters and the dialectic of mechanism and autonomy express our illusory but real experience of will; that is, the seemingly inexorable possibility of realizing our thoughts through action. My thesis is that such animated cartoon characters emphasize the illusion of individual will but also the foundation of interiority in movement and being in the world. This contention is supported by recent scholarship in the fields of philosophy of mind and embodied thinking, which revise theories of subjectivity and epistemology that rely on subject/object and inside/outside formulations. Instead of grounding human knowledge in a separation from things in themselves, today's theories of mind suggest that human knowledge is grounded in constant, bodily contact with the world. The emphasis on movement that we find in many animated cartoons illuminates this contact and how the movement of bodies and things in the world informs our notions of will, autonomy, and interiority. Analyzing animated cartoon characters in this fashion is critical in today's media and political environment given the continued ideological investment in individual will. Feature film franchises and effects-driven films with CG characters remain focused on heroic individuals who are capable of successfully navigating and overcoming the complexity of global technological and economic systems. Animated cartoons offer a critical vocabulary for this context to the extent that they present exaggerated and parodic depictions of individual will, or even the futility of will as exemplified by Chuck Jones's Wile E. Coyote. Understanding the essential role of movement in these depictions may help us reinterpret them in terms of a non-sovereign subject whose will is not separate from or oppositional to the world but grounded in it.

Biography

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Eric Herhuth is Assistant Professor of Film Studies in the Department of Communication at Tulane University. His research areas include animation and film studies, aesthetics and politics, media and film theory, and modernity and globalization. He has published in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Cinema Journal*, and *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, and his book *Pixar and the Aesthetic Imagination: Animation, Storytelling, and Digital Culture* is forthcoming from the University of California Press (January 2017).