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Animated Sequences: Chronophotography in Contemporary Animation Practice

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Abstract

This creative research project addresses the question of how to reveal the construction of character animation in order to influence viewer engagement. Nineteenth-century chronophotography captured what the eye cannot see due to the physical limitations of human perception. These images encouraged the viewer to expand their sight into a new mode of *seeing*. Chronophotography has inspired artists interested in the representation of movement throughout history. By considering these artistic engagements with chronophotography, I focus on animation techniques from the Golden Age of American animation. I am interested in the representation of movement in these cartoons – the squashes and stretches, the 'smears' and 'multiples' – and how these techniques go *unseen* by the viewer in standard viewing practice. I argue that they are the fleeting 'moments' that give meaning to animated movement, enhancing the visual style of the animation – but due to the technical nature of cinema, are never actually *seen* by the viewer. I therefore ask, how can the animator exploit these 'moments' that are barely visible to the audience? Also, if exposing these 'unseen' frames proves effective, what would it reveal about the movement itself? Using techniques of chronophotography to inform my creative practice, I expand on the strata-stencil animation technique to create an experimental short film and art exhibition that reveal movement for the viewer in a deliberately playful manner. Together these works provoke the viewer to question their understanding of animated movement and the aesthetics involved in seeing more than one frame at a time. I propose that we look at the individual frames not in isolation but simultaneously as sequences, so that the notion of seriality informs the viewer's understanding of animated movement as a distinct aesthetic experience. In doing this, I challenge the viewer to look at cartoons in a different way. This study is about making the imperceptible, perceptible and raises questions about how sequential images speak to us.

Keywords: Chronophotography, Golden Age of animation, animation techniques, imperceptible, experimental, strata-stencil, sequences, aesthetics.