

Panel H3

Sala Emiciclo

Discourses on Animation Authors

Dirk De Bruyn

Compositing One Complete Revolution



'Every revolution, be it political, economic, social, or aesthetic, is, in the last analysis, a technological revolution.' Vilém Flusser (1988)

One Complete Revolution, a 10-minute Black and White animation by Melbourne animator Noel Richards is an important achievement in the jigsaw of Australian animation history and an important signpost in the evolution of technique. It was completed in 1989 and first screened at the 1990 Melbourne International Film Festival. This film implicitly documents shifts in animation technique and reflexively references cinema's history and its evolving language inside its narrative. As a mixed media work, *One Complete Revolution* straddles the shift from analog to digital animation. As an early piece of computer animation, Richards devised a form of computer assisted rotoscoping and fashioned a rudimentary form of compositing, before that term was in general use, predicting compositing's ascendancy in digital art and commercial use, where Richards built his subsequent career.

The film's narrative is inspired by Berthold Bartosch's *The Idea* (1932) (25 minutes), nominated by Richards as an influence and which itself was based on the woodcuts of Flemish painter and graphic artist Frans Masereel (1889–1972). In turn Masereel's 'wordless novels' which included *The Idea* (1920) are considered a precursor to the contemporary Graphic Novel and is cited by Art Spiegelman as an influence on his serialized seminal Graphic *Maus* (1980--91), which introduced the form globally. Pin-board animator Alexandre Alexeieff, friend of Bartosch, described his 1932 animation as 'Serious, historical, poetic', to stress the adult philosophical subject of the film, a far cry from the cartoon animation for children in which animation has often been pigeon-holed. Animation is considered a time intensive process and the use of computers, as with their use generally, was touted as speeding up this process (see Paul Virilio's *Speed and Politics* (1977)). For *The Idea* Bartosch produced 45,000 frames over two years, with up to four levels of animation and at times 18 superimpositions. Richards' hybrid work did not fare any better, partly because Richard's images migrated from material to digital form and then back again, to finish as a 16mm celluloid film. Produced on a *Macintosh Plus Computer*, the third Apple model introduced in 1986, expandable from 1 MB to a massive 4 MB, his animation took 4 years from 1985 to 1989 in between work commitments. Richards produced over 8,000, 20k black and white images collected and archived on 165 1.2 Megabyte Floppy Discs. Each floppy disc stored about 50 images.

One Complete Revolution displays a strong cinematic aesthetic through its editing and the use of originating black and white cinema material from the 1930s. The compositing process that Richards developed through this experimentation proved a productive calling card for his emerging professional career in advertising and film work. Motion compositing did not really become available commercially until 1990, after this film was completed. Although the look is very different, the processes Richards utilized in his visual effects work as leading computer animator on Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1998) are related, though higher budget and more sophisticated.

This film can be understood as an example of what Vilém Flusser has termed a “technical image”. For Flusser ‘technical images are meaningful surfaces. Created by programs, they are dependent on the laws of technology and the natural sciences’ (Ströhl 2004: xxiii). For Flusser, the photograph is an early form technical image, programmed by the technology of the camera. The production path of sifting through the film archive, rotoscoping with *MacVision* and composing with the Mac Plus Computer and *SuperPaint* outlines an even more refined form of programmability, metamorphosing the technical image from analogue form to digital surface.

References:

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Biography

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Dirk de Bruyn is Associate Professor of Screen and Design at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He has made numerous experimental, documentary and animation films, videos and performance and installation work over the last 40 years and written and curated extensively in these areas of practice. He was a founding member and past president of MIMA (Experimenta). His book *The Performance of Trauma in Moving Image Art* (ISBN-13: 978-1-4438-6053-6) was published in 2014. His feature length time-lapse animation *Telescope* (75 minutes 2012) screened in July 2013 in the Australian Perspectives Series at the Australian Centre of the Moving Image. His experimental film work and performances have screened internationally, with retrospectives at Punto Y Raya and Melbourne International Animation Festivals in 2016.