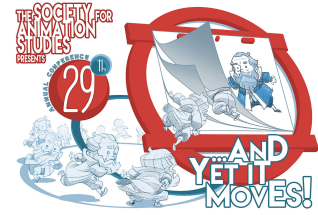## Panel G1
Auditorium
Death, Life, and (Re)Animation

Mihaela Mihailova
Computer Anima(tion) and the "Soul-Glow" of Digital Visual Effects

Academic discourse on photorealistic digital animation often presents the absence of profilmic materiality as an obstacle that computer-generated imagery needs to overcome – and indeed compensate for – in order to legitimize its connection to reality. For instance, in his analysis of Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (Hironobu Sakaguchi and Motonori Sakakibara, 2001), Thomas Lamarre writes that "it comes as no surprise that both the story and the aesthetics of the film hinge on the problem […] of finding the spirit within," arguing that the film is preoccupied with the need to "counteract the spectator's sense that these weightless bodies with their hypertextured complexions and overly bright eyes are completely lifeless and soulless" (171).

While the "panicked quest for signs of life" described by Lamarre is certainly a common narrative and aesthetic feature of digital filmmaking, this paper will focus on an alternative articulation of contemporary computer animation's relationship with its own life-giving and life-taking capacities. Using a selection of recent films, including Prometheus (Ridley Scott, 2012), Thor: The Dark World (Alan Taylor, 2013), and X-Men: Apocalypse (Bryan Singer, 2016), it will unpack the ways in which digital visual effects play out – spectacularly, on screen – their own ability to embody animating life forces. In scenes such as the Engineer's sacrifice in Prometheus and Apocalypse's reincarnation into a new body in the most recent X-Men, the creation, manipulation, and transference of life itself is coded as a visual effect. In acting out cycles of disintegration and becoming within narratives centered on genesis and re-birth, the "soul-glow" (to borrow the apt name given to the computer-animated life force of X-Men: Apocalypse's titular mutant) of computer anima(tion) performs its own creative process. Thus, expanding upon Kristen Whissel's concept of the "deadly vitality" which allows digital creatures to "emblematize […] the unprecedented technological mediation of organic life and death," this paper proposes to read the digital visual effect as a celebration of – rather than an anxious search for – the spirit within.

Bibliography
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Whissel, Kristen. Spectacular Digital Effects: CGI and Contemporary Cinema. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Biography

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Mihaela Mihailova is a PhD candidate in the joint Film and Media Studies and Slavic Languages and Literatures program at Yale University. Her research interests include animation, film and media theory, early Soviet cinema, contemporary Eastern European cinema, video games, and comics. She has published articles in animation: an

interdisciplinary journal, Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema, Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities, and Kino Kultura. Her piece "Frame-Shot: Vertov's Ideologies of Animation" (co-written with John MacKay) is included in Animating Film Theory (ed. Karen Beckman). Her essay "Latvian Animation: Landscapes of Resistance" appears in Animated Landscapes: History, Form, and Function (ed. Chris Pallant).