Animating Film Theory

by Karen Beckman, Editor Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014 376 pp., illus. 49 b/w. Trade, \$89.96 ISBN: 978-0-823-5652-3.

Reviewed by Amanda Egbe

Animating Film Theory is an ambitious collection of essays that seeks to outline the relationship between animation and film theory. The starting point for the realisation of the collection stems from the marginalisation of animation in film studies and is considered here in light of the recent interest in the digital. It is the shift towards the digital that brings animation to the foreground in thinking through not only film history and theory but also the moving image outside of the domain of the cinema. It is with this first concern, to think through media in the inter-related pairing of animation and film studies that this collection is structured and it is primarily this audience of film and animation scholars that the book is aimed at.

Karen Beckman identifies through her introduction several themes as the organising principle for the collection in what is a vast territory of scholarship concerning animation. The book is divided into sections: Time and Space, Cinema and Animation, The Experiment, and Animation and the World. There are essays that revisit, for example, animation history, tracing alternative archaeologies to just those of early cinema, such as Galloway's approach of anti-cinema. Galloway links polygraphic photography to 3d animation and the computer, bypassing arguments that speak to the birth of cinema as a coming together of the right technical conditions. There is Gaycken's approach of reading scientific visualisation and animating objects in order to note how animation is neither a process of reproduction or caricature, but rather makes visible

those processes that were hidden, invisible, or imperceptible previously.

The sections of the book include an address to what animation is by differentiating it from film as the 'radical other' as in Alan Cholodenko's "First principles" of Animation, which recovers the work of Emile Reynaud as a film animator. The book also addresses how animation studies should be advanced as in Suzanne Buchan's Animation, in Theory, which calls for an interdisciplinary approach. The book also speaks to the techniques of animation into the realms of design and graphics: the work of Len Lye in Andrew Johnson, Signatures of Motion: Len Lye's Scratch Films and the Energy of the Line essay, Yuriko Furuhashi's Animating Copies: Japanese Graphic Design, the Xerox Machine, and Walter Benjamin in relation to the use of the Xerox machine and the Japanese concern for mimesis or the use of titling in Frame Shot: Vertov's Ideologies of Animation by Mihaela Mihailova and John Mackay.

The collection also takes in essays on animation in the setting of world cinema, looking at animation in the context of African American animation and Japan, recognising the role animation plays in representation, documentary and propaganda.

Animating Film Theory poses areas for possible new concerns or underdeveloped areas for research in animation. Several essays locate what is at stake when we consider the techniques of animation alongside wider notions of the animation of things particularly in relation to human experience. The connection of animation expressing human experience and desire and as an aesthetic technique are suggested for example in Tom Gunning's two concepts of animation in Animating the Instant: The Secret Symmetry between Animation and Photography and Daniel Hendrickson's Film as Experiment in Animation: Are Films Experiments on Human Beings?.

However, it is Beckman's insightful highlighting of themes such as Movement, The Frame and the Shot, Objectification, The Line and The Letter, and Kinesthetic Thinking and Feeling that helps the reader to navigate the landscape of writings on animation. The collection of essays is at its most coherent when animation is considered in an interdisciplinary context that is beyond the poles of film theory and animation studies. Furuhashi's essay for example takes in Walter Benjamin's conception of reproduction into a Japanese context through design practice and animation. The approach steers a path through what could be considered well-travelled terrain to offer new insights into old questions. Keeping in mind Beckman's themes, *Animating Film Theory* encompasses a wide concern for moving images and underexplored theoretical and aesthetic issues that thinking through and about animation opens up for readers.