

Panel H1

Auditorium

Animation, the Double and the Uncanny

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Rotoscoping Uncanny Bodies: Animation Technology, Animation Aesthetics



In America's animation industry in the 1930s, an aesthetic that became known as 'Realism' arose and quickly became seen as an important marker for 'Quality' animation. This was especially true of the Disney studio, who took their approach to Realism to great heights. Other forms of Realism did exist, however, to include one that used a combination of technologies (such as the Rotoscope), which – particularly at the Fleischer studio – manifested a very different form of Realism. Ultimately, the Disney approach would come to dominate animation, and Fleischer's version of Realism would become seen as a novelty of a by-gone era, as well as less successful. How and why this may have happened is the subject of this paper.

In the 1930s, two studios found themselves in direct competition with one another. The first of these was the Fleischer Studio, headed by Max Fleischer and his brother, Dave Fleischer. The Fleischer studio had risen during the 1920s to be one of the top animation studios in the U.S., but, by the mid-1930s, it had begun to lose ground. The second studio, which had struggled during the 1920s but achieved meteoric success in late 1928, eventually dominating American animation, was Walt Disney Productions. Though many factors were at play in both Disney's rise and Fleischer's fall, this paper concentrates primarily on some of the key aesthetic differences of the two studios.

Ultimately, what would separate these two studios most was their differing approaches to the same basic concept: 'Realism'. This term covered not only how characters looked on screen, but also how animated characters *moved*; indeed, the Rotoscope was invented in large part because it was seen as a solution for creating realistic movement for animated characters at a time when most animators' artistic skills were lacking in an understanding of anatomy – as well as sufficient artistic training – for realistic movement to be achieved in early animation without the aid of devices such as the Rotoscope. For Disney, the style and aesthetic focus that would emerge beginning in the early 1930s would move their work away from the style more typical of the 1920s – caricature, exaggeration, loose design constraints, and an emphasis on gags – to a new focus on bringing their characters to life: giving them heart, imbuing them with thought, and designing them with features and proportions that made them not only look and move in a form echoing live-action cinema, but also led to characters who seemed both to think and to feel.

Biography

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Amy M. Davis is a lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Hull. She is the author of *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (John Libbey, 2006) and *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains: Men in Disney's Feature Animation* (John Libbey,

2013) as well as various papers on Disney, US Animation, and Horror. She has taught modules on (amongst other things) Disney Studio history, American Animation History, Gender and Cinema, and Hollywood Cinema History at the University of Hull since 2009. She recently edited the book *Discussing Disney* (which grew out of her 2014 conference of the same name), and is currently working on a monograph on children's horror, a monograph on non-human characters in Disney, and a longer-term project on the Disney theme parks.