

INTRODUCTION: ANIMATION BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

 **SAHRA KUNZ**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa,
School of Arts
Research Centre for Science
and Technology of the Arts
skunz@ucp.pt

 **EKATERINA CORDAS**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa,
School of Human Sciences
Research Centre for Communication
and Culture
ecordas@ucp.pt

ABSTRACT

The materials presented in this dossier aim to open a discussion on the present and future(s) of animation and invite the readers to look critically at the role of the medium in the contemporary world. By including articles from scholars and visual essays from artists, we would like to make a statement that animation studies should acknowledge both theory and practice. Animation film, throughout the years, has fought for its place within academia, and the discourse surrounding it should be rich and intermedial. With this approach, we intend to articulate that through different ways of producing knowledge and fostering interdisciplinarity, we instigate powerful and fruitful discussion that advances the medium.

Keywords: 2D Animation; 3D Animation; Animation; Intermediality; Portuguese Animation; Serious Games; Videogames.

This dossier, edited by Sahra Kunz and Ekaterina Cordas, focuses on animation under the headline *On Animation: In-Between Frames*. With it, we would like to encourage critical inquiry into this ground-breaking artistic field through the lenses of theory and practice. As such, we invite the readers to think about the present and the future(s) of animation by engaging with both theoretical articles contributed by scholars and visual artistic essay materials submitted by the artists for this edition. We believe that any conversation on the matter should mention an interdisciplinary reflection and acknowledge that animation today is part of a complex, rapidly changing, and interrelated media environment encompassing various practices within the moving images “ecosystem”. Animation today englobes all sorts of practices such as filmmaking, contemporary art, videogames (to name just a few). It is used not only in the arts but also, for example, in healthcare. Animation can also become a method of conducting practice-based research to reflect on pertinent socio-cultural problems. Animated film, throughout the years, has claimed its place within academia, and the discourse surrounding it is again rich and intermedial, reminding us of the metaphors collected by the prominent contemporary animation scholar Esther Leslie from sources dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century: “living paintings”, “musography”, “eye music”, “optical poetry”, “dance of ornaments”.

The two articles in this issue also contribute to framing animation within this interdisciplinary and intermedial discourse. Together with Anthony Enns, who calls animation a “time-critical medium”, we invite you to examine the differences and the possible blurring of the borders between live-action film and digital animation and trace the latter’s development from its emergence as a scientific instrument to its prevalence in use in contemporary filmmaking. The team of scholars of Catarina Vieira, André Perrotta, and Carla Pais-Vieira write on videogames and, more specifically, investigate the realm of healthcare and Serious Games with which animation is intrinsically linked.

These theoretical contributions are followed by two visual essays submitted to us by the representatives of two generations of Portuguese animators — David Doutel and Vasco Sá (BAP Animation Studios) and João González. These artists are at the forefront of the Portuguese animation industry and are experiencing an amazing moment of international recognition. Garrano (2022), by David and Vasco, has been nominated for the Sundance Film Festival, amongst other international nominations and accolades. *The Ice Merchants* (2022), by João Gonzalez, has, after an amazing run of festivals, including Cannes and the Annies, made history by being the first Portuguese film ever nominated for the Oscars. Having been born more than a decade apart, these animators represent the increasing relevance that Portuguese animation has been able to attain. They are by no means the only ones working successfully in this field, but their style and method of working are becoming increasingly common among young Portuguese animators.

In this dossier, we publish their pre-production materials, which give us a glimpse into their work process, illustrating the most important

steps in the creation of their animated films. These examples allow us to understand better the complexity of this type of work and the dedication, commitment, and research that goes into it. The graphic richness of the first sketches does not pale in comparison to the finished work, as “raw” drawing comes to life and is intertwined in the whole process, both in its subsidiary aspects (storyboards, concept art), as well as in the final piece.

Finally, in this issue of JSTA, there is a thematic book review under the title “A new language of truth: the role of animation in a fast-changing world”. Carla MacKinnon reflects on Nea Ehrlich’s *Animating Truth: Documentary and Visual Culture in the 21st Century* (2021) that positions firmly the animated documentary into contemporary media studies.

REFERENCE

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