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FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES:

EXPLORING STORYTELLING APPROACHES FOR ANIMATION IN SPATIAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Animation is considered a prevalent medium in contemporary moving image culture, which increasingly appears across non--conventional surfaces and spaces. And while storytelling in animation films has been extensively theorized, narrative forms that employ physical space as part of storytelling have been less explored. This paper will examine the narrative aspect of animation works which are screened outside the traditional cinematic venues. It will look at how these animation works tell stories differently - using the full potential of the space, as a narrative device, a tool, and a stage where the narratives unfold.

This paper will look at the historical perspective and the state of the art in animation installation today, exploring the relationship between the space and narrative in pre-cinematic, cinematic and post-cinematic conditions. It will examine how narrative structures in animation have changed over time, on their way from the black box of the cinema to the white cube of the gallery and even further, where they became part of any space or architecture. Through case studies of works by Tabaimo, Rose Bond, William Kentridge and other relevant artists, the interdependency of the narrative and the space where it appears will be explored, in order to identify new strategies for storytelling in animation. The aim of this paper is to emphasize the storytelling novelty that animation installations offer, which goes beyond the narrative structures that we are used to see on a single flat surface.

Keywords: Expanded Animation, Animated Installation, Narrative, Storytelling, Spatial Storytelling

Introduction

As animation increasingly appears across non-conventional surfaces and spaces, it becomes crucial to explore, re-define and re-invent narrative possibilities for animation in this context. While linear storytelling is the most commonly used narrative structure, it has little to do with how one perceives information in reality. Söke Dinkla expresses 'doubt whether a narrative can represent the complex reality of modern society with the help of linear, casually motivated stories.' (Dinkla, 2004) Dinkla's statement has strengthened this author's interest to question whether conventional narrative strategies are the best fit for expanded animation, considering that these works are no longer projected in single screen-based theatrical venues, nor on TV, but they coexist with architecture in the most versatile settings. Martin Raiser and Andrea Zapp note, in this "age of narrative chaos, […] traditional frameworks are being overthrown by emergent experimental and radical attempts to remaster the art of storytelling in developing technologies." (Raiser & Zapp, 2002, xxv) However, where can animation be located and identified within this framework of emerging narratives? This paper aims to explore the interdependency of space and narrative in order to get insight into the working mechanics of animation storytelling in space. Understanding this reciprocal relationship of the narrative and space will contribute to the re-articulation of visual storytelling for animation in a spatial context. For an easier understanding and readability, this article is divided into the following chapters: 1. Spatial storytelling with static and moving image, 2. Spatial Montage and its Aesthetic Effectiveness, 3. Fragments, 4. From Loops to Multi-layered Storylines: Narratives in Pre-cinematic, Cinematic and Post-cinematic Conditions, 5. Site specificity and other notions of spatial storytelling and 6. The white cube/black box dichotomy.

1. Spatial storytelling with static and moving image

Spatial storytelling denotes visual storytelling practices that unfold in a spatial context beyond the screen, in both virtual and physical space (caves, churches, galleries, etc.) Both physical and virtual spaces are considered because similar spatial storytelling methods are applied in these two types of spaces. What makes these works spatial is the fact that they are inseparable from the spatial context in which they are being shown. This is clearly visible in, for example, fresco cycles that are located in the physical space of a cathedral. The same goes for sculptural formations that are dependent on their architectural frames. However, even artworks that are not site-specific (for example, some moving image installations) can be considered spatial, if their separate elements require certain spatial configurations and arrangements for storytelling purposes.

Spatial narratives are told using either static or dynamic images. For example, a static spatial story would be a comic, because in comics, the passage of time is depicted in two-dimensional space, in a deliberate sequence. In the Western tradition, the sequential convention when reading comics is to read the panels from left to right, but the separate panels are not always organized in this way. They can be any size or shape, depending on what the story demands. It is their position and organization on a page that matters. Comics completely rely on the readers' participation. The reader connects and relates two or more images in order to convey meaning. They can see the previous and the following images, or they can browse freely on the page in any order they like, and for as long as they feel like it. The same applies if we consider static narratives in physical space.

Sergei Eisenstein argued that architecture was a precursor of the montage technique. As an example, he explored the unique spatial arrangement of the building of the Acropolis, as well as the Stations of the Cross. In the latter example, he described how these stations were often depicted in 12 differing sculptural formations or paintings at a certain distance from one another, in which each one represented a certain stop in Christ's journey to Golgotha. Eisenstein states that the viewer is stitching together the separate elements of the legend into a whole with his movement through space, and this action is

a precursor of filmic montage (Eisenstein, 1938). In this case, the element of time is a completely provisional duration created by the path the viewer takes to walk through the space and connect the static images in a coherent whole.

However, when moving images are shown in space, time becomes malleable. To understand how time is transformed in physical space, it is necessary to first understand how montage and editing work on the screen space, and then compare how these approaches are transferred to the physical space. In films, the sequences are organized one after the other in linear succession, in a timeline. Similarly to comics, the meaning of a film is derived from individual fragments. The difference is that in comics there are several fragments presented at once in the two-dimensional space, while in the film they are presented one after the other in a timeline. In films, there is less (or limited) time for interpretation between the individual film clips, compared to the unlimited time that the reader might spend viewing individual panels in comics. McCloud explains "each successive frame of the movie is projected on exactly the same space—the screen—while each frame in comics must occupy a different space. Space does for comics what time does for film" (McCloud, 1993, p.7). When thinking of the aesthetic of montage in spatial context, it becomes apparent that the montage techniques that were used for creating complex sequential narratives in a single timeline will now need to be adapted to another kind of storytelling. Not to a sequential, but to a spatial one.

2. Spatial Montage and its Aesthetic Effectiveness

Lev Manovich writes that what happened with a montage in cinema was completely the opposite of what the public was used to in a spatial context. He asserts that cinema erased this tradition by lining events into a sequential, linear form, and describes his interest in alternatives to cinematic montage, "replacing its traditional sequential mode with a spatial one" (Manovich 1995). In *Little Movies* (1994), he experimented with spatial storytelling by showing a multitude of small images within a single screen, with each small segment presenting a separate loop. Spatialized and organized in such a way, he introduces a specific method of organization and representation of moving image sequences in a spatial context—a kind of spatial storytelling. He emphasizes the expressive possibilities of spatial montage, saying:

> [...] montage in time gives way to montage in space [...] In addition to montage dimensions already explored by cinema (differences in images' content, composition, movement) we now have a new dimension: the position of the images in space in relation to each other. [...] The logic of replacement, characteristic of cinema, gives way to the logic of addition and co-existence. Time becomes spatialized, distributed over the surface of the screen (Manovich, 1995).

The *split-screen* format is positioned at the junction of sequential and spatial storytelling. This is because it is still taking place on a screen, yet involves the spatial arrangement of two or more of its fragments within the screen space. Since the first multiple projections in space appeared in Abel

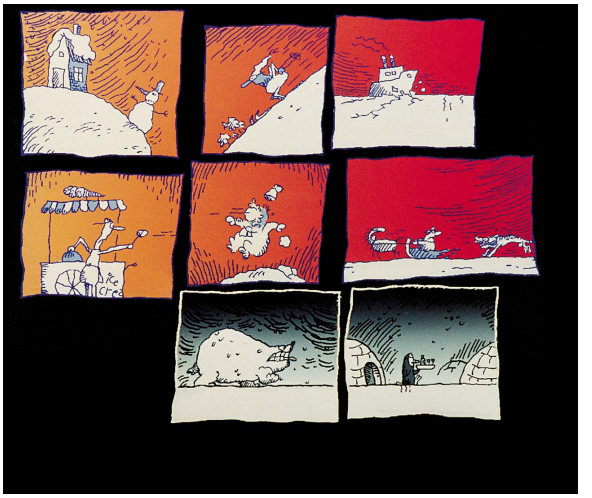

Fig. 1 *The End of The World in Four Seasons*, Driessen, P.,1995.

Fig. 2 *Through the Hawthorn,* Burditt, G., Borg, P. and Brenner, A., 2013.

Gance's film Napoleon (1927), we witnessed a range of split-screen films in both live action and animation films. Animations by Paul Driessen are compelling examples of storylines that develop simultaneously. While in *The Boy Who Saw the Iceberg* (2000) he is using a screen split into two halves to juxtaposing the same story in two worlds – the real and the imaginary, in *The End of the World in Four Seasons*, the screen contains up to eight windows with micro-narratives unfolding in each one. While the relationships between the fragments are usually casually motivated and dependent, they can be rather complex too, and not easy to define.

On the other hand, the split-screen can be used to tell a story from three points of view (in Anna Benner, Pia Borg and Gemma Burdit's film *Through the Hawthorn* (2013), Figure 2), or to depict the complex mental state of the protagonist (in Don Hertzfeldt's film *Everything Will be OK* (2006), Figure 3).

The split-screen format illustrates the concept of spatial montage and the moving images that coexist side by side in a spatial context. The same spatial storytelling potential can be translated into three-dimensional physical space when considering moving image installations or immersive environments dealing with moving images. Spatial montage is a kind of expanded montage, in which the organization of fragmentary imagery expands beyond the screen to the architectural space. This means that the organization happens between two primary entities, the fragmented moving image sequences, and the gaps between them. By utilizing spatial montage, the actions happen not only on screens, but continue in the off-screen space, in the gaps, outside the realm of the moving images. When montage is transferred to a spatial context, it is no longer only about how moving image content is juxtaposed, but also what happens with the space in between. It thus seems feasible that the aesthetic effectiveness

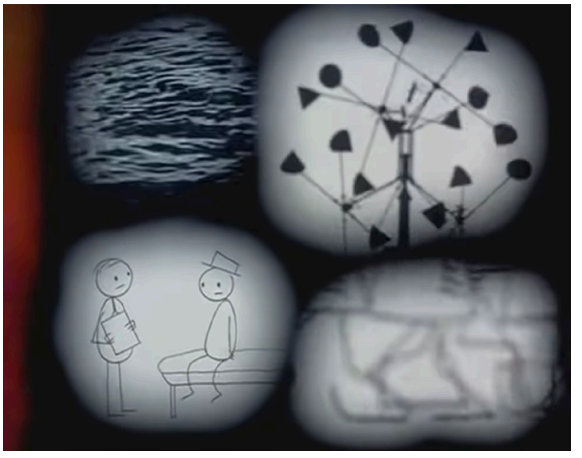

Fig. 3 *Everything Will be OK,* Hertzfeldt, D., 2006.

Fig. 4 *Sisters,* Vidakovic, L., 2012.

of spatial storytelling derives from organizing and juxtaposing these two basic, equally important components, rather like oppositions that fulfil each other.

Figure 4 shows an example of how a film expands outside the border of the screen. The elongated frame-space usually shows a triptych, but this shot shows only the left projection, in which a girl is staring out of the window, or rather, out of the frame. The direction of her gaze is directing the viewer's gaze and thoughts to a space beyond that which is visible.

Thus, her gaze extends the film to the physical space of the gallery in which the projection is shown. Sound has as important a role as the moving image because it might also suggest what is going on in the gaps between the screens, even if these are blank spaces meant to incite the viewer's imagination.

3. Fragments

What Manovich describes as spatial montage within a single screen means that the images do not only replace each other sequentially but coexist on a screen (or in physical space), forming juxtaposed interrelations. There is a myriad of possible combinations that can be experimented with in spatial contexts. The active engagement of the viewer is a response to an orchestration of both fragmented sequences of moving images and the gaps between them. This strategy leans on the nature of the spatial narrative, which in most cases either frustrates the viewer's need for closure, or it offers several layers of meaning to please a wide range of audiences.

Norman McLaren's definition of animation states "what happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame" (McLaren, 1995). This means that what is crucial for animation is the animator's decision about the

manipulation of the invisible interval between frames. The movement, or the magic, happens in this gap. If we imagine two panels from Scott McCloud's comic, where one panel shows a man chasing his victim with an axe, while the other panel depicts only a night cityscape, with letters suggesting that someone is crying out in horror, we can see how important this gap between the two panels become. Since neither of the panels show the act of killing, it is up to the reader to imagine what happened in the "gutter." (In the world of comics, the space between two panels is called the "gutter".) By creating such clues, the author is telling a story without telling it, or rather without showing it—similarly to the hidden magic concealed between frames. McCloud writes: "To kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths" (McCloud, 1994, p.69). By showing two panels in a sequence, the reader connects and relates them in order to extract meaning. This meaning-making process will be slightly different for everyone because it is up to the reader to imagine what is missing. This unique reading experience is intrinsic to comics, relies entirely on the reader's participation and it can be directly related to animation films and installations alike. In the case of films, these gaps between the panels can be related to the off-screen space, but more importantly to Hayao Miyazaki's concept of *MA* – meaning emptiness in Japanese. Miyazaki utilises MA in his animations by breaking the action with necessary silence and stagnation, where the characters are allowed to stand still and just be. Without an urge to actively support the narrative, these characters (but also backgrounds) support the narrative in a more passive, contemplative way, that is charged with meaning and helps building deeper emotional attachments (Miyazaki, 2002).

Both the MA and the gaps between the panels in comics can be related to installations, more precisely to the physical gap between the projections or screens in the space where the work is shown. An exhibition is seen as a multi-layered, multi-threaded narrative, in which the viewers can freely move around and, as they do so, they collect fragments of information and stitch them together in unique ways, just like when reading a comic or when watching a split-screen film. The purpose of the multi-threaded narrative in a spatial context is to offer a variety of details to satisfy both experts and the general audience alike. Kossmann explains:

> An exhibition is a narrative unfolding in space and time [where the] visitor is physically moving. [...] The walk serves as a way of linking separate scenes to form a narrative, like threading pearls to a string. [...] The image of the string of pearls suggests that there is more to exhibitions than mere items on display. It implies continuity and emphasizes the interrelatedness of things. The walk is what connects the exhibition maker – as a storyteller – and his audience (Kossmann, 2012, p.47).

The visitors compose their own story by assembling the fragments they engaged with. To this end, Elwes also argues that "installation and the moving image dramatizes and focuses our relationship to culture by creating a separate space for interaction, an ante-room to reality, a playroom in which visitors can explore and seek new ways of participating in our increasingly fragmented, polyphonic and mediated environment" (Elwes, 2015, p.151). While supporting Elwes' views, this author suggests that instead of the linear, conventional narrative structure used for single-screen projections, here, fragmented, open and disjointed narratives are a better solution to tell (or rather suggest) a story in a spatial environment.

Fragmented narratives are, within the scope of this paper, understood as indicators of non-linear, disjointed, fractured narratives that do not comprise a whole, but are rather segments of a larger entity that is not fully defined. Therefore, fragmented narratives are narratives that have a disrupted structure, in which parts of the basic building blocks of a narrative might be left out.

Viktor Shklovsky, a Soviet literary theorist and formalist, differentiates the *fabula* (the story) from the *syuzhet* (or the plot). The first refers to the overall story, while the former refers to the structure and order in which the events that make the story are presented. (Shklovsky, 2016) Therefore, fragmentation refers to the *syuzhet*, or the plot, that is, to the way the story is presented. Shklovsky is known as well for his idea of the defamiliarized fabula. According to him, the story can be defamiliarized, or made strange or interesting by the way the events are organized and presented. If the plot is for example fragmented, the structure makes the viewer more alert, so he puts together the clues of the story in a unique way (Shklovsky, 2016).

It is challenging to determine how fractured a narrative can be and yet still be considered a narrative. The short answer would be—very fractured. From this author's point of view, even very few fractions of information are enough to tell a story, and these might not even include actions or characters. A scene can tell a story without actually "telling" it, but rather by hinting at it with clues. The brain is wired to read into pictures and extract meaning from the sum of their parts. As Abbott states, "this human tendency to insert narrative time into static, immobile scenes seems almost automatic, like a reflex action. We want to know not just what is there, but also what happened" (Abbot, 2008, p.7).

In this author's view, it is possible to feel empathy for the characters even when they are no longer present in the space, through their belongings and the mise-en-scène. Perhaps, an action does not necessarily need to occur, or at least it does not need to build up towards a catharsis, as in a cinematic narrative. Fragmentation, especially when spatialized, means that the viewer might miss out on something if not guided. In a spatial context, the catharsis is often not predetermined and timed. Thus, the viewer might experience it, or miss it all together.

Spatial storytelling might also rely on modes of world discovery instead of action and might not include characters at all. Carolyn Handler Miller writes that "characters in digital media behave differently than they do in linear media, and play roles that are unique to an interactive environment" (Miller, 2004, p.117). In immersive environments, the user, viewer, or player could become the character themselves, and, as such, they are predetermined to achieve a goal. Miller asserts, for example, that the goal could be that of finding an exotic orchid in a forest that is packed with obstacles. This equals world discovery. Thus, as long as the fragments are "speaking to" and touching the viewer, a narrative is embedded in them. However, to fully understand the relationship between the narrative and the space, it is essential to explore the nature of narratives in animation in the pre-cinematic, cinematic and post-cinematic conditions.

4. From Loops to Multi-layered Storylines: Narratives in Pre-cinematic, Cinematic and Post-cinematic Conditions

When considering moving images in space, it is worth looking back to the first trick shows, in which the performers applied early animation devices to immerse and amuse the audiences. These shows are relevant to the exploration of storytelling in spatial contexts, because, generally, in the pre-cinema era, animation relied more on the space in which it was presented—just as contemporary animated installations do. Thus, when considering contemporary animated installations today, one returns to some of the pre-cinematic experiences. Early forms of animation, such as optical toys, were more direct and interactive, considering that these devices relied completely on the user's manual intervention and participation. As these devices were small, they were suitable to be consumed anywhere, while, for example, magic lantern shows were held in various places, such as victorian parlours and street corners. Therefore, in the sense of interactivity and space dependency, early animations come

quite close to resembling contemporary animated installations screened outside single screen-based theatrical venues, that is, in a gallery, museum, or practically any urban space or surface.

In the early, pre-cinematic stage, optical toys offered an interactive and intimate experience of animation, featuring extremely simple narrative forms, such as the morphing of two pictures (thaumatrope) or loops (zoetrope, phenakistoscope). Manovich explains what this most minimal narrative form—the loop—meant in the context of pre-cinematic devices:

> All of them—the zoetrope, the phonoscope, the tachyscope, the kinetoscope—were based on loops, sequences of images featuring complete actions that can be played repeatedly. The thaumatrope (1825), in which a disk with two different images painted on each face was rapidly rotated by twirling a string attached to it, was in essence a loop in its most minimal form: two elements replacing one another in succession (Manovich, 2016, p.24-25).

Donald Crafton writes that "for the most part the animation sequences in these first films serve no narrative function; they exited only as movement for its own sake" (Crafton, 1993, p.32). Although they carry narrative meaning, the focus was not on the narrative aspect of these devices, but on the movement itself, and the intended engagement with the viewer. Rather than telling complex narratives, these educational devices were meant to introduce the technical novelty, reveal the workings of human vision while entertaining and amusing the audience/user.

In the chapter titled *Defining Narrative*, in the section *The Bare Minimum*, Abbot writes that "narrative is a representation of an event or a series of events." (Abbot, 2008, p.12) This means that the minimum requirement for a narrative to exist is to depict at least one action or event. Then it is viable to consider simple events depicted on a thaumatrope as a narrative. While a caged bird cannot be considered a narrative as it lacks an event, a woman kissing a man can, because two protagonists are involved in an action. Therefore, examples that do not depict an event or an action are not relevant to this paper.

The consumption of pre-cinematic optical toys could take place anywhere. These devices were mobile and generally small (zoetrope, thaumatrope), thus they are suitable to be used at home. On the other hand, magic lantern shows took place in a range of public places, such as street corners, Victorian parlours or pubs. Étienne-Gaspard Robert's Phantasmagoria (1799) was shown in an abandoned part of a Capucin's convent. He chose this specific place to add a sensory experience to the show and enhance its frightening effect. The magic lantern shows were often accompanied by the sound of thunder, bells or other auditory effects that immersed the viewer in the experience even more. However, the novelty of these shows started to wear off, and soon they could no longer entertain the audience which got used to the 'magic' and demanded more complex and entertaining content. With the invention of cinema, the new venues accommodated seated audiences, which resulted in a longer attention span than it was possible earlier. Consequently, narratives became longer, and more complex structures emerged. Manovich notes:

> as 'the seventh art' began to mature, it banished the loop to the low-art realms of the instructional film, the pornographic peep-show and the animated cartoon. In contrast, narrative cinema has avoided repetitions; as modern Western fictional forms in general, it put forward a notion of human existence as a linear progression through numerous unique events (Manovich, 2016, p.36).

What was different at this stage was that there was very little connection between the film and the space in which it was

shown. The audience was seated at a distance from the cinematic apparatus, "the magic" and the bodily experience of the space. In this regard, Lorelai Pepi writes:

> The beginning concepts of animation were entwined with user interactivity, but as mechanical invention intervened, animation as "cinema" was transferred to the performative gestures of drama and spectacle, and the audience began to be physically separated from the cinema screen. The spectator's body was being removed from the equation (Pepi, 2005).

Addressing the same issue, Norman M. Klein writes

> as cinema took charge of visual culture after 1895, it [animation] lost its earlier links to theater and scripted spaces and became associated mostly (and then entirely) with the flat screen. But that was only temporary. After 1955, with Disneyland, animation returned to its roots, as an architectural, sculptural, and graphic narrative" (Klein, 2005, p.27).

This indicates that in the post-cinematic stage, it is possible to identify similarities with elements of the pre-cinematic stage of narrative.

As animation began to be increasingly screened outside of cinematic venues, the connection between space and narrative re-emerged. The attention span has shortened once again, and the narratives now rely on the viewers' active participation, as in the pre-cinematic stage. However, there is an important element that was not present before. It is now possible to incorporate the knowledge of film studies regarding complex storytelling structures and methods, and apply it to contemporary animated installations. Based on this knowledge, animation has left the single screen-based theatrical venues in the quest to amuse a wider range of spectators in immersive and interactive environments. Spark and Honari point out that "viewing works displayed on non-flat surfaces in large-scale environments is becoming commonplace. While many works include elements of narratives, or aspects of visual playfulness and optical whimsy, they do not manage to combine both of these facets into a singular,

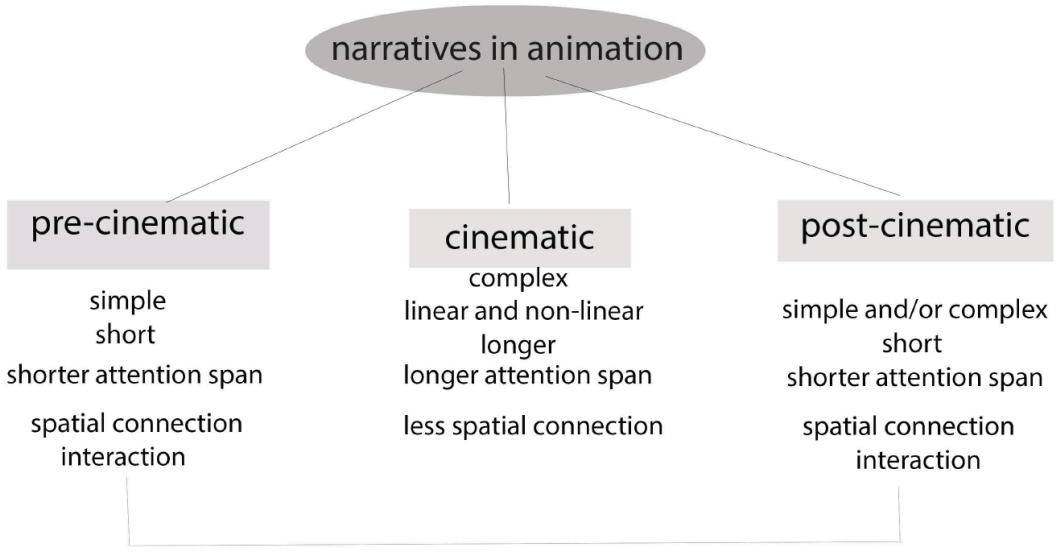

Fig 5 Narratives in animation in pre-cinematic, cinematic and post-cinematic condition, Vidakovic, L., 2016.

immersive, visually engaging storytelling experience" (Spark & Honari, 2015, p.52). Today, there are only a small number of works with complex narratives; the majority of animation artists rather use loops or abstract visual forms, or are creating immersive environments with no stories, but rather only hints and visual clues. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda define post-cinema as the landscape of the 21st century new media formats, devices, and networks. They write:

> it is the collection of media, and the mediation of life forms, that "follows" the broadly cinematic regime of the twentieth century. [...] post-cinema asks us to think about new media not only in terms of novelty but in terms of an ongoing, uneven, and indeterminate historical transition. The post-cinematic perspective challenges us to think about the affordances (and limitations) of the emerging media regime not simply in terms of radical and unprecedented change, but in terms of the ways that post-cinematic media are in conversation with and are engaged in actively re-shaping our inherited cultural forms" (Denson & Leyda, 2016, p.2).

In an attempt to expand on this and fill in the gap with more complex animated storytelling, a deeper exploration of the narrative possibilities of this form is required. This author's research interest and approach is to examine the storytelling mechanics for animated installations in terms of spatial orientation (direction of gaze by utilizing spatial montage, sound, colours, etc.), yet also to negotiate them in relation to framing, composition, staging and editing, which spatially distributed multi-screen installations allow for.

The narrative forms that are largely employed today in animated installations are still loops and minimal forms such as gags or abstract decorative patterns. There is still a lack of complex, multi-layered and multithreaded narratives. With respect to conceptual works, such as expanded cinema, when examining how this form (compared to expanded animation) accommodates narrative structures, one finds that they are characterized more by concepts than narratives and stories. To understand why there is no story in expanded cinema, it is worth looking at Gene Youngblood's definition of synaesthetic cinema as "the art of evocative emotion rather than concrete facts" (Youngblood, 1970, p.117). Youngblood says that in an expositional narrative, a story is being told; in evocative synaesthesia an experience is being created (Youngblood, 1970, p.92).

He states how distinctive these two approaches are, and while clearly expanded cinema embraced the evocative approach, the dramatic structure of film language was completely neglected, seen for its negative effect on producing a passive and numb audience. How is storytelling then seen today in the context of animated installations? How did animated stories change to adapt to expanded animation forms?

In order to discover adequate methods of spatial storytelling, this author also considered narrative approaches to games and Virtual Reality (VR). These media seemed adequate to explore storytelling approaches, because they shared the following similarities with animated installations: they have to accomplish storytelling within a spatial environment, both require a balance between linear and non-linear storytelling and rely entirely on non-linear (interactive) techniques.

Identifying these approaches will hopefully shed light on how spatial narratives are not centrally located or linear, but are spread throughout the entire storyworld. As such, they rely on the active participation of the viewer or player, in order to be fully perceived. This is the case with games, VR and animated installations. These stories are at least loosely scripted, space-dependent, and can be more or less interactive. Regarding the craft of storytelling in VR and the dilemma of whether to leave the audience free to roam or to guide them intentionally, Gray Hodgkinson identifies two modes of storytelling. These are *story-telling* and *story-giving* (Hodgkinson, 2016, p.251). The first is an author-driven story, where the

author uses techniques to guide the viewers' gaze in order to tell a predetermined story that the audience cannot change. The second is a more interactive story mode, in which one offers clues and bits of the world for the viewers to discover at their own pace. Hodgkinson emphasizes that there is a constant struggle to balance these two modes, because there is a narrative paradox between authorship and the autonomy of the viewer. The author seeks control because he or she is concerned with the fixed content and message, but the viewers seek autonomy to freely move around and digest the story at their own pace. The stories in spatial context generally balance between these two storytelling approaches, which vary depending on the spaces where they appear.

5. Site specificity and other notions of spatial storytelling

In this section, the complex relationship between space, animation, and the narrative is explored by citing examples of space being utilized as a narrative device, and which appear along the black box of the cinema to the white cube of the gallery [trajectory] (and, even further, where animation becomes part of any space or architecture). Some of these works are tied so closely to the place in which they appear, that they would completely change if they were to be screened elsewhere. Such works are called *site-specific*. A site-specific installation is a term derived from contemporary art, which refers to a work created for a specific space or place in time. [...] The work considers the viewer's entire sensory experience coupled with the specific geographic, historical, and cultural significance of the place. (Igi-Global Dictionary) Rose Bond's animated installation *Illumination #01* is such a work, for which the place is an integral, if not the key, component of the work.

Illuminations #1 (2002) was rear-projected onto the windows of the Portland Seamen's Bethel Building. It tells the story of the building, the area and its inhabitants over the past 120 years. This work represents spatial montage in a site-specific context—whereby the inclusion of the specific building is a crucial part of the work. The windows of the building are used as screens, showing fragmented storylines, while the particular area of the city is the space in which the narrative unfolds. Here the specific space not only adds an aesthetic appeal to the work, but also provides a contextual background. Displacing this work would essentially change its meaning. It is a site-specific work that represents an open-ended, fragmented narrative. It depicts glimpses of the characteristic epochs of this building. The "revived ghosts" move from window to window in the continuous space of the building, which does not show only the interiors, but also events taking place outside. Montage was used in this project in close relation to the

Fig. 6 *Illuminations #1*, Bond, R., 2015.

building's window arrangement. At times separate frames were used to show a certain scene within a larger picture, but sometimes the sum of the windows was used to depict a continuous scene, within all the frames. Bond says, "viewers not only derive meaning from snatches and fragments but a kind constructivism—which may involve imagining what is missed." (Bond, 2011, p.73) Bond used the specific architecture of the building, to tie it closely to the narrative of its never-ending change. It appears as if this work projects the community-based history of the neighbourhood back onto itself. This example shows that once the animation is placed in a site-specific context, it starts to speak to a different audience—in this case to everyone in the city who happens to walk by.

Birgitta Hosea also works in the domain of site-specific installations. In her projects, an animation is often combined with performative elements, and incorporated into museum displays or exhibited on multiple screens in an old chapel. In her work *Medium* (2012) the interior of the chapel adds another dimension to the work, because the darkness, the damp air of the space, and the many stairs one has to climb down in order to see the work all add to the experience. She describes this influence of place on the animations and explores the phenomenon of the mobile and active viewer in the context of animated installations:

> viewing an animation as part of an installation is an altogether different experience to watching an animation from a fixed seat. It is much more than just putting a screen in a gallery and expecting people to engage with fixed concentration. It should be considered as a spatial experience in which the visitor's angle of view is choreographed and in which all of their kinaesthetic, sensory and haptic faculties are engaged to make sense of the experience (Hosea, 2015, p.135).

Such examples show that since Bill Brand's Masstransiscope (1980), which engaged the public space by bringing animation to the metro underground in New York, animating public space has become quite common. Animated works emerge on various sites, video mapping in various buildings in the city, on art museums' media walls, but other public displays as well. An example of such initiatives includes *Midnight Moment* curated by Times Square Arts since 2012. It is a digital exhibition on billboards in Times Square in NYC, which runs every night from 11:57 pm to midnight.

During her recent show at *Midnight Moment,* Vergine Keaton's work was screened across several large displays in Times Square. Her work, digitally assembled from hundreds of engravings, is nothing but captivating, especially seeing it along billboards and advertisements. Engraved deer, dogs and birds rush across projection screens resembling the contrast of old and new along with the contrast of hunting in old and new times. This event counts over 2.5 million viewers annually, thus, it is no wonder that museums and galleries aim for public screening to reach out to such wide audiences.

Museums often use their media walls that are visible from the outside, to reach people who are passing by on the street. Such an example is the Museum of Contemporary

Fig. 7 *I was Crying out at Life,* Keaton, V., 2019. Photography by Ian Douglas for Times Square Arts NYC.

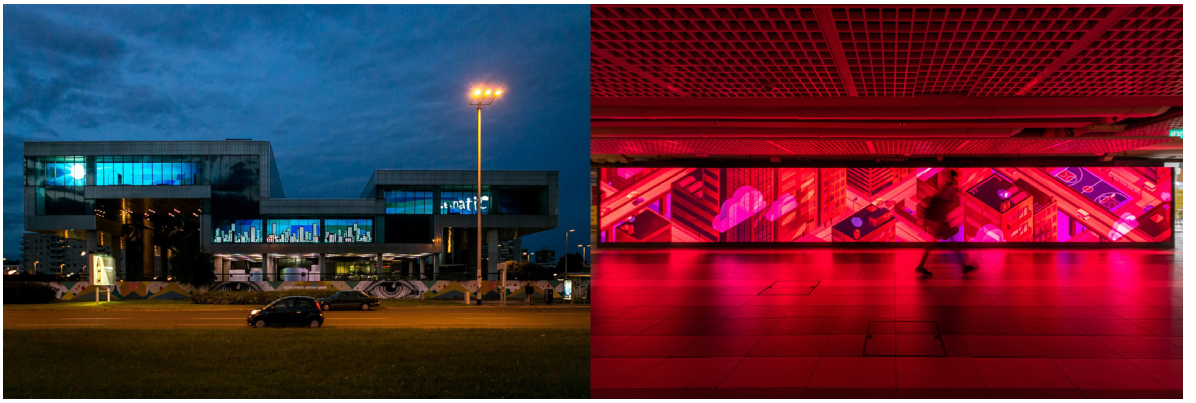

Fig. 8 (left) *Lunatic,* Hergesic, B., 2016. Photography by Julien Duval for the World Festival of Animated Film – Animafest Zagreb. Croatia. (right) *Pixel City,* Murillo, J., 2018. Photography by Quek Jia Liang, Media Art Nexus and NTU Museum Singapore.

Art in Zagreb, which in conjunction with Animafest, initiated the project *Animation Goes MSU.* In 2017 Animafest hosted a special competitive program for site-specific works, which were projected onto three screens within the museum's glass walls. Such practices are not new, and not isolated. Another remarkable example is an elongated, 15 meter-long and two-meter-high led screen, which was placed on the busy campus of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore in 2016.

The Media Art Nexus is the only non-commercial urban media screen in Singapore, an urban media art platform initiated by Ina Conradi and Mark Chavez. It hosts a variety of screenings and programs and features mostly abstract, interactive animation works, and occasionally figurative, narrative animations too, of about 500 artists per year. It is important to differentiate the above-mentioned initiatives from large scale projections and urban spectacles of video mappings of various contents with a pure purpose to entertain wide audiences. These are narratives that are entertaining and engaging, and often stay in the domain of the spectacle, but others can deliver meaningful content, going beyond the entertainment emblem. In order to raise awareness of climate change, Marina Zurkow's work *Slurb* (2009) was screened on a building in Tampa during the Lights of Tampa Biennial. The work addresses climate change, overfishing and other ecological issues. This indicates that animation can tell not only engaging stories but also deliver meaningful content, beyond single-screen based theatrical venues.

6. The white cube/black box dichotomy

While animated works in public spaces are made available to everyone, animated installations that are shown in the black box or white cube contexts are exclusively for people who visit these museums and galleries. These venues often show installations less dependent on the specific place at which they are displayed. Instead, they integrate the space as a narrative device, or form spatial relations within the work and with the space in which they are displayed. As long as the spatial arrangement is configured in the same way, these works can be reproduced in any space that supports this spatial organization.

It is worth looking at the dichotomy of the white cube and the black box, making a distinction between works that function more as sculptures or art objects within the gallery setting, versus those works, mainly projections, that turn the gallery space into a black box. The black box is often understood to

be merely another cinema space placed in the gallery, most often having seating, because it accommodates works of a certain length. In this context, the black box was not seen as "cinema in the gallery", but a darkened space without seating, which allows the viewer free passage and movement within the immersive space. Christine Veras states that "the gallery is not an extension of the movie theatre and therefore the viewer's behaviour and attention span changes. [...] The white cube format per se is being reviewed when welcoming and calling for a transformed black box appearance of the cinema. Consequently, it can combine the best of both spaces, embracing the public and inviting people to play and discover" (Veras, 2016, p.156).

Therefore, when exhibiting animation in a gallery, one must consider the two most common types of artworks: an art object as a mobile sculpture or a form of projection. Depending on the context and the nature of the work, these artworks can be displayed in the white cube, and are sometimes considered objects or sculptures (Juan Fontenive, Gregory Barsamian), or might demand turning the whiteness into a black box if the immersive nature of the work demands that (Tabaimo, William Kentridge).

While featuring different possibilities of screening animated works on screens, walls, curved spaces, and immersive environments, one of the main concerns in a black box context is the question of framing and the surface of the projections. Notably, the "screen" as a projection surface ceases to exist in the way one is used to in single screen-based theatrical venues, or, on a smaller scale, a monitor. Here the space becomes the "screen". This means that the projections may vary in size and shape, as much as the architecture of the building allows. Such an example is Tabaimo's work, often projected on various surfaces, such as several curved surfaces, with mirrors. In these cases the work becomes a moving image environment that is radically different from the sculptural form of animated works that were mentioned in the above section on the white cube. The viewer must move through these environments in order to perceive them, whereas in the white cube it is still possible to be a voyeur.

Even though there are examples of the black box being perceived as merely an extension of the cinema, these works are of less interest to this paper, because they constitute a cinema screening in the gallery; they do not offer a viewing experience that differs from that of a regular cinema. The focus is rather on those works that, as Spark and Honari put it, might "break the dichotomy of the white cube/black box paradigm" (Spark & Honari, 2016, p.56). It is crucial to highlight the importance of these kinds of works and exhibitions, because they push the boundaries of animation's potential, in terms of its technical requirements, storytelling potential and immersive characteristic that enables the viewers to see animated content in a completely different environment than was possible before. These animation artists, as Spark and Honari note, "create a work positioned on the spectrum between cinema and art" (Spark & Honari, 2016, p.56). To mention just a few, artists whose work fits well to this group are Tabaimo, William Kentridge, Kara Walker, Gregory Barsamian, Marian Zurkow, and Rose Bond.

In a way, contemporary digital museums that opened in 2018, such as the Tokyo-based digital art museum featuring Team Lab's Borderless project and L' Atelier des Lumiere in Paris, could also be considered large black boxes. The digital museum, which is entirely dedicated to a mix of immersive and interactive animated installations by Team Lab, is an example of a borderless, giant black box. Here, as the title suggests, 460 projectors create an environment in which the projections seamlessly bleed into one another and form a seamless passage from one space to another, making the entire space a borderless "screen." While the digital museum featuring original immersive installations by Team Lab provides unique experiences of interactive art and immersive environments, the first Paris-based digital museum has a different agenda. Their exhibitions comprise a re-imagination and animation of paintings by Klimt and Hundertwassers (perhaps chosen because

of the colourful pallet suitable to appeal to a broad audience), with the purpose to lure the visitor in. However, it is important to bear in mind that the focus of this paper is precisely on the narrative aspect of animated installations.

The examples provided so far contained short loops and simple storylines, but rarely contained complex narrative structures. To address this gap, and to frame the novelty of this research, in the following section the focus is precisely on this issue, with an even deeper analysis of storytelling and staging mechanics, and their efficacy for spatial storytelling. It is exactly the narrative potential of multi-projection environments and the methods of harmonizing the disparate, fragmented images that are employed in designing these experiences which are central to this paper. The exploration of narratives in animated installations follows a historic route from the early history of animation, such as that of pre-cinematic toys, and from there a relationship to contemporary approaches in storytelling for animated installations is established. The purpose of this investigation is to determine whether single screen-based theatrical venues can meet the demands of emerging, versatile forms of contemporary storytelling, or whether these narratives demand a specific spatial presentation.

In traditional Western animation, space is usually seen as a character-centred background for action. However, a complementary and much needed view is presented in Pedro Serrazina's article "Narrative Space" and Chris Pallant's book *The Animated Landscape*. The latter is a collection of writings that gives the animated backgrounds, places and landscapes credibility in their own right, such that they become more than a background element for the action. Special attention has been paid to Pallant's "The Stop-Motion Landscape" because it is highly relevant to this research. He writes that "it is this sense of tangible space, established through material familiarity, which endows the stop-motion landscape with potential for great symbolic significance. [...] it can be made to serve as more than just a surface, more than just a set, more than just a location" (Pallant, 2015, p.35). He then continues to define three types of landscapes, namely instrumental, symbolic and narrative landscapes, depending on their primary function in the film. For the purpose of creating The Family Portrait, the narrative and the symbolic landscapes are most relevant. The first "adds value to the narrative through the details introduced via the mise-en-scene", while the latter contributes to storytelling with symbols and metaphors (Pallant, 2015, p.43).

Along the same line, Serrazina writes that space can mean much more than simple background support. It can go "beyond the traditional supportive role, and intervene in the construction of the visual narrative" (Serrazina, 2018). This author has produced a practical work, an animated installation in 2012, which ties in perfectly with the theoretical background of Serrazina's view that space can be more than a "decorative element," and Pallant's exploration of the symbolic animated landscape in stop-motion animation films. Serrazina's notion that "the frame can be liberated from the dominance of the character," (Serrazina, 2018) ties perfectly to this author's fascination with still, empty interiors, in which the protagonists play minor roles, if any.

This author's work shows three synchronized screens (Figure 4) and conveys a story through the depiction of atmosphere and minimal action in 3 interiors reminiscent of Dutch paintings. The plot is loose, depicting mundane, melancholic actions from everyday life, spiced with a dash of mystery. The characters walk around the house engaged in housework, hardly taking any notice of one another. Visual metaphors and different editing approaches are utilized; the off-screen space and sound are engaged as narrative tools in order to offer guidance for the viewer.

Besides the triptych, a miniature of an abandoned room is also shown in the gallery space. (Figure 9) This room, apart from its closed door, is never shown in the films. However, the viewer is privileged to peek inside and see this room in the gallery. This miniature space is the key to understanding the films, because it holds clues that help one to grasp the

characters' behaviour. The miniature room has an extended narrative function—that is, to expand the story beyond the screen to the physical space, inviting active engagement. The viewer may choose to engage only with the films, or with the miniature space as well, and find the clues that reveal another layer of the story. By not showing this room in the films, the author aimed to emphasize that there was a certain place, a secret, a trauma, that the characters did not acknowledge, and avoided. The clues in the miniature work as a cluster to depict an atmosphere of an abandoned room that belonged to someone recently departed. The meaning of the work fluctuates from the projections into the miniature space and then back again. This approach demonstrates that when animation is displaced from single screen-based theatrical venues, it can engage the viewers in novel ways.

Another artist who has a unique sense of merging the notions of spatial presentation with storytelling, performativity and animation is William Kentridge. The most recognizable traits of his art are rooted in his background in theatre. For his animated works, he uses traditional hand-drawn animation, using charcoal on paper. Kentridge avoids climactic narratives and often leads his characters round and round in circles. He believes that a marginalized narrative sheds more light on the "real thing" than when it is spelled out clearly.

Fig. 9 *Sisters*, Vidakovic, L., 2012.

His work *The Refusal of Time* (2012) is an example of sculptural space. The exhibition consists of projections, projected on uneven wooden boards mounted to the walls, megaphones with sound, and a mobile wooden sculpture. Kentridge calls it "the breathing machine" that holds the work together and gives it a rhythm. Like human lungs, it represents the human body as a clock.

The projections of videos, stop-motion and charcoal animations represent time which is manipulated in a frame-by-frame animation process. All these elements flirt with the inevitability of passing time, and the passing of life itself. Most of the projections are black-and-white, bearing reference to early film and photography. The work uses metaphors of time and in a way, it is all about passing, death and fragmentation. The work is created in a manner of an "organized disorder." The elements meet in coherence from time to time, but in the meantime the work functions as a fragmented entity. It is not a linear narrative but a set of vignettes and fragments. In such setting, the viewer fluctuates from one fragment to another, and the story evolves as the viewers move, depending on their participation. In an interview titled *How we make sense of the world*, Kentridge states

> We don't have complete information. [...] We take in a fragment, a headline, a memory, a part of a dream, a phone conversation, and through this we construct what feels to us and to others like a coherent being. [...] it is a completely provisional, fragile construction of a walking collage of thoughts and ideas (Kentridge, 2014).

Because of their similarity to perceiving real-life events, these seemingly voluntarily clustered narratives seem to have a more flexible structure than linear three-act narratives. Fragmented narratives are dependent on the way the audience perceives them, and as such it could be said that the beauty of this kind of works is partially in the eyes of the beholder. Dinkla proposes that this kind of works could be called "floating work of art [...] which is not an entity, but a state transformed

by changing influences. Its uniqueness lies precisely in the fact that it is recreated in every moment of perception" (Dinkla, 2002, p.28). Each person "edits" his or her account of events as he or she goes along. As in real life.

Conclusion

Animation no longer appears only in animated film formats, which were earlier associated with children's entertainment on television or in the cinema. Today, versatile animated content is present across many platforms, and is also embedded in the architecture, in both physical and virtual spaces. The single screen-based theatrical venues are no longer the only, nor are they the most sufficient, venues to accommodate the emerging story structures with animated content.

In both site-specific and non-site-specific works, the content and the form of the presentation are heavily intertwined and are dependent on one another. In site-specific animated installations, the place comes first and the content of the narrative is adjusted to it. These works are created mindfully considering the site's history, shape, structure, and alike. However, in works that are non-site-specific, but in which space is used as a storytelling element, the content and the form of its presentation develop hand-in-hand. Unlike site-specific installations, these works can be exhibited in versatile spaces without changing the work's context, as long as the spatial arrangement of the work's elements remain intact.

Theoretical and practical explorations of narrative approaches revealed that the most significant difference when screening animation in this context is that the storyline as one knows it, ceases to exist. There is a shift from a linear narrative mindset to that of the more fragmented and flexible story structures that are suitable to use in spatial storytelling. The films are usually presented as endless loops in the space; thus, the beginning and end have a different meaning in this context. The point of the visitor's entry defines the beginning, and a provisional ending follows according to his or her decision to leave at any time. The freedom to move in the space offers a bodily experience of animation, much like in the pre-cinematic stage. These installations invite the audience to interact with the work in novel ways, often combining the author-driven and interactive storytelling approach. In these tangled, multithreaded tales, every cycle enriches the story, revealing another layer, and as none of the viewers enter the same way or watch with the same eyes, or in the same order, it remains a unique experience. To this end, what speaks in favour of disjointed, fragmented and non-linear narratives which propel the viewers' presence, participation and critical engagement is Nicolai Carsten's statement that "it is not the linearity that makes us think. It's the unexpected gap in between, like the silence between sounds" (Carlsten, 2006).

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