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HOW CARTOONS BECAME ART:  
EXHIBITIONS AND SALES OF ANIMATION ART  
AS COMMUNICATION OF AESTHETIC VALUE

William Anthony Mikulak

A DISSERTATION

in

Communication

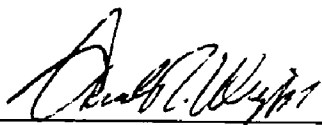
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

1996



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Supervisor of Dissertation



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Graduate Group Chairperson

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*for my parents,  
who taught me that a little  
knowledge is dangerous thing,  
but a lot can really run  
up your debts.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HOW CARTOONS BECAME ART: EXHIBITIONS AND SALES OF ANIMATION ART AS COMMUNICATION OF AESTHETIC VALUE**

**WILLIAM ANTHONY MIKULAK**

**PAUL MESSARIS**

**Animation has risen from a commercially and aesthetically marginalized medium to one that is gaining recognition as an art form worthy of adult appreciation. Three realms of this recognition are: the Museum of Modern Art's film department, which has supported animation in a variety of ways since its inception in 1935; exhibitions of the art contributing to Disney animation, which began in 1932; the market for artworks related to animation, which has grown from early gallery sales in the late 1930s to a broad base of collectors in the 1980s and 1990s. Exhibit materials, critical reviews, news coverage, and interviews with animation art market participants provided a basis to analyze these sites of aesthetic legitimation in terms of the barriers to acceptance animation faced, the strategies employed to overcome them, and the effects of legitimacy on the current state of animation. Curators, critics, and dealers have overcome prejudices that animation is merely a children's mass medium by locating original pieces of production art within animation that are like fine art. Some have argued that animation's basis in technology and mass production should not disqualify it from serious attention as art, nor should emotional satisfaction be a lesser aspect of aesthetic appreciation than disinterested analysis of form. Whereas commercially produced animation has gained both respect and economic vitality, independent and foreign animation has primarily gained prestige within the boundaries of festivals, museums, and art house theaters.**

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## Preface

In 1985 the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) was the first major art museum in the United States to launch an extended exhibition of artworks from the cartoons of the Warner Bros. studio. “Warner Bros. Cartoons Golden Jubilee” opened on 10 September with a black tie invitation-only tribute to surviving animation directors Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng and continued into January 1986 with seventeen programs of cartoons screened as weekend matinees. The physical installation, called “That’s Not All, Folks,” consisted of handsomely framed animation cels, background art, and character sketches. Video monitors showed a 1975 television documentary about the studio and its artists called “The Boys from Termite Terrace.” In addition, Jones drew pictures on the walls of such stars as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Porky Pig giving running commentaries on the exhibit itself.

That fall, I had entered the master’s program at the Annenberg School for Communication (then called the Annenberg School of Communications) in the University of Pennsylvania. During that semester I bought the November/December issue of *Film Comment*, because its cover bore a picture of Daffy striking a glamour pose, under which was printed, “Daffy, you ought to be in a museum.” Inside, Richard Corliss (1985b) and David Chute (1985) had written glowing critical appraisals of the Warner Bros. cartoon directors to coincide with the Museum exhibit. I quickly arranged to meet a couple of friends at MoMA and take in one of those matinee screenings.

On a blustery December day, we laughed at a program of shorts linked by their musical themes, culminating in Chuck Jones’s *What’s Opera, Doc?* (1957), a tour de force of art direction, rapid editing, and hilarious operatic parody starring the perennial foes, Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd. Afterwards, with melodies from Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* and *Tannhäuser* reverberating in our heads, we made our way through the physical exhibit.

After soaking up the pleasures to be had from the art and video presentation, we promptly exited the Museum without touring any of the other galleries.

Reflecting on that event, I realized what a difference it made to see these cartoons as 35mm prints projected onto a large screen, rather than as truncated cartoons shoehorned into children's viewing slots on television. To the best of my recollection, the packed auditorium at the Museum contained a mix of adults and children, all laughing together. MoMA provided a public forum for us to declare our affection for the Warner Bros. cartoons and to experience an affiliation with others who shared those feelings. Seeing the artworks hanging on the Museum walls gave me more than an education in the process of cartoon production; I felt like I was in a reliquary, surrounded by historical records of the act of creation.

Prior to this pilgrimage, I had visited the Museum of Modern Art with my family several times, most memorably for the blockbuster Picasso exhibit in 1980. This, too, included a visit to the theater for a screening of the silent serial *Perils of Pauline*. However, my parents instigated this trip to give my sister and me a culturally enriching experience. Picasso, we knew, was important enough to displace the permanent exhibits, but the reasons for his importance escaped us. Unlike my lifelong exposure to Warner Bros. cartoons, my scant art historical knowledge provided little context for making sense of Picasso's works. Instead, I enjoyed the exhibit as a relatively painless means of self improvement.

The prestige of the Museum contrasted greatly with other venues where I viewed cartoons as an undergraduate college student at Cornell University. Late afternoon reruns of *Rocky and Bullwinkle* on television were a staple in my dormitory lounge. Animation rarely appeared in the school's cinema series, though I fondly remember seeing a Fleischer studio retrospective of silent Ko-Ko the Clown cartoons and Bruno Bozzetto's *Allegro Non Troppo*. My friends and I also caught such commercial theatrical releases as *Fantasia* and *The Secret of NIMH*. But even a trip to the Museum of Cartoon Art in Rye Brook,

New York, in the summer of 1985 offered nothing to match the cachet of MoMA.

### **My Immersion in Animation**

After the MoMA exhibit I never missed any of the animation compilations that appeared in our local theaters: *The International Tournée of Animation*, *Animation Celebration*, and *Spike & Mike's Festival of Animation*. When the Museum of Television and Radio (then called the Museum of Broadcasting) in New York City programmed a series of screenings of *Rocky and Bullwinkle* I made the trip and bought the exhibit poster. I also went to the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia when it held a screening of ethnic stereotypes in cartoons.

As a teaching assistant for Amos Vogel's introductory film course, I learned of such experimental animators as Norman McLaren, Dan McLaughlin, Frank Mouris, André Leduc, Scott Bartlett, Carmine d'Avino, Jan Svankmajer, Suzan Pitt, and George Griffin, whose films reside in the Annenberg school archives. I began to include animation clips when I taught my sections of the course, noting a degree of student enthusiasm that had been absent when I unspooled such cinematic classics as *Triumph of the Will*.

When I returned to Annenberg in the Ph.D. program, I became convinced that adult appreciation of animation as an art form was a useful topic to pursue for a dissertation. The interest in animation generated by museum exhibits and auction house sales of animation art seemed an intriguing phenomenon to study, yielding information about how an oft-criticized form of popular culture gains the respect of elite art world members.

This newfound legitimacy countered the usual stigma attached to adults enjoying an apparently child-oriented medium, who are stereotyped as immature, socially maladapted, and escapist. News coverage of animation and most communication research often centers on cartoon violence and product-based programming as insidious forces at work on an audience of vulnerable children. In fact, throughout my childhood, my parents signaled similar fears with their looks of disapproval at finding me in front of the television on countless Saturday mornings.

I must admit that staking out animation as the locus for study requires fortitude in the face of the many cheaply made, poorly animated, and abominably written shows that have filled the airwaves with increasing frequency since late 1960s. Burdened by the comparatively low budgets and hectic schedules of broadcast television, companies such as Hanna-Barbara subcontract the bulk of actual animation chores overseas to a variety of low-wage sweat shops capable of cranking out miles of film using limited animation techniques. The upswing in the early 1980s of cartoons based on toys and candy contributed even further to animation's reputation as exploitative kidvid.

If all these reservations held me back from completely embracing animation's legitimacy as an art form, I wondered if other aficionados also found their enthusiasm dampened by animation's poor image? What about those whose tastes run against the grain of critically lauded Disney films? Does the veneration of Disney merely condemn all other animation to also-ran status or could the winds lifting that company's sails buoy others up as well? Or is animation so marginalized that critics merely exempt a few artistic triumphs in the Disney vein from their blanket condemnation of the medium? If so, what happens to the wide range of animation that fits neither the Disney high gloss naturalism nor the crass exploitation of juveniles?

### **Development of This Dissertation**

Armed with these concerns, I began to reconsider that initial Warner Bros. exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. How did such an ostensibly elite, exclusive cultural organization come to hang pictures of Bugs Bunny on its walls? What antecedents led to this undertaking? Chapter 1 considers a number of factors that contribute to animation's marginality and its potential for legitimation.

Using historical scholarship I show how animation has been marginalized by its liminal position between fine arts and mass media production, its increasingly restricted focus on the children in its audience, and its assumed affinity for comedy and fantasy. According to the prejudices of the class-based cultural hierarchy, it is a form of lower and

middle class popular culture that provides escape or moral lessons for the young and naive. This low status has hindered animation's access to resources available to more accepted art forms.

I then present a sociological model of artistic production and reception that provides a framework for understanding how institutionally sanctioned arbiters of taste may select certain candidates for aesthetic appreciation from those works thought to be artistically illegitimate. By applying to animation those modes of evaluation used for elite culture, these arbiters may recontextualize it in terms more congenial to elite art worlds. However, elite modes of appreciation (such as attention to form over content, connoisseurship, and art collecting) downplay commercial animation's broad emotional appeal and accessible aesthetic conventions in favor of those qualities it shares with avant-garde fine art. Chapter 1 ends by looking at less exalted modes of reception that center on immersion in the diegetic world and identification with characters. Art world participants who acknowledge the validity of such audience responses and who disengage mass produced art from the yolk of the cultural hierarchy aid the democratization of aesthetic communication.

Chapter 2 takes the Museum of Modern Art as an emblematic elite tastemaking organization that nonetheless broadened its reach to the larger public. My methodology for analyzing its presentation of animation includes the use of the Museum's publications, curatorial materials, and press releases that were available in its Film Study Center and Library. In addition, I examined 22 scrapbooks that past MoMA staff members compiled, which contained news clippings devoted to the activities of the Museum's Film Library from its inception to the late 1940s. I searched printed and online newspaper indexes and indexes of journals devoted to art and film regarding the Museum's film-related activities from the 1940s to the present. I located the range of materials these searches unearthed in the University of Pennsylvania Library and the New York Public Library. I also conducted interviews with four of MoMA's film curators and two other guest curators involved in key recent animation exhibits.

Chapter 2 shows how the depth and breadth of the Museum's support for animation have fluctuated over the years as its curators and trustees have used a variety of strategies to make palatable the Museum's promotion of many nontraditional art forms. These strategies combine populist innovations with more conservative appeals to elites so as to reinforce the Museum's right to legitimize the illegitimate. Curatorial justifications for animation continue to diversify, shedding the initial framework of placing it within an art historical evolutionary tree in order to validate animation in terms of sociology, pedagogy, entertainment, and persuasion. In addition, animation fit into MoMA's reorientation from elite trustees and donors to government agencies, foundations, and corporations. The latter patrons demanded that the Museum be accountable to the general public as an educational organization. As both film suppliers and corporate sponsors, Hollywood studios such as Disney and Warner sometimes contributed money to promote the animation events they sponsored, raising attendance and increasing news coverage.

My research into the early years of MoMA's film department revealed Walt Disney's centrality to the Museum's interest in animation. In addition to screening Disney films throughout its history, MoMA has mounted exhibits of production art from the company's animation. I group these exhibits with other Disney art exhibits in chapter 3 to consider the role such exhibits played in the Disney company's growing aesthetic legitimacy. The chapter concentrates on exhibits held in art museums, though some exhibits traveled to other kinds of museums, civic centers, and department stores. In addition I compare early museum exhibits to early gallery sales of Disney art.

To research this chapter, I examined scrapbooks and files of exhibit materials and newspaper clippings in the Walt Disney Archives on the studio lot in Burbank, California; Philadelphia Art Alliance materials in the Special Collections of the University of Pennsylvania Library; and newspapers and journals in the Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Philadelphia Free Library, and University of Pennsylvania Library. I interviewed three people involved with some recent exhibits as well.



Chapter 3 focuses on how museums framed their exhibits of production art from Disney animated films and how critics responded to them. Many museums grouped the individual pieces together to illustrate the process of animation, often linking that narrative to one of Walt Disney's own career. Over the years, studio employees gained recognition once reserved for Walt alone and the early anticipation of continued innovation slowly gave way to nostalgia for Disney's golden age. By showing what goes on behind the scenes, these exhibits provided tools for reviewers and museum visitors to depart from the cultural hierarchy's assumptions to accept mass produced art as aesthetically legitimate, rather than as debased lower class culture condemned by its popularity and commercial origin.

Collecting animation production artwork is an important mode of adult appreciation of animation outside the realm of museums. Chapter 4's coverage of adult cartoon enthusiasts analyzes the growing animation art market. The market exploded in the mid-to-late 1980s and currently continues to expand as handcrafted and mechanically reproduced limited edition artworks accompany those from actual animation productions.

To research how the animation art market compares to markets devoted to collectibles and fine arts, I interviewed 32 market participants who are animation art dealers, auction house representatives, collectors, conservators, animation artists, limited edition publishers and distributors, and animation art writers. In addition, I followed news coverage and critical evaluations of the market in general circulation newspapers and magazines as well as in specialized periodicals devoted to art, collectibles, and animation.

Chapter 4 concludes that the animation art market is a hybrid market, portions of which share traits of the collectibles market's concern for artifactuality and portions of which share the fine art market's emphasis on aesthetics and authorship. The market centers on art from commercial Hollywood studios, especially Disney, at the expense of most independent and foreign animation because the former gained wide exposure in theaters and on television. Members of the market still fight for cultural respectability despite the appearance of value imparted by the record auction prices that some pieces have

garnered.

My concluding chapter summarizes the current state of animation in terms of its commercial vitality, the growth of international animation festivals, and the institutionalization of academic attention to animation. I review the three realms of artistic legitimation presented in chapters 2, 3, and 4 in terms of the barriers to acceptance animation faced, the strategies employed to overcome those barriers, and the effects of those strategies on the current state of animation I presented.

## Ch. 1

### **Animation, Marginalization, and Legitimacy**

#### **The Research Problem**

My overall question is: What happens when cultural organizations recognize a marginalized medium (in this case, animation) as a legitimate art form worthy of adult appreciation? By asking “what happens,” I am considering: What barriers must such organizations overcome? What strategies are entailed in legitimation? Whom does it affect and how? Let me first clarify the meaning of each segment of the question.

Before going further, I want to consider exactly what the term “animation” encompasses. In the following section, “Defining Animation,” I illustrate how animation resides on the peripheries of fine arts and moving image production, the latter including filmmaking, videography, and computer multimedia. Different definitions foreground certain techniques over others, which, in turn, favor certain organizational structures for animation production.

As these organizational issues are central to my queries, I follow with a section called “Cultural Organizations in Context” that defines organizations and their relationship to the institutions of the arts and the media. Here I also examine ways to differentiate cultural organizations and activities beyond the standard hierarchy of popular culture and elite art.

In the subsequent section, “Marginalization of Animation,” I argue that historically animation producers have been disadvantaged compared to their live-action counterparts when claiming resources available in both the arts and the media. I review how the U.S. film industry gradually restricted animation’s audience from a wide range of ages to children exclusively, which television then accelerated. I then consider how independent

animators have their own difficulties, and end with the marginalization of adult animation consumers.

In the section “Legitimacy,” I explore the term’s legal, normative, matrimonial, and religious connotations to show how those who hold authority over others judge what is acceptable. Individuals and organizations who can offer prestige through their judgments grant authenticity to an animation producer as a true heir to aesthetic traditions. This may bolster the producer’s claim to resources necessary to create more work or have it displayed but may also place new constraints on the producer.

The last section, “Appreciation,” argues that legitimacy favors certain expressions of interest in animation, particularly activities involving critical appraisal, scholarship, connoisseurship, and art collection. Yet, I challenge the notion that aesthetic appreciation must necessarily be a disinterested act, as Kant would have it. Instead, emotional responses such as immersion into the diegetic world and identification with depicted characters are valid aspects of aesthetic appreciation.

Throughout the following sections I will take examples from Warner Bros. and Disney animation in particular because they figure prominently in the chapters to come. Both the Disney company and Time Warner began as family-run businesses that expanded into conglomerates that produce, distribute, and exhibit animation on film, television, cable, video, and new technologies. Their rich histories provide many examples of the issues this dissertation will examine.

## **Defining Animation**

### **Live-Action vs. Animation vs. Fine Arts**

One of the difficulties of studying animation is defining it in such a way as to capture those aspects of its many techniques that are distinct from live-action moving image

production. A typical definition is the following: “(1) the imagery is recorded frame-by-frame and (2) the illusion of motion is created, rather than recorded” (Solomon 1987, 10). The first part of the definition does not restrict the rate of exposure to any particular range, but acknowledges that recording occurs at a rate independent of the film projection speed of twenty-four frames per second. Live-action filmmaking is hardly limited to exposing film at the rate it will be projected; slow-motion effects result from a higher exposure-to-projection ratio, while fast-motion is obtained by the reverse. Time-lapse photography can even increase the interval between single-frame exposures far beyond that found in most animation techniques. Thus, rather than specify a rate of exposure, the first part of the definition identifies the single frame as the locus of control.

The second part of the above definition provides the basis for excluding time-lapse photography from animation because that technique merely samples the changes that actually occurred before the camera. In contrast, the animator intervenes between each still image recorded, building up motion through the concatenation of exposures. This was the essence of Norman McLaren’s oft-quoted definition:

Animation is not the art of *DRAWINGS-that-move* but the art of *MOVEMENTS-that-are-drawn*. What happens *between* each frame is much more important than what exists *on* each frame. Animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames. (His emphasis, McLaren 1995, 62)

The above definitions need not assume the use of motion picture cameras to record animation and projectors to display the developed film. The frame may be interpreted as a single still image of any type, not necessarily one on a strip of celluloid. Animation may be created and displayed without cameras, as it was using the inventions of the nineteenth century: flip books, phenakistoscopes, thaumatropes, zoetropes, mutoscopes, and praxinoscopes (Leskosky 1993; Robinson 1990; Solomon 1989, 7-10). Each of these presented a succession of drawings that appeared to move. Another departure from motion picture photography is cameraless animation, in which one draws, paints, scratches, or affixes objects directly onto film, not necessarily a frame at a time.

Computer animators may also avoid frame-by-frame creation by designing objects in either two or three dimensions and placing them in a visual field. The animator specifies their initial state, a set of transformations, and a final state for each step of animation and the computer then calculates the succession of changes required to create transformations in motion, perspective, texture, lighting, color, and shape. When converted into fully rendered single frames this animation may be transferred to film or video, but need not be if the computer is also the display vehicle.

Sufficiently powerful computers offer interactive real-time animation with no lapse of time for frame-by-frame rendering. For example, in 1990, Jim Henson Productions collaborated with Pacific Data Images on a real-time animation character named Waldo operated by a puppeteer and composited with live actors who interacted with it (Givens 1990, 31). More recently the post-production house Manhattan Transfer/Edit offered “a digital ‘facial expression tracker’ for real-time lip-synching and emotion in an animation character” (Kaufman, “Manhattan Goes Digital,” 1995, 20).

Another approach to defining animation is to consider “single-frame cinematography” the minimum limiting case of montage in which the editing is self-effacing enough to convey motion or transformation of the depicted image rather than a succession of separate images (Small and Levinson 1989). This stance attempts to integrate animation and live-action filmmaking at the point of editing, whereby individual filmed takes may approach animation as they are spliced into shorter and shorter pieces. Conversely, as animation becomes more limited, the number of frames in a row that depict the same image increases, thus approaching such montage techniques. A number of variables, such as “image duration and timing, spatial proximity and similarity, overall illumination level, and even perceptual adaptation and learning” affect whether the viewer perceives motion or image replacement (Small and Levinson 1989, 72).

Such a definition highlights the continuity between animation and other forms of moving image production, implicitly stressing those materials, facilities, procedures, specialized personnel, and viewing experiences they share. While this offers a valuable perspective for research, it may inadvertently direct attention away from the fine art materials and procedures that separate animation from live-action filmmaking. Each technique has its own economy of production and degree of adaptability to industrialized divisions of labor.

### **Animation Techniques and Their Economies of Production**

The technique of cel animation has been popularly equated with animation as a whole, especially prior to computer animation. It is a two-dimensional technique involving drawing and painting, employing clear plastic sheets (cels) to overlay characters and moving objects onto a separate background, thus requiring new drawings only for the portion of the scene that changes from frame to frame. Because animators use pencil and paper, their drawings must be traced onto cels and painted in so the background does not show through. This affords a division of labor between the better paid creative jobs of animation and the lower wage technical tasks of inking and painting cels, which have been computerized in recent big budget productions. <sup>7</sup>

Cel animation became the standard American film industry technique in the 1910s (Crafton [1982] 1993, 150-3) and studios modeled further divisions of labor on the live-action mode of filmmaking. Animation is divided into units of head animators, assistant animators, and in-betweeners, so that the most valued artists only create the key character poses, leaving the mediating poses for lower-level workers to complete. Most chores for animation created for television shows are subcontracted out to overseas firms with extremely cheap labor pools (Girdner 1987).

The initial animation drawings are usually done in a loose style. These “roughs” have to be “cleaned up” so clear lines are visible to the inkers (or, since the 1960s, the

xerographic machine and computer scanner). Because individual scenes within each cartoon are divided among the animation staff members, uniformity of drawing style is required. This is ensured by the use of character model sheets, which give a number of standard poses from different perspectives with information about design features and bodily proportions. Sometimes, for larger budget productions, three-dimensional models of characters, props, and sets are also used. Live-action reference footage of actors and props may also be shot.

Other specialized jobs include character and background designers, storyboard writers, layout and background artists, personality animators, special effects animators, and animation continuity checkers. The positions of director, producer, and some associate roles carry over from live-action. In the case of Warner Bros., cartoon directors oversaw the minutiae of each film to an even greater extent than in most live-action. According to critic and historian Steve Schneider, “With their pencils and their stopwatches, the Warner directors ultimately determined such ingredients as choice of story, pacing, character design, composition of the film frame, character expression, color values, character movement, background feel, actors’ line-readings, and other variables” (1988, 30).

Critics often mistake having final say on all of the above elements for being the creative force behind each of those elements. Thus, directorial credit is conflated with sole authorship of particular cartoons, when, in fact, interviews with Warner cartoon writer Michael Maltese and layout artist Maurice Noble confirm the trust their director, Chuck Jones, placed in their abilities to respond to the challenge of each new cartoon in a fresh way (Adamson 1975a). Jones includes in his autobiography a case history of the production of *Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2 Century* (1953) that confirms his dependence on each of his team members to be “far better at his job than I could ever be” (1989, 157).

Synchronized sound usually involves composers, arrangers, musicians, vocal talent, sound effects people, sound editors, recording technicians, and others drawn from



live-action. It requires an elaborate notation system that translates sheet music, sound effects, and dialogue into bar (or “dope”) sheets for frame-by-frame timing (Newsom 1985). Sharing specialized work categories with live-action also allowed for easy access to resources of the Warner Bros. studio. Cartoon composer Carl Stalling used the Warner catalog of songs in his soundtracks and conducted the fifty-piece Warner orchestra in Warner’s recording studios (Schneider 1988, 52-6).

The organization of labor in cel animation results in all major decisions occurring long before actual filming begins, thus reducing the camera operator to the role of technician. In contrast, object animation produces changes between exposures in front of the camera. Whether they use puppets, cut-outs, silhouettes, miniatures, photos, or pixillation (frame-by-frame recording of actors), animators must manipulate the objects themselves or the camera’s relation to them as filming transpires. This same restriction applies to paint-on-glass and sand animation, in which a visual design on a two-dimensional surface undergoes continual transformation. The only record of each stage of transformation is the exposed film, unlike the stack of drawings, cels, and backgrounds produced in cel animation. While this does not preclude extensive pre-planning (which is especially necessary for synchronized dialogue), it does allow for fortuitous events to shape the final product if the animators are so inclined. However, these techniques cannot compete with cel animation for minimizing the risk of such events, which hinders the ability to institute industrial divisions of labor using them.

Cameraless animation offers the cheapest way for an individual to create animation; even soundtracks may be drawn on film, as Oskar Fischinger, Norman McLaren, and others have demonstrated (Russett and Starr [1976] 1988, 163-9). On the other hand, computer animation has until recently required large outlays of time and money to develop hardware and software suitable for animation. Added to this are the skills required to use the applications programs necessary to create particular projects and the computer time

required to fully render the images. However, the capabilities of such personal computers as the Apple Macintosh, IBM PC, and their clones are fast expanding to take advantage of programs for animation production. In addition, computer animation continues to merge with digitized video and interactive multimedia information technologies.

As formerly distinct modes of media production converge and their formats of presentation proliferate, problems of defining animation will only increase. The new technologies continue to improve on the verisimilitude of their images and are increasingly able to efface any trace of their constructed nature. While realism may be the goal of only a portion of animation producers, it has many lucrative applications in the entertainment industry, which seeks inexpensive simulations of costly production procedures. The extent to which this is an aesthetic concern depends on conventions in critical discourse regarding the importance of the process of an artwork's creation in assessing its final form. It will be of interest to this study precisely insofar as the identification of films and videos as "animation" is important to museum curators, critics, gallery owners, and animation enthusiasts.

## **Cultural Organizations in Context**

### **Organizations and Institutions**

The above discussion acknowledges that animation tools and techniques may be used by a range of producers, from individuals to complex groups of interrelated organizations, each hierarchically divided according to a variety of specialized tasks. To deal with the ways organizations structure individual actions, both in producing animation and responding to it, I turn to Joseph Turow's work on media industries. He cites Howard Aldrich's definition: "Organizations are goal directed, boundary maintaining activity systems" (1984, 8). Turow notes that whatever is external to an organization is part of its

environment, which contains resources (people, supplies, permission, information, services, money) and competing organizations. Organizational leaders cannot merely manage their own organizations but must also manage their environment, both minimizing their dependence on other organizations and maximizing the dependence of others on them. He argues that the specific resources an organization controls can be used as leverage in negotiations with other organizations (1984, 9-10).

Organizations may relate to each other in ways beyond competition: “Institutions (e.g., medicine, law, education) are loosely knit sets of organizations (hospitals, bar associations, teacher unions) that hold authority over fundamental aspects of social life” (Turow 1989, 12). Institutions are not merely accumulations of related organizations but embodiments of governing principles for their interactions. Enforcement of these principles may devolve upon explicit regulatory bodies to maintain boundaries around institutions by defining which organizations may gain and retain membership. An example is the American Association of Museums, which published a Code of Ethics in 1978 to guide museum practices (Meyer 1979, 286-306).

### **Animation in the Arts and the Media**

I would like to discuss animation’s position within the institutions I will label “arts” and “media,” both of which seem to be broadly constituted, if somewhat overlapping, spheres of social life. The arts include organizations, activities, and interactions centering on art in the form of objects, events, or performances. For example, in their study of the economics of art and culture, James Heilbrun and Charles Gray include in the arts “the live performing arts of theater, opera, symphony concerts, and dance, plus the fine arts of painting and sculpture and the associated... art museums, galleries, and dealers” but they exclude “motion pictures (which are *not* live), and rock, pop, and jazz concerts (even though they *are* live)... writing, publishing, and commercial (but not public) broadcasting” (1993, 4). Their conception of the arts centers on activities that are associated with non-

profit status, traditional art forms, or both. This is similar to criteria implied by others who write about the arts, especially when considering questions of funding (e.g. Netzer 1978; Keller 1984; DiMaggio 1986a and 1986b).

In contrast, most of the excluded activities (except for live performances) fall within the institution of the media, at least that portion of it that operates on a for-profit basis. Turow's definition of "mass communication" is useful here: "the industrialized ('mass') production, reproduction, and multiple distribution of messages through technological devices" (1984, 4). Interrelated organizations form an industry that disburses copies of messages in a regularized way. The institution of the media encompasses the numerous individual media industries: film, television, cable, radio, publishing, music recording, etc.

### **Media Power Roles**

The kinds of activities involved in the media overlap greatly with those of the arts. Turow sets out thirteen power roles in mass media industries, each of which maintains leverage over others through control of particular resources. These roles are: (1) producer (controls people and ideas), (2) authority (controls political and military power), (3) investor (controls money), (4) patron (controls money on an ongoing basis), (5) auxiliary (controls supplies), (6) creator (controls own participation), (7) union (collective representation of personnel), (8) distributor (controls channels to exhibition), (9) exhibitor (controls outlets for public access to material), (10) linking pin (controls access to new markets), (11) facilitator (controls intermediary services), (12) public advocacy (pressure through boycotts, appeals to authorities), and the (13) public (controls individual decision to choose material) (1984, 12-3). Of these roles, Turow defines those of creator and public to be played by individuals rather than organizations.

To illustrate a number of these power roles, from 1930 to 1944 Warner Bros. acted as distributor and patron for cartoons made by Leon Schlesinger Productions, while relying on Wall Street financiers for its capital. Warner Bros. also provided production facilities for

Schlesinger on its old Sunset Boulevard lot from late 1933 onwards (Roddick 1983, 18). Warner Bros. packaged the cartoons with its feature films and other short subjects into film bills that were exhibited in theaters, some of which it owned. Schlesinger employed creators to produce the cartoons using a mix of standardized and customized supplies for cel animation. In 1941 these creators organized with the Screen Cartoonists Guild and won a union contract (Allen and Denning 1993, 92). The Leon Schlesinger Corporation was set up in 1937 as a linking pin activity to license comic books, dolls, ceramic statues, toys, games, and other commercial tie-ins for the Warner cartoon characters (Adamson 1990, 66). Facilitators included trade journals such as *Showman's Trade Review* and *Boxoffice*, which provided exhibitor polls of the viewing public's responses to short subjects according to series title (Adamson 1990, 63). The Warner Bros. studio submitted brief descriptions of each cartoon to the Library of Congress to enable the government to exercise its authority as copyright protector (Smoodin 1993, 10).

### **Art World Activities**

Howard Becker notes a range of activities similar to these power roles in what he calls art worlds. He identifies conception, production, execution, distribution, exhibition, rehearsal, performance, appreciation, patronage, support services, training, and state authority as necessary for each art world to yield the works for which it is known. However, he also emphasizes the aesthetician's activity of "creating and maintaining the rationale according to which all these other activities make sense and are worth doing" and a subset of this activity, the critic's "specific evaluation of individual works to determine whether they meet the standards contained in the more general justification for that class of work or whether, perhaps, the rationale requires revision" (1982, 4).

While Turow relates many evaluative activities implicit in each of the mass media power roles he identifies, only the facilitators explicitly "help production firms... evaluate mass media material" (1984, 13). Facilitator organizations include talent agencies, law

firms, consulting firms, and market research firms, each of which offer input ranging from packages of creative talent to information gauging mass media materials' potential for commercial success (Turow 1984, 35). Of course, authorities, investors, patrons, distributors, exhibitors, and public advocacy roles provide organizations with a variety of ways to influence the content of materials producers and creators bring forth.

However, critics abound in the media as well as in the arts. Is their leverage so small within the former institution that they are not accorded a power role? Much of this dissertation will focus on what resources are controlled by those who evaluate animation as part of their professional roles, whether they do so within the arts (e.g. as museum curators or art critics) or within the media (e.g. as newspaper reviewers of television and film). In particular I will examine how their evaluating activities fit into the priorities of the organizations for whom they work (or with whom they are temporarily allied). I will consider critics more fully in the subsection "Critical Evaluation" within the section "Legitimacy."

### **Against Essentializing Popular Culture and Elite Culture**

The above discussion accords the institutions of art and media similar complexity both in their elaboration of roles and in their products. However, it is commonly assumed that the institutions of the arts and the media seem to fall neatly into the categories of elite art and popular culture, respectively. This simplistic division accords the latter a naturally lower status because of the following characterizations. Mass media materials (including animation) are considered inferior popular culture rather than superior elite art because they result from industrial mass production rather than from the talent and genius of an individual; they are made for multiplicity and wide distribution rather than unique existence; they appeal to broad audiences for profit rather than narrow audiences for studied appreciation; they require little formal education for the audience to consume them as

intended; they are less complex than elite art; and they adhere to existing artistic conventions rather than challenging them in the radical ways that elite avant-garde does.

These suppositions are problematic because they are undergirded by the assumption of inherent differences between elite art and popular culture, rather than acknowledging the socially constructed nature of the categories. In the section “Cultural Hierarchy as Historical Artifact” I will address how these categories developed under specific historical conditions in this country. Following that I will present an alternate scheme that more accurately accounts for current cultural production. At this point, however, I will restrict myself to refuting the above generalizations as they apply to animation.

### **Mass vs. Individual Production**

Animation is not always the result of industrial mass production. While commercial entertainment has become the dominant system for producing animation in the United States, some independent animation producers work outside of this system, obtaining grants from government agencies or private arts foundations or applying profits from commercial work to personal projects. In other countries state-owned or subsidized studios produce animation on a non-profit basis, although many of these studios have disappeared in the post-Communist era. Thus, what bears the surface similarity of being animated may have been produced under vastly different conditions.

In addition, the previous section discussed the many activities that art worlds require for the production and reception of those worlds’ characteristic works. Rather than springing fully formed from a transcendent creative genius as the romantic stereotype would have it, all artworks depend on extensive divisions of labor. Becker gives the examples of two seemingly solitary artists: “Poets depend on printers and publishers, as painters do on distributors, and use shared traditions for the background against which their work makes sense and for the raw materials with which they work” (1982, 14).

Even within media industries, the notion of industrialized mass production does not accurately convey the integration of craft production of unique programs with mass reproduction and distribution. As Janet Staiger states, “In filmmaking mass production never reached the assembly-line degree of rigidity that it did in other industries. Rather it remained a manufacturing division of labor with craftsmen collectively and serially producing a commodity” (Bordwell et al. 1985, 93). Unlike a brand of soap, each bar of which is expected to be identical, a studio’s films must incorporate both standardization and differentiation. Thus, Warner Bros. cartoons offered Bugs Bunny in a variety of situations with a rotating cast of co-stars, standardizing the star persona amidst continual innovations in plot, scenery, visual design, and cast.

### **Multiplicity vs. Uniqueness**

It is true that animation is usually produced as a template for reproduction: a film negative, videotape master, or computer file. However, in the course of producing those templates many unique pieces of art may be created, e.g. drawings, paintings, three-dimensional models. Similarly, a painter may make preliminary sketches, or produce a series of similar works. The uniqueness of a particular painting is part of its exchange value in the dealer-gallery system that convinces collectors to pay much more than they would for a life-size poster of the same work. In contrast, commercial animation is circulated in a system in which the right to profit from exhibition does not extend to most purchasers of animated films, videotapes, and digital media.

Yet, various elite arts depend on reproducing performances in front of successive audiences, which may also be recorded and circulated in the same ways as animation. In fine arts, printmaking and casted sculpture also create multiple copies of each art work. Meanwhile, drawings, cels, and background art from historical animation productions are now coveted as the rare survivors of the millions of such works originally produced. Each cel differs from all the rest in depicting a single frame of animation from an entire film.



Clearly multiplicity and uniqueness can be found in both elite and popular realms of culture.

### **Audience Size and Profit Orientation**

Classifying that which has broad appeal as popular culture is tautological, but many commercially produced works of animation fail to appeal to the size of the audience their producers (and creators, patrons, investors, distributors, exhibitors, facilitators) intended. As Lawrence Grossberg argues, “the mode by which a text is produced, or the motivations behind it, do not guarantee how it is placed into the larger cultural context nor how it is received by different audiences” (1992, 51). Therefore, “popular culture” is better conceived as something profit-oriented cultural organizations aspire to produce rather than as a category of production. When the *Motion Picture Herald* poll of theater owners ranked “Bugs Bunny Specials” the most popular short subjects in the United States and Canada from 1945 through 1961, *that* was popular culture (Adamson 1990, 12).

Nor is unintended popularity cause to deny an artwork elite cultural legitimacy. However, artists in elite art worlds expect few to appreciate their work because of modern Western society’s view that art is valuable insofar as it expresses unique individuality rather than conveying shared meaningful codes and conventions. Larry Gross describes the result: “This peculiarly romantic model of the artist as quintessential outsider both justifies and maintains the alienation of art from ‘real life’ and the ambivalence that often characterizes the relationship between artists and their audiences” (1989, 113).

This way of thinking disengages artists from their audiences in favor of concerns internal to the artistic medium in which they work. Those who can interpret from the finished product the artist’s intent and skill must have knowledge of previous works and the conventions they embody in order to judge the present work’s achievements. But Gross notes, elite arts do not have an exclusive claim to sophisticated modes of creation and

appreciation: “Any activity that requires skill can afford the aesthetic pleasures of competent performance and appreciation” (1989, 120).

Regarding profit-seeking, some elite cultural organizations, e.g. certain performing arts groups and many museums, do operate as non-profits. But many elite art world galleries are profit-oriented. Rhapsodic contemplation of a painting does not provide what artists, art dealers, or auctioneers require for continued participation in the art world. If such art does have a narrow appeal, pricing must adjust upward to compensate. Then an artist’s small circle of collectors certify their exclusive taste and vision through large capital investments. In sum, audience size does not necessarily correspond with profitability, which depends on the success of setting either a small profit margin per unit for high volume sales or a large profit margin per unit on low volume sales.

### **Education Required for Proper Consumption**

It is not controversial to claim that much elite art requires extensive formal education, especially to gain competence in creating or performing it. Yet, Gross (1983) argues that our education system views the vast majority of its pupils as artistically ineducable beyond their roles as passive audiences for the gifted few. Instead, what is taught is that certain elite, traditional cultural forms are intellectually and morally superior to more recent, popular forms. By openly disdaining the mass media materials students enjoy at their leisure, teachers lose the opportunity to teach aesthetic competence in a way that validates the students’ already existing tastes.

I am arguing that formal education devoted to mass media, including animation, could be as beneficial as education in elite arts. For example, Paul Messaris finds two benefits to teaching conventions employed in visual media (both stills and moving pictures): “First, it gives the viewer a foundation for a heightened conscious appreciation of artistry; second, it is a prerequisite for the ability to see through the manipulative uses and ideological implications of visual images” (1994, 165).

The irony of discounting popular cultural forms in favor of elite art forms is obvious to the many adults whose earliest memories of the music of Rossini and Wagner come not from visits to concert halls but from the Bugs Bunny cartoons *Rabbit of Seville* (1951) and *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957). Warner cartoons also contain a goldmine of visual styles, ranging from the fully rounded three-dimensional realism of background art by Paul Julian in Friz Freleng's *Mutiny on the Bunny* (1950) to early efforts at stylization by John McGrew, Eugene Fleury, and Bernyce Polifka in Chuck Jones's *The Dover Boys* (1942) (Fleury 1942; "New Approach" 1944; Schneider 1988, 73, 99).

Those who have viewed such cartoons repeatedly have gained an informal education that cannot be ignored. Pierre Bourdieu claims that one's home background and upbringing cultivate a receptivity to later exposure to formal education in the arts. Indeed, he acknowledges that mastery of aesthetic discrimination "is, for the most part, acquired simply by contact with works of art—that is, through an implicit learning analogous to that which makes it possible to recognize familiar faces without explicit rules or criteria" (1984, 4).

### **Complexity and Innovation**

Attributing simplicity to mass media productions belies the elaborate production procedures, the address to multiple audiences, and the range of artistic conventions and violations of those conventions that animation entails. As I have mentioned above, longterm exposure to animation prepares audiences to appreciate these complexities so tacitly that they may be unaware of the degree to which they have internalized the conventions of the medium. Yet certain animated films, such as Chuck Jones's *Duck Amuck* (1953) for Warner Bros., expertly play with the boundaries of accepted conventions by subjecting Daffy Duck to the torments of an unseen animator finally revealed as Bugs Bunny. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson argue that *Duck Amuck* takes as its subject the manipulation of animation conventions regarding painted

backgrounds, sound effects, framing, music, and narrative structure, while grounding its experiments in comedy and Daffy Duck's personality as Bugs Bunny's dupe (1990, 350-2).

If such bold experiments as *Duck Amuck* demonstrate innovations within mass media, adherents to cultural hierarchy usually presume they are merely recipients of elite avant-garde influences. But, as the Museum of Modern Art's "High and Low" exhibit amply demonstrated, the flow of influence is multidirectional, both within and across categories (Varnedo and Gopnik 1990). In addition, Diana Crane argues that avant-gardes, which she considers to be innovations that attract relatively small audiences, exist in all forms of culture, for example, romance novels, science fiction, and designer clothing, and not merely in those labeled high art (1992, 7). Different artistic media have also crossed over from popular culture to high art, exemplified by the novel's rise from a vulgar, lower class format to one perceived to sustain works of fine literature.

### **Cultural Hierarchy as Historical Artifact**

The cultural hierarchy that may seem universal and timeless was actually tied to the specific conditions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before this, the American cultural landscape did not yet differentiate high culture from popular culture. Performing arts programs were eclectic, juxtaposing Shakespeare, novelty acts, farces, arias, and parlor tunes to appeal to a broad cross section of society. Museums harbored in densely packed display cases a diverse array of items, including biological specimens, technological equipment, exotic cultural artifacts, paintings, and sculpture (Levine 1988, 147-9). These cultural organizations were usually privately owned, for-profit firms that sought to maximize their audiences by targetting a wide range of tastes.

As urbanization and immigration increased, upper classes in cities attempted to protect their own cultural activities from those of lower classes (DiMaggio 1982). Among the organizations they formed were symphonies, opera companies, legitimate theaters,

museums, conservatories, and libraries. An organization that began to appear at the turn of the nineteenth century provided the model for enforcing cultural segregation. The fine arts academy was meant to develop a distinctly American art while maintaining a continuity to European traditions by studying copies of Old World masterworks (Taylor 1975, 35). These academies were non-profit organizations under the private control of self-perpetuating boards of trustees, a form of governance that would be adopted when specialized art museums were founded later in the century (Meyer 1979, 25).

The charitable corporation proved to be an ideal way for elite members of society to define high culture and segregate it from popular culture because this type of organization was insulated from pressures of the market, the state, and other classes (DiMaggio 1982, 38). When rowdy lower classes were invited in to be educated in the intricacies of high culture, architectural grandeur and elaborate dress and behavioral codes worked to intimidate and discipline them into polite immobility (Levine 1988).

In the twentieth century, this urban-based cultural hierarchy had to contend with a number of trends. Mass media technologies such as movies, radio, and television nationalized audiences on a scale unmatched by touring companies of the nineteenth century. The decline in the manufacturing base depleted urban economies, leaving concentrated wealth juxtaposed with concentrated poverty. Meanwhile, the middle class fled to the suburbs along with the jobs and these people were more conveniently situated to receive nationally-based media than urban-based theater, music, and museums.

### **Mass Media Overwhelm the Cultural Hierarchy**

Because of the above economic, technological, and demographic shifts, Crane (1992) argues that today's cultural landscape is dominated by nationally and internationally distributed mass media targeting audiences that often cross traditional class boundaries. Television, film, magazines, radio, musical recordings, and books can traverse great distances to find particular taste groups and the members of these groups may share few

demographic traits other than their overlapping choices of culture. Post-industrial society's increase in leisure time and range of activities has allowed lifestyle to overtake occupation or class origin as the basis for identity. The available goods and media allow people to assemble markers of identification consonant with their distinct sets of attitudes, values, and behaviors (Crane 1992, 37-9).

In contrast, the old cultural hierarchy requires reinforcement through ongoing live interactions between audience members and artists, which limits it to local and regional influence until it is appropriated by mass media for wider distribution. Often, at this point the media tend to dislocate message contents (e.g. images, narratives, and ideas) from the specific spatial and temporal contexts in which they originated (Crane 1992, 6). The cultural hierarchy has not disappeared but has become a subset of a broader system of cultural production and reception.

### **Elite Cultural Organizations**

This model does much to diffuse the tendency to automatically equate elite culture with power, influence, and authority. According to Crane, "the relative prestige and visibility of high culture declined in the second half of the 20th century as cultural industries increased in size and importance. The power and resources of these organizations meant that popular culture began to have the impact and importance, if not the prestige, that had been attached to culture produced in organizations controlled by elites" (Crane 1992, 34). Mass media, then, reach more people, are more influential, and have greater financial resources than elite culture.

But if elite organizations no longer lead the society's cultural trends, they do retain the somewhat diminished resource of prestige, which they may bestow on select items of mass media as well as on more traditionally accepted forms of elite culture. The increased attention elite organizations pay to products of the mass culture industries reflects a shift in their funding orientation over the last half century, during which "the expenses of running

high culture organizations increased substantially. The upper class could no longer afford to subsidize them entirely but were forced to rely on grants from corporations and state and federal government. To justify this type of support, the organizations had to change their cultural offerings to attract a wider audience” (Crane 1992, 34).

These attempts to locate elite organizations in the shifting sands of our cultural terrain call into question such terms as centrality and periphery, middle and margin. As geographic centers of cities lose their populations to the suburbs, the diffusion of cultural space follows. Mass media technologies were designed to transport multiple copies of messages across time and space in pursuit of a mobile population. In contrast, localized urban cultures emphasize the direct experience of performers’ or art objects’ physical presence within particular places. These may travel, but to one place at a time.

Yet, the cultural landscape extends beyond physical space. We may chart social distance between people, hierarchic divisions of labor in organizations, flows of aesthetic influence, proximity to resources, obstacles in the way of goals, horizons of future possibilities. Thus, the following section regards marginality and centrality as mutually defined positions on a variety of topographies that I will roughly divide into realms of production and consumption.

## **Marginalization of Animation**

### **Production, Distribution & Exhibition**

In the following sections I will detail how cartoons long dwelt at the bottom of most major studios’ business priorities. Part of what placed them there was the structure of the emerging film industry and later, the television industry. As this dissertation examines animation’s emergence from this marginalization in the mid-to-late 1980s, it will analyze how commercial exploitation of animation relates to its aesthetic appreciation and

legitimation. In important ways these areas overlap, but they cannot be equated in any simplistic manner.

### **Ideological Marginalization**

During the decade of the 1910s the film industry saw strategies for production, distribution, and exhibition of film become standardized. During that time cartoons moved from an occasional curiosity to a regular portion of the film program within packages of short subjects shown between the feature length films. Donald Crafton demonstrates that from 1913 to 1915 a key transformation in animation production allowed this to happen: J. R. Bray obtained patents for the cel animation process with Earl Hurd and applied Frederick Taylor's scientific management principles to create an efficient hierarchy of specialized jobs ([1982] 1993, 162-7). A number of animation producers (e.g. Paul Terry, Max Fleischer, Walter Lantz) who worked for Bray adapted those management principles when starting their own shops.

David Callahan argues that Bray's production methods "soon led the animated film to a marginal and highly conventionalized position within the motion picture industry" (1988, 223). However, neither technology nor the organizational structure of the animation shop necessitated this. Instead, Thompson claims "the cel technique quickly became defined within relatively narrow boundaries" because it "originated within the industry of a single country, the USA, and that country was in the process (during World War I) of becoming the leading production force in world cinema" (1980, 108).

In other words, the emergent Hollywood entertainment industry confined animation to a niche as an inferior filler to round out a film program dominated by the live-action feature. In part, the time-consuming and labor-intensive nature of cel animation made feature production a high-risk endeavor compared to live-action. However, Thompson claims a broader ideological basis for animation's marginalization: "Animation could do things live-action could not, and hence it came to be assumed that it *should* do only those



things” (her emphasis, 1980, 110). Its departure from verisimilitude was most easily contained in the genres of comedy, musical, fantasy, and fable, which were often associated with children.

These genres did not encompass all commercially produced animation. World War I occasioned Winsor McCay’s two-reel *Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), an attempt at replicating documentary subject matter in cartoon form. The war also opened a new market for J. R. Bray’s cartoon studio: Army training films (Crafton [1982] 1993, 158). Other animation studios also created at least partially-animated educational films for both adults and children, presenting physics, for example, in the Fleischer four-reeler *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* (1923) (Cabarga [1976] 1988, 29-31) as well as tooth decay in Disney’s early short *Tommy Tucker’s Tooth* (1922) (Merritt and Kaufman 1993, 47-8).

### **Animation’s Broad Initial Audience**

More proof that animation was initially enjoyed by a mixed audience comes in the form of product licensing and advertising endorsements. For example, the silent era’s most popular cartoon character was Felix the Cat, produced by the Pat Sullivan studio, under the direction of Otto Messmer. John Canemaker quotes publicist David Bader on the range of Felix products: “Felix songs, Felix tie pins, Felix brooches, Felix silver spoons, little and big Felix dolls, Felix pillow tops, Felix automobile radiator tops, Felix candy, Felix blankets, Felix street vendor novelties” (1991, 89). Felix also got drunk on liquor in ads for Felix dolls, appeared in advertisements for automobiles, and danced with a scantily clad Ziegfeld follies star in a photo spread (Canemaker 1991, 71, 88, 101).

The early 1930s saw such cartoons as the Fleischer “Betty Boop” series continue to address adults through sexuality and live-action segments featuring jazz musicians. Other studios also employed sexual innuendo, like the Ub Iwerks studio, whose Flip the Frog cartoon *The Office Boy* (1932) was described by Leonard Maltin as having “shocking sexual gags involving a shapely secretary” ([1980a] 1987, 192). However, such treatments

of female sexuality were greatly toned down after the Hollywood Production Code began to be fully enforced in 1934. The 1940s saw a certain relaxation of these standards during World War II, when Tex Avery produced a series cartoons at MGM featuring a wolf and a showgirl in which censors worried more about the visual metaphors signifying the wolf's lust than the showgirl's skimpy outfit and alluring dances (Adamson 1975b, 182).

Various cartoon studios were enlisted to create incentive films for the general public during the war as well. Bugs Bunny sold war bonds in a 1942 short by Bob Clampett called "Any Bonds Today?" and 45 out of the 114 cartoons Warner Bros. released during wartime had topical references to the war (Shale 1982, 96). Additionally, characters from many cartoon studios decorated the insignia of the U.S. Armed Forces (Shull and Wilt 1987; Rawls 1992). As I will discuss in chapters 2 and 3, the Disney studio not only made films for adult American civilians and members of the Armed Forces, but, under President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, it produced educational films for Latin American adult audiences on war- and health-related topics.

### **Focusing on Children**

The war seemed to interrupt the strategies of several cartoon studios to deliberately court the child audience. Eric Smoodin's analysis of an article from a 1939 issue of *Look* magazine illustrates those strategies. The article, "Hollywood Censors Its Animated Cartoons," features a close-up picture of Porky Pig kissing Petunia Pig as scissors cut that frame away from rest of the film strip. Smoodin quotes Leon Schlesinger from the article saying, "We cannot forget that while the cartoon today is excellent entertainment for young and old, it is primarily the favorite motion picture fare of children. Hence, we always must keep their best interests a heart by making our product proper for their impressionable minds" (1993, 12). Smoodin interprets this article as a press release in disguise, designed to help Schlesinger obtain more toy licensing arrangements for his characters.

The leader among such licensors at that time was Disney. As an independent producer, the company needed outside distributors to gain global access to theaters. After contracting with Columbia Pictures from 1929 to 1931 and United Artists from 1931 to 1936, Disney finally obtained a share of the profits that its shorts generated in first run theaters under its contract with RKO from 1936 to 1954 (Gomery 1994, 72). Thus, during the 1930s, the Disney company looked to license its characters to generate income to supplement the thin profit margins of its short subjects.

Richard deCordova (1994, 205-8) details the massive promotions and toy department displays that resulted from Disney's licensing deal with the George Borgfeldt company in 1930. Children were the primary market for such Mickey Mouse products as clothing, bathroom accessories, tableware, toys, games, and school supplies. Beginning in 1930 children also joined Mickey Mouse Clubs centering on regular attendance at Saturday matinees, which combined cartoon screenings with club meetings and prize giveaways. Disney reached mothers by placing illustrated monthly nursery rhymes based on upcoming shorts in *Good Housekeeping* magazine (Kaufman, "Good Mousekeeping," 1995).

Although Mickey's appeal crossed boundaries of age, class, gender, race, and ethnicity, the family market provided the greatest source of ancillary profits so necessary to offset chronic production cost overruns, costly innovations such as Technicolor and the multiplane camera, and delayed profit cycles for short subjects. David Forgacs (1992) argues that cuteness provided a path of expansion to feature length animated films, whose profit potential far outstripped that of the shorts. These films, in turn, could reap the benefits of the market for licensed merchandise that Mickey products had created.

Thus, Forgacs traces the conscious attempts by Disney animators to emphasize cuteness in characters beginning with some cartoons in the "Silly Symphony" series, which was based on music rather than star characters. He also quotes story conference notes rife with references to how a character's design or bits of business could be made cuter (1992,

364-5). Indeed, Mickey himself underwent a similar evolution from adult roidential ruffian in *Steamboat Willie* (1928) to the juvenilized anthropomorphic model citizen his last regular short, *The Simple Things* (1953) (Gould 1979).

### **Geographical Marginalization of New York**

Disney pursued children through a stylistic and ideological shift from what dominated cartoons in the era when the animation industry was centered in New York. In the 1910s and '20s, New York was home to studios run by J. R. Bray, Gregory La Cava (owned by William Randolph Hearst), Paul Terry and Amadee Van Beuren, Raoul Barré and Charles Bowers, Max and Dave Fleischer, and Pat Sullivan (Crafton [1982] 1993). By the 1930s, Van Beuren and Terry (now with separate studios) and the Fleischers remained. Meanwhile, Walt Disney relocated from Kansas City to Hollywood in 1923 and his studio was joined in the 1930s by those of Walter Lantz (Universal), Leon Schlesinger (Warner Bros.), Charles Mintz (Columbia), Ub Iwerks (MGM), and Harman-Ising (MGM).

Disney led in developing a West Coast style distinct from that of the New York studios, according to Mark Langer (1990c). Where the New York studios maintained a rubbery style, Disney sought well-observed naturalism; in place of their emphasis on artificiality, he aimed for plausibility. The West Coast Style centered on animal characters to a much greater extent; it had pastoral or small town settings rather than urban locales; and its narratives were more linearly structured. Disney, especially, gave characters such as Mickey upward mobility from the barnyard to managerial and professional positions over the course of his 1930s films, while New York studios retained a working class orientation that accentuated ethnicity. As I mentioned above, adult characters concerns and forbidden behavior appeared in many Betty Boop shorts of the early 1930s, and Popeye's violence replaced Betty's Boop-boop-a-doop as the decade wore on.

The West Coast studios quickly came to dominate the animation industry. Van Beuren closed shop in 1936. After an abortive relocation in Miami for feature production,

Paramount took over the Fleischer Studio and returned production to New York under the name Famous Studios in 1942 (Langer 1990b). Paul Terry continued to produce Terrytoons until 1955, when he sold his studio and back catalog to CBS. Both studios continued to produce cartoons on ever-shrinking budgets until the late 1960s.

If the New York studios themselves became marginalized within the animation industry, the distinctive New York style fared better during the 1940s. Disney and other West Coast studios did absorb some of the traits of the New York style, as well as many of its animators, but at the cost of their direct adult address. Langer's analysis of the "Pink Elephants" sequence in Disney's *Dumbo* (1941) demonstrates how the stylized metamorphoses are motivated by narrative requirements for Dumbo to realize his unique talents and use them to reunite his family and attain success (1990c, 318). However, other West Coast studios, such as Warner Bros., employed aspects of the New York Style in a much less restrictive manner.

### **Warner's Differentiation from Disney**

If the war temporarily interrupted Disney's consolidation of the children's audience, it provided the atmosphere for Warner cartoons to differentiate themselves from those Disney so successfully produced. Warner cartoons from the early to mid-1930s imitated Disney with their characters (notably their first star, Bosko, who was a humanized Mickey), series titles ("Looney Tunes" and "Merrie Melodies" were variations on "Silly Symphonies"), and attempts at cuteness. However, genre spoofs and topical references to movie stars, radio personalities, and other media culture crept into the cartoons. Beginning in 1936, a unit under the direction of Tex Avery began to experiment with self-referential jokes about cinematic conventions and studio politics, direct address of the audience, irreverent characters, and abrupt changes in pacing (Adamson 1975b, 42-54; Schneider 1988, 46-9).

If Schlesinger promoted the cuteness of Porky in 1939 and fledgling director Chuck Jones mimicked the Disney style with a stream of cute pictures of his own, other Warner directors (e.g. Frank Tashlin, Bob Clampett, Friz Freleng) followed Avery's lead into the sharply satiric. New characters, such as Daffy Duck (first seen in *Porky's Duck Hunt* [1937]) and Bugs Bunny (premiering in *Porky's Hare Hunt* [1938]) developed into bigger stars than Porky during the war, outwitting foes with a mix of verbal repartee, trickery, and outright violence.

The success of this differentiation from Disney is illustrated by the *Showman's Trade Review*, whose poll of exhibitors showed the Warner "Merrie Melodies" series climb from sixth place to first place from 1937 to 1943 (Adamson 1990, 63). Licensing interest in Bugs Bunny followed almost immediately after his breakthrough role in *A Wild Hare* (1940), directed by Avery. He joined Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, and Elmer Fudd in comic books, newspaper comic strips, sheet music clocks, ceramic statues, banks, children's neckties, wall plaques, games, etc. (Adamson 1990, 66; "Looney Tunes Collectibles" 1992, 39-43). As other characters caught on, they too were added to the merchandising mix.

### **Film Industry Contraction and Television Expansion**

A number of factors made the postwar years unsettling for the animation business: internecine union struggles and strikes, anti-Communist hearings, the postwar recession, and the 1948 Supreme Court anti-trust consent decree. Each threatened the viability of the studio cartoon as a staple of the film industry.

As I noted above in "Media Power Roles," the Screen Cartoonists Guild was successful in organizing the Schlesinger cartoon studio in 1941. It had previously gained a contract with MGM in 1940 also succeeded at Disney after a bitter strike during the summer of 1941. Eventually other studios accepted the union's representation. The Guild joined other Hollywood craft unions to form the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU). Towards

the end of the war the CSU lost a bitter struggle with the International Alliance of of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) to represent the craft workers of the major studios, including cartoonists. IATSE was a much bigger group of unions, which provided more bargaining leverage, but it also had ties to organized crime at the time (Solomon 1989, 221). Its strategies included accusing the CSU leadership of Communism while affiliating itself with the conservative Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Values (Sklar 1975, 257-8).

Economic troubles loomed with the postwar recession and the culmination of the Justice Department's longterm anti-trust suit against Hollywood's eight major producer-distributor organizations. A trial consent decree in 1940 had ended blind-booking, in which exhibitors accepted films to exhibit without examination, and had limited block-booking to blocks of no more than five films (Bordwell et al. 1985, 331). This started the trend for studios to make fewer pictures overall. They concentrated on prestige A pictures, which distributors could place in first run theaters and obtain a percentage of the gross, instead of the flat rate that B pictures commanded (Balio 1993, 144).

Booking of smaller blocks of films still forced exhibitors to pay for the cartoons and other shorts packaged with each feature, even if they only wanted the feature for its box office draw. In 1948 the Supreme Court decided in *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et al* to end block-booking and the district court ordered the companies to divest their theater chains (Sklar 1975, 273-4). This did not create the competitive field independent exhibitors sought because the studios merely continued to reduce their output to the most potentially profitable films. Among the prominent targets for production cutbacks were the cartoon studios.

At the Warner Bros. cartoon studio (bought from Schlesinger in 1944), these cutbacks meant dismantling the fourth animation unit in 1949, leaving three directors, Friz Freleng, Chuck Jones, and Robert McKimson, to produce virtually all of Warner's

cartoons into the early 1960s. In the summer of 1953 Warner Bros. suspended production in its animation studio after producing one 3-D cartoon, Chuck Jones's *Lumberjack Rabbit* (1954) and finding it too expensive (Pryor 1953, 32; Schneider 1988, 122). Jack Warner expected that 3-D production would become the industry norm. When it did not, the studio soon reopened. The annual count of new Warner cartoon releases dropped from a high of 44 in 1939 to approximately 30 during the first half of the 1950s, and steadily declined into the teens until Warner closed the shop in 1963. Warner then rented out the physical plant to a new company headed by Friz Freleng and David DePatie, which continued very low budget cartoon production for Warner and others until Warner resumed cartoon production from 1967 to 1969 (Schneider 1988, 130-2).

During those years, television went from a small ancillary market for animation to its primary one. In 1947 the Dumont network's New York television station aired a show "Movies for Small Fry" featuring old black and white cartoons from the Van Beuren studio (Lenburg 1991, 9-10). This was the first in a long line of cartoon programs aimed squarely at children. Among them were scores of kiddie shows hosted by local personalities in costume. Each made liberal use of old theatrical cartoons that had long been unavailable.

The film studios often did not anticipate the ongoing source of revenues that the television market could provide. Paul Terry sold his studio and film catalog to CBS for only \$3.5 million in 1955 (Solomon 1989, 181). In 1956 Warner Bros. sold to the television distributor Associated Artists Productions a package of its features and shorts that included all of its color cartoons copyrighted before 1 September 1948 (Schneider 1988, 133). The cartoons have been successively acquired by several owners, eventually becoming the property of Turner Broadcasting.

In comparison, back in 1936 Walt's brother and financial officer, Roy Disney, had retained future television rights from their distributor (Gomery 1994, 73). Disney went on to produce two primarily live-action series that made use of Disney's back catalog of



cartoons in addition to new animation created just for the programs (Solomon 1989, 231). The first was “Disneyland,” which premiered in 1954 on Wednesday evenings. It not only promoted the upcoming theme park but made ABC a major investor in the park as well (Gomery 1994, 75-6). In 1955 Disney debuted the second, a weekday afternoon show, “The Mickey Mouse Club.”

### **The Economics of Animation Made for Television**

While television aired many old theatrical cartoons, it also provided a large market for new animation that could be produced cheaply and quickly. In 1949, Jay Ward, Alex Anderson, and Jerry Fairbanks test marketed the first such series, “Crusader Rabbit.” Budgets were restricted to \$2,500 for each nineteen-and-a-half minute story and even in the late 1950s the newly formed Hanna-Barbera studio received only \$2,700 per half-hour cartoon show (Lenburg 1991, 11). In contrast, in the 1950s theatrical cartoons running approximately six minutes each cost Walter Lantz \$25,000 and Warner Bros. \$30,000, and these were two cost-conscious studios (Solomon 1989, 149, 176).

Time pressures were equally severe. Television schedules required weekly product to fill its timeslots. Those who came from theatrical production made abrupt adjustments to survive. Former Warner Bros. cartoon director Friz Freleng made that transition to form DePatie-Freleng in the early 1960s. He stated, “I used to turn out 11 or 12 theatrical cartoons a year. At six minutes per cartoon, that was a little over an hour’s worth. Here, in one week, they’ll turn out four shows. they do at least one and a half hours of new animation a week” (quoted in Lenburg 1991, 13). In order to meet production schedules and budgets, character and background designs were simplified, motion was greatly reduced, and dialogue proliferated to make up for lost visual richness. Executives of General Mills, which owned Jay Ward’s series “Rocky and His Friends,” pioneered another cost-cutting strategy. They set up a studio in Mexico City to animate the series, saving substantial production costs (Solomon 1989, 233-4).

In 1958 CBS was the first network to air an all-animated series in primetime when it rebroadcast “The Gerald McBoing-Boing Show” as an evening summer replacement series. The series was produced by United Productions of America (UPA), which had great impact on the style of animation in the late 1940s through the 1950s with its emphasis on simplified modern graphic designs and wide-ranging subject matter. Gerald was a creation of Dr. Seuss and he starred in several UPA theatrical cartoons before hosting the television series.

Other animated primetime series followed in the fall of 1960, when Hanna-Barbera debuted “The Flintstones” and Warner Bros. produced its own cartoon television series, “The Bugs Bunny Show,” using brief framing segments of new animation around intact cartoons selected from the remaining Warners back catalog. Several more such series followed, but by 1966 most of these had ended their runs to be syndicated in the afternoons or on Saturday mornings and only the occasional animated special would appear in primetime. Then one series, “Wait Till Your Father Gets Home,” appeared for two seasons in the early 1970s and the format did not resurface in primetime until “The Simpsons” premiered on the Fox network in 1990.

I note the timeslots these programs received to indicate that during the late 1950s to the mid-1960s animated shows were expected to draw a family audience of a wide age range. For example, among the sponsors for “The Flintstones” in its primetime run were Winston cigarettes, Alka-Seltzer, One-A-Day Vitamins, and Post Cereals (Lenburg 1991, 326). However, it was Saturday morning that soon became most associated with cartoons after CBS daytime programmer Fred Silverman scheduled the first two-hour block of cartoons in that time period for the 1963-4 season. Eventually ABC and NBC followed suit and live-action shows were squeezed out of the line-up in favor of inexpensive cartoons that generated high advertising revenues.

Television animation mirrored theatrical animation by adapting pre-existing characters for its subject matter. As Hearst's International Film Service cartoon studio in the 1910s created cinematic equivalents of his newspapers' comic strips, animation for television adapted characters and stories from comic books. Live-action film stars, such as Abbott and Costello, and recording personalities, such as the Beatles, also lent themselves to animated caricatures. Other cartoons were thinly veiled alterations of popular shows, exemplified by Hanna-Barbera's "Flintstones," which owed a great deal to "The Honeymooners."

### **Public Advocacy and Government Regulatory Pressures**

One other source of adaptation led to greater controversy among public advocacy groups and government representatives: products aimed at children. While such products often follow the successful character created for print, radio, film, or television, in this case the product precedes the program. One early example, "Linus the Lionhearted," premiered in 1964 using characters derived from Post cereal boxes (Lenburg 1991, 362). With such productions, animated programs shared content as well as narrative strategies with animated commercials. Both programs and commercials employed a wealth of associative juxtapositions (Messaris 1991) in which the products were linked to fun, acting grown-up, popularity, and ridicule of adults (Schneider 1987, 94-108).

Concerned that such practices were exploiting the vulnerabilities of children in the audience, Peggy Charren founded in 1968 what was to become Action for Children's Television (ACT). Rather than seeking changes in program content, such as reducing violence, ACT petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to require stations to broadcast a minimum of fourteen weekly hours of programming for children that had no sponsorship either within children's shows or in commercials (Cole 1978, 251). Some members of Congress and other advocacy groups did wish to place limits on violent

television content, the amount of which was measured by content analysis to be six times as high during cartoons than during adult shows in 1969 (Gerbner 1971, 36).

The end result was that under pressure from government regulators, advocacy groups, and the press, the industry agreed to set its own standards that limited the time per hour devoted to commercials during weekend children's programs. The networks also devised "standards and procedures" codes for their animation producers to follow to minimize violence and maximize pro-social values. The networks also excised what they considered violent action from cartoons, such as the Warner Bros. theatricals, produced before these codes were in place (Solomon 1989, 246). However, the syndication market did not succumb to such stringent controls and it was there in the 1980s that many more toy-based programs flourished.

### **Marginality Hinders Access to Resources**

The above historical summary indicates how animation came to be pigeonholed as children's entertainment. The categorization is not absolute, but individual animated productions intended for adults, such as Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* (1972), are seen as aberrations rather than part of medium's range. Because the Disney company has defined and dominated the path to box office success for feature animation, all other contenders must compete from an inferior position regarding reputation, production talent, organizational structure, and financing. In addition to its lavish production methods, Disney can afford wide distribution to theaters and high-profile campaigns of advertising, merchandising, and promotion.

For Disney's competitors, fortunes rise and fall precipitously, particularly those independent production companies in need of powerful distributors to break into the market. In an expanding market, more distributors are willing to finance low-budget animated productions, but when these do not meet box office expectations, the medium of animation takes the blame rather than crass opportunism, poor writing, jerky limited

animation, or flawed design. Investors seek the pre-sold commodity that could reap large returns from minimal outlays of cash.

For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s Warner Communications Inc., the corporate entity that absorbed Warner Bros., produced a number of television specials and theatrical feature films using snippets of various vintage cartoons woven together with newly animated framing stories. The styles of various directors' old shorts clashed with each other and with the new bridge animation, whose contrivances to provide unity were shameless. When *1001 Rabbit Tales* (1982) and *Daffy Duck's Movie: Fantastic Island* (1983) together earned less than \$2 million at the box office, their poor performance added to a string of failures from other companies. Solomon notes the verdict: "Animation was tagged box office poison" (1989, 278).

In the mid-1980s a quick boom and bust of animation based on products followed, in which theatrical features were churned out to promote such toys as the Care Bears, My Little Pony, Transformers, Gobots, and Rainbow Brite. A much larger collection of made-for-syndication series glutted the television market until ratings dropped precipitously in late 1986. Toy companies spent as much on advertising as they did to finance these series, earning many times their investments in merchandise sold (Solomon 1989, 284-5).

Television animation studios now do little actual animating in-house. Instead, "runaway" production has chased the cheapest labor and currency exchange rates to set up foreign shops for animating much of what appears on the small screen. Despite this, the Cartoonists Local 839 of IATSE reported in 1990 that 80% of 1,064 members were employed in union shops in contrast to 1988, when 50% to 60% of 750 members were similarly employed (Robb 1990, 30). By 1994, the Local had 1,600 active members, of which only 100 were either unemployed or working at nonunion shops (Deneroff 1994, 18). Those animating features for Disney and others do gain the kind of on-the-job training once provided to all during the era of fully animated theatrical shorts. But many merely

design characters, storyboards, and the minimal character poses necessary to guide the foreign shops.

One more resource animation has difficulty obtaining is equal footing in the competition for industry-wide honors, such as motion picture Academy Awards and television Emmys. For example, the Emmy Awards for television achievement initially prevented “The Simpsons” program from competing in comedy categories against other primetime sitcoms, relegating it instead to animation categories. The best picture nomination for *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) was a startling breakout for Disney, whose animated features gained recognition from the Academy Awards primarily in music categories.

A feast or famine mentality is endemic to marginalized media and even the prolonged expansion of the business cannot shake the doubts of some animation workers, as evidenced by an article in a cartoonist union publication:

There is the lurking fear that, with one or two big-budget bombs, all the movie executives who were so eager to jump into animation will now scramble madly to get out, that all the animation jobs will vanish across the Pacific.... Many [animation workers] suffer from an inferiority complex. They’re just in animation, after all, not the “real” part of the movie industry, the part with cameras and lights and flesh-and-blood actors pulling down one to ten million dollars per picture. (“Where Do We Go from Here?” 1992, 110)

### **Non-Commercial Animation**

The history of animation I have presented demonstrates roots in a variety of fine arts and technologies that preceded cinema. Early industry workers crossed over from commercial art and fine art backgrounds to learn the new craft on the job. By the time schools began to offer animation in their curricula, it already was a marginalized form within both fine arts and filmmaking. An alternate view suggests “that animation film not only preceded the advent of cinema but engendered it;... that, inverting the conventional wisdom, cinema might then be thought of as animation’s ‘step-child’” (Cholodenko 1991, 9-10). Had animation been considered a culmination of the possibilities of fine arts and film

from the beginning, it may have been spared being their unacknowledged bastard child. However, being on the peripheries has allowed those learning animation to select from the traditions of each field without being constrained by them.

Anyone interested college animation programs has few choices for learning traditional techniques but more options for computer animation. California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts), University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), New York University, and Rhode Island School of Design are the best-known among fifteen programs Gunnar Strøm found available in the United States (1990). Curricula in animation range from a few specialized courses within film, art, or design departments to full-fledged majors in animation. The highest profile programs are at Cal Arts, which received large amounts of funding and guidance from Walt Disney and his estate (Smith 1977). Cal Arts offers both a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Character Animation for future industry workers and a Masters of Fine Arts in Experimental Animation.

Yet people who become independent or experimental animators find that their work has little support either from the commercial animation market or the fine arts market. Prizes at animation festivals across the globe may bring some recognition, but that does not often translate into distribution deals. Also a number of museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art, collect and exhibit independent animation, and rent it to educational and cultural institutions. But Jules Engel, founder and director of the Experimental Animation program at Cal Arts, feels “the future of experimental animation... depends on people who will promote the abstract film as galleries did the paintings of Ellsworth Kelly, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko” (paraphrased in Russett and Starr 1988, 17).

The difficulty remains in finding an equivalent of the gallery system, which circulates a restricted number of individually-authored, handcrafted artworks. The art independent animators create (often working alone or in small groups) is the moving image

record rather than the materials that went into producing it. Instead, some animation techniques, such as paint-on-glass, actually destroy the materials used to create the motion. The only record of all the successive paintings is the film negative, master videotape, or computer file, which are templates for reproduction rather than unique collectible objects. Indeed, even those objects that survive were produced to serve motion over time and may reflect little of the inventiveness that went into the film as a whole.

As I will demonstrate in chapter 4, art derived from commercial animation actually has a better chance to sell in galleries than does art from independent animation. The animation art gallery and auction system depends on collectors recognizing the filmic or televisual source of the art they purchase. No such means of distribution and exhibition of independent animation is available.

Nor is there a geographic center of independent animation, as Hollywood functions for commercial animation or New York functions for fine arts. Centralization greatly aids the perpetuation of these art worlds by allowing economies of scale to operate regarding talent pools, funding, support services, materials, distribution organizations, and market demand (Netzer 1978, 27). However if the level of production drops below the threshold necessary for specialized support services to survive, the benefits are quickly lost. This is apparent in the animation industry's near abandonment of New York, in which a few shops produce commercials and client-based animation, in contrast to the thriving industry the city housed in the 1920s.

Instead, Solomon details how geographically disbursed independent animators survive in this country:

As there is no equivalent of the Canadian Film Board or the government-subsidized studios of Eastern Europe, American filmmakers must finance their own work, which means raising thousands of dollars. The artists must teach, seek grants, or corporate sponsors, work in studios or find jobs outside their art. (1989, 291)

Indeed, Hollywood provides some of these resources for independents and other enclaves tend to surround schools that offer independent animators teaching opportunities.



Since the late 1980s, animators in Eastern Europe have lost their state-sponsored studios as those countries made the transition from Communism. Their previous status gave them funding while marginalizing them in comparison to the states' live-action film production industries. This allowed animators to produce many cartoons that exposed the hypocrisy and excesses of the very system that funded them, while the official censors were preoccupied with live-action filmmaking (Richie 1961, 33-4).

Some independents have explored new avenues to marketing their personal animation. Such cable stations as MTV, Nickelodeon, and the Cartoon Network provide new outlets for some shorts, although their market niches still place limitations on what they air. Also, videos and laserdiscs have offered the work of independents to the fairly modest market of experimental animation enthusiasts. These collectors, and other animation consumers, have dealt with marginalization as well, as the next section discusses.

### **Animation Consumers**

#### **Practical Effects of Marginalization**

Adults who consume animation were until recently a guilty secret of the industry, especially after it moved to target children to the exclusion of others in the mid-1960s. While animation producers have acknowledged adult interest to a greater extent, in some ways these consumers still feel the industry's neglect. In the simplest terms, neglect means scarcity of product. Fans must wait a long time between theatrical releases of animated feature films because so few are made in comparison to live-action.

Television is a different situation. Because it is the primary market for animation, cartoons are freely available. But, aside from a few primetime specials and series, most notably "The Simpsons" and "The Critic," animation for television is targeted to some portion of the juvenile demographic (ages two to six, six to eleven, and eleven to fifteen are rough divisions of the age groups). The shows often are gender specific as well. The focus

of the appeal is narrow precisely to attract advertisers whose products suit restricted markets (e.g. Barbie dolls). While an increase in viewership is generally desirable, a show with cross-over appeal beyond the targeted juvenile demographic dilutes the effectiveness of advertisements meant for specific segments of the children's audience. Thus, adult fans challenge the basis for separating cultural production into age-differentiated products, and in so doing challenge the advertising and marketing industries for enforcing that segmentation.

While some adult fans enjoy shows aimed at much younger viewers, others seek out those they believe to have a dual address, which combines simpler messages for children with more sophisticated elements for teens and adults. Animation workers derive satisfaction from embedding in-jokes for cartoon buffs while targeting advertisers' demographics. An example is "Tiny Toon Adventures," a syndicated series co-produced by Time Warner and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment that first aired in fall 1990. This series offered the first new characters from Warner since the original theatrical shorts ceased production in 1969. The producers created juvenile variations on the classic characters and placed them in a school for cartoon comedy taught by the originals. Over the course of the initial 65-episode run, many old jokes and obscure characters from the earlier theatrical cartoons made appearances, as did adult references to Mike Tyson's spousal abuse and big money baseball contract negotiations. Playful allusions proliferated, such as a parody of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles phenomenon called "Immature Radioactive Samurai Slugs" (who were named Picasso, Warhol, Rockwell, and Grandma Moses) (Mackey 1991).

Another example is Time Warner's "Batman: The Animated Series," which upon its premiere in 1992 was praised for the sophistication of its art deco/film noir graphic design and somber story lines. This show's license to address adults as well as children derived from previously released Warner properties: the 1986 adult-oriented comic book

reinterpretations of Batman, notably, *The Dark Knight Returns*, by Frank Miller; and the 1989 film *Batman*, directed by Tim Burton (Meehan 1991). Some of the neo-fascist overtones of the comic books and stylistic excess of the film were toned down to draw an adolescent audience while retaining some elements of adult address the earlier products had cultivated. When the series subsequently moved to Saturday mornings on the Fox network its tone lightened with the inclusion of Robin and the downplay of a sexually suggestive, morally ambiguous character, Harley Quinn. The show's producers grudgingly acknowledged pressure from Fox network representatives to adjust to the younger audience who watch during that time period compared to weekday late afternoons (Kindred 1993, 33-4).

Practical disadvantages of being an adult fan of animation also arise at many video stores. Fans seeking animation videos often have to look in the children's section of most video stores for what they seek. I have seen some adult-oriented titles, such as the sexually explicit and violent Japanese animated film *Legend of the Overfiend* inappropriately placed in children's sections of video stores because it falls in the category of "cartoon." Just a few years ago, this and many other examples of Japanese animation (also called Japanimation and Anime) were not available through commercial venues, but a fandom grew around bootleg copies of tapes from Japan even though they were not subtitled or dubbed.

Moreover, the availability of cartoon-themed merchandise for adults was quite limited before the proliferation of Disney Stores and Warner Bros. Studio Stores. Prior to the late 1980s, fans had to inquire whether character-decorated clothing was offered in adult sizes. As I will show in chapter 4, animation art dealing also slowly moved from informal swap meets and comic book conventions of the 1960s and 1970s to mail order businesses run out of collectors' homes to gallery spaces and auction houses in the 1980s and 1990s. Cartoon memorabilia followed a similar path from an informal network

haphazardly offering rescued cast-offs to a thriving business modeled on the antiques and fine art markets.

### **Social and Personal Marginalization**

Beyond the above-mentioned practical problems of determining age-appropriateness and product availability are social and psychological marginalization of adults who consume animation. Here, research on fandom is instructive. Stereotypes of the “fan” retain pejorative connotations according to Henry Jenkins:

The fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire. Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a “fanatic” or false worshiper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of “normal” cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality. (1992, 15).

Similarly, Jolie Jenson notes that popular and scholarly characterizations of fans fall into two deviant and potentially dangerous types: the obsessed loner and the hysterical crowd (1992, 9).

Such extreme depictions of fans reflect the uneasiness felt by those whose authority is anchored in the cultural hierarchy I discussed above. The power of the hierarchy lies in the way it naturalizes particular correspondences between cultural forms and their consumers based on class, education, age, gender, and ethnicity. But Crane acknowledges that the growth of mass media has outstripped that of the traditional hierarchy based in the urban domain (Crane 1992, 5-6). The category of the fan grew along with mass media culture, blurring the demographic distinctions in taste that the cultural hierarchy maintained.

An adult who enjoys animation alone or in the company of unappreciative cohabitants may not know that others the same age and older share the interest. If people in the daily experience of this person give no indication that they too appreciate animation, the fan may consider such tastes a sign of deviance from more normative cultural consumption.

Reinforcing this is the message through television scheduling of cartoons and the accompanying commercials that the shows are for children.

Such an individual may avoid stigma by refusing to disclose any enjoyment of cartoons, or limiting disclosures to a trusted few, such as family members or friends, even if they do not understand that enjoyment but merely tolerate it. The fan may watch cartoons only in the company of children, who provide a cover explanation for viewing. Erving Goffman notes that the individual may go so far as to employ *disidentifiers*, e.g. displays of behavior or objects that falsely claim taste in more legitimate culture, or even public denunciations of the very cartoons he or she is too ashamed to admit liking (1963, 44). The latter example's pre-emptive denial may cause increased shame at having felt the need to lie rather than face the potentially disapproving responses to a truthful disclosure.

This shows how animation fans may evaluate their own activities according to a gradient of acceptability to the norms of outsiders, concealing that which would most likely be judged as deviant or offensive. In this way, standards of legitimacy provide benchmarks even for those who reject those standards. I turn now to look at legitimacy in more depth.

## **Legitimacy**

### **Connotations**

The concept of legitimacy stems from compliance with the law, but it has broader connotations as well. Legitimacy may require answering to other authorities whose power is based on such things as knowledge, morality, or tradition. These authorities use legitimacy as a means of defining who is acceptable as a member of a social group. The requirements for acceptance may or may not be formalized, but those who seek to be judged for entry may appeal to institutionally derived principles. As the above sections "Media Power Roles" and "Art World Activities" discussed, the institutions of arts and

media can have different criteria for accepting new participants as well as different power roles devoted to evaluating aspirants.

Legal legitimacy may involve certain protections and contractual obligations between the legitimated and the legitimating authority. For the illegitimate to accept reassignment as legitimate, this means accepting the prerogative of the legitimating agent. This prerogative may extend to areas within which the newly legitimated did not initially intend to forsake autonomy. Thus, legitimacy has costs as well as benefits.

Nor is the conferral of legitimacy permanent. It is contingent on the continuing adherence to laws or traditions. Beyond legal strictures are more normative expectations to fulfill. These are less formal ways of constraining behavior than through legal authority, but are enforced through the bludgeon of public opinion, which can be harsher and more capricious.

Another connotation of legitimacy pertains to birth in the sanctity of marriage. In the above section “Non-Commercial Animation” I called animation the unacknowledged bastard child of fine arts and moving image production because these realms have forsaken it to some extent and, thus, ignored their own interrelationship. If they had developed a tradition of mutual influence and support, animation would be the exalted fruition of both fields of production, rather than the illegitimate scrounger for their castoffs.

The boundaries between fine arts and moving image production are reinforced by the romantic myth of fine arts as pure means of self-expression in contrast to applied arts. Those who toil in the latter realm are cast out of this divine inner circle for serving commerce. Practitioners of such applied arts as illustration, fashion design, interior decoration, and advertising art direction are forever suspect for foresaking artistic autonomy in pursuit of monetary success. Of course, as I have cited above in “Against Essentializing Popular Culture and Elite Culture,” Becker (1982) and others argue that the

autonomy of fine artists is more an ideological construct than an accurate representation of their activities in art worlds.

However, the belief in the construct produces a division between fine art and applied art that has real consequences. Animation producers may be called upon to declare their loyalty to the ideals of artistic autonomy and self-expression to gain legitimacy in the institution of the arts, while the institution of the media demands practical accommodations to profitability. Those who create both personal works and commissioned works may have divided loyalties and identities, which members of each institution may call into question.

The legitimacy of one's origins goes beyond the question of wedlock to the heritage one may claim. This requires a demonstration of authenticity: proof of a lineage to what is already acceptable. The legitimate is rightful heir to traditions, inheritor of resources others cannot access. As I will show in chapter 4, the animation art market has taken an interest in tracing the provenance of certain pieces back to the artists who collected them from the studios at which they worked. Just as an individual artist's reputation is the wellspring of legitimacy for works of fine art, the studio's imprimatur is given only to those pieces of art legally removed from the premises.

Lastly, legitimacy has an air of religious sanctification. I will pay attention to morally-based arguments regarding what may be included as legitimate and what should be excluded. I contend that as elite cultural organizations see their tangible resources dwindle, their moral dignification remains a powerful weapon of influence. Museums resemble temples housing the sacred, while barring entrance to the profane. Also, those animators working in experimental or avant-garde modes, having forsaken monetary rewards, often argue for the purity of what they do in almost religious terms.

It may also be useful to consider the difference between conquering monotheists, who seek to impose their one true God on others, and syncretistic religionists, who absorb other gods into their own pantheon. The counterparts of these two temperaments in art

worlds would, in the first case, place narrow confines on who is sanctified; but in the second, be more pluralistic in bestowing blessings. As I will cover in the next section, those who invest their resources (including their reputations) narrowly in a particular group style of animation have greater reason to exclude others from sanctification. However, those who are on a more inclusive evangelical mission (e.g. a museum whose funding sources have shifted from rich patrons to government and corporate support) are willing to honor a greater diversity within the temple.

### **Investments in Authority**

#### **Structures of Authority**

The above discussion leads me to claim that whoever seeks to control how legitimacy is bestowed must invest in structures of authority. Individuals and organizations make expenditures to reinforce the governing principles of existing institutions. Only as long as society grants legitimacy to its institutions can people whose authority derives from these institutions continue to enforce judgments about legitimacy. It is here that Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capital may be useful.

Bourdieu argues that the authority to convey legitimacy is a form of cultural capital (1984). He describes cultural capital as a resource that one may invest, much like economic capital. In certain circumstances, the two forms of capital may be interconvertible. One builds up cultural capital most easily by being born into the elite and having lifelong exposure to refined culture, so that a sense of discrimination becomes second-nature. The complexity of classical music, theatrical traditions, literature, fine wine and food, and behavioral mores at formal occasions all require lengthy immersion to acquire competence in their symbolic codes. For the upper classes, this immersion begins very early in life, much like children of all classes acquire language.



Others of lesser means and little access to these cultural realms may make up for their prior ignorance with formal education. However, Bourdieu claims that acquisition of cultural knowledge in this fashion can never overcome the sense of inadequacy of those not born into the elite. This inadequacy may be concealed through expressions of distrust or rejection of the culture. Thus, social stratification causes differences both in access to and desire for non-essential but enriching aesthetic curricula. Those individuals with earliest exposure to this culture may naturalize their predispositions for it as inherent to their positions of social and economic superiority.

### **Personal Authority**

Cultural capital is derived from longterm investments in already legitimated culture and the class structure in which it operates. But Bourdieu argues that those who build up this form of capital may also invest it in legitimating the illegitimate. Careful investment of this capital should confirm the person's own authority as tastemaker. Spending cultural capital converts an arsenal of specialized knowledge into self-assured deployment of discriminating taste.

Bourdieu claims that the appropriation of illegitimate culture depends on bestowing the proper connotations upon it:

Because the very meaning and value of a cultural object varies according to the system of objects in which it is placed, detective stories, science fiction or strip cartoons may be entirely prestigious cultural assets or be reduced to their ordinary value, depending on whether they are associated with avant-garde literature or music—in which case they appear as manifestations of daring and freedom—or combine to form a constellation typical of middle-brow taste—when they appear as what they are, simple substitutes for legitimate assets (1984, 88).

Tastemakers may thus employ their competencies with legitimated culture to bring other cultural productions into their sphere of influence by stressing those aspects of the productions that are shared by highbrow works. The self-assured way they proclaim their tastes contributes to their success in imposing those tastes on others in their elite circles (1984, 92).

Similarly, Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as that which is accumulated by tastemakers such as art dealers, who build a reputation on their uncanny selections of potentially important artists, while disavowing the economic returns such importance will bring to the exchange value of the artist's works (1986, 132). The fact that these tastemakers spot talent before others do allows them to build 'credit,' which they may redeem in the long run once the artists' reputations are established and the market responds with higher prices for their work.

Accumulating symbolic capital does involve such expenditures as time, money, reputation, attention, emotional attachment, gallery space, and promotional costs. Talent-spotting is always a gamble if the selected artists do not eventually gain reputations sufficient to inflate the economic value of their work. Yet the rewards are great if one gains the reputation of having what the art market calls the "eye" for worthwhile art (Marquis 1991, 208).

Bourdieu has come under fire for universalizing the value inherent in elite traditional culture, while slighting other realms of culture more associated with middle and working classes. Diana Crane argues that Bourdieu's theorizing may not be fully generalizable from the late 1960s France from which he took his survey data (1992, 47). America's class system is not so rigid, nor does our society find such universal value in elite culture. John Fiske also notes two weaknesses in Bourdieu's model: Bourdieu overemphasizes economics and class to the exclusion of gender, race, and age as bases for social discrimination and he fails to analyze subordinated cultures with the same subtlety he employs on elite culture (1992, 32). As I have discussed in the section, "Against Essentializing Popular Culture and Elite Culture," culture is not so rigidly categorized as Bourdieu's theories would suggest.

## **Authority Within and Beyond Taste Groups**

I acknowledge these criticisms, but also contend that a more supple use of Bourdieu's concepts will provide useful tools for analysis of many types of taste groups. Cultural capital in these cases may not depend on class origin so much as early immersion in a realm of culture in comparison with other members of the taste group. Expertise becomes a form of cultural capital within a community centered on an area of interest. This capital may only be spent within the taste group, because outside of it, people will fail to appreciate it to the extent that group members will.

However, as Bourdieu describes how tastemakers can recontextualize midbrow culture as highbrow assets, possessors of cultural capital within taste groups may translate their cultural capital into assets that broader institutions such as the arts or the media can recognize. For example, when outsiders do notice the esoteric culture of a specific taste group such as animation art collectors, what they first notice is an increase in monetary value of the cultural items that are exchanged. Thus, the animation art expert can play the role of appraiser as people outside the taste group wish to buy or sell the art they previously ignored. To be an accurate appraiser is to reinforce the tastes of those who have spent money on similar items, to calculate aesthetic evaluation in market terms.

In the realm of media, one's expertise as an animation historian might be valuable for a production company that wishes to recycle its assets into new productions. Thus, Greg Ford, who had written about Warner Bros. animation (1975) and programmed retrospectives of old cartoons, was hired as a producer in Warner's revived animation studio. He supervised the new Daffy Duck theatrical shorts *The Duxorcist* (1987) and *Night of the Living Duck* (1988), as well as the feature *Daffy Duck's Quackbusters* (1988), which wove clips from the old Warner cartoons into a new storyline.

My modification of Bourdieu's view of cultural capital acknowledges that culture is influenced by many portions of the public, not merely the elites. Cultural capital accrued

within a taste group may become relevant to others, despite that taste group's origins as a marginalized community.

I do not want to suggest that translation of one's reputation from one realm to another is effortless or without cost. Our society's penchant to categorize people and culture often confines reputation to a particular setting. Just as academia and medicine have evolved into specialities, so too, have cultural fields of production and reception. This is true not merely for such broad categories as fine art and applied art that I discussed above, but even across such similar media as television and film, or animation and live-action. For example, virtually alone among animation directors who crossed over to live-action filmmaking in 1950s Hollywood was Frank Tashlin. In retrospect, Steve Schneider described Tashlin's Warner Bros. cartoons as cinematic (1988, 50); J. Hoberman found his live-action films cartoony (1982b).

Thus, expanding one's reputation to include accomplishments in different fields often brings along old associations, which, for some, imply limitations. Just how individuals and organizations act to label and categorize reputations is the subject of the next section.

## **Critical Evaluation**

### **Evaluators in the Media**

To discuss which of Turow's media power roles confer legitimacy requires a clearer sense of what legitimacy means in the media. I wish to consider legitimation in the media as the commitment of the evaluator's available resources to a particular project. These resources differ according to each power role.

First are those who are part of animation production, distribution, and exhibition. Production firms buy ideas for films and television shows (specials, pilots for series, telemovies, etc.). The executives of these firms act as evaluators of the various pitches

offered to them. Distribution firms must choose among products to distribute, sometimes investing prior to production, sometimes afterwards. Exhibition firms select from completed programming (sometimes merely pilot shows) what they wish to exhibit based on anticipated ticket sales in film or advertising revenue in television. Advertisers are evaluators of concepts for commercials, which may include animation. They also buy airtime during animated shows. Each may be aided by facilitators in their evaluations of potential animation productions.

Another form of evaluation is the determination whether animation complies with Federal Communication Commission rules and regulations in place. Thus, government regulatory bodies may challenge what television stations have aired. In addition, chapter 4 gives an example of how the Federal Trade Commission has pursued lawsuits against animation art dealers who fraudulently misrepresent what they sell.

These bodies may be alerted to possible violations by advocacy groups, such as Action for Children's Television. Such groups may act by trying to impede production of shows they disapprove of through such mass actions as boycotting products advertised during the program, writing letters to legislators and regulators, and placing advertisements denouncing the shows they target. Other advocacy groups form to support shows that may be threatened with cancellation.

Because of the elaborate production organizations required to create much animation, its mere existence as a completed project is a sign of legitimacy. Market or other considerations may still keep it from being distributed and exhibited, but many people had to approve it for it to even be made. Once it is in existence other acknowledgments of legitimacy may be bestowed.

For example, audience size and the profitability derived from it grant the greatest legitimacy to media productions within the economy of the industry. Also, good reviews from critics can add value. Many organizations both within the industry and outside of it

offer awards and recognition for outstanding work. The industry itself has Academy Awards and Emmy Awards for film and television, respectively, which allow industry participants to reward peers' achievements. Critics' organizations join advocacy groups in bestowing awards as well. Academic writing can also contribute to the sense that certain productions are worth intensive examination. Similarly, museums and archives state through their exhibitions and collections what is worth seeing repeatedly and preserving.

### **The Roles of Critics**

Critics and aestheticians in an art world are consensually acknowledged as authoritative judges of art who wield the power to contribute to an artist's reputation or diminish it. Thus, they act as gatekeepers by influencing those holding scarce resources to make them available to certain people and not others (Becker 1982, 131). However, this authority lasts only as long as others are willing to defer to it. In addition, Becker argues that when critics bestow the title of "art" upon particular projects, they endow them with legitimacy only insofar as that label has value as a resource to the producers and distributors of those projects (1982, 133).

Hollywood film and television productions, for instance, operate in an economy where the label of "art" is accepted with ambivalence. Even Walt Disney, whom some critics claim achieved the greatest artistic triumphs of the animation medium, stated plainly, "I've never called this art. It's show business. We're selling corn, and I like corn." ("Walt Disney, 65, Dies" 1966). This stance reflects Disney's attempt to distance his films from the negative entailments of "art," such as elitism and pretension, which connote an appeal to a restricted audience of well educated upper class snobs. That audience is too small to pay back the enormous investments required of mass media production and usually is not worth courting at the expense of broader based audiences.

Yet, when the prestigious title "art" is applied to a popular production, more interest may be kindled in it (e.g. when Oscar awards contribute to box office returns). Critics'

leverage rests on affecting the public's consumption of particular mass media products. To the extent that they work under conditions that maximize that influence, their resources should be sought by distributors and exhibitors.

It is necessary, then, to situate critics within the actual contexts of their work. In his examination of film criticism, *Making Meaning*, Bordwell identifies three "macroinstitutions" of criticism: journalistic, essayistic, and academic. Each has its own publishing formats as well as formal and informal institutions. (His use of the term "institution" is more colloquially construed than is my own.) Journalistic criticism appears in newspapers, popular weeklies, and broadcast programs; essayistic criticism in specialized or intellectual monthlies or quarterlies; academic criticism in scholarly journals. He places criticism that emerges from museums in the essayistic category; whereas, criticism written under the auspices of colleges, universities, government agencies, academic associations, and conferences belongs to academic criticism (1989, 20).

Journalistic criticism is usually aimed at influencing readers' decisions whether or not to attend particular films currently in release. To the extent that readers and viewers act on their advice, they indirectly affect box office returns, which then has repercussions for potential ancillary media profits. The value of their advice is predicated on their autonomy as disinterested judges of a media production's quality. However, numerous constraints operate on their practices: restricted copy space, tight deadlines, other reportorial duties, accountability to editors, availability of films, maintenance of film advertising revenue, pecking order among critics, and editorial policy restricting both the coverage of adult films and the language permissible in reviews (English 1979, 24-42).

Such pressures can lead critics to adopt routines and formulas that rely on easily accessible information. Film distributors have long satisfied these needs by offering journalistic critics resources in the form of special screenings, press kits, junkets, and celebrity interviews. Television critics, having larger audiences than most print critics, are

offered the most expensive materials, including video clips. The power role model suggests that distributors expect returns from these investments. One obvious return is the blurb, a quotable snippet of a review which may be used in advertising copy. This employs the critic as a name-brand seal of approval.

However, if critics become too dependent on distributors' resources, they can be reduced to performing as part of the overall advertising strategy for major distributors' products. The value of their opinions as unbiased consumer guides is called into question by such conflicts of interest. While many critics refuse to compromise their independence of judgment, they often cede control over what they review. Public relations and advertising campaigns are increasingly successful at maximizing journalistic coverage of particular films, if not guaranteeing favorable reviews (English 1979, 98-107).

As a means of defining their individuality amidst these pressures, reviewers may establish personae through stylistic flourishes that gain them recognition (Bordwell 1989, 38). In essence, critics distinguish themselves from each other by developing name-brand qualities in their modes of review. They may then convert the public's recognition of their names (and on television, their faces) into supplementary income in the form of collections of reviews, guide books, interactive CD-ROM databases, and guest appearances on lecture circuits and in media outlets.

Essayistic and academic critics write in publications whose long lead time and small circulation prevents most commentary from appearing during a film's initial release or reaching many people. Thus, their influence within the film distribution system is highly circumscribed. Their criticism instead assumes the reader's familiarity with the films discussed. They usually place films into a broader context than do journalistic critics, using interpretive schemes to explicate implicit meanings or reveal repressed or symptomatic meanings (Bordwell 1989, 8-9).



Bordwell dispenses with the issue of evaluation in his study, claiming “most academic critics have defined it out of existence or left it to the reviewers” (1989, 39), but certain evaluative strategies are apparent in such interpretive frameworks as auteurism or in the invocation of a film’s modernist aesthetics. Evaluation also lurks within the commonplace arguments critics use to claim that certain films are “critically significant.” The next section will address in detail how critics and others may express their appreciation of art, even if that appreciation is denied under the guise of interpretation.

### **Appreciation**

I will begin with those modes of appreciation long favored among cultured and educated individuals, i.e. the appreciation of critics and connoisseurs. Then I will compare the ideal of the refined, discerning aesthetic disposition with the more passionately emotional modes of appreciation, exposing the similarities in actual behavior that belie the ideal.

The above section, “Investing in Authority” detailed some aspects of cultural and symbolic capital without addressing how people invest that capital in the form of aesthetic appreciation. According to Bourdieu, the aesthete may apply discriminating taste to objects of popular culture by exhibiting a degree of disinterestedness that signals one’s distinction (1984, 34). This aesthetic distancing is accomplished through the denigration of overt content elements such as characters and plot in favor of formal elements that may be rationally compared to artistic effects in other works. Bourdieu relates this appreciative stance to the historical roots of Western aesthetics that were epitomized by Kant’s attempt to remove pure aesthetic judgment from all kinds of interest: emotional satisfaction, sensual gratification, ethical goodness, or practical utility.

In contrast, Bourdieu claims these interests play a large part in working and middle class modes of appreciation. For these groups, art must offer solutions to problems or an

escape from them. It must relate to real life and its moral dilemmas, allowing emotional involvement with the fictive world. This kind of appreciation prizes direct apprehension and sensual pleasure rather than refined self-denial (1984, 4-6).

While I question Bourdieu's reductive linkage of these modes of appreciation to class differences, they do present contrasting attitudes that are worth pursuing in this study. As professional tastemakers, critics must offer their own tastes as guides for others to follow. Thus, I will examine their discourse of appreciation in light of Bourdieu's dichotomy. In general, journalistic criticism involves more expression of one's interestedness, while essayistic criticism downplays it, and academic criticism often denies it completely in favor of disinterestedness.

### **Professional Modes of Critical Appreciation**

One means of situating critics more precisely within their respective establishments of journalistic, essayistic, and academic criticism is to consider how they justify their evaluations. Journalistic reviewers often disagree on what standards to apply to films or whether there is even a need for any (English 1979, 51). By considering criticism as a subjective art, many of them defend their judgments as much through arguments about their own virtues as about the films themselves (Bordwell 1989, 35-6). They may prominently display their personal responses to a film in terms that Bourdieu associates with utility, emotional involvement, verisimilitude, and pleasure. They can use a wide range of stylistic flourishes to establish their personae because colloquial mannerisms are accepted most readily in the popular press, less so in essayistic periodicals, and least of all in academic journals (Bordwell 1989, 38, 215).

Essayistic and academic critics often refrain from such personalized responses to films; instead, they are more likely to state their aesthetic or theoretical affiliations to display their credentials to an audience appreciative of such references. In this way, they remain aloof from the films under study, aligning themselves with Bourdieu's Kantian imperative

to bring all manner of objects before their disinterested gaze. Academics, especially, adopt a jargon-laden, self-conscious style that contributes to their authority (Bordwell 1989, 217).

### **Taste Cloaked in Theory**

This is not to argue that academic criticism betrays no personal tastes, only that theory and interpretation offer such evaluations implicitly rather than explicitly. For example, Bordwell notes that academic criticism has come to favor symptomatic interpretations of repressed meanings in films over explications of themes deliberately woven into them (1989, xiii). No longer guided by a search for the underlying unity of a film, critics now seek contradictions that may be explained by broader psychological, social, political, or economic contradictions beyond the control of filmmakers. However, they apply symptomatic interpretation selectively to mainstream films while seeking the filmmakers' intended implicit meanings in alternative cinema (Bordwell 1989, 101-2).

This is an asymmetrical application of explanatory framework that naturalizes one's own taste in alternative cinema while explaining mainstream tastes by external causative factors (Smith 1988, 36). Explications valorize particular films and filmmakers by unearthing the hidden richness of particular works and the worldviews that informed them. In contrast, symptomatic interpretations valorize the theories one employs to seek the societal etiology of filmic symptoms. In so doing, symptomatic readings implicitly dismiss the films as objects worthy of aesthetic appreciation.

In comparison, essayistic criticism written for museum film programs often centers on touting the importance of the exhibited films, and employs explicatory rather than symptomatic strategies to serve this end. Additionally, it contains more explicitly evaluative declarations than does most academic criticism. Museums with ongoing film programs also require a steady stream of films worthy of advocacy and exhibition. Thus, one role of museum-affiliated critics and curators is to discover new films and rehabilitate old ones in

order to fill the schedule. This exemplifies the pressures in an art world for aesthetic judgments to provide enough acceptable artworks to meet the capacity of the distribution system (Becker 1982, 142).

Whether cloaked in the above interpretative frameworks or explicitly stated as judgments, critics must use some criteria to evaluate animation. I turn now to consider what these criteria might be.

### **Evaluative Criteria**

Gross lists six criteria of evaluation that audiences may use to judge art: 1) skill, 2) labor, 3) complexity, 4) repeatability, 5) novelty, and 6) sincerity (1973, 117). He argues that the appreciation of skill requires the audience to be familiar with the choices and exercise of control that go into an artistic production, as well as understand the degree of difficulty that is being attempted (1973, 127). In animation, this requires familiarity with a variety of plastic arts and the temporal effects achieved through frame-by-frame photography. While curricula in art generously cover many plastic arts, the temporal aspect of animation is more difficult for non-practitioners to comprehend. Only relatively recently have such books appeared as Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (1981), which undertakes an in-depth analysis of the skills and choices that go into Disney-style character animation.

The criterion of labor expresses an appreciation of sheer scale of undertaking and the efforts exerted to accomplish projects (Gross 1973, 128). Critics regularly mention this criterion when discussing virtually any full-length animated feature, especially those using full animation rather than limited animation (which uses fewer drawings per second). Thus, Lotte Reiniger is extolled for the three years that went into her feature-length silhouette animated film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, completed in 1926 (Russett and Starr 1988, 75). Russett and Starr also single out the pin-screen technique of Alexandre

Alexeïeff and Claire Parker for the meticulous labor required to adjust the one million pins that are used to create intricate tonal pictures ([1976] 1988, 94).

The evaluation of complexity requires knowledge of conventions that guide the patterning of regularity and variation, conflict and integration, relationships of parts and wholes. Such knowledge allows comprehension of whether conventions are broken by choice or by ineptitude; it enables evaluation of works for what they omit as well as what they include; and it offers an awareness of such syntactically-based tropes as ellipsis, metaphor, and montage (Gross 1973, 130). Complex works reward active attention to formal relations, implied meanings, and a whole range of sensory-perceptual cues that the audience assumes were purposely chosen by the producers of the works (Gross 1973, 116). The critical establishment, in turn, rewards works of sufficient complexity for ratifying their own extensive education in the elaborate cultural codes necessary to appreciate and interpret them (Smith 1988, 51).

Complexity, then, is a multivalent concept that performs particularly well as a means of discrimination between art forms of different social and educational strata in a society. Complex forms that require a great degree of specialization and practice among creators and performers (e.g. opera) must command numerous resources to be maintained. One such resource is the educational system, which builds barriers between performers and audiences by removing specialized creative and performative skills from the core curriculum of skills deemed necessary for the society at large.

The evaluative criterion of repeatability applies to creative and performative practice, discipline, and craft, but also to the audience's repeated encounters with aesthetic products (Gross 1973, 132). The familiarity with convention and standards of performance grows with each experience, attuning an audience member to subtle variations among similar events. Animation director Chuck Jones refers to this criterion when he lists the rules and disciplines his animation unit followed when making the Coyote and Roadrunner series

(1989, 225). Consistency in adhering to those rules preserved character identity, from which flowed the humor.

The emphasis on novelty, on the other hand, stresses the competitive nature of Western art worlds in which verbalized justifications often accompany artworks that do not share communicative codes with their predecessors (Gross 1973, 134). Novelty is especially central to the advocacy of non-objective and non-linear animation, some of whose defenders have even tried to disqualify representational animation from the honorific category of “true animation” (e.g., Moritz, 1988). William Moritz bestows intellectual and moral virtues upon novelty when he claims, “Inventing interesting forms, shapes and colors, creating new, imaginative and expressive motions... requires the highest mental and spiritual faculties, as well as the most sensitive talents of hand” (1988, 25). As an animation scholar, Moritz has invested heavily in this narrow segment of animation, making monotheistic claims for abstraction paralleling those of critic Clement Greenberg.

However, when novelty overshadows the other criteria for evaluation, the final evaluative criterion of sincerity becomes more important to many audience members who fail to see evidence of skill, labor, or complexity, and must seek assurances of the artist’s honorable intentions (Gross 1973, 135). If the works have gained institutional approval by being exhibited in a gallery or museum, this may be taken as a sign that the artist created art of value. Again, verbal statements of principles by the artist or critics may serve this purpose in lieu of decodable cues from the artwork itself.

These criteria are divorced from one means of evaluation that operates throughout our society: monetary exchange value. Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues that to mix aesthetic evaluative discourse with economic evaluative discourse mingles what are traditionally considered the sacred and the profane, respectively. According to Smith, those who talk about economic value usually explain events in terms of calculation, preferences, costs, benefits, profits, prices, and utility; in contrast, those who discuss aesthetic value

justify events in terms of inspiration, discrimination, taste, the test of time, intrinsic value, and transcendent value (1988, 127). One's choice of discourse reflects an investment in a community that shares those values. If a critic risks combining both discourses, he or she may suffer rejection by both communities.

Yet the mode of appreciation Bourdieu attributes to working and middle classes does unite these two discourses and apprehends the indivisibility of aesthetic and economic value. In contrast, Alice Goldfarb Marquis demonstrates that the fine art world continually disavows interest in economic value while acting on its imperatives. In fact, she documents that this denial leads to business practices that would be unethical and unlawful elsewhere: "secret deals, undisclosed prices, concealed partnerships, furtive financing," as well as misrepresentation and conflicts of interest (1991, 3).

Chapter 4 will consider how the animation art market compares to the fine art market and the collectibles market in resolving such contradictions between aesthetic evaluation and economic evaluation. It makes sense to consider other participants who also contribute to the discourse surrounding animation as art: collectors and connoisseurs.

### **Connoisseurship and Collecting**

In 1912 Frank Jewitt Mather, an art historian at Harvard University wrote in his book, *The Collectors*, "Morally considered, the art collector is tainted with the fourth deadly sin [greed]; pathologically, he is often afflicted by a degree of mania. His distinguished kinsman, the connoisseur, scorns him as a kind of mercenary" (quoted in Marquis 1989, 27; her parenthetical). Mather's attribution of relative moral dignity to connoisseurship is no doubt based on its de-emphasis of monopolized ownership. Yet the connoisseur collects experiences, which form the basis for discriminating among future experiences. In fact, consumption of a rare wine removes that wine from circulation even more permanently than the purchase of a painting may remove it from public display.

But merely collecting such experiences does not a connoisseur make. One must continually attune one's senses to detect ever finer distinctions among the items apprehended. Bourdieu contrasts the connoisseur to the formally educated (among whom I would include critics and aestheticians):

... the art lover, in a sense surrendering himself to the work, can internalize its principles of construction, without these ever being brought to his consciousness and formulated or formulable as such; and this is what makes all the difference between the theory of art and the experience of the connoisseur, who is generally incapable of stating the principles of his judgements. By contrast, all institutionalized learning presupposes a degree of rationalization, which leaves its mark on the relationship to the goods consumed. (1984, 66)

Bourdieu claims that institutionalized learning can lock in place classifications that do not yield as easily as a connoisseur's tastes can to shifting cultural contexts. As Marquis notes, "with such training, it is no surprise that a preponderance of museum visitors view art as an exercise in identification as opposed to appreciation" (1991, 138). What distinguishes connoisseurship from scholarship is in part an attitude of self-assurance in one's tastes that needs no support from facts and figures. One's comportment conveys more than a host of citations.

Thus, when someone becomes an art collector, this comportment helps to elevate acquisition into something greater. An international survey by Russell W. Belk et al. found many ways that collectors do this: they give their collections "a sense of *noble* purpose in supposedly generating knowledge, perserving fragile art, or providing those who see it with a richer sense of history"; they seek museum display of their collections; they transform their own display space into a sacred, ritualized sphere; and they use their collections for self-definition (1988, 549).

Belk et al. also found that collectors exhibited addictive behavior, including compulsive searches for new materials, euphoria upon acquisition, and depression after integrating them into the collection. Some collectors reported loss of control in pursuing acquisitions, affecting other spheres of their lives. Indeed, many avoided completing their



collections by redefining what those collections encompassed, fearing the withdrawal symptoms they might have upon completion.

Yet, rarely is collecting pathologized when the objects collected are of sufficiently high status or expense. The informants openly described their own behavior as “addiction” and “getting a fix,” which indicates that the label “collecting” legitimizes what would otherwise be considered a maladaptive behavior. This behavior is not confined to popular culture collectors, but also the those at the pinnacle of fine art collection. The addictive natures of those collecting contemporary art are typified by Frances Gorman, who admitted after gaining and losing a collection, “being a collector is a terrible illness.... You are possessed by possessions” (quoted in Marquis 1991, 169).

Nor do the collectors in this rarefied realm remain distanced from the artists who produced the art they buy. Many fawn over artists, accepting humiliation at their hands for the chance to enter their studios and purchase art not yet made available through galleries. Contact with the artist offers entry into an exotic, passionate, chaotic realm inhabited by genius. As one art professor noted, collectors “like to buy biography” (quoted in Marquis 1991, 206). Dining with artists, inviting them to parties, knowing details of their lives—all of these things became increasingly important to collectors from the 1950s onward. This is not so different from the adulation that greets animation artists who appear at galleries and other public forums to sign books or artwork.

### **The Emotional Basis of Appreciation**

The affection people feel toward animation artists grows out of a love for their creations. I have witnessed beaming faces of audiences at public appearances of artists such as Chuck Jones, Shamus Culhane, Myron Waldman, Frank Thomas, and Ollie Johnston. These artists endowed their characters with life and personalities so vivid that many people consider the characters to be, if not literally, then emotionally real.

Such responses to artistic creations and creators are legitimate modes of aesthetic appreciation that should be accorded respect. They cannot be discounted as merely effusions of the unsophisticated, lower class, or immature. Instead, it is more fruitful to consider how they threaten the ideology of a cultural hierarchy that rewards upper class-inflected modes of disciplined appreciation.

Jenson contends that what differentiates pathologized fans from genteel academics or other respectable aficionados is a class distinction that developed along with our cultural hierarchy as a means to discipline the emotions through rationality (1992, 20-1). This parallels Levine's findings that cultural organizations such as museums and performance halls began to insist on proper etiquette as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth (1988, 184-200). Bodily discipline in the face of legitimate culture served to maintain subordination of lower classes to the extent that they carried their polite behavior with them into movie theaters and other sites of mass culture.

But much can be learned from ways that animation enthusiasts mix critical distance and emotional immersion, participating in constructing the fictive world and sustaining the illusion that it exists, but judging the skill and sincerity of the producers in creating that world and staying true to the characters. A love for animation provides a basis for organizing social interaction among others who share that love. Taste segregates individuals within a taste group as well as segregating these highly engaged individuals from more casual viewers of cartoons and non-viewers.

This is no different from the avant-garde element of any field of cultural production and reception: a small contingent seeks out what others have yet to appreciate. Those who are willing to accept the mainstreaming of their tastes may reap the monetary rewards to be gotten from selling off their collections of animation art at many times what they originally paid. Some also promote their own tastes in animation by seeking out cultural organizations that can offer prestige and mainstream exposure, e.g. publishers, museums, schools.

Thus, throughout the following chapters are examples of animation enthusiasts who have shared their knowledge and animation art collections in books and exhibits.

### **Goals of this Dissertation**

This dissertation will make use of the above concepts in presenting the range of ways that animation has been accorded legitimacy as an art form worthy of adult appreciation. I will begin with the elite cultural organization, the Museum of Modern Art, showing the risks its curators took in promoting all kinds of animation and the ways that professional critics responded. Then I examine how other museums and cultural organizations singled out Disney among all animation producers as worthy of exhibition. Again, I analyze critical responses. Then I turn to the marketing of animation art, discussing it as a form of animation connoisseurship. I will also argue that cultural value cannot be collapsed into either economic or pure aesthetic value, despite the efforts of so many people to do so. My goal is that by the concluding chapter, I will have detailed a specific case of a much broader process: the communication of cultural re-evaluation.

## **Ch. 2**

### **Animation Enters the Museum of Modern Art**

#### **Introduction**

**This chapter takes the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York as a prominent example of an elite art museum that has presented animation as a legitimate art form alongside other art, despite a number of disincentives against doing so. I first examine how the Museum initially positioned itself to pass judgment on not only traditional art forms, but those newly developed arts unique to the 20th century, including film.**

**However, gaining access to the new mass media required flexibility. The Museum's cultural capital of prestige has different value to artists and organizations within the institution of the media compared to those within the institution of the arts. Negotiation for screening and acquiring animation from Hollywood studios differs significantly from negotiation for independent and foreign animation; each has its own monetary and logistical difficulties.**

**I begin with an overview of the strategies MoMA curators used to legitimize film although it is a mass produced, disposable medium. By attending to the formal similarities film shares with traditional fine art and by isolating unique, collectible objects within the film production process to preserve and display, the curators relied on the cultural hierarchy to infuse elite value into mass culture. The same strategies that link artistic movements and influences in fine art media could be applied to film, and animation within it.**

**Gradually this gave way to a broader range of strategies that extolled the uniquely communicative properties of animation, which suited it for entertainment, pedagogy, persuasion, and self-expression. The Museum's interest encompassed not only those experimental animators whose work could be tied to other modernist artists on display, but**

commercial Hollywood cartoons, animation sponsored by government and industry, animation created for various educational markets, and animation produced as part of different national cinematic traditions.

MoMA neither shied away from cartoons that many considered to be children's fare, nor did it confine them in a ghetto reserved for young audiences. In fact, its first recognition of animation came in the form of a film review of Walt Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933). In the third issue of its *Bulletin* (November 1933) the Museum of Modern Art presented Iris Barry's brief "Film Comments" column, in which she devoted three out of four paragraphs to this "cinematic gem," whose "wealth of invention" made a much greater impression on her than did the Mae West feature *I'm No Angel*. Thus began the Museum's official attention to animation, which has expanded over the decades to include a wide range of animation as part of its screenings, permanent collection, circulating film library, and physical exhibits.

What is interesting about the Museum of Modern Art's activities on behalf of animation is how they illuminate larger questions about cultural value. Animation encompasses a wide range of techniques and production modes, yet, as I argued in chapter 1, it is primarily thought of as children's popular entertainment. In contrast, the Museum of Modern Art is known for exhibiting challenging avant-garde art. When the Museum started screening cartoons, what did it say about their worth compared to the other art it exhibited?

To answer this, I wish to place MoMA in the context of the contradictory roles art museums play. On the one hand, museums preserve precious objects, on the other, they educate the public. The former role sets the standards by which objects are judged fit to enter the collection, and cultivates specialized tastes and scholarship to recognize those standards. The latter role requires that the objects serve a pedagogic function, that they be useful for communication to a wide range of people. If the objects do not clearly communicate some meaning, then the museum's own discourse can provide a framework

for comprehending them. The museum can combine its two roles when it teaches the public what constitutes artistic legitimacy. The prestige embodied in its standing collection and preceding exhibits imbues each new exhibit with a certain degree of importance.

More often, the roles conflict and this discord is exacerbated by American art museums' organizational structure. In balancing private control and public responsibilities, the priorities of wealthy sponsors often clash with those of such external constituencies as artists, governments, art critics, and the public. When the Museum of Modern Art first included the marginalized art form of animation in its film collection, whose interests was it serving and what risks were entailed? Was this a clear case of public education defeating exclusivity? Or was it part of a more complex process of negotiation? I argue the latter.

I will also consider how the Museum's promotion of certain examples of animation affected animation producers themselves. I include among the effects how the Museum has influenced animation's stature as an art form as well as more specific benefits that accrue to those whose work has been exhibited, collected, and distributed by the Museum's film department. The resources that MoMA makes available to scholars and others regarding animation and film in general also offer the means for people to reassess various films and conduct historical research.

Because the Museum of Modern Art's film department began with few people and continues today with a relatively small staff, the role of department head sets the tone for its activities and prioritizes the disposition of its resources. Therefore, I will divide this chapter into sections according to the tenures of each leader of the Film Library (renamed the Film Department in 1966). I will begin with the Iris Barry years (1932 to 1951), followed by the Richard Griffith years (1951 to 1965), the Willard Van Dyke years (1965 to 1974), the years of Margareta Akermark and Ted Perry (1974 to 1978), and finally, Mary Lea Bandy's years at the helm (1978 to the present).

## **The Iris Barry Years**

I open by asserting that the Museum of Modern Art could anticipate few benefits from branching out into film, much less animation. When its Film Library was founded, MoMA was a six-year-old upstart organization beside such venerable giants as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the midst of the Depression its resources were already spread thin and it was still establishing its authority regarding modern painting, sculpture, and architecture. Why tackle film in addition to everything else? Film was a chemically volatile, mass produced medium; collecting and circulating it often entailed a complex web of legal restrictions. Most of the trustees saw no point in collecting an art form that offered no investment potential in the way that the Museum's paintings and sculptures did.

Then whose interest was served by instituting a Film Library? While trustee John Hay Whitney was an investor in Hollywood, it was not his goal to launch such a department. That objective belonged to the Museum's founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. By hiring Iris Barry to be MoMA's first film curator, Barr put in place an individual whose enthusiasm and strategic prowess rivaled his own. In addition, their omnivorous appetites for cataloging and categorizing artistic influences provided a global framework that linked artistic innovators to predecessors. Their all-encompassing approaches laid the groundwork for the Museum's eclectic exhibition and acquisition policy.

Barry's approach benefited animation in several ways. She developed an art historical narrative of animation as a distinctive branch of film that encompassed traditions of many nations. Within those traditions, she recognized pioneers, such as Emile Cohl, and masters, such as Walt Disney. While acknowledging animation's special address to children, she and her successors never categorized it as exclusively a children's medium, as so many others have. On the contrary, the Museum's programs have placed animation in the company of a wide range of films. The Museum's supple approach to animation is

evidenced by its willingness to recontextualize films into different groupings as new circumstances suggest different perspectives.

Because the film medium did not operate within traditional fine art markets, much of the Museum's praise had little of the direct financial bearing on commercial film producers that it had on painters and sculptors. Some, such as Walt Disney, benefited indirectly. Late in the 1930s Disney found a way to convert aesthetic appreciation into fine art marketability through sales of production art from his films. Experimental filmmakers also benefited from the Museum's imprimatur, which could aid the pursuit of funding and teaching positions.

Film scholarship is likewise indebted to the Museum's pioneering efforts to preserve not only films, but also a range of printed material surrounding their production and evaluation. The Museum's circulation of film programs also offered a nucleus around which many schools were able to base film courses. To the extent that artistic reputations in film are influenced by academic efforts at canon formation, the Museum's contributions cannot be overstated. To understand the basis for the Film Library's pioneering activities on behalf of animation, I turn first to Alfred Barr's influential approach to art and museum curatorship.

### **Alfred Barr's Crusade for Modernism**

For decades the Museum of Modern Art was publicly associated with the taste and erudition of Alfred Barr. The Museum's wealthy founders were interested primarily in modern artists working in traditional media such as painting, sculpture, prints, and drawings. However, Barr envisioned a museum that was devoted not merely to these media but to innovations that appeared in all visual arts. As Russell Lynes put it, "Anything to which man applied his eyes and which might be given the dignity of an artist's or an artisan's or a designer's concern was, in Barr's concept, a proper study and province of the Museum" (1973, 73).



While the trustees' tastes for avant-garde painting and sculptural styles varied, they recognized these as fine art formats they could collect. Convincing them that industrial design, architecture, photography, and film were suitable recipients of their patronage was a much more daunting task. These applied arts had utilitarian and commercial aspects that clashed with the ascendant romantic view that great art eschewed practical concerns in favor of direct expression of genius.

Each of these industrial arts also presented problems in locating the original "authentic" artistic production amongst equivalent mechanically produced objects and in assigning authorship when those objects involved collaboration among many specialized workers. While museums had long collected antiquities that shared difficulties in attributing origins, their age and rarity contributed artifactual value that contemporary industrial products lacked.

Of course, the Museum of Modern Art was not the first art museum to attend to industrial arts. The Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna, the Museum of Applied Art in Berlin, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington were all founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They emphasized the practicality of what they displayed as exemplary specimens for craftsmen and designers to study, thus expanding European art museums beyond the role of elite treasure houses to embrace the working classes' modern industrialized culture (Hudson 1987, 50-55).

In addition, the Museum of Modern Art was preceded by Britain's Imperial War Museum in the collection of film. That museum began collecting motion picture footage from World War I in 1919, becoming "the oldest-surviving, noncommercial film archives in the world" according to film archivist Anthony Slide (1992, 11). It was followed by Bengt Idestam Almquist's archive in Sweden in 1933; the British government's National Film Library, MoMA's Film Library, Germany's Reichsfilmarchiv, all in 1935; and the Cinémathèque Française in 1936. The latter four would be the founders of the Federation

Internationale des Archives du Film (International Federation of Film Archives, known by its French acronym, FIAF).

This increased attention to industrial arts and mass media provided the backdrop for Marxist aesthete Walter Benjamin to predict that mechanical reproduction would make art universally accessible. He hoped this would break the religious and capitalist fetishization of singular, authentic works of art. He claimed that cultural tradition imbued such works with an aura of mystery, based first on divine power, then on creative genius. Only properly vested authorities could interpret the works to the public, while connoisseurs could express their appreciation through purchase of originals. Instead of the 'cult value' of these artworks, Benjamin promoted the 'exhibition value' of ubiquitous copies, available for all to critique and enjoy ([1936] 1979).

While the Museum of Modern Art's trustees had obvious investments in preserving the cult value of the art within the Museum, Barr's position was more equivocal. His authority as an art historical expert could be maintained through the accentuation of art's cult value over its exhibition value, but his mission as public educator might be served better by the reverse. Barr accentuated that which most suited each audience he addressed. Trustees could be placated by a stress on cult value within each industrially-based department. Architects' models and blueprints, industrial design prototypes, and photographic proofs were among the items that could be collected and attributed to individuals. Production and advertising materials from films also provided artifacts of the artistic process. Animation offered particularly suitable pre-filmic constituents in the form of drawings and paintings. Thus, Barr and his curators could isolate individuals within the mass production process, uniqueness within ubiquity, authenticity amidst copies to satisfy concerned trustees.

However, the emphasis on cult value did not prevail universally within the Museum. As Christopher Phillips (1982) demonstrates, MoMA's trustees caused the

Department of Photography to depart from this strategy when it failed to either draw the public to exhibits or generate a significant art market for photography. In 1947 the trustees replaced photography curator Beaumont Newhall with Edward Steichen, who reoriented the department's exhibitions toward large scale photojournalistic essays. Eventually, the department returned to cultivating the aura of specific photographic prints as collectible artworks.

In addition, Barr was the inheritor of what I called in chapter 1 an emerging cultural hierarchy in the United States that reversed Europe's increased attention to utilitarian art. Whereas early American museums were founded on egalitarian goals of useful pedagogy, specialized art museums, such as Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, began to favor aesthetic appreciation over technical instruction. This coincided with their increased means to collect original artworks to replace the plaster casts and reproductions that once filled their halls (Levine 1988, 151-4).

Thus, Barr's contextualization of applied arts was very different from that of the German and British museums mentioned above. He placed selected examples of these arts into the same theoretical framework he used for fine art. To bridge the gap between industrial manufacture and handcrafted art he delineated the influences that flowed between them. For example, a major exhibition Barr organized was "Cubism and Abstract Art" (1936), in which he linked examples of photography, furniture, typography, posters, theater, film, painting, and sculpture into a genealogy of artistic movements (Cox 1984, 21). In this way, he illuminated aesthetic crosscurrents that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

As Alice Goldfarb Marquis argues, this exhibit and another titled "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism" (1936) "proposed a way of looking at a work of art that minimized its purely aesthetic, sensual qualities and instead emphasized its place in the development of a particular artist's oeuvre and in the history of art. Ultimately, this approach would

squeeze most aesthetic criteria out of the appreciation of modern art and leave only one standard by which contemporary art could be judged. For better or worse, that standard would be novelty” (1989, 150).

Barr’s catalogs concisely described the innovative techniques artists used to break previous conventions. Those conventions had developed over centuries to achieve the illusion that three-dimensional reality had been captured on two-dimensional canvases. From techniques to convey perspective to the range of color available through oil paints, each served the purpose of verisimilitude in depicting everything from Biblical scenes to secular portraits. Artistic skill could be judged against reality; thematic importance and beauty were widely acknowledged criteria as well.

As I discussed in chapter 1, Larry Gross argues that art communicates meaning and predictably evokes emotions if the artist employs symbolic codes that the audience shares to a significant extent (1989, 116-7). The above conventions provided such symbolic codes but Barr’s chosen artists often rejected them. Instead, Barr’s elucidations created a communicative framework within which to comprehend the defiantly uncommunicative works that modern artists were producing. Barr’s idiosyncratic tastes led him to seek novelty wherever it might appear, even “in works by children, lunatics, and savages” (Marquis 1989, 44), which outraged Museum trustees and art critics alike on some occasions.

What linked all of Barr’s chosen works was his regard for their “importance,” a term he used that deliberately sidestepped the evaluation of quality, which he called “a far more debatable and intangible factor” (quoted in Marquis 1989, 268). Art might gain importance through its influence on subsequent work, though such influence was sometimes visible only to the trained eye of Alfred Barr. According to Marquis, Barr “separated a welter of baffling and seemingly unrelated artists into coherent schools and convincingly related them to artists who had flourished centuries ago in other places, tying

Expressionism, for example, to El Greco, or fantasy painting to Hieronymus Bosch” (1989, 294).

In this way, Barr employed his educational capital, gained from art history studies at Princeton and Harvard, to legitimate new art through its links to already legitimated works from the past. However, this mode of scholarship and criticism alone did not give him his influence in the fine art world. Nor did this son of a Presbyterian minister draw on an aristocratic background, which Bourdieu claims would predispose a tastemaker toward self-assurance in his “capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even ‘common’” (1984, 5). No, it was his directorship of the Museum of Modern Art that professionalized his role as tastemaker. However, he was reluctant to accept the extent that his tastes came to affect the art market’s prices, dealers’ selections of artists, and artists’ choices of painting style.

But Barr did not wish for modern art’s emphasis on novelty to render it irrelevant to social life. This is what Gross asserts may happen, because the “pattern of constant innovation in the arts undermines their ability to embody the common experiences and meanings of the society, to serve the central communicative functions of socialization and integration—roles now assigned to the domain of the popular arts and the mass media” (1989, 113). Thus, Barr’s longterm interest in mass media alongside traditional art media kept the Museum in the midst of the most socially meaningful currents of artistic endeavor. In addition, Barr was not averse to using the mass media to promote the Museum. He hired public relations pioneer Edward L. Bernays for consultation on a membership drive and kept a full-time publicity person on staff (Marquis 1989, 79, 130-2).

Barr’s persistence eventually overcame trustee wariness regarding art that held primarily exhibition value rather than cult value. Such art often had communicative or utilitarian purposes that Barr’s chosen fine art lacked. The Museum trustees eventually assented to establish departments devoted to the mass media of film and photography along

with those for architecture and industrial design. As long as modern painting, sculpture, drawing, and prints grew in cult value as collectibles, the trustees could accept that the mass media did not develop such value, especially if they drew museum visitors instead.

The Film Library under Iris Barry would take liberally from Barr's construction of artistic lineages in judging films to be important enough for the Museum to collect. In addition, it would contend with film's popularity and social meaning, the former tarnishing the medium with a crassness disdained by art world insiders and the latter charging it with political volatility.

### **Founding the Film Library**

Barr included a film library in the Museum of Modern Art's 1929 prospectus, but he did not gain full trustee support or funding until 1935. In the meantime, he groomed the Museum librarian, Iris Barry, for the post of curator of films, drawing on her background as film critic for London's *Daily Mail* and as co-founder of the London Film Society in 1925, one of the world's the first groups to view film as a serious art form.

In addition to contributing her "Film Comments" to the Museum's *Bulletin*, Barry put together two series of film screenings, one for the newly founded New York Film Society and one that took place at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, over the 1934-35 winter. Among the Atheneum programs was one titled "Experimental, Abstract, Amateur Films and the Animated Cartoon," which presented Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), M. Webber and J.S. Watson's *Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), Castleton Knight's *Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C Sharp Minor* (1927), Ivor Montague's *Blue Bottles* (1928), and Walt Disney's *King Neptune* (1932) ("Dec. 16th" 1934).

The Museum's committee on motion pictures surveyed college presidents and museum directors and found that many of them were interested in renting film programs from MoMA (Lynes 1973, 111). Abby Rockefeller agreed to fund a film department,

though she expressed reluctance to include “films that might be objectionable on what she called ‘Freudian grounds’” (Marquis 1989, 128).

The Film Library was officially incorporated in May 1935 with a \$100,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and \$60,000 in private subscriptions, most of which trustee John Hay Whitney contributed. Whitney was an investor in Technicolor and Selznick International, and his Hollywood connections were vital for the Film Library’s early acquisitions. Iris Barry was named curator and her husband, John E. Abbott, director (Lynes 1973, 111). As stated in the Museum’s *Bulletin*, the Film Library’s purpose was

to trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of films in exactly the same manner in which the Museum traces, catalogs, exhibits and circulates paintings, sculpture, architectural photographs and models or reproductions of works of art, so that the film may be studied as any other one of the arts is studied and enjoyed. (“The Founding” [1935] 1967, 4)

This statement makes clear that the Film Library was meant to promulgate the Museum’s specific interpretation of how films qualify as art. Films would circulate in structured programs far beyond the walls of the Museum, complete with program notes discussing the importance of each grouping.

The first private press screening was held in June 1935 to preview the work of the Film Library. On the program were three films: the Edison Company’s *Irwin-Rice Kiss* (1896), Edwin S. Porter’s *Great Train Robbery* (1903), and *Joie de Vivre* (1934) by Anthony Gross and Hector Hoppin. *Joie de Vivre* featured two stylized young women and a young man chasing them on a bicycle through a kaleidoscopic landscape (Bendazzi 1994, 78). This screening illustrated the breadth of the Film Library’s interest by showing pieces of history alongside a recent animated film with obvious artistic aspirations. Many newspapers ran the Museum’s press release, which stressed Gross and Hoppin’s independence from Hollywood traditions in their two-year struggle to produce 34,000 drawings and celluloid paintings to make their film. The press release not only provided subsidized information but also subsidized aesthetic evaluation of the film when it

proclaimed: "*Joie de Vivre* is a distinctly new and original step in that branch of the motion picture devoted to the animated cartoon, and as such it has its place in the Museum of Modern Art Film Library" ("Unique Films" 1935).

Some writers went beyond the press release script to offer responses ranging from approval to outright mockery. William Troy of *The Nation* praised the Film Library's endeavor, predicting that future Ph.D.'s will be grateful and that "the existence of such an institution will have the immediate effect of increasing the prestige of the films in those quarters which still consider a serious interest in them a sign either of affectation or of intellectual decay" (1935). On the other hand, a piece in the *Boston Post* joked, "Now that *Joie de Vivre* picture was some action and sex appeal picture and no foolin'" ("Missing in a Wilderness" 1935).

### **Building the Collection**

Once the Film Library was officially founded, its staff had to build the collection. Alfred Barr regularly visited New York and European galleries and artists' studios looking for potential Museum acquisitions; Iris Barry turned first to Hollywood and then to Europe's film producers. While artistic reputation and subsequent sales could increase when a museum collects and exhibits a fine artist's work, no comparable relationship existed between the Museum and filmmakers. Film producers and distributors operated under economies that did not necessarily value the museum's sacralization and collection of their products.

Iris Barry and John E. Abbott found this out on their initial trip to Hollywood in the summer of 1935, armed with letters of introduction from John Hay Whitney. Whitney arranged for Mary Pickford to host a dinner and screening at Pickfair, where Barry and Abbott could request donations from prominent producers, directors, and actors in order to preserve an art form threatened with extinction through neglect (Lynes 1973, 112). The program featured a sampling of American film history from early 'primitives' to excerpts



from Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush* (1925) and Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), ending with the Walt Disney short *Pluto's Judgment Day* (1935) ("Motion Pictures of Yesterday and Today" 1935). Disney was among the invited guests, and Iris Barry later reflected that this dinner was his personal introduction to some of other attendees (1969, 22). The dinner marked the beginning of Disney's relationship with the Museum of Modern Art that saw Disney donate films and production artwork as well as briefly serve as a Museum trustee in 1944.

However, for the other film producers, this gathering initially generated more publicity than film donations. Hollywood's reluctance to donate stemmed from the reproducibility of film, which made each print that escaped the control of its distributor a possible target of piracy or unlicensed exhibition. The fear of lost profits even prompted the industry practice of destroying most prints after a picture's initial run (Houston 1994, 16). The Museum aroused considerable suspicion in asking for prints, as evidenced by the title of a news item in the *Showman's Trade Review*: "More Trouble for Theatre Men Seen in 'Film Library' Set-Up" (1935).

Iris Barry later recalled the irony of her sojourn to the West Coast because "the way into open water lay not through Hollywood but through New York, where real control of the industry resided in the hands of the big corporations, the lawyers, the banks." Once Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's corporate lawyer in New York, J. Robert Rubin, drew up a restrictive contract classifying the film prints as permanent loans accompanied by limited exhibition rights, other companies accepted the terms and contributed the requested films (Barry 1969, 23). The Museum does own many prints outright. But only a subset of the Museum's film collection on permanent loan is available for circulation to nonprofit and educational institutions, because these are additional rights that must be negotiated. Most films within the standing collection can only be shown on the Museum's premises and only preservation and reference copies may be made (Bandy and Bowser 1984, 530).

Meanwhile owners of the films in the collection may circulate them outside the Museum and may even withdraw them from the Museum.

These stipulations did not impede the Film Library's emphasis on the exhibition value of its collection. Preservation was important (and eventually costly), but exhibition and circulation of the films was paramount. As a *Museum Bulletin* article on Film Library's founding noted, "...a film two years old is a film which will not be seen again, and the situation is comparable to that which would be created in the world of literature if exclusively new books published with the past twelve months alone were available" ("The Founding" [1935] 1967, 2). The emphasis on circulating the films far and wide served not only to financially support the Film Library, but to increase accessibility of the films, so people could respond directly to them rather than rely exclusively on textual descriptions.

In going beyond the fine art market to collect film, not only was the Museum denied its usual sources of artworks but it also lost a network of appraisers, judges, and critics, whose evaluative activity joined art sales prices as a means to measure the impact of the Museum's exhibits and acquisitions.<sup>1</sup> In their place, the Museum had to gauge its influence from a much broader spectrum of responses: attendance at its screenings, news coverage and reviews, subsequent foundings of other archives and film societies, and general academic attention given to film. Nor were the Film Library staff members idly curious about such matters. Regular reports in the *Museum of Modern Art Film Library Bulletin* listed the increasing number of institutions that rented film programs from the Museum.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At times, Alfred Barr felt the need to justify his selections to the trustees in terms of monetary investments. When requesting a raise in salary, he claimed that "the purchases and exchanges which were made on my recommendation have increased in value more rapidly than those made by any other American museum during the same period" (quoted in Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 213).

<sup>2</sup> *The Museum of Modern Art Film Library Bulletin 1938-39* stated its circulating film programs during the previous season went to 175 institutions; the *Bulletin 1940* cited circulation to 280 institutions; the *Bulletin 1941* cited 345 institutions; and the catalog *16 and 35mm Circulating Film Programs, 1944-45* cited 801 institutions. *Film Library Bulletins* are in *Film Library Scrapbook* vol. 21. Early *Annual Reports* of the Museum of Modern Art also gave attendance figures for the Museum's own film screenings in the year preceding each report: 3,318 reported in 1938; 179,327 in 1939-40; 111,307 in 1940-41; and 207,825 in 1943-44. No *Annual Reports* were issued prior to these or in the gaps

The Museum also paid a news clipping service to collect all mentions of its name, and those that mentioned the Film Library were compiled into 22 scrapbooks now held in the Film Study Center.

One event that gained the Museum's Film Library nationwide news coverage was its receipt of a special scroll certificate in March 1938 from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for "its significant work in collecting films dating from 1895 to the present and for the first time making available to the public the means of studying the historical and esthetic development of the motion picture as one of the major arts" ("Film Library Honored" 1938). The Academy would not repeat this honor until 1979.

### **Film Selection Criteria**

Precisely because no art market circulated films, the Museum loomed large as a bellwether in the aesthetic consecration of film. By naming certain films as art, the Museum in essence created new art from non-art. Its approbation transformed business products into artworks whose true value the Museum took pains to differentiate from box office receipts. The Museum issued the following statement of intent to clarify what would guide its choices:

[The Film Library] will show commercial films of quality, amateur and 'avant-garde' films, and films of the past thirty years which are worth reviving because of their artistic quality or because of their importance in the development of the art. Gradually it is hoped to accumulate a collection of films of historic and artistic value. ("Films and the Museum" [1934] 1967, 3).

In this statement the Museum opened a back door for films whose acquisition might not be justifiable on aesthetic merits alone: their historic value. Films were artifactual evidence of times past, which would otherwise be lost. The chemical instability of film, its rapid technological advances, and seismic shifts in fashion combined to prematurely age the medium during its infancy. The transition to sound production turned silent films into

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between them. Attendance specific to film screenings was not recorded after the 1943-44 *Report*. *Annual Reports* are in the Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

quaint relics of a bygone era. Indeed, Iris Barry claimed the advent of talkies lent urgency to the idea of founding the Film Library, in order to recapture the lost experience of the silent film accompanied by live musicians (1969, 20).

The Film Library's concern for historical as well as artistic value aided its justification for collecting Hollywood films in addition to foreign and experimental films that were more self-consciously artistic statements. Through methods similar to Barr's, the Film Library linked artistic crosscurrents between Hollywood and Europe ("The Founding" [1935] 1967, 6), even though Barr himself exempted most American painting and sculpture from his Eurocentric artistic lineages of the 1930s.

To pre-empt complaints about Hollywood's output lacking an artistic pedigree, the Film Library sought those experts whose authority in matters of art criticism was more established than either Iris Barry's or the Museum's. In effect, such experts lent their cultural capital to the Museum. Barry called a lecture given at MoMA by noted art historian Erwin Panofsky "a great feather in the Film Library's cap" for displaying his learned interest in Buster Keaton as well as medieval painting. Barry confessed, "Up till then I suspect that many aesthetes may have cast a dubious eye at my choice of films for the collection and might indeed have preferred one confined more closely to purely experimental and 'art' films" (1969, 26).

Indeed, only a few critics of the period castigated Barry for being too exclusive in her tastes, even if later writers shuddered at the opportunities the Museum missed to preserve history on film. One rare contemporary critic was Herb Sterne, who dubbed her in 1945 "the Attila of Films" for her dismissal of a silent cliffhanger serial, *The Exploits of Elaine*, as too 'dull' to circulate (quoted in Slide 1992, 22). Much more recently, archivist Anthony Slide bemoaned Barry's initial rejection of a minor D.W. Griffith film, *A Romance of Happy Valley* (1919), which was eagerly remedied when the Museum was able to obtain a print decades later (1992, 21). Andrew Sarris, on the other hand, argued

that the Film Library's selectivity made a virtue of ongoing funding limitations due in part to Hollywood's unwillingness to contribute financially to film preservation (1979, 110).

Encompassing all of film within an art historical narrative was an enormous undertaking that benefited from the example set by Barr's genealogy of art movements. The Film Library's first two circulating film series traced the development of American film, including some early foreign film influences. These series included animation as part of that development. Disney's *Steamboat Willie* (1928) was offered on the same program with an excerpt of Alan Crosland's *Jazz Singer* (1927), a Movietone newsreel, and Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) to illustrate the early talkies. The alternate program for projectors without sound placed Disney's *Plane Crazy* (1928) alongside von Sternberg's *Last Command* (1928) to depict the end of the silent era. Thus, Mickey Mouse was accorded a privileged position at the juncture of film's momentous transition to sound.

In the second series, both Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) and Disney's *Skeleton Dance* (1929) were featured on a program devoted to comedies. They shared the bill with George Méliès's *Hydrothérapie fantastique [The Doctor's Secret]* (1910), Mack Sennett's *His Bitter Pill* (1916), and Robert Benchley in *The Sex Life of the Polyp* (1928). The feature-length film on the program was a choice between one of two Harold Lloyd films: *The Freshman* (1925) or *Safety Last* (1923). Thus, the Film Library saw McCay and Disney not merely as animation producers, but contributors to the American comedy genre.

### Creating an Art History of Animation

However, this did not prevent the Film Library from recontextualizing these films within a circulating program entirely devoted to animation. The fifty-minute-long program

“A Short History of Animation” was initially made available in 1938 (Barry 1940)<sup>3</sup> and a variant of it is still offered for rental in the Museum’s circulating film and video catalog (Bowser 1984, 29). Because it offers a representation of animation that was widely circulated I will discuss it in depth. Iris Barry’s program notes placed the films in an historical narrative more narrowly focused than the above-mentioned series. She accorded animation status as its own branch of film with its own technological and aesthetic innovations.

Barry’s notes cited two early sources of animation scholarship, E.G. Lutz’s *Animated Cartoons* (1920) and Earl Theisen’s “History of the Animated Cartoon” (1933), from which some of its narrative is drawn. Thus, interested students of animation could seek more in-depth information. The following summarizes the landmarks chronicled in the program notes, letting stand some errors in production dates and attributions of primacy.<sup>4</sup>

Barry chronicled a progression of historical landmarks: the “Wheel of Life” optical toy and Emile Reynaud’s Théâtre Optique were precursors to filmed cartoons; these were followed by the first cartoons-on-film, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906) by J. Stuart Blackton, and *Fantasmagorie* and *Drame chez les Fantoques [A Love Affair in Toyland]* (1907-8) by Emile Cohl. Other milestones she discussed were the first

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<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether an earlier version of the notes that I obtained (copyrighted in 1940) circulated in 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Corrections to the program notes are as follows. See Donald Crafton ([1982] 1993) for a discussion of the complexities involved in identifying the first animated film. He pointed to evidence that James Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith may have discovered the technique of stop-motion animation as early as 1898 (pp. 20-1). He also indicated that Cohl produced both *Fantasmagorie* (p. 62) and *Un Drame chez les fantoches* (p. 85) in 1908. Crafton cited the release date of 16 March 1913 for Cohl’s animated series “The Newlyweds” (p. 81), which predated the 12 June 1913 release date of J.R. Bray’s first film, “The Artist’s Dream” (p. 143), as well as the 14 January 1914 release date of his first *Colonel Heeza Liar*, *Colonel Heeza Liar’s African Hunt* (p. 148). Crafton (1990) treats Cohl in much greater depth. Bendazzi (1994, 49-52) discussed the Argentine animator Quirino Cristiani, who produced the 70 minute long *El Apóstol [The Apostle]*, first screened on 9 November 1917. This preceded the 20 July 1918 release date for *The Sinking of the Lusitania* given by John Canemaker (1987, 154). Indeed, Canemaker quotes McCay’s claim that the film required 25,000 pictures to create, which, at one picture per frame and 16 frames per second, would be 26 minutes long or the length of a two-reeler. Crafton ([1982] 1993, 287-9) also mentioned several instances of animal protagonists appearing in series prior to Van Bueren’s *Aesop’s Fables*.

continuous series of animated cartoons, John R. Bray's *Colonel Heeza Liar* series in 1913; the first feature-length cartoon, *The Sinking of the Lusitania* by Winsor McCay; and the first anthropomorphic animal cartoon series, Amadee Van Bueren's *Aesop's Fables*, beginning in 1917.

I also wish to retain some inaccurate production dates for films included in the program itself.<sup>5</sup> The program led off with Skladanowsky's magic lantern slides, filmed to show primitive animation (c1879), followed by Cohl's *Drame chez les Fantoches* (1907-8), McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1909), a Mutt and Jeff film, *The Big Swim* (1927), and a Felix the Cat, *Felix Gets the Can* (1924). The last four of the nine shorts presented were Disney films: *Newman's Laugh-O-Grams* (1920), *Steamboat Willie* (1928), *Flowers and Trees* (1932) and *Les Trois Petit Cochons* [French-language version of *The Three Little Pigs*] (1933). An alternative program for 16 mm rather than 35 mm projectors replaced the last two films with Lotte Reiniger's *Carmen* (1933) and Disney's *Mad Dog* (1932) and these substitutions remain on the currently offered "Animation Program."

As Barr traced a succession of innovations in artistic conventions, Barry's program notes included both technological and narrative milestones. She accorded *Steamboat Willie* status as the first sound cartoon, claiming, "from the moment Disney added sound to his drawings, the whole medium gained new scope and vitality." Similarly, she credited *Flowers and Trees* as the first color sound cartoon. In fact, many films Disney donated at Iris Barry's request were firsts of some kind: Disney's first animated film (*Newman Laugh-O-Grams*), the first "Mickey Mouse" (*Plane Crazy* [1928]), the first "Silly Symphony" (*Skeleton Dance* [1929]), and the first Technicolor "Mickey" (*The Band Concert* [1935]). These represent not only advances in technology, but the Disney studio's aesthetic exploitation of new possibilities that the technology made available.

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<sup>5</sup> Corrected production dates for films on the program are as follows. Canemaker (1987, 143) gave the vaudeville premiere of *Gertie the Dinosaur* as February 1914. Russell Merritt and J. B. Kaufman (1993, 38) offered the release date of 20 March 1921 for the *Newman's Laugh-O-Grams* sample reel. Jeff Lenberg (1991, 37) gave the release date for *The Big Swim* as 1 October 1926.

Nor did Barry ignore extrafilmic influences. She noted that both comic strip characters (e.g. Mutt and Jeff) and artists (e.g. Blackton, Cohl, Bray, Earl Hurd, Raoul Barré, and Bill Nolan) crossed over from newspapers. Rather than merely listing a series of firsts, she also discussed those who helped refine cartoons: Max Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series combined live-action backgrounds with the cartoon character Ko-Ko; Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer's *Felix the Cat* series helped establish the "anthropomorphic and folkloristic elements predominant today." In addition, Barry mentioned animators, such as Earl Hurd, Bill Nolan, and Otto Messmer, working under the studio heads who usually got all the credit.

Thus, packed into one-and-a-half brief pages is a narrative neither parochially American nor snobbishly Eurocentric. Iris Barry treated cartoons seriously as an art form, interpreting the development of animal protagonists as a notable innovation in narrative strategy, not a juvenilization of the medium. Rather than a scattered compendium of favorites, the program offers a historical progression of increasing complexity and assurance of technique.

Recent historians have revised some of the above films' production dates and invalidated claims for their historical primacy, but this brief set of notes should not be held to current historiographic standards. It should be noted, however, that McCay's *Sinking of the Lusitania* was shorter than feature-length and his *Gertie the Dinosaur* premiered in 1914, not 1909.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, sound cartoons by the Fleischers and Paul Terry preceded those by Disney (Langer 1992, 353). Also, with other formats of color available prior to 1932, *Flowers and Trees* is better described as the first three-strip Technicolor sound cartoon.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See notes 4 and 5 regarding corrections to the McCay claims.

<sup>7</sup> Solomon (1989, 89) discussed Walter Lantz's two-and-a-half minute animated prologue of the Universal feature *King of Jazz* (1930) as the first color sound cartoon. It used Technicolor's two-strip process.



Are there other ways to look at animation history? Certainly. Differences in how animation production is organized might be included; animation's circulation within a variety of economic and political systems could also add complexity to a narrative of artistic progress.<sup>8</sup> Even Alfred Barr's "Cubism and Abstract Art" catalog came under fire at the time of its publication when Meyer Schapiro accused Barr of isolating artworks from the historical, social, and economic positions of the artists who created them (Marquis 1989, 156; Cox 1984, 22). However, it is the Museum's prerogative to recontextualize what it examines into an aesthetic framework. As Christopher Phillips notes about the Museum's photography department, "a crucial feature of MoMA's critical apparatus [is] the projection of the critical concerns of one's own day onto a wide range of photographs of the past that were not originally intended as art" (1982, 37). If Barry had to wait until filmmakers acknowledged that what they produced was art before she could consider their work, the Film Library might not have come into being.

The circulating film programs were repeatedly shown within the Museum once its new building opened in 1939 (as well as in the Museum of Natural History's auditorium before that). For several years, the program "A Short History of Animation" was offered as a special children's program. Two others grouped with it were a Georges Méliès retrospective and "Three French Film Pioneers," which featured animator Emile Cohl along with trick film creators Ferdinand Zecca and Jean Durand. The Museum's announcement, quoted in several newspapers, insisted the the programs "represent the taste of children themselves rather than, as in the case of most 'specially arranged' juvenile programs, the tastes or principles of adults" ("Film Revival" 1941). In this way, the Museum pressed the films into service for young audiences without necessarily ghettoizing them as merely children's fare.

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<sup>8</sup> For an example of valuable historiographic revisionism, see Langer (1992), which critiques approaches to Disney that depict him as a 'great man' rather than as head of an expanding and complex entertainment organization in competition with rivals such as the Fleischer Studio.

## Displaying Animation Production Art

One other aspect of animation aided its presentation within an art historical context: it provided the Museum with unique, handcrafted objects to display. The Museum could exhibit animation production artwork in traditional fine arts media such as drawing and painting. These materials resembled what circulated in the art world and could be assimilated into that world. In October 1939, Iris Barry wrote a letter to *Cue* magazine detailing MoMA's abstract film offerings, which included a wall exhibit of "the designs, evolved as master drawings for an abstract film, by the cubist painter Léopold Survage." These date back to 1912-14 and are among the earliest attempts at abstract animation (Bendazzi 1994, 14). However, Survage never was able to film his drawings. As part of its April 1940 "Abstract Films" screenings, the Museum collected and exhibited items of artwork from abstract animated films of Douglass Crockwell, Howard Lester, Horace Pierce, and Mary Ellen Bute ("Abstract Films" [1940] 1967, 8).

On several occasions, art of the Disney studio received similar treatment. Disney initially provided at Iris Barry's request not only films, but production materials that showed the individual steps that go into making "Mickey Mouse" and "Silly Symphony" cartoons. Alfred Barr's 1936 exhibit, "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism" included a cel and matching background from the Disney short cartoon, *Three Little Wolves*. In addition, MoMA hosted an exhibit of artworks involved in the making of *Bambi* in summer 1942. As I will demonstrate in chapter 3, the Museum of Modern Art was hardly the first cultural organization to exhibit such materials; the Philadelphia Art Alliance held such an exhibition in fall 1932 and several others followed.

However, the Museum's interest in Disney's artworks was not lost on the Disney company or on gallery owner Julien Levy, who had been involved in several MoMA exhibits. Levy placed Iris Barry on the guest list for his gallery's opening of an exhibit of production art from Disney's first feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Barry's

presence was captured in a photograph published in the *New York State Exhibitor* (“Disney Exhibit” 1938). Indeed, museums were targets of Disney’s marketing of production art, according to a press release for the opening (“Notes and Comment” 1938). The Metropolitan Museum of Art responded by purchasing cels (Nugent 1939).

Chapter 3 will compare the Museum of Modern Art’s presentations of Disney production art to those of other cultural organizations and galleries. Here, I will merely note that Disney was one of a number of filmmakers whose preliminary art was displayed at the Museum as objects that were aesthetically pleasing in their own right and as illustrations of a larger process. The next section will examine the range of contexts in which the Museum screened animation.

### **Recontextualizing Animation**

In the summer of 1939, guest curator Joseph Losey organized a 22-film retrospective of animation that mixed examples of many techniques: cel, pin screen, stop-motion puppets, silhouette, and painting-on-film. Abstraction coexisted with narrative, drama with humor. Hans Richter, Len Lye, Alexandre Alexeïeff, and Wladyslaw Starewicz were among those international experimenters who shared the screen with Walt Disney, Walter Lantz, and Winsor McCay (“Tracing History” 1939). The retrospective supported Iris Barry’s art historical narrative by dividing the branch of film devoted to animation into separate national traditions: French, American, English, German, and Russian.

Meanwhile, experimental animation was included in a special program, “Abstract Films,” offered at the Museum in April 1940. Animation was not the defining aspect of these films, but one of many techniques the filmmakers used. Overlapping with Losey’s animation program were Hans Richter’s *Rhythmus 21* (1921) and Len Lye’s *Colour Box* (1935). In addition, all films on the program but Marcel Duchamp’s *Anemic Cinema* (1926) include at least some animation. Len Lye’s *Swinging the Lambeth Walk* (1939), B.G.D. Salt’s *X + X = A Syn Nt* (1937), and *Parabola* (1937) and *Escape* (1939) by Mary

Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth were all animated films. Also, both Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) and Man Ray's *Emak-Bakia* (1927) contained some animation. One tongue-in-cheek review commented on the films, "None of their producers seem to appreciate their fitness for comic uses" ("A File of Abstracts" 1940), which alludes to the generic role that dominated cartoons in contrast to the incomprehensibility of these works.

Other contexts in which the Museum presented animation through the mid-1940s included their contributions to wartime training films (e.g. several Private Snafu cartoons in *Army-Navy Screen Magazines*), propaganda films (e.g. Disney's *Chicken Little* [1943], Len Lye's *Musical Poster No.1* [1940]), educational films (e.g. *The Pacific Problem* [1934] by de Hubsch), dance in film (e.g. Disney's *Skeleton Dance* [1929]), and musical composition for film (e.g. Tex Avery's *Screwball Squirrel* [1944]). The last of these was at the behest of the National Association of American Composers and Conductors, which met at the Museum in 1941 and 1944 to view films for the study of scoring film music (Kastendieck 1941; "Composers See Short" 1944). I will now consider how the political pressures of the pre-war and war years affected the Film Library's consideration of both foreign and domestic animation in the next section.

## **Political Constraints on the Film Library**

### **Pre-War Politics**

As I have noted above, the Museum of Modern Art's purview was international in scope and this extended to its consideration of animation. I would like to take up some specific instances in which the Film Library had to balance its global interest in films with the need to assert its nationalistic loyalties. Although Iris Barry initially sought the cream of Hollywood's output, her subsequent film collecting trip to Europe in the summer of 1936 raised some eyebrows for her stopovers in Berlin and the Soviet Union. In an article

published shortly after her return from this excursion, Barry reaffirmed the Museum's primary concern with American film:

It was not merely because of the accessibility of American films that the staff of the Film Library turned their attention to the domestic cinema. In the huge volume of production thus far, the United States has contributed a veritable Mississippi of films. What is more, whether by good fortune or by accident, this country has undeniably contributed a very large proportion of what is genuinely cinematic: the film is largely and typically an American expression (1937, 41).

However, she furthered her watery analogy as a justification for circulating programs of European films: "If America has provided a Mississippi of films, Germany and France have certainly resembled her Missouri and her Ohio Rivers" (1937, 42). Thus, American waterways stood in for international artistic influences, all of which eventually fed back into American filmdom for global redistribution.

Indeed, the Film Library's president, John Hay Whitney, explained the Museum's interest in foreign films in terms of cinema's universal appeal:

The motion picture is the youngest of the arts but it speaks to the greatest number of people everywhere. In California Mickey Mouse sets off a laugh that is heard round the world. Jannings of Germany, Laughton of England are eagerly welcomed on the screens of all nations. The motion picture is the greatest common denominator of humanity (quoted in Grimes 1936).

By insisting that art transcends national boundaries, the Museum placed itself above petty political affiliations and nationalisms to be an agent of cosmopolitanism.

Of course, it helped when a German filmmaker whose works they collected could be distanced from Germany's Nazi regime. For example, articles quoting a Museum press release about the Film Library's 1936 European acquisitions mentioned only two animated films: *Carmen* and *The Little Chimney Sweep*, both produced by Lotte Reiniger using silhouette cut-outs. The articles note that Reiniger emigrated from Germany to London, where the Victoria and Albert Museum had exhibited her work. ("Rare German Films" 1936; Prim 1937).

Powerful trustees sometimes had nationalistic agendas that guided the Museum's activities. For example, in the summer of 1938 the Museum's president, A. Conger

Goodyear, orchestrated an exhibit at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris, “Trois siècles d’art aux États-Unis” (“Three Centuries of American Art”). Russell Lynes recounted the resistance of French officials to this exhibit, which delayed it for several years (1973, 182-84).

The American painters and sculptors on display received a drubbing at the hands of many French critics, yet even the ones writing for Fascist papers disposed to chauvinism praised the films. For example, André Villeboeuf wrote in *Gringoire* that the paintings by the “so-called avant-garde” were “without origin, without taste, marked alone by an originality that accentuates the indecency of its arrogance, the puerility of its conceit out of fashion with us in France” (1938). Yet, he also complained, “as for Walt Disney, the prodigious enchanter, two measly cartoons by him in the film section. And that’s it for the animated cartoon!”

One important outcome of the Paris exhibit was that it occasioned the first exploratory meeting of what became the International Federation of Film Archives (French acronym FIAF). This led to its official charter in November 1938 in New York at the Museum of Modern Art. Through the years FIAF’s member archives would trade prints to bolster each other’s collections, sometimes gaining from foreign archives the only surviving prints of domestic films. Thus, Goodyear’s expression of national pride had the happy side effect of improving international cross-fertilization of film collections.

Even when the Film Library contributed to projects that were clearly internationally conceived, they were often described primarily in nationalistic terms. One example was a reference work it undertook with a local version of Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration. Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the city of New York began compiling in 1935 a three-volume *Film Index: A Bibliography* with the cooperation of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library (Leonard 1941). The

Museum's bibliographic resources and Iris Barry's encyclopedic film knowledge aided this team of researchers and MoMA co-published it with the H.W. Wilson Company.

The 723-page first volume was subtitled *The Film as Art* and included a 24-page section, "Miscellaneous Types of Film" devoted to animated cartoons, animated model films, animated silhouette films, and experimental films. This volume drew from a range of books, journals, and program notes to provide an comprehensive bibliography of international scope. Yet, a story in *Magazine of Art* remarked (presumably according to the press release) that the *Film Index* "will include source material on foreign films, but its major contribution will be in clarifying and coordinating data on our native industry" ("Bibliography of the Cinema" 1939, 106). Given the government funding of the project, it is not surprising that the article would call attention to the *Film Index*'s American subject matter.

The necessity of reaffirming the Museum's commitment to American art was illustrated again in April 1940 when a group of artists calling themselves American Abstract Artists publicly criticized MoMA's discrimination against contemporary American artists. The Museum responded to this protest as well as other long simmering complaints in the June/July 1940 issue of its *Bulletin*, which was devoted entirely to a defense of its exhibition of American art. Each department gave an accounting of how many American artworks it exhibited, and the Film Library was no exception.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Film Library report lavishly praised American films:

From the very nature of film history, its subject matter was bound to be predominantly American in spirit and influence, for the American filmmakers have been more prodigiously creative and technically resourceful, more commercially successful and have distributed their product more universally than any.

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<sup>9</sup> The Film Library reported that since 11 May 1939, when it acquired its first auditorium, it had shown 144 American films versus 85 foreign; in its archives were 1,432 American films and 229 foreign; in film footage this amounted to 10,799,791 feet American compared to 724,138 foreign ("American Films" [1940] 1967, 16).

Having to justify the Museum's attention to American film gave rise to such proclamations that explained U.S. domination of the global film market in artistic rather than economic terms (see Thompson 1985 for an economic explanation).

The Museum's *Bulletin* of the summer of 1941 was devoted to the Film Library and herein Iris Barry laid bare one reason for the Museum's repeated breastbeating on behalf of American films:

Recent events have led to a wide recognition of the use and value of studying propaganda material. But ... the acquisition of foreign material of this kind gave rise to a whispering campaign (originating, it seemed, among small groups of film enthusiasts with axes to grind) that the Film Library or the Museum as a whole, or perhaps even the Board of Trustees (!) was infiltrated with Nazi principles (this was in 1937 and 1938) or with Communist principles (this was in 1940) or at best with some 'un-American' spirit. ([1941] 1967, 10)

World War II would offer many opportunities for the Museum to prove its patriotism in the face of this whispering campaign, and among the beneficiaries would be MoMA donor Walt Disney.

### **The War Years**

Trustees instigated a number of war-related Museum activities much as A. Conger Goodyear pursued the Paris exhibit of 1938. Nelson Rockefeller, founder Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's second son, assumed the presidency of the Museum on 8 May 1939, two days before its brand new building at 11 W. 53rd Street was officially opened. A radio program carried the opening, which included live hookups to Walt Disney in Hollywood and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the White House, both of whom predicted great achievements for the Museum (Lynes 1973, 201-6).

Rockefeller's role at the Museum soon intertwined with his service for the U.S. government when President Roosevelt appointed him head of a new State Department Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) on 16 August 1940. Rockefeller remained President of MoMA for five months before allowing John Hay



Whitney to succeed him. Meanwhile he had already tapped Whitney to head the Motion Picture Section of the CIAA (Shale 1982, 41; Cartright and Goldfarb 1994, 171-2).

Both Rockefeller and Whitney included the Museum of Modern Art in activities that supported the CIAA's mission. For example, Rockefeller provided an 'Inter-American Fund' for the Museum to purchase artworks from Latin American countries (Lynes 1973, 224) and Whitney contracted the Film Library to dub documentaries for Latin American audiences (*Annual Report*, Museum of Modern Art 1943-44). In addition, they enlisted MoMA donor Walt Disney to make films that would bridge the cultural differences between North and South America.

It is unclear whether Disney's ties to the Museum were what led to this collaboration because he also had a connection to the CIAA through the appointment late in 1940 of his studio's chief counsel, Gunther Lessing, as chairman of the Short Subjects Committee of the Motion Picture Section (Shale 1982, 41). However, the Museum did exhibit Disney's wartime films created for troop training, civilian education, and propaganda. Thus, it took seriously the use of animation for the purposes of adult pedagogy and propaganda.

The Museum of Modern Art hosted a screening in December 1942 of several of Disney's films produced under contract with the office of the CIAA: *Saludos Amigos*, *Education for Death*, and *Der Fuehrer's Face*, all slated for release the following year ("See 'Saludos Amigos'" 1942). The first was a live-action/animated film that featured Donald Duck and Goofy learning Latin American ways. The latter two were strongly anti-Hitler animated shorts the CIAA contracted for in order to warn Latin Americans against the evils of Nazism. Among the guests invited to the Museum screening were consuls from South and Central American countries and a number of representatives of U.S. government agencies. Complete with a reception in the Museum's penthouse, this event was a carefully

orchestrated public relations gambit to elevate MoMA's stature as a home to intrahemispheric diplomacy (Lyons 1942).

In contrast, the Museum held another screening in May 1943 that was instigated by Republican Senator Harry Byrd, who sought justification for the money spent on Disney films made under contract to the CIAA ("Congressional Curiosity" 1943). Three Disney films, *Disney Sees South America* (a.k.a. *South of the Border with Disney*) (1942), *Winged Scourge* (1943), and *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* (1943) were shown. The first was a travelogue taken from footage of Disney's 1941 goodwill tour and the latter two were health education films on malaria and corn, respectively. This command performance echoed the previous year's controversy over the Disney short, *The New Spirit*, which employed Donald Duck to urge timely filing of income tax returns. House Republicans had led a campaign to end wasteful expenditures on entertainment, noting the irony of paying \$80,000 in taxpayers' money on a cartoon asking the public to pay more taxes (Shale 1982, 29).

Such questions were not raised about the Museum's war contracts, perhaps because, unlike Disney's studio, it was a nonprofit organization (even though Disney merely covered his costs with his government contracts). MoMA's activities also cost much less to mount than Disney's films and often directly benefited members of the U.S. Armed Forces rather than distant populations in South America. It did not hurt that Museum trustees Rockefeller and Whitney were donating their services to the government as "dollar-a-year-men" (Lynes 1973, 222).

An additional patriotic service that the Film Library provided was to help the Library of Congress collect contemporary American films on the basis of their sociological significance. Beginning in 1942 Iris Barry supervised a four-person selection committee that included *Los Angeles Times* critic Norbert Lusk and *Commonweal* critic Philip Hartung. Regarding Barry's qualifications, an article noted, "her position invests her with

an aura of omniscience concerning filmdom” (Bugbee 1942). Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish chose 104 films from a list the committee drew up for the 1942-43 year of releases, including *Saludos Amigos* (“MacLeish Picks 104 Films” 1943). MoMA’s 1943-44 *Annual Report* noted among the Film Library’s accomplishments: “1,452 films reviewed and reported on for the Library of Congress.” The Library of Congress selected from these a variety of animated shorts, *What’s Buzzin’ Buzzard?*, *Red Hot Riding Hood*, *Tin Pan Alley Cats*, and *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*, thought to be films “which best record the life and tastes and preferences of the American people” (Guernsey 1944). Thus, through this selection committee, the Museum influenced what was to represent our national heritage, which included cartoons from Disney, MGM, and Warner Bros.

The Film Library also co-sponsored war-related events that might just as well have occurred during peacetime. The fifteenth “birthday” of Mickey Mouse was one such event. On 27 September 1943, the Disney studio in conjunction with its distributor, RKO, hosted a party at the Museum for around 200 invited guests that included a screening of “Mickey Mouse” shorts. The illustration run by newspapers in advance of the event showed Mickey holding a war bond and it was “rushed in from the West Coast to W. Randolph Burgess, chairman of the War Finance Committee for New York State” (“Backs Attack” 1943). Such anniversary celebrations would become a staple of the Museum’s film programs in future years as a convenient organizing principle for retrospectives of individuals, studios, and even national cinemas. Indeed, many of these would depend on financial support from the honorees.

Walt Disney’s relationship to the Museum reached its pinnacle in 1944 when he was elected to its Board of Trustees for a year (“New Trustees” [1944] 1967, 11). In its biographical sketch of its new trustee, the Museum mentioned his wartime films, *Saludos Amigos* and *Victory Through Airpower*, and honors bestowed upon him from Brazil and

Mexico. All but *Victory* were a direct result of Disney's participation in Rockefeller's CIAA activities.

To sum up the war years, the web of relationships that connected such individuals as Disney, Rockefeller, and Whitney crossed the boundaries we conceptualize between business, government, and culture. These men used interpersonal networks to obtain the resources that yielded the results they desired. When Rockefeller and Whitney assisted the U.S. government in waging war against the Axis powers, they employed what was at their disposal, which included the cultural authority vested in the Museum of Modern Art and its links to Disney and his popular animated films.

Looking back at the many special projects the Film Library was involved in during the war years, Iris Barry noted, "This was a good effort on everyone's part and could have been undertaken nowhere else, though I will admit that I feel tired now just remembering what work all these projects entailed—what endless human contacts, projection schedules, book-keeping, what visits from FBI men and the unmentionable red tape now right on the doorstep" (1969, 26). The Museum's *Bulletin* noted in February 1946 that "since 1940, the Film Library has of necessity neglected much of its normal work, notably in the collection and preservation of films, in research and publication" ([1946] 1967, 13). It was an extraordinary, anomalous time for the Museum, from which it would eventually recover to resume these curatorial activities.

### **The Post-War Years**

In the war's aftermath Barry programmed a retrospective of documentary films that gave the public its first glimpse of a number of training and incentive films previously restricted to the armed forces. Among these were some off-color Private Snafu cartoons by Warner Bros. cartoonists that were much more obviously geared to adults than most theatrical cartoon fare of the time (Arms 1946). Thus, the war years provided the Museum

of Modern Art an opportunity to help recast animation into a medium of adult education and persuasion, serious pursuits for films known chiefly as children's entertainment.

The years between the war's end and Barry's departure from the Museum late in 1950 were a period of consolidation. From 1939, when John E. Abbott left the directorship of the Film Library to become an executive vice president of the Museum, Barry unofficially assumed his role until 1946 when it was made official. During the postwar years the Film Library repeated all-encompassing retrospectives of the history of film under titles such as "The Art of the Motion Picture, 1895-1941," "The History of the Motion Picture, 1895-1946," and "The Film Till Now." Animation had its place in these, as well as in a few special programs, such as the "Special Holiday Program of Color Films" shown in December of 1947, which included the Disney shorts *Flowers and Trees* (1932), *Music Land* (1935), *Mother Goose Goes Hollywood* (1938), *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* (1943), and a Warner Bros. short, *Swooner Crooner* (1944). Another example is a 1949 screening that was part of the "Film Till Now" series. It paired a Bugs Bunny cartoon, *Hair-Raising Hare* (1946), with Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night* (1948), about which David Platt quoted a Film Library statement that claimed Bugs Bunny was "fast and violent, highly imaginative and a radical departure from the sweet, sentimental cartoon characters" (1949).

In addition to its own programs, the Museum of Modern Art hosted symposia and special screenings for other organizations. One example is the Museum's 1946 screening for United Nations officials of films that won at Cannes. Among them was the Czech cartoon, *Zviratka A Loupeznici (Brigands and Animals)*. Reactions to it ranged from the praise that its achievement in shading and characterizations "has not yet been fully realized in cartoons in this country" (Barstow 1946) to the criticism "it looks like it might have been rejected by the Walt Disney studios several years ago for lack of experienced animators" (Konecuff 1946). The Disney studio implicitly sets the benchmark for American cartoons

for these and other critics, and measuring the departures from its norms is a way of complimenting or condemning animation from elsewhere.

Another example of an interesting special screening at the Museum is its premiere of *The Brotherhood of Man* (1947), a film directed by Robert Cannon, of the recently formed United Productions of America (UPA) (“Short on Tolerance” 1947). A number of artists in this organization had left the Disney studio after a strike in 1941 and were interested in expanding animation to include modernist styles, as well as broadening its subject matter to comment on politics and social problems (Allen and Denning 1993).

*The Brotherhood of Man* was based on a 1943 pamphlet *The Races of Mankind* by Columbia University anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, which illustrated how similar the different races really were. The film was sponsored by the United Automobile Workers Education Department in order to help in an organizing drive in the South called Operation Dixie (Allen and Denning 1993, 111). Its message of racial unity struck a universal chord, but the left wing political affiliations of many involved (e.g. John Hubley, Ring Lardner, Jr., Phil Eastman) would lead to encounters with Hollywood blacklisting.

Indeed, documentarian Pare Lorentz cited *The Brotherhood of Man* as an example of the kind of film that U.S. government should support but did not, noting that it “was banned by a major general in Germany for fear that some Southern Congressman might object and slash the War Department’s military appropriation” (quoted in “Documentary Films’ ‘Decline’” 1948). I have found nothing that would indicate any repercussions from this screening, but it is a rare example of animation serving political ends beyond the World War II propaganda and training films that were shown. Those were sponsored by the U.S. and allied governments, not a union.

In part, this represented Iris Barry’s preference for the aesthetics of film rather than their social significance. She argued in an article on research into motion pictures, “during

the last ten years—since the founding of the Museum’s Film Library opened up any such possibilities—a much keener interest in the sociological implications of the motion picture has been elicited than in its aesthetic content, and it would be unfortunate if this unbalance were to persist” (1945, 208). Her suggestions for research followed very much what Bordwell calls explication of artistic intention and style rather than symptomatic readings of repressed meanings.

Barry ended her career at the Museum of Modern Art abruptly and without warning when she did not return from a trip to Europe for Christmas 1950. Only one year earlier, she had completed a 68-page history of early film, published in the Museum *Bulletin* as “The Silent Film: Part I” (Barry [1949] 1967). She never added to it. In addition to this project was the overwhelming task of raising funds to duplicate the decaying nitrate reels of film in the Film Library’s collection. Whether it was this combination of pressures, or a possible cancer scare, as Russell Lynes suggested (1973, 332), Barry remained in Europe and her “retirement” was announced. There she stayed until her death in 1969, remaining active in the International Federation of Film Archives.

### **Iris Barry’s Legacy**

As founding curator and then director, Iris Barry guided the Museum of Modern Art Film Library to include commercial Hollywood films in its collection. She encountered an elitist disdain for mass produced popular culture on the one hand and an incredulous group of business owners on the other. Had she restricted her interest to independently produced experimental and avant-garde films, she might have had a much easier time. Independent filmmakers recognize the Museum’s role in presenting their work to a select appreciative audience and donate films more readily than do entertainment companies, whose films represent corporate assets. However, Iris Barry and her colleagues held the conviction that popular entertainment was to be preserved and cherished as art, despite the difficulties involved in acquiring and archiving it. The demands of this project taxed the

Museum's resources, requiring the Film Library staff to acquiesce to restrictive rights of usage to satisfy Hollywood donors.

Simultaneously the Museum had to placate conservative trustees and elite art world members, whose scepticism of movies was best countered by placing film into familiar art historical contexts. Iris Barry's curatorial strategy was similar to Alfred Barr's in accentuating artistic innovations and influences across the entire global field of film production. This had the effect of making the Museum of Modern Art much more inclusive of art spanning the popular-elite culture hierarchy.

Barry was always interested in the entire scope of film's aesthetic achievements. She acknowledged animation as one branch of film that contributed its own innovations to the medium. Thus, from the very beginning of her association with the Museum of Modern Art, Iris Barry made animation a part of the Film Library's undertakings. The Museum's early inclusion of animation was aided by such items as the drawings and paintings required for its production, which could be hung on the walls much as other art in the Museum was displayed. Yet, the circulation and screening of films took precedence over the cult value of such items.

### **The Richard Griffith Years**

When it became clear that Iris Barry did not plan to return from Europe, the trustees appointed Richard Griffith to the position of curator, declining to appoint a new director until 1966, when Willard Van Dyke replaced Griffith. Instead, Barry's duties were divided between Griffith and executive secretary Margareta Akermark, who had run the circulating film program. Griffith had worked in Frank Capra's Signal Corps. unit on the *Why We Fight* series of wartime propaganda films and his association with the Museum of Modern Art began in 1937-38 when he conducted research there on a Rockefeller Foundation



fellowship. After the war he was assistant to Barry while serving as executive director of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures (Slide 1992, 61).

George Amberg, who had been curator of MoMA's short-lived Dance Archives before becoming professor of cinema at New York University, noted of Griffith, "He was a man of great fairness. He had good judgment but many blind spots, which Iris did not. There were thousands of films he simply rejected because he couldn't see them, and he finally was interested just in documentary" (quoted in Lynes 1973, 335-6). Film historian and critic Lewis Jacobs also found him Barry's inferior, opining, "He was not in the same league as Iris Barry.... Certainly, she was more politically astute than Griffith. I think her standards were higher. I don't think he had the same social ambience" (quoted in Slide 1992, 62).

Countering this assessment was archivist Anthony Slide's view that compared to Iris Barry, "Griffith's differing social outlook was important to the Museum's film collecting policy. He had a much more popular approach towards the cinema. Griffith understood the art of the film, but also he had almost a film buff's love of the medium" (1992, 62). According to Slide, Griffith began a shift away from Barry's restrictive emphasis on aesthetic importance, so that, "today, the Museum is much more open to acquiring and preserving any film which has value as popular culture as much as art. In fact, the changes in staff and concomitant changes in selection policies and justifications for individual films have proved healthy for both the Museum and film preservation" (1992, 21). What must be acknowledged is that Griffith was appointed to maintain what Barry had begun rather than embark on a new endeavor and even that mission was compromised by the immediate concern over film preservation.

### **Preservation Takes Priority**

During Iris Barry's tenure, a duplicate negative would be struck only for the rare important nitrate negative that had seriously deteriorated. This was an expensive but

temporary solution, because the new negative was as chemically volatile as that which it replaced. However, the introduction of triacetate “safety” stock in 1950 finally provided a long-term solution to the Film Library’s chronic state of crisis over its deteriorating nitrate reels, but also cost money that might have gone toward purchasing or exhibiting more films.

Additionally, even the storage facilities for its nitrate films were sorely taxed and in 1952 the staff of the Film Library reluctantly agreed to allow the new archive at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, to store some of the nitrate films (“Movie Archive Set Up” 1952; Slide 1992, 58). Again, in 1959, the Film Library shipped several nitrate negatives to overseas archives because it could not adequately safeguard them (Slide 1992, 105).

The Museum’s *Annual Report* of 1954-55 mentioned the formation of the Film Preservation Fund run by the Committee for the Film Library Collection under the chairmanship of J. Robert Rubin, the same lawyer for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer who had drawn up the original agreement by which Hollywood companies would donate films to the Museum. The Rockefeller Foundation agreed to give \$25,000 if this committee could find matching funds.

Several articles appeared in the 1950s regarding this shift of priorities at the Museum. Herbert Mitgang quoted Griffith in 1953 as saying, “Most of the film library’s budget is perforce devoted to the continuous duplication of celluloid and it is beyond the resources of any agency, including the industry itself, to preserve all negatives which may not have commercial value.” An ongoing aspect of this coverage was the fact that neither the Library of Congress nor the Hollywood film industry contributed the necessary funds to aid or supplant the Museum’s preservation efforts. As a means of publicizing the problem, Griffith instituted a Thursday night film series to benefit the Film Preservation Fund, but it amassed only \$2,000 (Nason 1955; Griffith [1956] 1967, 7). By December

1956, the preservation fund collected \$52,361 through donations matched by the Rockefeller Foundation ("Film Library Fund Gains" 1956; Lynes 1973, 335).

Meanwhile, several Hollywood studios went beyond snubbing this preservation effort. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Universal-International, and Warner Bros. "asked the museum to halt national distribution and limit showings of their notable old films to the museum proper in New York." Among the reasons the article offered for this move was that "one studio cited an instance of conflict with commercial 16-mm. distribution of its film product" ("Film Studios Stop" 1956).

In addition, the growth of the television market led the financially ailing Hollywood studios to sell large blocks of their backlogs of films to companies formed to distribute to television. The new owners of the films often withdrew from agreements the studios had made with the Museum of Modern Art. The television industry also found the Museum to be a treasure trove. Richard Griffith noted, "the networks continually come to the Film Library for help in locating rare documentary film material.... Many television personalities, such as Sid Caesar, have used the Film Library's collection as sources of material and of ideas adaptable to television" ([1956] 1967, 14).

The Museum no doubt contributed to the growth of commercial competitors by fostering public and educational interest in older films. From 1935 to 1956 the number of accredited academic courses in United States colleges and universities devoted to motion pictures grew from one to almost 75 (Griffith [1956] 1967, 8). Once, the Film Library was the sole source for many film programs run by schools, film societies, and other groups. But by the mid-1950s, many commercial distributors were tapping the market for nontheatrical exhibition of 16mm film prints. It must be remembered that the monetary justification for founding the Film Library in 1935 lay in the recuperation of costs through its circulating film programs. Now this funding source was threatened at precisely the time when costly preservation became an immediate concern.

In contrast, the paintings in the Museum continued to escalate in value. By 1954 when MoMA celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, Barr's catalog of the Museum's finest holdings, *Masters of Modern Art*, heavily favored paintings over other media. He included for the first time a comprehensive list of all donors to the Museum, which, Marquis argues, "indicated that the museum's interest had perhaps tipped from exhibiting and collecting the most progressive art of its time to amassing goods." In addition, she cited a long memo Barr wrote to Richard Griffith apologizing for the catalog's slighting of the Film Library because of trustee attitudes, marketability of the book, and problems with printing film stills (1989, 275-6). This was a telling indication of the Film Library's peripheral position within the Museum in comparison to painting.

### **Animation Highlights**

Given these difficulties and Griffith's own preference for documentary over other types of film, it comes as no surprise that few animation-related events were planned during his tenure. However, I will address several notable exceptions.

One series, which was most likely partly developed in the final months of Iris Barry's tenure, was called "The Art of the Film." It offered yet another grandly encompassing framework for re-running old programs such as "Screen Personalities," "Film and Theater," and "Animation." It ran from 1951 through 1953, during which time its program headings became more restrictive, until its third year's programs presented oeuvres of individual filmmakers Robert Flaherty and Ernst Lubitsch. This would become the norm in the following decades, as narrowly focused in-depth retrospectives would replace the all-inclusive programs of the past. Among those retrospectives were two devoted to individual animation studios: Terrytoons and United Productions of America (UPA).

## **Paul Terry**

In 1952 the Film Library devoted a week to a screening of nine cartoons produced by Paul Terry, extending from his silent “Aesop’s Fables” series through his newest Terrytoon, *Flatfoot Fledgling* (1952), which was his one-thousandth film cartoon. The retrospective screening presaged others in the late 1960s onward that would focus on a single animator. The press release for the screenings included both biography and evaluation, citing Terry’s entry into the cartoon business in the year 1915, discussing his development of the “Aesop’s Fables” series in the 1920s, and noting that the series “was so successful that Terry eventually told on the screen 240 more fables than Aesop himself, who had told 220.” As for the quality of Terry’s productivity, the release quotes Griffith: “Although his continuous output for 37 years can only be called mass-production, it has, thanks largely to its satiric qualities, maintained an almost equally continuous level of fresh invention.” Additionally, the release touted Terry’s decision to stay in New Rochelle, New York, long after the bulk of the animation industry moved to Hollywood (“Paul Terry Cartoon Series” 1952).

In 1973 the Museum acquired 47 volumes of original scripts, drawings, and music scores for the first sound cartoons by Paul Terry (*Annual Report*, Museum of Modern Art 1972-73; Hoffer 1981, 237). According to Ron Magliozzi of the MoMA Film Study Center, these materials are important to the Museum despite Terry’s own mediocre reputation as an animation producer because they pertain to film activities in the New York City area (personal interview, 16 April 1992). The Museum has taken an interest in all such items for their value as historical research sources.

## **Oskar Fischinger**

In 1953 the Museum announced the acquisition of eight films by the abstract animator Oskar Fischinger that were available for rental. This is the first instance I found of the Museum’s support for Fischinger, whose career in abstract animation was essentially

over by this time. However, the press release tied Fischinger to the long history of the Museum's support for abstract film, noting that among its holdings were the unfiled abstract paintings that Leopold Survage executed.

In touting Fischinger's adherence to principles of abstraction, the Museum questioned other experimental paths: "... when the course of film experiment turned elsewhere—toward surrealism in the late twenties—abstract films were abandoned to an obscurity which is only now beginning to lift." This statement came at a time when American Abstract Expressionist painters were eclipsing European surrealism and other movements. Indeed, the release portrays Fischinger as the stereotypical visionary artist who sacrificed everything for his art: "He received esthetic recognition but had no financial success. He continued his film-making at his own expense in the belief, as he has said, that, "There is only one way for the creative artist: To produce only for the highest ideals—not thinking in terms of money or sensations or to please the masses"" ("Eight Experimental Films" 1953).

The Museum mentioned experiments that Fischinger was conducting on the production of stereoscopic abstract animation, but these yielded only a few fragments of footage, and aside from some commercial work he did through 1955, Fischinger never completed another abstract film after *Motion Painting No. 1* (1947). Fischinger had long experienced difficulties in making a living from his abstract films: his successful studio in Germany in the early 1930s was attacked by the Nazis for producing degenerate abstract art; his forays into Hollywood work at Paramount, MGM, and Disney ended badly (Moritz 1974, 54-65).

However, the Museum of Modern Art offered a means to promote his films, if not offer an income from them. Unlike MGM, Universal-International, and Warner Bros., Fischinger had no other market for his films and, thus, the Museum's circulation of them

did not present problems of competition. Instead, it helped promote Fischinger's reputation as an abstract artist, which might transfer to his latest medium of choice, painting.

MoMA was hardly the first museum to recognize Fischinger. Hilla Rebay, director of the Guggenheim Museum, had been interested in creating a Film Center since 1930 and had unofficially begun collecting abstract films by Fischinger, Hans Richter, Norman McLaren, and John and James Whitney (Russett and Starr [1976] 1988, 14-5). Although Solomon Guggenheim's death in 1949 removed Rebay from power and doomed the Film Center, during the 1940s Rebay aided abstract animators, including Fischinger, through Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation grants. Additionally, the San Francisco Museum of Art's "Art in Cinema" series featured a cycle of Fischinger's work after the war, which helped establish his name in the West Coast experimental film movement (Russett and Starr [1976] 1988, 58).

## UPA

The summer of 1955 saw the largest MoMA exhibition of animation since the 1942 "Bambi" exhibit. In 1947 the Museum had shown *Brotherhood of Man* and now it launched a two-month retrospective of the studio that produced it, United Productions of America (UPA). In addition to a series of screenings, the exhibit included a physical installation, which the press release differentiated from the format of the previous Disney display: "Instead of an outline of the technical steps taken in the production of an animated cartoon, the show will be an illustration of UPA ideas—how ideas generate and the people behind them, the many ways ideas take shape, their final form and the major directions in which UPA ideas reach the public" ("The Museum of Modern Art Has Invited UPA" 1955).

This emphasis on UPA's ideas illustrates the Museum's interest in promoting the pride the studio took in its intellectual leanings. John Hubley, vice president and supervising director of the company, had argued during the war years for animation's

potential to address “human behavior and broad social caricature.” He castigated his former employer, Disney, for elevating “formal and technical development” at the expense of social relevance because Disney’s “story men avoided anything labeled ‘social’ in writing for what they considered a ‘pure’ medium” (quoted in Allen and Denning 1992, 108-9).

During the war, Hubley joined other ex-Disney artists David Hilberman, Zachary Schwartz, and Stephen Bosustow at a new studio dedicated to presenting ideas and graphics in innovative ways. UPA got its start in election campaign films (e.g. *Hell-Bent for Election* [1944]) and instructional films (e.g. *Flat Hatting* [1945]), and went on to earn praise for clearly and cleverly presenting abstract information. For example, Bosley Crowther lauded the studio’s “intelligence and ingenuity in using animation and cartoon for the conveyance of intellectual concepts” (1952, 23). Georgine Oeri echoed this sentiment, highlighting “the literary invention in the UPA films” (1953, 471). Catherine Sullivan, too, noted that its educational films were “unusually fresh and appropriate” (1955, 39). The latter two critics are significant because they were writing in the arts journals *Graphis* and *American Artist*, respectively. Such journals generally ignored all Hollywood animation except for the occasional article on Disney.

Indeed, UPA represented the first major challenge to Disney’s reigning aesthetic of naturalism and critics leapt at the chance to pass the torch to UPA. For example, Gilbert Seldes enthused, “every time you see one of [UPA’s] animated cartoons you are likely to recapture the sensation you had when you first saw ‘Steamboat Willie,’ the early ‘Silly Symphonies,’ ‘The Band Concert’—the feeling that something new and wonderful has happened, something almost too good to be true.” Meanwhile, Seldes argued, “As Disney has come closer and closer to photographic realism, he has subtly violated the character of the cartoon”(1952).

Similarly, David Fisher used the simultaneous London openings of Disney’s *Peter Pan* (1953) and UPA’s Mister Magoo short *The Dog Snatcher* (1952) to condemn Disney’s



“comic-strip mind and sentimental vulgarity” while extolling UPA’s “wit and gaiety and cleverness.” For him, the “difference between Disney and UPA” was that “the latter rejects the traditional never-never land of the film cartoon in favor of human reality, even though its style is less realistic on the surface” ([1953] 1980, 179, 182).

Nor did critics pass up an opportunity to identify which modern art styles influenced UPA’s output. Aline B. Saarinen, cultural critic for the *New York Times*, pointed out “the debt to such fine artists as Picasso, Matisse, Steinberg, and above all, to Modigliani” ([1953] 1979, 256). Writing in the *Art Digest*, Arthur Knight acknowledged not merely UPA’s stylistic similarity to Klee and Miró, but also cited the recognition UPA artists received for their own paintings and sculptures at museums and galleries (1952). Of course, in art journals such fine art credentials carry weight that popular box office success does not.

As I noted in the “Post-War Years” section above, the animators at UPA were self-conscious in their use of modernist styles. John Hubley claimed that Saul Steinberg influenced *Brotherhood of Man* and “in the early days [of UPA] it was Picasso, Dufy, Matisse that influenced the drive to a direct, childlike, flat, simplified design rather than a Disney eighteenth-century watercolor” (quoted in Ford [1973] 1980, 185, 190). In contrast, chapter 3 will show that Disney and his artists scrutinized these older aesthetic styles, but Disney himself was ambivalent about discussing his output in fine art terms. He was willing to express his dislike for much of modern art, however.

Thus, the Museum of Modern Art had in UPA the ideal animation studio to exhibit. Its artists were well-versed in the kind of paintings the Museum prized and it had received critical acclaim as the new standard-bearer for animation from not merely film critics but art critics as well. Indeed, the individual artists were deemed important enough to merit a section of the exhibit in which “photomurals will point up the correlation between the attitude of the UPA people and the point of view of UPA films” by showing “personal joke

cartoons, the hobbies, interests, and backgrounds of the UPA staff' ("The Museum of Modern Art Has Invited UPA" 1955).

Yet, as MoMA recognized Oskar Fischinger at the end of his productivity as an animator, it unwittingly promoted a studio at the beginning of its decline. By 1955 John Hubley, Phil Eastman, and Bill Scott had resigned under pressure from UPA's distributor, Columbia, because their association with left-wing causes had branded them Communist sympathizers (Maltin [1980a] 1987, 340; Solomon 1989, 221-2). Several others would also exit UPA to form their own studios, sometimes taking commercial accounts with them. By the time Steve Bosustow sold UPA to Henry G. Saperstein in late 1959, he was the only one left from the original team. Saperstein professed no pretense toward art and led UPA down the road of extremely limited animation for television.

By the time the Museum again paid tribute to UPA in 1980, it was an excursion in nostalgia that promoted Mister Magoo's thirtieth "birthday." At this time, UPA still produced commercials and sponsored films for clients such as General Electric, but it subcontracted its production chores to a separate entity, Paul Carson Cartoons, Inc. Thus, it was a shell of its former self and the six programs that ran for three weekends that February heavily emphasized the films produced from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, a number of which were already in the Museum's collection. The program notes cited MoMA's 1955 exhibit and reproduced statements of others (including Arthur Knight's 1952 *Art Digest* article) to provide critical assessments ("UPA" 1980).

### **Miscellaneous screenings**

Throughout Richard Griffith's tenure, animation slipped into the schedule most often in screenings devoted to the Film Library's acquisitions, films for children, and thematic retrospectives. For example, a weeklong session of "Recent Acquisitions and Loans" in November 1953 yielded an international session of independent animation, including *Motion Painting No. 1* (1947) by Oskar Fischinger, *Boundary Lines* (1947) by

Philip Stapp, *Loops* (1948) and *Pen Point Percussion* (1951) by Norman McLaren of Canada, and *John Gilpin's Ride* (1951) by John Halas of England. In December the following year, the screening "Children's Holiday Films" included *Carmen* (1933) by Lotte Reiniger, *The Old Mill* (1937) by Disney, *Swooner Crooner* (1944) by Frank Tashlin, and *Mickey's Grand Opera* (1936) by Disney.

A single animated film might also show up in series on national cinemas or film genres. The 1957 series "Past and Present: A Selection of German Films, 1896-1957" included *Skladanowsky Primitives* (c.1879-95), the pre-cinematic magic lantern slides that had started off the "Short History of Animation" circulating program. Three Norman McLaren films, *Neighbors* (1952), *Blinkity Blank* (1956), and *Le Merle* (1958) were included in the weeklong 1960 retrospective series on the National Film Board. Even a series on documentary in 1965 included Len Lye's *Trade Tattoo* (1937) as one of "Four British Documentary Films," although it qualifies as such primarily because Lye used outtakes from British General Post Office Film Unit documentaries as raw material for his animation.

An occasional screening would be organized with animation as a central theme, as was a 1956 weeklong showing that combined the "Short History of Animation" program with *John Gilpin's Ride* and *Pen Point Percussion*. Also, a 1963 series highlighted animation: "The Independent Film: Animation and Abstraction, Surrealism and Poetry, Symbolism and the Unconscious." In 1957, the Museum cosponsored with the New York Film Council a series of three screenings with panel discussions. Called "Prospects for the Film" it provided a means for people from nontheatrical film to interact with Hollywood film and television veterans. The third of these was titled "Artists and Film—Animation and Experiment" and featured Stephen Bosustow, John Hubley, Robert Osborne, Len Lye, Norman McLaren, Robert Stapp, and Allon Schoener.

### **The Film Library as Research Facility**

One last aspect of the Film Library under Richard Griffith should be noted. In 1963 *Film Quarterly* published statements about the various film archives available to film scholars. Curatorial assistant Eileen Bowser wrote on the Museum of Modern Art's facilities for research. This represented a turn toward open encouragement of outside scholars to make use of the Film Library's film collection and supporting documents (production materials, business records, film stills, press clippings, etc.). These materials had previously been reserved for staff use when putting together screenings at the Museum and circulating programs. Bowser acknowledged that the Film Library's private projection room had limited access, was understaffed, and cost dearly for screenings of films in the collection, but she noted that the Museum offered reduced rates to one or two scholars per year.

Bowser's statement is important in that it acknowledged a vibrant scholarly community developing in the field of film, one that no longer required the singular guidance of Iris Barry's organizing principles. The Museum became a repository of many kinds of films, collected for many reasons, not merely because of a narrowly construed judgment of their aesthetic importance. Instead, scholars and critics were invited to use the facilities to make such judgments themselves. The backdoor Barry provided to films that had historical or sociological significance had now been thrust wide open. As more staff and guest curators would organize screenings in the future, they would offer an increasing range of reasons for their choices of films.

### **The Willard Van Dyke Years**

When the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art announced they had appointed Willard Van Dyke to succeed Richard Griffith, they gave him the title of director, which had been left empty since Iris Barry's departure. At this news, *New York Times* film critic

Bosley Crowther expressed enthusiasm that Van Dyke might restore the luster that had worn off the Film Library:

The appointment of Mr. Van Dyke is regarded with optimism and relief by persons in motion picture circles, where the talk has been unrestrained about the evident decline in the activities and prestige of the Film Library over the last few years. (1965, 13)

Crowther also noted that the Museum of Modern Art now faced competition from the New York Film Festival for presenting new talent and the Gallery of Modern Art for screening classic films. Griffith resigned due to ill health, but during his tenure he had been prolific, coauthoring or authoring a series of books and pamphlets that included *The Movies* (1957), *Documentary Film* (1952), *The World of Robert Flaherty* (1953), *Samuel Goldwyn: The Producer and His Films* (1956), *Fred Zinnemann* (1957), *Anatomy of a Motion Picture* (1959), and *The Cinema of Gene Kelly* (1962).

These publications and the attendant curatorial programs show Griffith's distinct preference for documentary and Hollywood filmmaking to the burgeoning postwar avant-garde and experimental film movement. He defended the Museum's disregard for these films: "... it is a paradox of this new *avant-garde* movement, lively and assertive as it has been, that its actual productions have been, with striking exceptions, in large part literal duplications of the ideas, imagery, and cinematic achievements of the Paris *avant-garde* of thirty years ago" ([1956] 1967, 12). For many New Yorkers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the way to see experimental film screenings was to join Amos Vogel's "Cinema 16" film society.

To reassert MoMA's presence in this area, one of Van Dyke's first actions upon his appointment was to arrange a program of avant-garde films titled "The Independent Film: Selections from the Filmmakers' Cooperative, New York." Among these was the work of experimental animator Stan VanDerBeek. Not only did Van Dyke show their films and multimedia productions, but he organized symposia in which the artists were present to discuss their work. This would become institutionalized on the Museum's schedule as the

series "Cineprobe," which has continued into the 1990s. Whereas Griffith wanted to "wait for the emergence of a genuinely personal expression," Van Dyke allowed that "not everything we show [in Cineprobe] has to be a masterpiece... and we insist that [the filmmakers] remain and face the audience and answer whatever questions are put to them" (Griffith [1956] 1967, 12; Van Dyke quoted in Lynes 1973, 337).

Van Dyke also changed the name of the Film Library to the Department of Film, in line with the other departments in the Museum. Margareta Akermark recalled that Iris Barry came up with the title "Film Library" to sound stuffy and academic rather than commercially competitive with potential donors (Lynes 1973, 331). The film department's stature in the film world was now assured enough to discard the name and take one that would "clarify to the public the broadened scope of its activities" (*Annual Report, Museum of Modern Art 1965-66*).

Willard Van Dyke was an acclaimed documentarian on such classics as *The River* (1937), *The City* (1939), and *Valley Town* (1940) and an educator at City College of New York, New York University, Yale, Dartmouth, and Bradford College. Although these credentials were inspiring to Bosley Crowther, some at the Museum were skeptical that he was too narrowly focused as a "documentary person" (Lynes 1973, 336). His documentary leanings were satisfied by another series that, like "Cineprobe," continues into the present. It was called "What's Happening?" and addressed controversial social and political topics.

Yet, Van Dyke was not easy to pigeonhole. His "Cineprobe" series demonstrated interest in experiments and newcomers to film. Also, animation history received more extended attention during his tenure. In addition, the Department of Film expanded coverage of international cinema beyond France, Germany, Britain, Italy, and the Soviet Union to encompass Eastern Europe, Asia (primarily Japan), Latin America, and North Africa. Among the first recipients of this globalized outlook was animation.

## **International Animation**

For two weeks in January and February 1966 the Museum of Modern Art presented "Animation: Films from Many Nations," in which it showed 28 recent animated films from Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Great Britain, Japan, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and the United States. The reviewer Howard Thompson quoted Van Dyke as saying, "We are trying to highlight and encourage a definite art form of film developing all over the world and not accorded rightful appreciation in the United States, where slick, assembly-line animation predominates as a theater-program supplement" (1966, 13). Thus, Van Dyke stated the goals of the department with respect to animation: to show the broad range of animation being produced outside of the Hollywood commercial mold.

The dark, brooding animation from "behind the Iron Curtain" particularly impressed Thompson, in part for its divergence from the simplistic children's fare usually available. In contrast, Howard Junker, writing in *The Nation*, found many of the foreign shorts "morbid, anguished and pretentious," because of the "government sponsorship which abroad gives animators time and facilities for metaphysics" (1966, 250).

The last international survey of animation approaching this scope was Joseph Losey's 22-film retrospective in 1939. That series encompassed both old and new films, but "Animation: Films from Many Nations" concentrated solely on films dating from the 1960s. This series demonstrated the Museum's renewed interest in current film production. Included was a special symposium called "The Art of Animated Film" moderated by John Hubley, whose own independently produced film, *The Hat* (1964), was part of the series. On the panel were Louis Dorfsman, Art Director of CBS; Leonard Glasser, filmmaker; Fred Mogubgub, filmmaker; and Jerome Snyder, Art Director of *Scientific American*. Glasser's film *Howard* and Mogubgub's *Enter Hamlet* were in the series. The panel seemed designed to force interaction between independent producers and industry executives.

The Museum's *Annual Report* for 1965-66 noted that Van Dyke selected the films despite his having been in office only a couple of months at the time of the screenings. According to Thompson, two-thirds of the films had been exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in a program of the International Association of Animated Film-Makers (French acronym ASIFA) and many had appeared at the New York Film Festival (Thompson 1966, 13). Indeed, Junker mentioned that the animation program had been a last-minute substitution for a planned Jean Cocteau retrospective that fell through due to a dispute over distribution rights (1966, 249).

The person involved in this dispute was Raymond Rohauer, who began to plague the Museum with claims that he held the rights to a number of films in its collection. He also ran repertory film programs at the Gallery of Modern Art, which competed with those of MoMA. His only connection to animation was in representing "Rocky and Bullwinkle" producer Jay Ward, but he was an example of a larger problem for the Museum's film collection: competing claims within the murky legal territory of copyright, and rights to distribution, exhibition, and duplication of films.

Anthony Slide claims that Rohauer "would contact widows and executors of apparently worthless estates of once-prominent names in the film community, and negotiate representation of the estate's rights in films, to which quite often the estates had no claims" (1992, 48). Thus, Rohauer sought films from the Museum of Modern Art, the British National Film Archive, the American Film Institute, and the Motion Picture Section of the Library of Congress. In addition to the difficulties over the Cocteau series, Rohauer attacked MoMA for lending a print of Buster Keaton's film *The General* (1927) to New York's public television station, Channel 13, in violation of rights he claimed to have (Junker 1966, 259). Thus, the Museum ran into serious difficulties in adjusting to the profiteers and legal labyrinths of the film and television industries.



In 1967 the Museum again presented “Animation: Films from Many Nations” in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Museum, and it was scheduled to be presented at the Annenberg School of Communications later in the year (Junker 1966, 249). In addition to three programs of international animation, the Museum also screened a program of Walt Disney’s shorts from 1928 to 1942. The Disney program inspired Richard Corliss writing for the Columbia University newspaper to praise “the brilliant camera technique and use of color, surpassing any contemporary live-action films” (1967).

Following the wide-ranging international surveys of animation the Museum offered in January 1968 a concentrated dose of four programs titled “Animation: Zagreb.” This series was organized by curatorial assistant Adrienne Mancina, who had joined the department in 1964. In the following decades, Mancina would consistently involve herself in the vast majority of animation programs that the Museum presented. For this series she traveled to Yugoslavia to select animation produced by the Zagreb Film Company. In conjunction with the series, a physical installation, “The Art of the Animator: The Storyboard,” was exhibited.

Zagreb animation gained international attention in the late 1950s and early 60s, winning festival prizes at Cannes, Mannheim, Oberhausen, and Venice. In addition, Dusan Vukotic’s *Ersatz* (1961) garnered the first Academy Award for animation ever given to a short produced outside of the United States. Drawing on styles ranging from Disney to UPA to Jirf Trnka’s Czech cartoons, Zagreb animators used reduced animation techniques artistically as well as economically (Holloway 1972).

In her program notes, Mancina gave this evaluation: “What has always distinguished the films from Zagreb has been a satirical wit, experimentation with modern graphic forms and composition, color harmony, and a contrapuntal use of music and sound effects. Most of them are fables, with all the charm and humor of Aesop or La Fontaine. We find them refreshing visual delights; they will enchant the imagination of any age” (1968). Both

Donald Richie (1961) and Ronald Holloway (1972) have stressed that the targets of the Zagreb Film's satirical wit were often politics and bureaucracy, but, in keeping with the Museum's depoliticization of curatorial interests, Mancia was circumspect about this.

In contrast, contemporary reviewer Renata Adler devoted her column to considering how successfully the Zagreb animators blended whimsy and message, arguing that the Zagreb films "frequently verge deliberately (and quite perilously for the kind of illusion cartoons normally depend on) upon the actual—adult fables, political satire, allegories." She compared them to American cartoons, which offer only an implicit message with their ever-present violence and anarchy that cause temporary and reversible harm (1968b, 21). Thus, she found Zagreb films were about consequences, while American films were about denying them.

International animation appeared again on programs devoted to retrospectives of national cinemas ("Bulgarian Films of the Sixties" in 1969 and "New Rumanian Films" in 1970), thematic programs ("Decade's End-Some Seminal Cinema of the Sixties" in 1969 and "Cinema of the Absurd" 1970), and under another rubric that deserves elaboration, selections from animated film festivals. The first of these was "Zagreb '72 in New York," which showcased 59 out of 150 animated shorts that were screened at the first International Festival of Animated Films held in Zagreb. France's animation festival at Annecy had been held since 1960, but the Museum did not present films from this festival until 1977.

Adrienne Mancia selected the "Zagreb '72" programs, which contained films from 18 countries, including the Soviet Union, West Germany, Poland, Japan, Australia, Rumania, Italy, Great Britain, and the United States. The Zagreb Festival Organizing Committee and its director, Zelimir Matko, were instrumental in aiding the Museum in obtaining the films. The press release noted that the Museum joined the Zagreb festival in attempting to overcome the marginalization of short films, which are usually ignored by festivals and distributors alike ("Zagreb '72 in New York" 1972). Again in 1974 Mancia

programmed a series “Zagreb ‘74 in New York” that was able to highlight a Russian animator whose works had very little exposure in the United States, Fodor Hitruk (“Zagreb Festival Brought to U.S.A.” 1974).

As a framework for raising the public’s consciousness regarding animation as an international art form, the Museum’s programs devoted to animation festivals seemed ideal. However, Mancia told me in a telephone interview (18 March 1992) that these programs are fraught with logistical and economic difficulties. After seeing the films at the festivals, she chooses those she would like to screen at the Museum. Then, she must write to each production entity for permission to use the film and to arrange shipping. Because this is a costly and time-consuming process, the Museum has tried to share curatorial duties with other cultural organizations, most regularly, the Cinémathèque Québécoise (originally called the Cinémathèque Canadienne). By touring the program, the Museum can defray some costs and alleviate some administrative burdens.

A curator must have a serious commitment to the films because, as Mancia stated, “It’s almost as much work [to organize] a week of animation as it is for a two-month program from a major studio.” Regarding the funds available to support such exhibitions, Mancia lamented, “We are all not only understaffed, [but] we do not have a budget for exhibitions. None of us have exhibition budgets. We have staff budgets. You have to go out and raise money for many of these programs. It’s very difficult. Most people don’t do animation programs because we have so much work to do for a film that just lasts a few minutes.”

Despite these hardships, the Museum has continued to present the best of a variety of animation festivals on nearly an annual basis. As other animation festivals held in Ottawa and Hiroshima came into existence, the Museum added them to its programs on Zagreb and Annecy. Additionally, the festivals have produced retrospectives of animation by individuals, studios, and nations that the Museum has sometimes picked up. One other

benefit of the festival screenings is that they provide the centerpiece around which to group other animation programs in what the Museum sometimes dubs an “Animation Week.” Thus, press releases go out detailing several related screenings as a single event.

### **Animation History**

In addition to presenting contemporary animation from around the world, Adrienne Mancina also curated in 1969 a series of three programs entitled, “Origins of the American Animated Film,” which presented 45 films dating from 1900 to 1930. While Iris Barry’s “Short History of Animation” was meant to circulate for years as the Museum’s statement on animation, this series had no such claim to definitiveness. Instead, Mancina presented an array of experimentation grouped according to the program titles “The Invention of Film Animation,” “The Discovery of Motion,” and “A Most Extraordinary Menagerie.” Mancina emphasized in the press release, “Animation, like the cartoon and comic strip, is an extension of the graphic arts rather than an extension of photographic realism.... What emerges in these early films is a delight in the art of transmogrification and the satiric and humorous possibilities of anthropomorphic protagonists” (quoted in “Origins of the American Animated Film” 1969).

The press release also provided a few landmarks in animation history, notably J. Stuart Blackton’s *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* and Winsor McCay’s *Gertie the Dinosaur*, which was still erroneously considered McCay’s first release in 1909. It also corroborated the importance of McCay by noting “some of McCay’s original line drawings in black and white were exhibited two years ago at the Metropolitan Museum.” As Barry had cited source books on animation, the release referred to a recent international survey of animation, Ralph Stephenson’s *Animation in the Cinema* (1967). However, even while quoting Stephenson’s claim that these cartoons were “uncomplicated fun, mostly without social implications,” the press release acknowledged that in them “nationality characteristics were frequently grossly exaggerated.”

This series included items from the Museum's own collection, but relied heavily on the Cinémathèque Canadienne's extensive collection of animation. This afforded a view of four of Blackton's films and six of McCay's amidst a range of films from the likes of J.R. Bray, Earl Hurd, Raoul Barré, Frank Moser, John Foster, Gregory La Cava, Rube Goldberg, Max and Dave Fleischer, Bud Fisher, Syd Marcus, Burt Gillett, Mannie Davis, Ben Harrison, Paul Terry, Manny Gould, Pat Sullivan, Otto Messmer, Walter Lantz, and Walt Disney. It was a smorgasbord of films from practically every American animation studio operating in the silent era, with generous coverage of the 1910s as well as the 1920s.

No longer was the Museum of Modern Art burdened by having its collection represent the whole of cinema within a single grand scheme of aesthetic progress. Curators could construct different themes by borrowing films from many sources. The obscure could stand beside the celebrated, the crude beside the polished. A more archaeological interest in unearthing early cinema overtook the evaluative imperative to discriminate major from minor works, masterpieces from interesting failures.

Animation also found a place in historical retrospectives of Hollywood studios, such as "Columbia Pictures: A Retrospective" in 1968-9, which included both Disney and UPA shorts that the Columbia had distributed. Similarly, "Paramount Pictures: Sixty Years" in 1972 offered shorts by the Fleischers and their successor, Famous Studio. Also, a fifty-year retrospective of Warner Bros. films in 1973 included "Looney Tunes" and "Merry Melodies" cartoons, and "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer: 1924-1974" had its share of cartoons as well. The retrospectives of Paramount and MGM were both guest curated by Leonard Maltin. According to Adrienne Mancina, obtaining film prints for these studio tributes was not always as simple as it might seem because the studios had sold off much of their backlogs to television distributors. Even when a studio did own a film, other sources sometimes had better quality prints (telephone interview, 18 March 1992).

## **Independent American Animation**

As I noted above, the Museum of Modern Art's embrace of independent filmmakers extended to independent animators, such as Stan VanDerBeek. VanDerBeek created at the Museum in January 1966 a mixed media performance called "A Culture Intercom" using three 16mm films, two 8mm films, several 35mm slides and live dancers (*Annual Report*, Museum of Modern Art 1965-66). In addition, his animation *Nos Moking* preceded each program of the 1966 "Animation: Films from Many Nations" series.

In 1967 the Department of Film's associate director, Margareta Akermark curated an exhibit titled "Mutoscopes," which was a striking blend of history and novelty. Douglass Crockwell, whose art for abstract films the Museum had displayed in 1940, provided his collection of refurbished mutoscopes. These peep show machines displayed motion pictures from the Museum's archives when the viewer hand cranked the flip-card reels within them. Crockwell also lent six of his own modern versions of the mutoscopes, which showed his own experiments with "photography, print, line, type and color" (Glueck 1967, 22).

The Museum also continued to acquire animated films for both its permanent collection and its circulating film program. Occasionally it obtained the odd piece of history, such as Walt Disney's *Alice Plays Cupid* (1925), which was thought to be lost. More often the Museum secured contemporary experimental animation by individuals such as Robert Breer, Harry Smith, Larry Jordan, and John Whitney. They used a range of techniques, including collage, objects, drawings, and computer imagery to create strikingly individual works.

Another work the Museum acquired, which was studio financed but independent in character, was Ralph Bakshi's feature-length animated film *Heavy Traffic* (1973). This was his follow-up to *Fritz the Cat* (1972) and also garnered an X-rating for its violence, sex, and language in telling a semi-autobiographical story of a young cartoonist living in

the gritty squalor of New York City. Bakshi mixed live-action, photographs, and paintings with animation to create his personal narrative.

In the fall of 1974 following Willard Van Dyke's departure, the Museum became embroiled in controversy when it showed Bakshi's next film as a work-in-progress. This feature was *Coonskin*, an offensive updating of Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" stories set in Harlem. As Charles Solomon recounted, "Representatives from CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) objected to the depictions of blacks and disrupted the program. As the controversy over *Coonskin* grew, Paramount declined to release it" (1989, 275). As I note in the following section, this was hardly the first time the Museum found itself attacked on grounds of racial insensitivity, nor was that the only aspect of MoMA that was criticized.

### **Turbulence at the Museum**

The Department of Film's broadened support for animation, experimental film, and topical films under Willard Van Dyke is all the more remarkable considering the organizational and social turbulence the Museum endured during those years. I would like to address: shifts in MoMA's funding sources; demands made by critics and artists; crises of the Museum's management; and the increased sources of competition for the public's interest in film.

### **Museum Funding**

From its founding in 1929 through the mid-1970s when Willard Van Dyke departed, the Museum of Modern Art had grown as a physical structure and as a bureaucratic organization. After a decade of moving through temporary locations, the Museum gained a permanent home on 53rd Street in 1939, with its steel and glass International Style building designed by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durrell Stone. The Museum expanded with the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden in 1953, two new

wings in 1963-64, and the annexation of the vacated 54th Street Whitney Museum building in 1966. The Museum's staff grew concomitantly with its facilities. At its founding, five people were on staff; that rose to 167 in 1948, 246 in 1959, and 537 in 1970 (Goldin and Smith 1977, 93).

MoMA's expansion over the decades dovetailed with the need to broaden its funding base beyond a circle of rich patrons led by the Rockefellers. As local, state, and federal government support for the arts began to swell in the mid-to-late 1960s, the Museum increasingly turned in that direction for support. Additionally, corporate donations provided another growing base of funding. Crane asserts this allowed for substantial growth and bureaucratization and also shifted the museum's orientation from an informal network of collectors, patrons, critics, scholars, artists, and dealers toward the general public and the more formal network of government agencies and corporate boards (Crane 1987, 128).

Two results of this reorientation were: a growing conservatism in MoMA's acquisition of avant-garde art over the decades (Crane 1987, 120-30); and the pursuit of increased attendance levels through such high-profile events as the blockbuster Picasso retrospective in 1980 (Halasz 1985, 122). Yet, the film department actually expanded its support of avant-garde film when the painting and sculpture department fell behind contemporary art movements. Because it never could rely on the fine art network for support, it had a broad public orientation much earlier than did the fine art departments. In the realm of film, the Museum's interest in the avant-garde coincided with that of the public. According to Willard Van Dyke, "the attendance at our screenings has been greatest when we have shown films that have been variously labeled avant-garde, experimental, underground, or independent" (quoted in *Annual Report, Museum of Modern Art 1966-67*).



As I have noted above, from its inception in 1935 the Department of Film brought in its own funding through its circulating film program. During Willard Van Dyke's years, that annual income rose from \$68,611 in the 1965-66 fiscal year to a high of \$186,300 in 1971-72 (*Annual Report*, Museum of Modern Art 1965-66 and 1971-72). However these revenues did not come close to covering the department's annual operating budget (which was \$300,000 in 1971). Nor did the Museum calculate the percentage of its total admission receipts attributable to film screenings (Lynes 1973, 340). Eileen Bowser suggested the reason for this is to avoid the appearance of competition with commercial exhibitors (1991, 172).

As with other departments, the Department of Film relied on trustees to come up with the money to make up the annual shortfall, either through personal donations or by dipping into the Museum's endowment. MoMA's annual deficit grew by a factor of ten from 1966-67 to 1969-70 to reach \$1,204,500 (*Annual Report*, Museum of Modern Art 1970). The next several years saw deficits run in excess of \$1,000,000 with alarming frequency. Meanwhile, the market value of MoMA's portfolio dropped from \$24,230,000 in 1969 to \$16,100,000 in 1975 (Meyer 1979, 137).

The prospect of obtaining government funds became especially important to the Department of Film after the inception of the American Film Institute (AFI) in 1967, which received partial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The AFI was founded as a private nonprofit corporation to support filmmaker training, film education, film production, preservation and cataloging of films, and publications. According to Anthony Slide, "Soon after the Institute's creation, in 1969 the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art allocated \$600,000 out of capital funds towards the preservation of the Museum's film holdings. It was a decision undoubtedly spurred by the work of the Institute and the new funding opportunities provided by the National Endowment for the Arts" (1992, 77).

Indeed, in 1971 the NEA did begin to provide funds for film preservation, distributed through the American Film Institute. In 1976, this amounted to \$455,000 that was divided among the Library of Congress, the George Eastman House, and the Museum of Modern Art. However, the AFI often claimed credit for the activities of these archives because of its enviable position of administering grants to them, which rankled many archivists (Slide 1992, 81). From 1967 to 1979 the American Film Institute disbursed a total of \$4,600,000 in NEA funds for all film preservation programs and private sources added enough to yield a total of \$11,200,000 (Slide 1992, 102).

Another way that the Museum of Modern Art adjusted its practices to meet government standards was to install separate informational rooms to satisfy educational requirements for National Endowment for the Humanities grants (Alpers 1991, 30-1). These rooms precede the exhibit space and offer extensive documentation for the works that follow. This melds well with the Museum's longterm educational mission that includes an ongoing commitment to publication. Similarly, program notes accompany each film screening, which range from lists of film credits to critical historical essays to statements by the filmmakers.

### **Critics and Artists**

In the mid-to-late 1960s, a number of people began to scrutinize the Museum of Modern Art's role in the art world as well as in larger society. For example, in 1967 *New York Times* art critic John Canaday wrote a series of articles taking the Museum to task for becoming an "expensively decorated place of entertainment with an impressive cachet... a hothouse of preciosities," in place of its former "position as the most valuable educational force in the art world" (1967a). Canaday blamed MoMA for inciting among American museums a "general coddling, cossetting, baby-sitting and competition for attention" in which superficial excitement replaced significance as the guiding principle of exhibitions (1967b).

Canaday's criticism of the Museum of Modern Art struck at the heart of its relation to the art world and the public. To what extent was the public's acceptance of modern art tied to its glamour as a concentrated representation of wealth? What was the Museum's role in fostering this attitude? Canaday argued that MoMA had been burdened by its own success, which brought in a broader segment of the public than ever before. To an extent, Canaday expressed an elitist skepticism of the masses, whose shallow experience of art could never compare to that of the select few who had the capacity for true contemplation.

Meanwhile, MoMA's success at making modern art fashionable did not seem to extend to film, according to *New York Times* film critic Renata Adler. She bemoaned the absence in America of an equivalent of the Cinémathèque Française in Paris and she placed the quality of the Museum of Modern Art's film archive beneath that of the Eastman House in Rochester. She cited the explanation of the Cinémathèque's director, Henri Langlois, that whereas, the Museum of Modern Art had money, *he* had to work to build a collection. In addition, Langlois claimed, "I do not have a museum over me which considers paintings high culture and regards films as low" (1968a).

Willard Van Dyke wrote a letter to the *New York Times* defending the Museum of Modern Art's film activities as comparable to those of the Cinémathèque Française, claiming superiority for the Museum's circulating film program and its film study facilities. He pointed out that Adler's ranking of the Cinémathèque's collection as the finest in the world could not be substantiated because Langlois refused to issue a list of its holdings. Van Dyke also dismissed Langlois's attack on MoMA, saying "The idea that connection with a museum of art is detrimental to a cinemathèque is ridiculous" (1968). Langlois had hit a nerve on this issue, for the Museum's painting and sculpture department had always claimed center stage.

However, Adler's article merely provided another volley in a long-running feud between Langlois and a number of film archives. Langlois had been Secretary-General of

the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF) from its inception until 1959, when he stormed out of its congress. This split FIAF into factions and led to a protracted legal battle. Relations between MoMA and Langlois had been cool during Richard Griffith's years (Crowther 1965) and Langlois continued to make enemies. Earlier in 1968 he had been dismissed as Director of the Cinémathèque, only to be reinstated after rallying film directors around him in support. Even his cry of poverty was belied by French governmental largesse during the 1960s, when the Ministry of Arts had given 20,000,000 francs in a ten-year period (Houston 1994, 56).

By invoking the Cinémathèque Française as an ideal, Adler fell under the sway of Langlois's flamboyant charm and his eclectic film programming. But Langlois represented a dying breed of eccentric autocrats who eschewed the tedious drudgery of cataloging and preserving films in favor of courting filmmakers and promoting himself. In contrast, Van Dyke oversaw an archive that made preservation a higher priority than access, though he noted that the film department still screened more than 700 films annually (1968).

Van Dyke's letter to the editor was only one example of the Museum's ongoing image management. As Eileen Bowser had described the Film Library's facilities available for scholarship in 1963, Van Dyke wrote a similar summary a few years later. In it he announced the official opening of a new film study center as well as touting the Museum's co-sponsorship of a workshop on the use of films in libraries (1967-68). In 1970, the Film Department celebrated its 35th anniversary with a promotion in which associate director Margareta Akermark was quoted as saying, "We started it all. We're the collective mother of the Film Generation." She offered as proof the 2,500 college courses in film, the strain on the Museum's research facilities and auditorium capacity, and the 10,000 annual mailings of films rented through its circulating film program (Gent 1970).

The Museum had much to be proud of, but it also was beset on all sides by demands and accusations. The Art Workers Coalition was a group of radical artists that

formed in 1969 in emulation of French and Belgian artists who protested against profiteering from art (Marquis 1989, 350). Charging the Museum with racism and elitism, the Coalition members made a series of demands.

**They insisted that the museum sell a million dollars of art from its collection and give the money to the poor of “all races in this country.” They demanded that the board of trustees accept members from “the public” with no regard to background or race so they could be involved in control. The Museum of Modern Art was to be closed until the end of the Vietnam War. They demanded the immediate resignation of all the Rockefellers from the board, since their investments were obtained by *matériel* supplied to the war effort.... Espousing the cause of black artists and women artist, they insisted that there be black art in all museums. The Museum of Modern Art was to set up a Martin Luther King Study Center headed by a black. (Rich 1975, 141).**

Rich noted that to gain attention for their demands, the Coalition picketed the Museum, issued manifestoes, and spilled containers of blood in the Museum’s galleries. This was one of many protests, among which was a 1972 “Ladies Day” demonstration by women in the arts who were dissatisfied with the Museum’s policies (Lynes 1973, 440).

That the Museum of Modern Art would be a target of radical political demands signalled its high profile as a cultural organization that served as an arena for negotiating society’s values. The Museum faced the perennial conflicts of serving the public interest while remaining under private control, and defining and maintaining standards of aesthetic excellence while including artists of underrepresented races, ethnicities, classes, and genders. As opposed to the 1940 protest by the American Abstract Artists group, these protests more broadly questioned the public accountability of art museums in general.

### **Crises in Management**

The Museum of Modern Art’s chronic deficits and the controversies noted above helped destabilize its management after years of solidity under director René d’Harnoncourt. After Alfred Barr retired in 1967 and d’Harnoncourt followed in 1968, the Museum’s trustees hired and fired two directors in four years. The first, Bates Lowry,

lasted less than a year. A triumvirate of trustees led by Walter Bareiss took over until John Hightower's appointment in 1970.

Hightower had plans to increase the Museum's social relevance through outreach programs and he spoke out against the ways museums must court collectors at the expense of the public. Hightower soon found his iconoclastic, politically progressive plans thwarted by trustees, department heads, and staff members. The trustees sought a strong administrator to reverse the Museum's woeful finances through a building program that would sell off the air rights above the Museum for the construction of an office tower. The department heads outmaneuvered Hightower in competing for funding and approval of exhibitions. The staff members, underpaid and unable to contribute to policymaking, staged a two-week strike in August 1971.

The staff members had organized themselves into the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA) and affiliated with a militant independent union dominated by racial minorities, the Distributive Workers of America. The PASTA strikers protested layoffs and low wages, but their primary aim was to gain representation on the board of trustees. Hightower settled the strike after two weeks by raising wages. But he did not last many months longer. In January 1972 Museum President William S. Paley handed Hightower a resignation letter to sign in January 1972 (Meyer 1979, 231-4).

Director of publications Richard Oldenburg was immediately appointed acting director of the Museum and after six months the appointment became permanent. When PASTA struck again in 1973, Oldenburg stood his ground with the trustees. The union once more sought input into management, this time by trying to expand eligibility for union membership to management positions (Phillips 1973b). After eleven weeks the strikers gained only minimal wage concessions and the right to petition the board of trustees (Rich 1975, 144).

The 1973 strike did interrupt the Museum's film program, because of some filmmakers' sympathies for the strikers and because of the refusals of other unions to cross picket lines. However, one striker complained, "Film freaks are the worst to keep from crossing a picket line. They'll go in to see Eisenstein's *Strike* when they have to cross a picket line to see it" (quoted in "Modern Museum's Film Series at Standstill" 1973).

### **Competition**

By this time, New Yorkers had several alternative sources for noncommercial film screenings. When Willard Van Dyke was first appointed Director of Museum of Modern Art's Department of Film in late 1965, Bosley Crowther already noted that both the New York Film Festival and the Gallery of Modern Art had begun to encroach on its activities. Another repertory theater of this era was the New Yorker. In 1970 Jonas Mekas founded Anthology Film Archives to promote experimental film. By 1974 the Museum of Modern Art and Pacific Film Archive began cooperating with Anthology as it embarked on a preservation program (Slide 1992, 89-90).

January 1971 saw the Whitney Museum of American Art's newly founded film department embark on its first "New American Filmmaker Series." The filmmakers that film curator David Bienstock showcased often overlapped with the independent animators whose work the Museum of Modern Art exhibited and collected. Robert Breer, Jordan Belson, Fred Mogubgub, Ed Emshwiller, Oskar Fischinger, George Dunning, Larry Jordan, Harry Smith, and John Whitney were among the filmmakers experimenting with animation whose work appeared in both museums. By 1976 "New American Filmmakers" began to include retrospectives devoted to long-dead individuals, such as Winsor McCay, or long-inactive ones, like Otto Messmer and his silent "Felix the Cat" films.

In addition, such repertory theaters as the Film Forum and the Thalia began to program series of both old films and new, experimental and classical Hollywood, foreign and domestic. At the Thalia, Greg Ford programmed a "Cartoonal Knowledge" series that

presented old Hollywood cartoons of many studios, highlighting such favorite directors as Tex Avery and Frank Tashlin. The Film Forum screened retrospectives of the Fleischers and recent Japanese animation alike. Also, a San Francisco company began to circulate annual compilation films of animation chosen from recent festivals under the title "International Tournée of Animation." These played in art house theaters and on college campuses and offered some small remuneration to animators who were selected. Adrienne Mancina cited the growth of these and other "package" films as direct competition against the Museum's programs devoted to animation festivals (telephone interview, 18 March 1992).

These were among the challenges that the Department of Film faced when Willard Van Dyke left to take a post at the State University of New York in Purchase. Margareta Akermark rose from associate director to acting director in his place. She provided continuity as an employee of the Museum since 1941 who built the circulating film program and took on most of the department's administrative duties upon Richard Griffith's appointment as curator. However, she was nearing the end of her career and was not about to embark in any new directions.

### **The Years of Margareta Akermark and Ted Perry**

Margareta Akermark remained acting director of the Department of Film from January 1974 until July 1975, when Ted Perry assumed the post of director. He was chairman of New York University's department of cinema studies, whose students had been offered in internships in the Museum of Modern Art's film department since the fall of 1968 (Van Dyke 1967-68, 37). By the fall of 1978 Perry left to become the dean of arts and humanities at Middlebury College and Mary Lea Bandy was appointed administrator of the film department. The following year she assumed the position of acting director, which was made permanent in 1980. Her previous roles at the Museum were in publications and coordination of exhibitions rather than in film.



The mid-to-late 1970s saw the continuation of film preservation grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Numerous program notes also cited the NEA and the New York State Council on the Arts as contributors to the film exhibition program. Then in April 1979, the Museum received its second honorary Academy Award “for the on-going program of film preservation and its continuing support of the motion picture as an art form” (Bowser 1979b, 283).

The Academy Award prompted film critic and historian Andrew Sarris to review the Museum’s attitudes toward film. He found the early years of the Film Library characterized by a reluctance to regard Hollywood talkies or films from fascist countries as art, in contrast to “the foreign language ‘art’ film, the ‘independent’ cinema, the avant-garde, animation and the documentary” (1979, 110). However in its most recent decades, Sarris saw MoMA’s fear of kitsch and political contamination fall away with series devoted to Howard Hawks, Italian films from the Mussolini era, and American International Pictures (makers of drive-in movies). Thus, he congratulated the film department on its “noticeable lack of snobbery” (1979, 112).

This reclamation of Hollywood movies as art rather than sociology offered an additional impetus to screen commercial animation with the same enthusiasm reserved for foreign and independent animation on the one hand, and silent-era animation on the other. While earlier exhibits elevated Disney and the UPA studio as exemplars of aesthetic innovation, the 1970s would see MoMA screenings devoted to cartoons whose chief virtue was their humor.

Nonetheless, the Museum continued to support foreign and independent animation that was more aesthetically-driven and experimental in nature. Also, as archives gathered more prints of silent-era films and others thought lost or forgotten, the Museum added to its collection and exhibition of such films. Before gauging the Museum’s presentation of this range of animation, I first would like to consider the role of guest curators who are

unabashed fans of funny Hollywood cartoons and compare their approaches to the Museum's exhibits that more readily serve a particular studio's public relations goals.

### **Fans as Guest Curators of Animation**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s a circle of individuals began to gather who were interested in commercial studio animation. They began to publish articles in both fan periodicals devoted to animation, such as *Funnyworld* and *Mindrot*, as well as in more broadly targeted film and graphic arts periodicals, like *Film Comment* and *Print*. I will discuss the contributions of three of these commercial cartoon fans who have been guest curators at the Museum of Modern Art: Leonard Maltin, Mark Langer, and Greg Ford.

#### **Leonard Maltin**

Leonard Maltin has been a film buff since childhood and in his teens he began writing and editing a fan magazine devoted to Hollywood history called *Film Fan Monthly*, published from 1961 to 1975. He has authored numerous popular historical books on Hollywood movies, which have addressed such subjects as movie comedy teams, cinematographers, movie shorts, Disney films, Carole Lombard, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the Little Rascals, and the history of Hollywood cartoons. In 1973 at the New School for Social Research he began to teach one of the first college-level courses on the history of animation. His book *Of Mice and Magic* ([1980a] 1987), written with research assistance from Jerry Beck, remains an authoritative history of American cartoon studios that combines much primary source material with interviews of people in the animation industry. He is the film correspondent for the syndicated television news magazine "Entertainment Tonight" and edits a long-running reference series, *Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide*.

Maltin helped program anniversary retrospectives of both Paramount Pictures and MGM in 1972 and 1974, respectively. Each included animated and live-action shorts he

selected in addition to feature-length films. Again in 1976 he was guest curator of an eight-month series “American Film Comedy,” which included a range of cartoons. Among them were shorts by a variety of directors (e.g. Tex Avery, Frank Tashlin) and studios (e.g. Fleischer, Lantz, Warner Bros.), featuring numerous cartoon stars (e.g. Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Pluto, Bugs Bunny, Mister Magoo). He also programmed feature-length animation in the series: *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* (1969) by Bill Melendez, and *Heavy Traffic* (1973) by Ralph Bakshi.

His program notes for the “American Film Comedy” series illustrate his approach to film. For example, of the 1936 Fleischer studio short, *Let’s Get Movin’*, he wrote, “Visually, there is first-rate character animation complemented by outstanding use of perspective and backgrounds. On the soundtrack there is an original song by Sammy Timberg and Sammy Lerner, sung by Olive Oyl (Mae Questel) as well as non-stop ad libs mumbled by Popeye (Jack Mercer) under his breath. Finally, there is the comic invention springing from the flexible Popeye formula; later, producers saw fit to reduce this series to a tired repetition of the same elements” (Maltin 1976a).

In these brief notes Maltin employed the same critical stance as a much longer review of the entire series of Popeye cartoons he wrote in *Film Fan Monthly* (1973b): he evaluated formal elements for their contribution to entertainment. He sought pleasure from films and needed no additional reason to praise them. His fannish enthusiasm is quite different from Iris Barry’s insistence on discerning a film’s aesthetic innovations or its social significance. Instead, his critical appraisals of animation, music, and plot focused on their success or failure in providing enjoyment.

Again in 1980, Leonard Maltin guest curated a program, “Popeye: A Belated 50th Birthday Tribute,” whose program notes reiterate the above sentiments. He singled out individuals for their contributions to the cartoons and created a hierarchy of quality that ranked the Fleischer studio-produced Popeye cartoons of the 1930s and early 1940s above

those later produced by Famous Studios and Hanna-Barbera, noting that the Fleischers alone subverted and twisted the standard Popeye formula “for the sake of comedy and for the sake of variety” (Maltin 1980). Maltin’s next big contribution to the Museum’s recognition of animation came in 1985 when he helped program the four-and-a-half-month retrospective exhibit of the Warner Bros. Cartoon Studio, which I will address more substantially in the following section devoted to the Mary Lea Bandy years.

### **Mark Langer**

Mark Langer was a doctoral student in film at Columbia University who received an internship to work at the Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Film. This led to his compiling several pairs of programs in 1975 and 1976 that celebrated the contributions of J.R. Bray, Bob Clampett, and Otto Messmer to animation. In 1975 he also taught a course on the history of animation in the Graduate School of Arts at Columbia (Langer 1993, 127) and has since gone on to teach at Carleton University in Ottawa, maintaining a research interest in commercial studio animation production, the Fleischer studio in particular. He returned as a guest curator of MoMA animation programs in the late 1980s and 1990s.

In his first MoMA pair of programs, “Happy Birthday, John Randolph Bray,” Langer celebrated a true pioneer of animation, whom I discussed in the “Marginalization of Animation” section of chapter 1. One set of screenings was actually held on Bray’s 96th birthday, 25 August 1975, and Bray traveled from Connecticut to be present for it. The year before, animator and historian John Canemaker had interviewed Bray and subsequently published a profile of the man in a small circulation journal (1975), but the Museum’s program brought him public attention and news coverage (e.g. Eder 1975).

Langer’s program notes (1975b) show glimmerings of his more recent arguments (e.g. 1990b, 1990c, 1992) that connect animation subject matter and style to geographic and organizational dynamics within the animation studio system. The notes discussed Bray’s patent with Earl Hurd for the labor-saving ‘cel’ production method, his pioneering

two-color Brewster process cartoon *The Debut of Thomas Cat*, his instructional animated films, and the numerous animation legends who got their starts in his studio.

Langer again proffered a pioneer from the silent era with a pair of programs displaying Otto Messmer's "Felix the Cat" cartoons in April 1976. Concurrently, Messmer was honored by the Whitney Museum, in a program guest curated by John Canemaker (1976a). Canemaker, an independent animator and animation historian, had interviewed Messmer in 1975 and included him in a January 1976b *Variety* article "Pioneers of American Animation." Messmer appeared at both the MoMA and Whitney openings to enthusiastic sold-out crowds, after which Messmer claimed he was "swamped" with media attention (Canemaker 1991, 159).

Langer's (1976) and Canemaker's (1976a) program notes overlap in telling how Otto Messmer originated Felix at Pat Sullivan's studio and oversaw production of the cartoons while Sullivan attended to business matters and the commercial promotion of Felix. However, Langer presented this dispassionately, while Canemaker insistently corrected the injustice he perceived Sullivan to have done to Messmer by taking sole credit as Felix's creator. Only Langer mentioned the animators Messmer supervised. Both called attention to Messmer's skills at giving Felix personality through subtle rendering of facial expressions and mannerisms, but Langer tied this to Messmer's previous work on an animated version of Charlie Chaplin, while Canemaker accorded Felix historic primacy in this regard.

One other pair of programs Langer guest curated was the November 1975 "Afternoon With Bob Clampett." In his program notes, Langer mentioned the many people with whom Clampett worked before rising to the rank of director at Warner Bros. in the late 1930s. Langer enthused about the Clampett directorial style's "elasticity," "flair for abstraction and rhythm," and "hallucinatory" nature. In addition, he reveled in Clampett's

satirical jabs at Hitler, Stalin, Disney, the Hays Office, and death itself (1975a). Clampett also traveled to the screening at his own expense, bringing his own slides and film prints.

Langer showed in these program notes an attention to technical, organizational, and commercial innovations within the development of animation as an industry. Even when focusing on an individual, he was careful to mention other people who were involved in both production and distribution of the films. His writing blends institutional concerns with examinations of particular films, which is more apparent in long articles, such as his review of the Fleischer studio in *Film Comment* (1975c). Yet, like Leonard Maltin, he presented commercial studio animation as intrinsically worthy of attention. He did not embark on a quest to rescue animators' reputations from oblivion, like John Canemaker. Instead, he held animation up as a field of cultural production available for scholarly research.

### **Greg Ford**

The January/February 1975 issue of *Film Comment* to which Langer contributed was the brainchild of Greg Ford. He was guest editor for this special issue devoted to "The Hollywood Cartoon." In it, five of the twelve articles were about the Warner Bros. studio and its artists. Ford authored "Warner Brothers" and co-authored an interview of animation director Chuck Jones. Subsequently, at the Museum of Modern Art he curated two brief series of three programs each, one devoted to the films of Chuck Jones and the other highlighting those of Tex Avery.

Ford had experience as a programmer of Hollywood cartoon retrospectives reaching back into the late 1960s. One large scale effort was his ten-part series of over 120 films, titled "The Hollywood Cartoon: A Soft-Cel Retrospective," which, from 1973 to 1976, played the New York Cultural Center (formerly the Gallery of Modern Art), (Cocks, 1973), the Annenberg School of Communications, and toured Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. Ford wrote an informal guide to the series that discussed the work of Max and Dave Fleischer, Walt Disney, Friz Freleng, Frank Tashlin, Robert Clampett, Tex Avery,

and Chuck Jones (1976). In addition, as I mentioned above, he programmed a series at the art house theater Film Forum called “Cartoonal Knowledge” in 1979. One other important act of curatorship was his 1981 exhibition at the Whitney Museum titled “Disney Animations and Animators,” which I will cover in greater depth in chapter 3.

Ford’s knowledge of old Warner Bros. cartoons led Warners to hire him in 1975 to write a compilation feature that would combine segments of cartoons from the studio’s backlog with a new framing story. He submitted a script titled *Hareport* that parodied the *Airport* series of disaster films. However, the film never got beyond early production stages. Ford went on to gain employment at Warner’s reopened animation department in the mid-1980s. He helped script the *Bugs Bunny/Looney Tunes 50th Anniversary Special*, airing January 1986, and he co-wrote and co-directed with Terry Lennon the first two Daffy Duck theatrical shorts to be produced since the 1960s: *The Duxorcist* (1987) and *The Night of the Living Duck* (1988). These were then incorporated in Ford and Lennon’s animation compilation theatrical feature *Daffy Duck’s Quackbusters* (1988) (Miller 1992, 25).

Ford had offered Langer assistance for the program of Bob Clampett works in 1975 and in March 1977 he was guest curator of a series of three programs of films titled “Chuck Jones: The Years at Warner Brothers.” Chuck Jones was present for two of the screenings. In 1978, Ford followed this with a series of three programs devoted to Tex Avery’s animation directing career spanning his years at Warner Bros. (1935-1941), MGM (1941-1954), and Walter Lantz (1954-55). Avery declined the invitation to appear at this tribute.

Ford’s program notes for these two programs differ markedly from his “Warner Brothers” article in *Film Comment*. In that article, he was on a crusade to deflate European pretensions embodied by Ralph Stephenson’s *Animation in the Cinema* (1967) on the one hand, and Robert Mundy’s comments in an Edinburgh Film Festival monograph (Johnson and Willemen 1973) on the other. Ford combatted Stephenson’s sweeping dismissal of

most Hollywood cartoons with pugnacious ferocity as he detailed the subtle nuances that distinguish the accomplishments of the various animation directors that Stephenson lumped together. Mundy presented the opposite sin by placing director Frank Tashlin on a post-modern pedestal for his “Brechtian devices of distantiation.” While not denying his use of such devices, Ford insisted on properly attributing them to Tashlin’s true inspiration, fellow director Tex Avery, not Berthold Brecht.

Ford’s program notes for MoMA bear a few traces of this crusade. He moved beyond his almost purely auteurist stance in “Warner Brothers” to detail a multitude of contributors to Chuck Jones’s pictures in “Chuck Jones: His Years at Warner Brothers” (1977). He traced Jones’s development as a director through a training period of slow-paced, realistic, child-oriented cartoons to his stylized breakthroughs in the early 1940s and ended with Jones’s period of refinement and distillation of personality animation. Similarly, in his program notes for “A Salute to Tex Avery” (1978) Ford charted Avery’s ascent as a purveyor of split-second timing, self-reflexive gags, genre parodies, and exaggerations, who left in his wake at Warner Bros. the crystallized personality of Bugs Bunny and a palpable shift toward “infectious maximal gagginess and fast, FAST pacing.”

Ford’s style is that of an enormously informed fan who astutely analyzes what makes his favorite films so successful. In the midst of so many claims for the aesthetic innovations of European art cinema, he happily declared “Avery’s pics confirm an always-lingering suspicion that the many radical plays with movie syntax and the numerous distancing techniques employed in 60’s live-action films, of ‘New Wave’ extractions, were, in fact, *first* invented, and used for purely comic effect, in animated cartoons.” In this pronouncement, Ford shares Maltin’s regard for entertainment and Canemaker’s interest in reviving reputations. It is all that remains of the earlier campaign to derail European claims of aesthetic superiority.



These fans of American cartoon studios led the way for others in the 1980s and 1990s, most recently Jerry Beck, who in February 1995 presented a retrospective of Paramount's Famous Studios, housed in New York from 1942-1967. This successor to the Fleischer studio has suffered in comparison to its predecessor and Beck sought to recuperate its reputation, claiming "its artists and actors turned out a fine product under time pressures, financial constraints, and reduced access to the Hollywood cartoon industry."

The programs these individuals guest curated relied on fulltime curators, such as Adrienne Mancina and Laurence Kardish, to become reality. Sometimes, as one newspaper article asserted about the "American Film Comedy" series, Mancina and Kardish came up with the theme and obtained Maltin's services as guest curator to draw up a selection of particular films (Flatley 1976). Even short series of programs can require the Museum's curatorial staff to seek out film prints from many sources to satisfy the requirements of the particular theme. However, other programs depend heavily on a single corporate source of film prints, which may offer input into the subject matter and timing of the screenings to benefit its own film release schedule.

### **Disney's Public Relations**

In chapter 3 I will analyze how the Disney company moved from merely cooperating with cultural organizations that displayed its production art to orchestrating such exhibits to coincide with its own promotional activities. I noted earlier in this chapter that the Museum of Modern Art presented an exhibit of *Bambi* artwork in 1942 in tandem with the film's release and lent its facilities to a 15th anniversary celebration of Mickey Mouse the following year. Such collaboration was revived in the 1970s.

On 21 December 1975, Gene London presented a lecture and film program that illustrated how the Disney studio developed its art to the point necessary to produce *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). London was teaching a course on Disney at the New School for Social Research and was scheduled to publish a book, *The Making of Snow*

*White*, the following year. This was part of the Museum's "Films for Young People" series and was tied to the Disney Company's imminent re-release of *Snow White* on 26 December ("Special Disney Program Offered" 1975). Reporter Peter Coutros noted that adults responded to London's revelations that Ub Iwerks and not Disney actually drew Mickey Mouse, but that children primarily responded to the characters on the screen (1975).

On 3 May 1978, the Disney company again sponsored a special event at the Museum of Modern Art, "An Evening with Three Disney Characters Hosted by Gilda Radner." A fancy brochure was produced for the occasion with notes by Christopher Finch, who had authored the mammoth coffee table book, *The Art of Walt Disney* in 1973. The evening featured three veteran Disney directing animators, Ollie Johnston, Eric Larson, and Frank Thomas, as well as a screening of *The Jungle Book* (1967). As with the *Snow White* presentation, this was timed to coincide with *The Jungle Book*'s re-release. Finch's notes dwell primarily on the appropriateness of the actors cast to voice the characters of the film, after giving brief biographical blurbs for the animators (1978). In contrast, Tom Topor's coverage of the event included an enlightening interview with Johnston and Thomas, in which they discussed the difficulties of animating interesting people and naked (non-anthropomorphized) animals (1978).

Because 1978 was Mickey Mouse's 50th anniversary year, the Disney company engaged in a series of public relations events that included a whistlestop tour for a Mickey-costumed actor, who traveled to 58 cities from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. Included in this promotional extravaganza was a stop at the Library of Congress for its "Building a Better Mouse" exhibit; an appearance at a benefit party hosted in the White House by Amy Carter; and a visit to the opening of a six-week retrospective of Mickey's films at the Museum of Modern Art (Shales 1978).

The retrospective began on the anniversary day of the 18 November 1928 premiere of *Steamboat Willie*. The following day a 90-minute special, *Mickey's 50th Anniversary*,

aired on NBC. The Disney company supplied all of the film prints for seven hourlong MoMA programs, produced a glossy booklet for the retrospective, and made veteran animator Ward Kimball available to introduce the opening evening's programs ("Fiftieth Anniversary Tribute to Mickey Mouse" 1978).

In the *New York Times*, Anna Quindlen was full of praise for Mickey but had to inquire into the connection between a modern art museum and an animated American icon. The response she got is telling: "The director of the museum, Richard Oldenburg, explained Mickey's presence among the Maillols and Matisses in these words: 'Mickey Mouse represented a kind of simple design that has an effect on many of the visual arts. Does that sound pompous?'" (1978). Oldenburg's focus on Mickey's form embodies the distinctive eye described by Bourdieu, but his self-deprecation deflates what might be perceived as pretension.

A couple of other Disney tie-ins followed in the 1980s and 1990s. The first was a 50th birthday film program for Donald Duck in November 1984, for which the Disney Company supplied a glossy foldout of program notes. However, an identical program had already been shown in June 1984 at the Guild Theater, where Vincent Canby bemoaned its brevity and its greater appeal to film historians than children (1984). During the summer of 1995, the exhibit space outside of the MoMA theaters was devoted to a "Designing Magic: Disney Animation Art" wall exhibit that included production artwork from *Steamboat Willie* to the current Disney release, *Pocahontas*. However, no series of screenings accompanied this exhibit, whose pieces were all drawn from the studio's Walt Disney Archives and its Animation Feature Research Library.

The Disney company is one of many that have participated over the decades in exhibitions of their work at the Museum of Modern Art. The correspondence between the Museum and these companies is not usually available for study, but one researcher obtained an example of it. Robert Kapsis (1986) found that, while Alfred Hitchcock did not

instigate a 1963 retrospective series of his films at MoMA, curator Richard Griffith did contract the publicity company handling Hitchcock's film *The Birds* to pay \$1,000 in shipping costs for the films to be shown and \$4,000 for Peter Bogdanovich to produce a monograph on Hitchcock. In return the Museum held a special preview showing of *The Birds* one day prior to its New York opening and mailed copies of the monograph to members of the press and industry leaders.

Bogdanovich, then a writer and film programmer for the New Yorker repertory theater, originated the idea for the series. Richard Griffith liked Bogdanovich's film notes at the New Yorker enough to hire him to write a monograph for an Orson Welles retrospective in 1961. Bogdanovich had previously initiated a MoMA retrospective for Howard Hawks that was tied to Paramount's release of *Hatari* in 1962 under conditions similar to the Hitchcock series ("Bogdanovich Goes Back" 1985).

Kapsis used the Hitchcock exhibition to illustrate "that an understanding of the reputational process must take into account the potentially dynamic and reciprocally self-serving relationship that can evolve between the art world and the 'artist.'" He argued that the media coverage of the exhibition credited the Museum alone for its initiation and that this was the intention of Hitchcock and his publicity firm (1966, 33). Was this an instance of dishonest hucksterism in which Hitchcock bought off the Museum's reputation for \$5,000? Or did Richard Griffith consider Hitchcock's films worthy of both a film series and a critical monograph bearing the Museum's imprint and found the donated money merely a welcome subsidy?

The Hitchcock series represents an exchange of the Museum's cultural capital for Hitchcock's economic capital that may indeed be "reciprocally self-serving," as Kapsis charged. However, the Museum plays on this field of negotiation because it must. The judgments of its film department staff have to be influenced by the resources on which they depend as well as those they have to offer. By no means do they abdicate their critical

standards and tastes, but they must apply those standards to whatever exhibition opportunities that are available. The Museum's reputation accumulates through the responses of those around it to its exhibitions, publications, and judgments. The Hitchcock series represented an investment of reputation, not the sale of it, and the increased critical attention Hitchcock has subsequently received confirms the foresight of that investment. To ascribe that attention to the Museum's tastemaking power is to greatly underestimate the critical faculties of many individuals who came to appreciate Hitchcock.

Meanwhile, Hitchcock sought from the Museum's cultural capital what his economic capital could not yield: respect. His distributor at the time, Universal, saw value if that respect influenced movie reviewers. The Museum's impact on box office returns for *The Birds* was one part of a larger advertising campaign attempting to affect reviews and word of mouth. Hitchcock's penchant for self-promotion rejects an ideal of pure service to one's art, an ideal whose relevance to the real world of cultural production and reception is limited to its use as an impossible standard against which to measure artistic impurity. The power of this standard rises in tandem with the hypocrisy of claiming for art a separate existence apart from human history and self-interest.

Regarding the Disney exhibits I've just mentioned, the question to ask is whether the Museum of Modern Art would have been as willing to program Disney films without the underwriting that the Disney Company provided to turn screenings into media events. A look at the film department's programming schedule from the late 1960s onward affirms the staff's genuine interest in Disney animation even when Disney was not the focus of the exhibition per se.

The 1967 "Animation from Many Nations" series and the 1968-69 "Columbia Pictures" retrospective both included Disney shorts, as I have mentioned. A 1969 series, "The Machine in Film," placed Disney with the Fleischers, Len Lye, the Eames brothers, and Robert Breer. In April 1975 the series "History of Film" featured five early Disney

shorts on a program of ten cartoons from the 1920s. In June 1975, *Steamboat Willie* showed up on a program demonstrating the range of animation techniques as part of the series, "Shorts and Documentaries." January 1977 saw the Museum screen the 1945 Disney feature *The Three Caballeros* in its entirety at a time when Disney primarily used only segments of the film for the "Wonderful World of Disney" TV show.

This interest continued under Mary Lea Bandy. In 1979, the "Films for Young People" series included the partially animated Disney features *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971). Later that year, a gallery exhibit "Art of the Twenties" was accompanied by a series of films from the Museum's archives, which included a program on U.S. animation. Four Disney cartoons from the early "Mickey" period followed three Sullivan/Messmer "Felix the Cat" cartoons and an early Fleischer. In her notes for this program, Eileen Bowser argued "Abstract animated films, shown earlier in this series, extended concepts of modern graphics in time and motion. The popular animated cartoon, while seeking only to amuse, led as well into new realms of graphic art" (1979a). As an aside, the notes for those abstract films never mentioned animation among the techniques on display. The mention of abstraction seems to aid the aesthetic legitimacy of cartoons; the reverse is not the case.

Disney films again cropped up in both the 50th (1985) and 60th (1995) anniversaries of the Film Department, when Iris Barry's original programs were repeated. A program devoted to Disney's mid-1920s distributor, Margaret J. Winkler included three Disney silent shorts from his "Alice" and "Oswald the Lucky Rabbit" series in addition to Fleischer's "Koko the Clown," "Felix the Cat," and a live-action short. The program curator, Ron Magliozzi, noted that Disney of this period was derivative and formulaic (1991). Magliozzi told me the genesis of the program had nothing to do with Disney, but with a scrapbook that Winkler's daughter donated to the Museum, which piqued his

interest. The exhibit relied exclusively on film prints from other archives, rather than on any funds from Disney (personal interview, 16 April 1992).

Thus, when the Museum presented the corporate sponsored events, it was able to proclaim its commendation of Disney before a larger public, but it violated no curatorial imperative in so doing. Disney films were recognized by the Museum's film programs in a variety of contexts, not all effusively laudatory. However, Mickey Mouse is a testament to influential character design, Richard Oldenburg's admission of pomposity to the contrary, and the Disney artists deserve recognition for that accomplishment as much as for any other.

At what point might one consider the Museum's relationship to a corporation to cross the line of professional standards to appear unethical? Merely depending on the owners of film rights is not enough to damn the Museum, for all archives are similarly dependent. In fact, as Eileen Bowser cautions in *A Handbook for Film Archives*, the temptation to copy, lend, or project an archive's film prints in violation of agreements with rights owners is the real ethical trap, not subservience to those owners (1991, 177).

Should the Museum be taken to task for not clarifying which party initiated each exhibition? This is troublesome because the inception of each program is difficult to ascertain in many cases. A variety of individuals propose ideas from outside the Museum as well as among the staff. Adrienne Mancina claims that such proposals must include submissions of work for the staff to watch and evaluate (telephone interview 18 March 1992). Even if the entity that owns the films approaches the Museum, Mancina says the staff must review those films to make a decision about exhibiting them.

Despite how the press covers these series, the Museum credits its financial supporters and guest curators in its press releases and program notes. What I am arguing is that the Museum offers its reputation when it commits to any exhibition and no amount of second-guessing about the motives of its initiators can deny that. The fact that the

Museum's schedule is not brimming with one Hollywood public relations-boosting series after another is testimony to the efforts of its curators to seek the best films they can from all over the world. I will now turn to these efforts.

### **Animation from Beyond Hollywood**

The Akemark and Perry years saw a consolidation and expansion of exhibition organizing strategies already in use. In addition to the Hollywood screenings noted above and a "Salute to Walter Lantz" (1977), at which this creator of Woody Woodpecker was present, the Museum continued to broaden its animation presentations. Programs devoted to international animation festivals sampled contemporary animation. Animation was included in national retrospectives either focusing on recent developments (e.g. "Perspectives on French Cinema" in 1975) or periods of history (e.g. "Sjöström, Stiller and Contemporaries" in 1977). Other brief series covered on an individual animator's career (e.g. "John and Faith Hubley" in 1975, "Homage to Hans Richter" in 1977, "Films by Oskar Fischinger" in 1977, "Emil Cohl: The First Animator" in 1978), a studio's output (e.g. "Three Animated Films from Mezhrabpom-Rus Studios" in 1975), a sampling of avant-garde works (e.g. "History of the Avant-Garde Cinema" in 1976, "A Tribute to Anthology Film Archives" in 1977), or a review of a particular animation technique (e.g. "Cut-Out Animation" in 1978). Animation was scattered within ongoing presentations of "Films for Young People" (e.g. *The Point* [1970] by Fred Wolf, presented in 1975; *Yellow Submarine* [1968] by George Dunning; presented in 1976), "Recent Acquisitions," and "Films from the Archives." The Museum also came up with such creative programming themes as "The Machine in Film," as I noted above.

What is apparent from these many programs is that film archives rely heavily on each other's holdings when designing their screenings. Eileen Bowser encourages archives to make films available for each other's screenings, "provided that (1) prints are protected by preservation materials and (2) the permission of the rights owner is obtained." Those



archives belonging to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF) do not charge each other the loan fees that other borrowers might be charged, only “shipping, insurance, and import costs” (1991, 177). Those costs are partially covered by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, as well as some owners of film rights or foreign government cultural bodies. Such subsidies are preferable to attempts to make a projection program self-sustaining through memberships and admission fees, Bowser argues, because this imperative forces the screening of only the most popular films “and the archive will have difficulty in fulfilling its mission to show films of special interest to a limited audience, and may even find itself in a competitive position with commercial cinemas” (1991, 172).

The range of programs I mentioned above indicate that the Museum maintained its distinctiveness from commercial cinemas. In addition, Adrienne Mancina continued to present the best of the international animation festivals, including Zagreb ‘74 and ‘78, Annecy ‘77, and Ottawa ‘78. In these series she shared curatorial duties with Louise Beaudet of Cinémathèque Québécoise and others, such as Ian Birnie of the Art Gallery of Ontario, animated film specialist Charles Samu, and Camille Cook of the Film Centre of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibits traveled to the above mentioned organizations.

Through its relationship to the festivals, the Museum presented other themed animation programs. A presentation at Annecy ‘75 appeared at MoMA as “Pioneers of Japanese Animation,” in 1977 before touring many other institutions in the United States and Canada. The Japan Film Library Council and the National Film Center in Tokyo were the archives that supplied the necessary prints. Adrienne Mancina was thus able to organize a traveling exhibit in which program notes were already available from Annecy and the National Film Center, which detailed how Japanese animation of the 1920s made use of

folktales, shadow theater, and Meiji era prints until falling increasingly under the sway of Western subjects and techniques (Tessier et al. 1977).

The “History of American Avant-Garde Cinema” series in 1976 stopped at the Museum of Modern Art on the way to other U.S. cities in “the first nationwide effort to cultivate new audiences” for the avant-garde film, according to Cecile Starr in the *New York Times* (1976). This required the support of the American Federation of Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. John Hanhardt, film and video curator at the Whitney Museum put together 39 films for the series, including works by experimental animators Harry Smith, Jordan Belson, and James Whitney.

An example of the Museum’s thriftiness is its reuse of the press release from 1953 I discussed above for its program notes on “Films by Oskar Fischinger” in 1977. However, the notes do mention William Moritz’s more recent writings on Fischinger, and also cited their availability in the Museum bookstore. Also, both Fischinger’s widow, Elfriede, and Moritz were on hand at the screenings with many fragmentary works that complemented the completed films in the Museum’s collection. This shows how the Museum attempts to offer something new when presenting a subject it has already covered.

Other guest curators lent their own brands of erudition to the Museum’s film programs. Ian Birnie both lectured and provided fifteen pages of program notes for his series of three programs on cut-out animation (1978). His selections crossed national borders and spanned the divide between commercial and non-commercial films in considering this collage-in-motion mode of animation. In his introduction, he quoted Polish animator Jan Lenica as saying that cut-out animation is “the only possibility to make a film like a painting.” In keeping with that sentiment Birnie drew from the discourse about modern painting to discuss the films, dividing his programs into the themes “Pioneers,” “Formalists,” and “Expressionists.” He also cited a number of critics’ responses to the individual films, as well as statements by the animators themselves.

Another guest curator, Donald Crafton, had received his Ph.D. at Yale for a dissertation on the pioneer animator Emile Cohl in 1977. His intention to resurrect Cohl's reputation was apparent in the title of his program notes, "Emile Cohl: The First Animator." While Crafton acknowledged J. Stuart Blackton's earlier animation, he asserted Cohl "was the first to apply the necessary qualities of intellect, imagination, Benedictine patience and the obsessive love of drawing that mark great animators." Additionally, Crafton placed Cohl in the company of the modern art painters, claiming Cohl's "lines, objects and images are in a constant metamorphic flux, reflecting a Bergsonian worldview not totally unlike that of his contemporaries, the Cubists."

These guest curators shared their interests and knowledge as advocates for the films they presented. They were followed in the 1980s and 1990s by other experts specializing in particular areas of animation, such as Charles Samu, who programmed many Eastern European screenings; Cecile Starr, who programmed experimental animation, Roger Horrocks, who programmed a Len Lye tribute; and Julianne Burton, who programmed a Latin American retrospective.

### **The Mary Lea Bandy Years**

When Mary Lea Bandy assumed leadership of the Department of Film in 1978, the Museum of Modern Art was about to undertake a massive expansion project that would also raise money by selling the air rights above the Museum to a developer of luxury condominiums. The trustees had shepherded the project through years of negotiations and legal complications until construction began in 1980 and was completed in 1984. The film exhibition program continued through much of the construction. The film department gained a second theater and exhibition space in the basement, as well as a new film study center and new preservation facilities on the fifth floor (Greenbaum 1984, 463). These additions were aided by contributions from wealthy individuals and organizations,

including Roy and Niuta Titus, trustee Celeste Bartos, the Gottesman Foundation, the Louis B. Mayer Foundation, and Warner Communications, Inc., some of whose names adorn the various film facilities. Despite the influx of funding, the Museum still required more money to run its film department.

In 1985 *Variety* compiled a special section honoring the Department of Film's 50th anniversary. In it Jim Robbins (1985) noted that they operated under such chronic funding shortages that "the film department had to cancel its short film showcase just before the museum's renovation began in 1980, do away with the series of children's pics on weekends, gradually cut back on the Cineprobe indieprod fare, and postpone important shows." Curator Adrienne Mancina also told Robbins the department no longer supported a staff musician to accompany silent film screenings; it had to cut down on program notes; and it needed more travel funds for curators to see films in their native countries in order to plan exhibitions.

In the same issue, curator Laurence Kardish told *Variety* how the Department of Film coped with its continuing cash crunch through joint efforts between MoMA and such partners as the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Pacific Film Archive, Film Society of Lincoln Center, American Film Institute, and the American Federation of the Arts. In addition, he stated, "A new aspect of our program is that MoMA is going to seek corporate backing from outside of the film industry. We are encouraging corporations to underwrite specifically film exhibitions, not just the traditional painting and sculpture programs" (Cohn 1985).

One example of this was a series called "Close-Up of Japan: New Films/Animation" jointly hosted by MoMA and the Japan Society in January 1986. The Museum of Modern Art showed programs devoted to three master Japanese animators, contemporary Japanese animation, and Japanese television commercials. The Japan Society held New York premieres of five feature films from Japan, two of which were animated.

An expensive booklet served as program notes. The film series was part of a much longer series of cultural activities, "Close-Up of Japan New York 1985-86," funded by the Mitsui Group. Mitsui is one of Japan's top keiretsu conglomerates, dominating finance, transportation, and industry rather than media. This allowed the Museum to publicize coincidentally timed program of highlights from the animation festival Hiroshima '85, which shared animators with "Close-Up of Japan" ("New Animation from Japan" 1985).

Mancia and Kardish described problems and solutions that are shared by the rest of the Museum and the cultural community as a whole. Penelope Houston paraphrased Mary Lea Bandy's lament at the current situation of arts funding: "the very rich, the traditional patrons of the great galleries and museums, are not in a mood for giving money to the arts. To prefer art to an AIDS or refugee charity is to show oneself as out of touch with the world" (1994, 92).

This climate of greater competition for fewer dollars was exacerbated by a shift in governmental priorities respecting arts funding that began in the 1980s during the Reagan administration. Paul DiMaggio argues that this shift in priorities damaged the arts in several ways: tax reforms reduced incentives to donate to the arts; federal cuts in social services and environmental protections pressured corporations and foundations to donate to these causes at the expense of the arts; and federal funding cuts caused cascading cuts in state and local levels of funding (1986, 66).

The Museum has handled economic uncertainties and deficits throughout its history, from its birth at the outset of the Great Depression. Alice Goldfarb Marquis credits Alfred Barr with such innovations in revenue generation as the sale of memberships and the operation of a restaurant and bookstore within the Museum, despite trustees' qualms that "the museum's high-minded atmosphere would be compromised" (1989, 174, 360). Indeed, Barr's use of publicity agents to promote the Museum's activities was also novel in its time, as I have noted.

After the turmoil in the late 1960s and 1970s regarding the Museum's funding and administration, MoMA responded to pressures within the arts to market itself according to the same principles employed by corporations like Disney when they participate in museum exhibitions. With the advent of blockbuster exhibitions, museums have sought to increase their income and their name recognition through large scale special events that gain the attention of the press and the public. Two such shows that MoMA organized required formal agreements with the French Ministry of Culture and a number of French museums. Those were the 1977 exhibition "Cézanne: The Late Work" and the even grander scale 1979-80 "Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective" (Hunter 1984, 32-3). A 1992 large scale exhibit "Henri Matisse: A Retrospective" continued this tradition.

The best example of this among its animation offerings was the Museum of Modern Art's several-month retrospective of Warner Bros. cartoons from September 1985 through January 1986. I would like to consider how the scale of this exhibition greatly enhanced the amount of journalistic and critical responses it garnered in relation to the Museum's other animation programs. Then I will return to MoMA's more modest ongoing support for the full range of animation, which cannot compete for public awareness on anywhere near the same scale. Finally, I will assess MoMA's overall role in legitimating animation as an art form.

### **Large Scale Exhibitions**

Thomas Hoving, former director of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, is usually given credit for ushering in the era of the blockbuster exhibition in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hoving claimed to be serving the museum's civic responsibility by attracting the public in droves using large scale temporary exhibitions on loan. He designed these exhibitions to be self-supporting through special admission prices, merchandise, food, and grants from corporations and foundations. However, Micheal Conforti argues that such exhibitions risk sacrificing a museum's roles of preserving objects in its

permanent collection and maintaining the aesthetic standards on which its integrity depends (Conforti 1986). He fears the values driving the marketplace may overwhelm those of artistic judgment, so that economic factors increasingly determine what is exhibited.

On a practical level, Albert Elsen summarizes the many negatives of blockbuster exhibitions: “expectations are established that cannot be consistently met; financial risks are considerable; the longterm demands on the staff are severe and create crises of professional identity and purpose; the museum’s operations and display of the permanent collection are disrupted for substantial periods of time; and the very character of the museum may change in ways uncongenial to its oldest and most loyal supporters” (1986, 26).

However, economists James Heilbrun and Charles Gray state that blockbusters increase public exposure to art in two ways: through a “concentration effect” of accumulating so much art on one subject from many locations; and through a “distribution effect” when the blockbuster exhibit travels to locations that might be remote from major collections (1993, 186). Indeed, Elsen counters his list of negatives with several positives that he feels justify blockbuster exhibitions. He finds practical benefits for museums in terms of income, corporate sponsorship, and increased prestige and visibility; but he also claims blockbusters support the dreams of curators to provide unique contexts for art by temporarily uniting masterpieces that are usually geographically disbursed. For example, “the public that saw the 1980 Picasso show at MoMA will long remember the incredible range of his art from his student days through the year of his death” (1986, 26).

### **Warner Bros. Cartoons Golden Jubilee**

The Museum of Modern Art’s “Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective” was indeed a blockbuster, taking up the museum’s entire exhibit space, even that reserved for the permanent collection. It provided a focal point to the Museum’s 50th anniversary fund drive, produced a catalog that sold well, and contributed, along with the sale of the Museum’s air rights, to the first annual surplus in the Museum’s history according to the

**Museum's *Annual Report* for 1979-80. To find an animation exhibition that approached this scope relative to the size of its host institution, one would have to look outside of the Museum of Modern Art to the Whitney Museum's 1981 exhibition of "Disney's Animations and Animators" and that only devoted one of its several floors to Disney art and film screenings.**

**However, the Museum of Modern Art's 1985 "Warner Bros. Cartoons Golden Jubilee" film series and concurrent wall exhibit "That's Not All, Folks!" was larger and and lasted longer than any previous or subsequent exhibit MoMA had devoted exclusively to animation. It filled the Museum's basement film exhibit hall and offered seventeen consecutive weekend screenings of programs. It also shared with the Picasso show an ability to attract press coverage, critical reviews, and attendance to an extent unmatched by its other animation screenings or exhibits.**

**I have already considered the ethics of subsidized exhibitions of Disney films that benefit the corporation's publicity for current releases and concluded that previous Disney screenings in the absence of such subsidies offer evidence of genuine curatorial interest in the films themselves. This is most definitely the case for the Warner Bros. films, as I have shown with the series in the 1970s highlighting the achievements of Warner animation directors Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett, and Tex Avery, as well as the smattering of Warner Bros. cartoons screened throughout the Museum's history.**

**Instead of belaboring the publicity benefits that corporate sponsors derived from the Warner Bros. exhibit, I would rather consider how other exhibit participants also gained from involvement with the exhibit. The increased aesthetic legitimacy already accorded some animation in 1985 yielded the possibility for the Museum to derive as many advantages from publicity as could the corporate sponsors.**

**The exhibit contributors can be divided into the corporate sponsors, Museum curators, and guest curators. The role of the artists in the negotiations was quite limited and**



peripheral; their cooperation was beneficial but unnecessary to the proceedings. In fact, when I asked animation director Chuck Jones about his response to the exhibit, he said he was surprised and flattered at the honor and just went along with it (personal communication, 28 October 1989).

The corporate sponsors were Warner Bros.; Warner's merchandising subsidiary, Licensing Corporation of America; and ABC Television, which began to broadcast "Bugs Bunny's Looney Tunes Comedy Hour" on Saturday mornings in September 1985. Publicly representing the sponsors were executive vice president of Warner Bros. Inc. and president of Warner Bros. Cartoons, Edward Bleier; New York liaison for cartoons, Eric Frankel; and spokesperson Debbi Laurita (Putzer 1985; Brown 1985; Graham 1985). The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Film curators involved in the show were Adrienne Mancina; Mary Corliss, assistant curator of film stills; and Jytte Jensen, curatorial assistant.

Leonard Maltin was guest curator of the film series and freelance critic and animation art collector Steve Schneider was guest curator of the wall exhibit ("MoMA to Salute" 1985). Schneider's collection of Warner Bros. animation cels, background paintings, drawings, model sheets, and other production art formed the basis for the wall exhibit. Chuck Jones also drew large pictures of the Warner Bros. characters on the walls.

The idea for the exhibit arose in several quarters over the course of years. Schneider stated that he wrote to the Museum suggesting an exhibit of art from his collection based on an earlier exhibit he organized at the Museum of Cartoon Art in Rye Brook, New York. He said that Mary Corliss expressed interest and, after a delay from 1980-84 due to the museum's building expansion, she contacted him about going ahead with the exhibit (telephone interview, 9 May 1990). According to Corliss, Warner Bros. had been planning to celebrate a major anniversary of its cartoon studio and had even considered coming to the Museum with a proposed exhibit when the curators approached them first (telephone interview, 16 April 1992). An article in *Variety* affirms that the Museum approached

Warner Bros. (Putzer 1985, 6). Corliss's candor at mentioning the prospect that a corporate entity would solicit the Museum's approbation rather than merely receiving it reinforces my conclusion that MoMA's commitment to an exhibit counts more to its staff than who initiated it.

Corliss noted that the staff members of the film department were Warner Bros. cartoon aficionados and they had been interested in mounting such a retrospective. She said that the exhibit was conceived from the outset to rely on funding and film prints from Warner Bros. and therefore had to wait for the appropriate year when the studio could promote an anniversary. However, 1985 was not the 50th anniversary of the studio's existence. As Schneider documents in his book on the history of the Warner Bros. cartoon studio, *That's All, Folks!*, Leon Schlesinger actually founded the studio in 1930 and the only landmark event of 1935 was the first appearance of Porky Pig (1988, 38). Yet, by 1985 Warner Home Video was ready to enter the sell-through market that Disney had successfully exploited and a golden anniversary made a valuable marketing tool for selling videotapes under the title "Golden Jubilee 24 Karat Collection." According to *Variety*, a number of recent Warner Bros. compilation movies had been issued on video in a higher price range but the new series was aimed at consumers rather than video rental outlets ("WHV Heats Kidvid Competition" 1985).

Leonard Maltin was brought in to choose a long list of films from which the final film programs would be selected. While his name recognition as a film commentator on the syndicated "Entertainment Tonight" television program was a draw for the exhibit, I noted above that he was knowledgeable about American animation and Hollywood movies generally. He stated that he was under no constraints regarding what cartoons to select; he merely wanted to offer a broad overview of the best of the studio's output and give new exposure to some of the lesser-known older films (telephone interview, 21 May 1990). While Maltin may have felt no constraints, Adrienne Mancina and Jytte Jensen had to obtain

the actual prints, which were controlled by different organizations. Mancia told me that in addition to using Warner Bros. as a source of film prints, they received the cooperation of MGM/UA for the pre-1948 color cartoons and also obtained some prints from private collectors (telephone interview, 18 March 1992).

The corporate sponsors provided funds that made it possible to obtain the best 35mm prints of each chosen film, which in the case of some black-and-white cartoons from the 1930s, meant striking new prints, according to Maltin. They also paid the costs of installing the exhibit and publicizing it. One of those publicity events was an opening night invitational black-tie gala honoring directors Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng on 10 September 1985. The third intended honoree was Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny and most other Warner Bros. characters, but he was unable to go to the event due to an illness. Warner Bros. had hired Lorne Michaels of "Saturday Night Live" fame, to produce a primetime television special using footage of the event. Michaels persuaded such celebrities as Cher, Marvin Hamlisch, and Penny Marshall to provide a degree of star power (Shales 1985). The special, "Bugs Bunny/Looney Tunes All-Star 50th Anniversary," aired 14 January 1986 on CBS stations (Bianculli 1986).

The exhibit began to receive news coverage long before it opened. A late July 1985 press release about the exhibit was picked up by newspapers across the country and was mentioned on the television news broadcasts of KIRO in Seattle, Washington; WNBC in New York City, WBNS in Columbus, Ohio; and WSMV in Nashville, Tennessee. Mutual Radio Network presented a story on it as well. By mid-August, Tom Shales wrote an extended appreciation in the *Washington Post* (1985a). The week before the opening saw the *Christian Science Monitor* (Maddocks 1985), *USA Today* (Graham 1985), and *Time* (Corliss 1985a) weigh in with articles as well.

The invitational gala was preceded by a press conference and together they generated write-ups in the *New York Times* (Kaplan 1985), *Newsday* (Gelmis 1985), the

*New York Post* (Burden 1985), and the *Washington Post* (Shales 1985b). Journalistic criticism continued through the fall with pieces in the *Chicago Tribune* (Beale 1985), *Newsweek* (Givens 1985), *Back Stage* (Beckerman 1985), and *TV Guide* (Cocks 1985). Richard Corliss (1985b) also used the exhibit to occasion an extended essayistic review of the Warner Bros. studio's output in that year's November/December issue of *Film Comment*, which also included a shorter appreciation by David Chute (1985).

Before analyzing what these writers had to say, I would like to note the resounding popularity of the exhibit. While the Museum of Modern Art does not make available attendance figures for its screenings, Maltin and Schneider spoke of the overflowing crowds at the shows, to which I can attest as a two-time visitor in December 1985. An item from the PR Newswire estimated that 300,000 people had seen the exhibit by its conclusion ("The Miami Film Festival" 1986). In addition, the Museum's film stills cataloger, Terry Geesken, suggested to me another indicator of the exhibit's success was that animation art collectors kept calling MoMA offering to sell their collections to the museum, but it did not have the resources to buy them (telephone interview, 21 May 1990).

The articles I have cited above all shared a genuine enthusiasm for the Warner Bros. studio and similar themes emerge in their commentary. However, the journalistic critics of the newspapers and news magazines differed from the essayistic critics of the film-oriented journal, *Film Comment*, in that they relied on quotations from the directors or others officially involved with the MoMA exhibit to a greater extent. In contrast, the essayists generally displayed more in-depth knowledge of each director's oeuvre. The journalists, lacking this knowledge, obtained information from press conferences and press kits subsidized by the corporate sponsors.

In addition, the journalistic critics appealed to readers' nostalgia to a greater degree than did the essayists. Martin Burden's article titled "Be Ve-wy, Ve-wy Quiet, It's Wabbit

**Time at MoMA” took on the verbal impediments of cartoon character Elmer Fudd, seeking the reader’s uncritical indulgence. Tom Shales ended his article reminiscing about “standing at the very imposing candy counter of the old Rialto” until someone uttered the magic words ““Come on! You’re missing the cartoon!”” (1985a).**

**Despite such differences, there was much common ground among all of the writers. Many noted the apparent disjunction between the serious, imposing galleries of the Museum of Modern Art and the irreverent, slam-bang humor of the cartoons. Richard Corliss opened his *Film Comment* article with an anecdote about a visitor to the exhibit who stifled a laugh because “surely you’re not supposed to laugh at a MoMA exhibition” (1985b, 11). Melvin Maddocks was happy that the “very serious Museum of Modern Art” was mounting the exhibit, “so long as we don’t kill the laughs” (1985). The title of the piece by Jay Cocks, “There’s a Renoir... There’s a Monet... There’s a—Daffy Duck?!” echoed their sentiments. A number of writers found Jones and Freleng responding in much the same way. For example, Joseph Gelmis quoted Jones: “We made pictures for the theaters. They were there to make people laugh, a relief from the melodrama. We hoped they would last three years. The idea that we would be recognized 50 years later is surprising, if not absurd” (1985).**

**Others noted the value of the Museum’s endorsement. Tom Shales found it “particularly gratifying” that the Museum of Modern Art was “implicitly conceding that art is just what these fine madnenses are” (1985a). Animator Howard Beckerman contrasted the Warner Bros. exhibit with MoMA’s 1955 UPA exhibit: “[UPA], with its penchant for adapting the styles of the post-impressionists to the cartoon medium, seemed like a perfect choice for distinction in an institution devoted to ideas. The Warner Brothers cartoons were always more of a popular crowd pleaser and so seeing their work being accorded recognition, finally, is an even more amazing and wonderful thing” (1985, 41).**

Another recurring theme is the artistic poverty of current Saturday morning cartoons in comparison to the decades-old Warner output and Warner's mistreatment of its own gems. Ron Givens quoted Chuck Jones's assessment that current television animation was "illustrated radio" (1985, 12). Tom Shales bemoaned the fact that even the Warner Bros. cartoons were bowdlerized when shown on television and he touted the availability of the "Golden Jubilee" videocassettes as a means to "help right this wrong" (1985a). Thus, he selectively contributed to the Warner Bros. marketing through his approval of those products that best preserve the original state of the cartoons.

Similarly, David Chute found value in the videocassette series for providing access to the cartoons in their entirety. However, he was concerned that, for most people, the set of tapes "*becomes* the Warner Bros. cartoon library" and, as such, underrepresents the metamorphic, fantastic, stylistically diverse creations of Warner directors Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, and Frank Tashlin. Against this shortsightedness he elevates MoMA's Warner retrospective for including "66 of the more exotic pre-1948 cartoons" (1985, 15). He took interest in the means by which corporate owners enforce canon formation through the limited release of sanctified cultural products.

Also common among the writers is their delight that not only the cartoons have been recognized for their artistry, but so have the creators. As Lewis Beale lamented, "Jones and Freleng, directors who were the cornerstones of an animation unite that, in its own way, was as successful as the Disney studio, slaved away in relative obscurity" (1985). Corliss discussed how the Warner Bros. directors "mixed to perfection (and not always in equal proportion) character comedy and self-irreverential modernism.... The lousy thing was, nobody noticed. Disney, who was perhaps entitled, won eleven of the first twelve Academy Awards for animated short subject. Warners, in more than 30 years, won just five" (1985b, 13).

The critics set Disney up as the artistically and economically dominant force in Hollywood animation, while the the Warner Bros. auteurs boldly opposed that dominant aesthetic. For example, Ron Givens singled out Chuck Jones for praise in his article "Honoring a Daffy Auteur," noting "The anarchic side of Chuck Jones comes out vividly in 'Duck Amuck'... which makes a shambles of the few conventions adhered to by Warners cartoonists" (1985, 12). Peter W. Kaplan quoted Adrienne Mancia's similar point: "It's not that I don't like Mickey Mouse, but the subversive, anarchic world only existed in the Warner Brothers cartoons" (1985).

For some writers, even the belated recognition of the Warner cartoons' artistic worth could not undo the economic injustice the artists suffered. Jefferson Graham quoted Friz Freleng saying of the 50th anniversary, "It inflates my ego a little bit, but there's no coin involved. I don't think I'll collect \$1.50 a year from Warner Bros." (1985). Tom Shales also noted that none of the artists receive royalties from the ancillary income the cartoons generate in each new medium and that Warner Bros. actually charges Jones's daughter a royalty to market the limited edition animation cels Jones creates using Warner characters (1985a). Both Shales and Graham gave company man Edward Bleier a chance to defend Warner's executive decisions as vastly improved over those of the previous regime.

A notable aspect of these appreciations is that they maintain an interest in how successful the cartoons were in popular and economic terms as well as aesthetic ones. As Barbara Hernnstein Smith (1988) argues, such a mix of evaluative criteria intermingles sacred aesthetic values with profane business concerns, making plain a connection that is often disavowed. The journalistic critics seemed more at ease with this intermingling, while the essayistic writing of Corliss and Chute adhered to a hierarchy that ranks aesthetics above economics. This is especially evident in Chute's claim, "One plausible account of the history of American animation insists that the form was born in a surreal state of grace and has been steadily falling away from the pure light source ever since" (1985, 14).

Many of the writers employed auteurist frameworks to evaluate the output of the Warner Bros. studio, despite my confirmation in chapter 1 that Howard Becker's sociology of art worlds would better describe the collaborative and hierarchically divided economy of commercial cartoon production. On the other hand, as critics with an investment in those art worlds, they gain much from auteurism. First, this concept provides an artist to accompany an artwork. It offers an escape from the idea of popular culture as mass-produced by particularizing the producer. This facilitates the critic's ability to accord a cartoon legitimacy as an artwork; it provides a name to promote, an individual in whom a critic can stake a personal claim. Critics then may abstract the artists from their conditions of production, externalizing the non-aesthetic factors such as producer Leon Schlesinger's tightfistedness. They pit art against business in a way that excoriates all concerns for profits or corporate growth. Then it becomes easier to speak of the Warner Bros. stable of directors as an artistic movement or school, who were defining themselves against the dominant aesthetic of Disney.

Because the creators were not the ones to reap the profits from the Warner Bros. cartoons, they could be made to fit the romantic mythology of the unappreciated artistic geniuses whose greatness requires the lapse of time for the establishment to notice. At first, their similarities to other aesthetic innovators could only be ascertained by those discerning enough to bridge the chasm between commercial entertainment and the avant-garde. According to Timothy White (1990), a group of critics emerged in the 1970s who did just that by linking Warner Bros. cartoon auteurs to European art cinema directors. For example, Richard Thompson called *Last Year at Marienbad* a "child" of Chuck Jones's Road Runner series ([1971] 1976, 133); J. Hoberman traced influences on Godard back to Frank Tashlin (1978); and Ronnie Scheib claimed Tex Avery "joins such live-action directors as Buñuel, Rossellini, Fuller, and Godard in the elaboration of a modernist film vocabulary" (1980, 114).



The strategy of these critics was to express their avant-garde taste in commercial entertainment products, which might influence other avant-garde art world members to accept those cartoons. This exemplifies the way tastemakers convert the common or banal into the distinctive according to Bourdieu (1984). Their attempt to align Warner Bros. animation with the European art cinema canon did not seek to change the aesthetic criteria that dictated legitimacy, only to broaden their application to other candidates for admission. This strategy confirms the critics' investment in and orientation toward the avant-garde artworld as a source of their own critical identities.

By the time of the 1985 MoMA exhibit, Corliss and Chute made no such references. Corliss mentioned Hollywood live-action directors Herbert Ross and Bob Zemeckis only to doubt the precision of their comic timing compared to that of Tex Avery and Chuck Jones (1985b, 12). Auteurism remained, but artistic legitimacy for Warner Bros. cartoons no longer required any bows in the direction of Europe or the avant-garde in general. In fact, popularity no longer counted against the films as something to be made up for through, say, technological invention or craftsmanship, as in the case of Disney.

Among the Museum of Modern Art staff this was not always the case. Adrienne Mancina did not want to address the issue of popularity, claiming that her sense of success derives from placing the best films into the screening schedule, not from promoting them or filling the theater (telephone interview, 18 March 1992). As an aesthetic evaluator at a non-profit institution of cultural consecration, she attempts to distance her priorities from those of the entertainment industry on which she must depend for a portion of her programs. This stance helps insulate the Museum's curatorial decisions from accountability to the marketplace values that Michael Conforti warns against.

Indeed, Mary Lea Bandy found reason to champion the artistry of American films precisely because their reputations "have suffered from their very popularity" (Kimmelman 1984, 75). By stressing formal elements, such as visual style and art direction, she hoped

to draw attention to the aesthetic richness behind the entertainment. From this perspective, such exhibits as the “Warner Bros. Cartoon Golden Jubilee” and “That’s Not All, Folks!” defy elitist snobbery regarding popular culture, rather than pander to mass audience tastes. The uniformly positive responses I’ve mentioned demonstrate how receptive both the public and the critical establishment were to the exhibits.

Even though it was not on the scale of blockbuster painting exhibits, the Warner Bros. exhibit did display Heilbrun and Gray’s “concentration effect” and “distribution effect.” While Steve Schneider’s art collection was already concentrated in his own hands, the 35mm prints of 122 animated shorts spanning the studio’s existence had not been gathered together since 1956, when Warner Bros. sold off its old backlog of color cartoons, as I noted in chapter 1.

The distribution effect occurred almost immediately after the Museum of Modern Art exhibit ended, when the wall exhibition and some of the films were shipped to Florida to accompany the Miami Film Festival held during February 1986 (Richter 1986). Chuck Jones and Steve Schneider were both guests of honor during the Festival. Some of the newly struck film prints were later used for a Bob Clampett retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, New York, during the winter of 1989-90, a portion of which became a traveling film program throughout 1990. In 1993 at MoMA, Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng were each given a single program tribute “by popular request,” and Freleng’s death in 1995 occasioned a memorial week of screenings in February 1996.

Schneider claimed that in the years preceding the exhibit, Warner Bros. looked askance at his “archeological” interest in the history of the animation studio. However, since then he gained the corporation’s cooperation in writing his book about it, *That’s All Folks!* (telephone interview, 9 May 1990). Schneider’s animation art collection has also

risen in market value since its exposure at the Museum of Modern Art, although prices of Warner Bros. art have lagged significantly behind Disney art, as I will show in chapter 4.

Since the exhibit, Schneider and Maltin have continued their professional relations with the corporate owners of the cartoons. Schneider lent his collection for a traveling exhibit of Warner animation art that originated with the Philharmonic Center for the Arts in Naples, Florida and visited such staid institutions as the Baltimore Museum of Art over the course of 1990-91 as part of Bugs Bunny's 50th Birthday merchandising blitz. Schneider's book served as the exhibit catalog. Maltin has contributed to advertising supplements for the 50th Birthday salute; he wrote the summary statements on the boxes of the "Golden Jubilee" home videos for Warner; and later hosted videos entitled "Bugs and Daffy: The Wartime Cartoons" and "Cartoons, for Big Kids" for Turner Entertainment Co., current owners of the MGM/UA collection of the pre-1948 Warner cartoons.

These events illustrate how the separate interests of aficionados, artists, museum officials, critics, and communication industry executives can dovetail in a process of mutual value enhancement. The cartoons themselves have gained the retrospective glow of art that was created in the golden age of Hollywood animation. The exhibit presented items of Warner Bros. animation art as objects of aesthetic value in their own right. The aficionados, collectors, and critics who have championed these works bask in the reflected glory of institutional recognition of their connoisseurship and some of them enhance their connections with the industry itself. The Museum of Modern Art and its staff gain as well, because their glorification of popular culture confirms the tastes of a broader segment of the population than they court through other exhibits. Their demonstration of modernist aesthetics within the realm of the familiar contributes to the museum's proselytizing mission for modern art.

Because the Warner Bros. cartoons are part of a popular communication industry that dominates culture economically and demographically, elite cultural institutions like the

Museum of Modern Art depend on corporate support in order to exercise their own authority over taste. The cultural consecration they bestow with such an exhibit is then available for exploitation by the communication industry, which carefully converts the cultural status into economic capital by playing up the generalized notion of quality.

### **National Film Board of Canada Retrospectives**

Large scale film retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art were never the sole province of Hollywood studio films. For example, Museum was able to generate significant press coverage of its anniversary retrospectives for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in 1981 and 1989, each of which went on for months (the latter included non-NFB Canadian films). Surrounding these exhibitions were more modest celebrations of this government-sponsored producer of animation, documentary, and fiction films, as well as screenings of works by its individual filmmakers.

Over the decades, Norman McLaren's name became synonymous with the National Film Board's animation unit. NFB founder John Grierson invited him to set up the animation unit in 1941, only two years after the Film Board itself was established. I have noted above that the Museum presented McLaren's work several times during the 1950s, and he was a panelist for a discussion about experimentation in animation in 1957. In between the 1981 and 1989 retrospectives, the Museum held the United States premiere for McLaren's final film for the NFB, *Narcissus*, in 1983; it received from the Film Board the complete Norman McLaren collection, for which it screened a one-day retrospective in 1985; and its "Best of Zagreb '86" series included two programs in tribute to McLaren. Subsequent to the 1989 retrospective, McLaren's work has cropped up repeatedly in the Museum's sporadic "Family Films" series and a documentary about the filmmaker by Donald McWilliams, *Creative Process: Norman McLaren*, was screened in 1991.

Because many animators from around the world have spent some time working at the National Film Board of Canada, the Museum's presentation of their work outside of

NFB-themed programs is not a reliable means of judging the Museum's interest in this unit's productions. Yet, an animator like Co Hoedeman has a long track record with the NFB, and thus, the retrospective program of his work in 1985 was a tribute to the Film Board as well. The films of other NFB animators, such as Grant Munro, René Jodoin, Derek Lamb, and Caroline Leaf have also appeared under the rubrics of the "Family Films" series, "Recent Acquisitions," and "Selections from the Circulating Library."

The last category of screening became more frequent soon after the acquisition of 37 films in the National Film Board of Canada animation collection in 1984. So many live-action and animated films from the NFB have entered the Museum of Modern Art's Circulating Library that the 1984 *Circulating Film Library Catalog* gives them a special section and an interpretive essay by Sally Bochner, Public Relations Officer of the NFB. Thus, in contrast to the broadly based sections on silent fiction, sound fiction, documentary film, experimental film, films on the arts, and film study, the NFB section stands next to that for British independent film. What demarcates these sections is that each came about through sizeable acquisitions from a single organization, the National Film Board and the British Film Institute, respectively.

Bochner also wrote the handsome booklet describing the Film Board's animation, documentary, and fiction production for the 1981 three-part, multi-month retrospective. The monthlong "Part One: Animation" portion of the retrospective comprised 150 films in 20 programs covering such topics as "Educational and Instructional Films," "Scientific Films," "Eskimo Themes," and "About Society." Norman McLaren's entire career at the NFB was also reviewed in five programs ("Museum to Honor National Film Board" 1980).

The press coverage in New York and in a newswire story originating from the National Film Board's home base of Montreal both dwelled on the irony that its international reputation exceeds its domestic stature. In Canada, it continually fights

budget-cutters who cite its competition against an expanded private film industry. In reviewing the Film Board's 40 years of activities, Andrew Malcolm did single out Norman McLaren contributing to its "golden decade" beginning in the late 1950s when the NFB "was a homespun mecca for many artistically inclined Canadians." Meanwhile, Brigid Phillips focused more on the board's present situation, helped by the New York exhibit and its further travel to Los Angeles, Chicago, and France (Malcolm 1981; Phillips 1981).

The 1989 exhibit celebrated the National Film Board's 50th anniversary, joining such cultural organizations as the Annecy animation festival in doing so. The Museum actually produced two tributes, the first a weeklong, five-program "50th Anniversary Sampler" in May, and the second, a longer series, "O Canada: L'Amour du Cinema from North to South." Both included animation, the latter placing it in two-week series: "A Glance at Animation in Canada." This time, films from independent production houses in Canada were included in the series, as well as those from the National Film Board.

Articles commenting on this anniversary echoed themes brought out in 1981. As David Sterritt put it, "Nowhere else has a government film agency racked up such an impressive reputation on at least three levels: for artistic quality, for thoughtfulness, and for independence from governmental influence as well as the whims of fashion" (1989). In addition, a piece by a Canadian television reporter quoted Film Board filmmaker Colin Low, who preferred the low budgets and artistic freedom to the "decadent era of American films, where the extravagance is totally artistically counterproductive on a vast scale." Animator Caroline Leaf left the stress of freelancing in Boston to be "left alone to do what I wanted" at the NFB (Curtin 1989). These filmmakers give up all rights to the films they produce for the National Film Board, but are glad to trade that for artistic control.

This kind of exhibit offers a contrast to the commercially based film production system that dominates the United States. The Film Board's mandate to "interpret Canada to Canadians and to other countries" elevated Canada's cultural identity above the imperatives

of the American-dominated mass communications marketplace. Rather than merely reflect existing cultures of Canada, the NFB's animation unit actually created new cultural assets, which MoMA curator Larry Kardish asserted have made a "significant contribution" to the animated film across the world (quoted in Portman 1989).

### **Gaumont's Centennial**

In 1994, the Museum of Modern Art presented a two-and-a-half-monthlong series, "Gaumont Presents: A Century of French Cinema," which received some additional encore screenings in May before traveling to a number of U.S. and Canadian cities and returning to France in 1995. The series included 50 programs in its MoMA incarnation, while subsequent exhibitors selected which of those programs they wished to show. Of all the programs, only two included animation: "The Pioneers: Alice Guy and Others, 1900-1908," and "Emile Cohl: The Animated Screen, 1909-1910." A film by Cohl was the sole animation on the first program.

The scale of this exhibit generated press coverage in New York and in cities that subsequently hosted it. The bulk of these articles lauded the Gaumont studio's longevity for surviving since its founding in 1895. They also touted the variety of its output, which includes popular and critical successes and many fascinating rediscoveries. Among the latter, Emile Cohl received favorable mention as a now-obscure animation pioneer, who "experimented with trick photography and cut-and-paste techniques as early as 1905" (Guthmann 1994). John Anderson responded to his crude film experiments by noting "too often the filmmaker's fascination with novelty is far too apparent, although one realizes just how remarkable such manipulated motion pictures must have seemed in 1910" (1994). Others noted that Cohl "combined live action and animation some 80 years before *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*" (Brunette 1994), and that his "style is primitive but often clever" (Parks 1994).

In this case, animation played a small part in a large scale series, but the Gaumont retrospective offered the Museum a chance to simultaneously schedule two related series, "Forty Years of French Animated Cinema" and "Jeanne Moreau: Nouvelle Vague and Beyond." The former was a five-program series that played for a week at the opening of the Gaumont retrospective. The Museum's calendar notes for the animation series stated, "In 1956 animated cinema brought a breath of fresh air to the Cannes Film Festival, where it was given a slot for the first time." The programs were drawn from a retrospective at the International Animated Film Festival of Annecy '93, "showcasing the multifaceted talents of the practitioners of what has been scornfully termed 'the caboose on the Seventh Art'" (*Member's Calendar*, Museum of Modern Art, February 1994).

The programs grouped the films according to the subjects "War and Peace—Satire and Great Causes," "Fantastic Stories, Tales, and Legends," and "Poets, Painters, Musicians, and Animated Drawings." Also, animation teams and newcomers each got a program. As suggested by the program titles, the French approach animation as a set of tools for artistic expression rather than a medium strictly for children's entertainment. The recognition of animation as an art form increased in France to the point that Cannes spawned the full-fledged animation festival at Annecy in 1960. Despite the Museum's attempt to dovetail animation into the larger French-themed show, none of the New York newspapers mentioned this series when discussing the Gaumont retrospective.

### **Small Scale Exhibitions**

In this section I wish to take up the Museum's screening of animation on a smaller scale than the above examples. I would like to begin with the Museum's increasing interest in animation's specific application to education, advertising, and special effects. Such animation is usually done under contract to clients to serve purposes other than art. In the past, the Museum showed propaganda and training films using animation, but after World War II, such films were only included in larger retrospectives devoted to animators,



studios, or festivals in which the dominant portion of the work was for entertainment or artistic purposes.

### **Niche Market Animation**

The Museum's first celebration under Mary Lea Bandy of animation produced for educational market for animation was "Children's Television Workshop [CTW]: 10 Years of Film." This screening in June 1979 contained 33 animated films and 7 documentaries produced for the PBS series "Sesame Street" and "Electric Company." Guest curated by John Hanhardt, it was the same program he had presented at his own museum, the Whitney, in January of that year. The program notes by CTW president Joan Ganz Cooney described how freedom from length and style restrictions allowed the contracted animators to satisfy the curriculum requirements in creative ways (1979). The sponsored films of "Sesame Street" were again recognized by the Museum in 1989 with the retrospective "Sesame Street: The First Generation." In addition to the United States version of the show, clips from international versions were screened as well. Then, in 1992, when CTW supervising film producer Edith Zornow died, the Museum's "In Memoriam" series again ran some of the animated and live-action clips she commissioned for "Sesame Street."

The Film Department recognized other educational films in the fall of 1979 into the spring of 1980 with its "Salute to the American Film Festival." This festival is sponsored by the Educational Film Library Association and includes animation among the pedagogical techniques. In July 1985, "Films for Young People: Weston Woods Animated Films" offered a weeklong retrospective of a studio that specialized in adapting award-winning children's books into animated films. Again in 1995 the Museum devoted a week to films from the United Nations Film Archives, a number of which were animated films commissioned on such topics as the arms race, UNESCO, and women's roles.

The Museum also began to present advertising films as a category of sponsored films worthy of appreciation. Beginning in 1983 and continuing annually since then,

MoMA has been screening award-winning British advertising films under the title “British Advertising Broadcast Awards.” Much more recently, the Museum has also shown the best of American commercials, as judged by the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (1992 and 1995). It is not clear why American commercials lagged so far behind gaining the Museum’s recognition, but I speculate that the distance we have from British products allows readier acknowledgement of the aesthetic achievements of those commercials. Animation, of course, represents only a portion of the techniques these advertisements use, but its presence has increased in recent years.

A wall exhibit, “Peter Ellenshaw: Special Effects Artist,” in 1979 showed the Museum’s interest in techniques behind-the-scenes of filmmaking. Ellenshaw created matte paintings and models for Disney’s live-action features, including *The Black Hole*, whose release tied into the exhibit. This led the way for another tribute to a special effects master, whose milieu was stop-motion animation. In the summer of 1981, “Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects” combined a wall exhibit of his models, sketches, and film clips with a six-film retrospective of the films to which he contributed.

Harryhausen’s MoMA tribute was timed to coincide with the release of the latest film he worked on, *Clash of the Titans*. This film had the benefit of a 33-monthlong marketing campaign prior to its release that played up its fantasy elements and special effects to groups of science fiction and fantasy enthusiasts. The campaign downplayed its basis in Greek mythology and its cast, which included revered stage actors Laurence Olivier, Claire Bloom, and Maggie Smith. Thus, it was Harryhausen who went on tour to universities and museums, including the Museum of Modern Art (Harnetz 1981).

John Culhane’s feature article on Harryhausen in the June 1981 issue of *American Film* prominently mentioned the upcoming MoMA exhibit before embarking on an appreciative biography of the man. Harryhausen discussed the importance of observing anatomy when creating and maneuvering the models he constructs, even when the creatures

are mythical. He also described feeling empathy for his models, which allows him to create emotions rather than mechanical movements. MoMA assistant curator Jon Gartenberg also wrote an appreciation that quoted Ray Bradbury's introduction to the exhibit. Bradbury is a childhood friend of Harryhausen's and wrote a story that was the source for one of his films. He noted that Harryhausen "reminds us once again of the creative powers of single individuals in the world. Not groups, but lonely, creative spirits, working long after midnight, change the cinematic and aesthetic machineries of civilization" (1981, 507).

Harryhausen was able to contribute to the collaborative process of commercial filmmaking by working in solitude designing and incrementally moving his models in front of the already-filmed live-action. Only on *Clash of the Titans* did he begin to use two assistant animators. Thus, his handcrafted contributions are easily identified and often critically praised more highly than the films of which they are a part.

Each of the above exhibits reflects the Museum's increased openness to the aesthetic creativity employed in somewhat debased forms of media production. Education is laudable as a purpose for creating a film compared to advertising or to the B-movie genres associated with special effects. However, all of these forms place the animator in the service of requirements that others dictate. By acknowledging artistic achievements within these constraints, the Museum implicitly departs from the romantic ideal of the lone artistic genius serving only his muse. Aspects of auteurism do remain, however, as the above discussions of Harryhausen's methods make clear.

### **Animation Grab-bags**

In contrast to the major shows given corporate funding, more modest film programs rarely get more than a brief mention in newspapers, if that. Instead, the Museum's screening or collection of an independent animator's work more often gets mentioned later as a résumé item in articles about the animator's career. In comparison,

**Warner Bros. animation director Chuck Jones received his publicity both during the exhibit and in subsequent coverage of his accomplishments.**

**The Museum cannot singlehandedly increase the interest level of journalists and the public in all of its exhibitions. However, the programmers in the Department of Film do make an effort to link related screenings into single headings whose impact is greater than that of each individual program. They used “Animation” as a heading to unite international festival screenings with screenings devoted to animation history, works by American independent animators, and animation from individual nations. When this heading was reused on a regular basis in the film exhibition schedule, people could anticipate it each season.**

**This mode of scheduling animation began in the fall of 1980, returned in 1983, and continued to 1991. 1993 and 1995 saw similar groupings of animation in late winter. Each of these included highlights of animation festivals at Annecy, Zagreb, Ottawa, or Hiroshima. Other than that, there was no set pattern for what accompanied them. Historical programs ranged from Spaniard Segundo de Chomon’s early stop-motion experiments to Betty Boop’s 60th “birthday;” from Lotte Reiniger’s cut-out silhouette films to the Fleischers’ 1940s “Superman” series. Foreign animation programs featured Poland, Bulgaria, the Soviet Union, Switzerland, and Denmark. A couple of times, programs were devoted to Jules Engel’s students in the California Institute for the Arts “Experimental Animation” program.**

**A number of guest curators repeatedly contributed to these programs surrounding the festival screenings. Animation expert Charles Samu programmed many of the European screenings. Louise Beudet contributed a number of early historical programs. Mark Langer provided retrospectives of American cartoon studios and their animators, such as Shamus Culhane and Myron Waldman. Film department curator Adrienne Mancina and**

assistant curator Jytte Jensen have been involved in nearly all animation programming at the Museum, both within these grab-bag compendia and outside of them.

Independent American animators were present for screenings of their own films as part of ongoing the “Cineprobe” series for experimental filmmakers. The annual “Animation” schedules began to include one or two of these programs, starting with John Canemaker in 1984. Following years included Paul Glabicki, David Ehrlich, Larry Jordan, Emily Hubley, Stacey Steers, Robert Ascher, and Bill Morrison. They represent quite a range of approaches to animation, from abstract to representational, humorous to analytical; their animation techniques vary widely as well.

Some of the above animators and many others also appeared at “Cineprobe” screenings in the 1980s and 1990s without being packaged in a larger animation series. They include Suzan Pitt, Stan VanDerBeek, George Griffin, Sally Cruikshank, Mary Ellen Bute, Jane Aaron, Maureen Selwood, and Lewis Klahr. A review of their participation in these events and the Museum’s acquisition of their works reveals that an invitation to present work at “Cineprobe” often precedes the Museum’s request of films. A combination of government and foundation grants have defrayed costs of striking the necessary film prints, so the donations do not financially burden the filmmakers. Once an animator’s films enter either the archive or the circulating library, they reappear in the ongoing series “Recent Acquisitions” and “Selections from the Circulating Library,” sometimes even grouped together on programs devoted to animation.

In addition to these ongoing series, the Museum has scheduled individual programs or brief series focusing on careers of animators. They have included Bruno Bozzetto of Italy in 1979, Alexeïeff and Parker of Paris in 1980, Halas and Batchelor of England in 1980, Len Lye of Australia in 1981, Co Hoedeman of Canada in 1985, the Brothers Quay of England in 1986, the Czechs Jan Svankmajer and Karel Zeman in 1988 and 1989, Piotr Dumala and Jerzy Kucia of Poland in 1990, the late American Harry Smith in 1992,

Borivoj Bovnikovic from Zagreb in 1994, and American mother and daughter animators Faith and Emily Hubley in 1995. A number of these were guest curated by experts in the field each animator represents.

Other familiar organizing principles for isolated animation programming include national schools of animation (e.g. Hungary in 1983, Japan in 1986, Estonia in 1989), animation studios (e.g. Famous Studios in 1995), and characters (e.g. Felix the Cat in 1991). Animation also appeared within larger series devoted to national cinemas (e.g. Belgium in 1980, Switzerland in 1991, Venezuela in 1994), geographic regions (e.g. Scandinavia in 1980, Latin America 1992), and film studios (e.g. Gaumont and MGM in 1994). Thematic shows, such as the 1991 series “Junction and Journey: Trains and Film” also included animation, as did tributes to a pioneering film distributor (Margaret J. Winkler in 1991) and to a film society (Amos Vogel’s “Cinema 16” in 1991).

Aside from the yearly cluster of animation programs, other items on the schedule have offered animation on a regular basis. Each spring animated short films appeared in the Museum screenings of Academy nominated films and accompanying some features in the “New Directors/New Films” showcase. Finally, a continuing series of “Family Film” Saturday screenings mixes live-action and animation on a regular basis. Each presents a set of films on a theme, such as “Sensational Shapes” and “Dreams of Sorts.”

The large number of the above animation programs prevents me from discussing any in depth, but I note that they follow similar patterns of presentation laid down in previous decades. Program notes offer brief descriptions of films, some historical context, and a few critical appraisals in the explicatory rather than symptomatic tradition of interpretation. Often, the notes take excerpts from previously published critical appreciations as well as statements from the filmmakers. The notes do the job of providing background while giving priority to the audience’s own experience of the films.

## **MoMA's Contributions to Animation**

After six decades of expanding its presentation and collection of animation, the Museum still chafes at the opinion that animation is “the caboose on the Seventh Art.” Yet its pioneering efforts on behalf of animation have opened doors for others to treat it as a legitimate art form. Iris Barry’s accomplishments surely inspired subsequent curators of MoMA’s Department of Film, but she also lay the groundwork for people beyond the Museum to “trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate” animated films for study and enjoyment, especially by co-founding the International Federation of Film Archives and establishing a circulating film library. As educational and cultural organizations made use of these resources, they contributed to the belief that animation deserved scrutiny as an art form.

Over the decades that the Museum has doggedly pursued its mission, its curators have operated under constraints ranging from willful trustees, political controversies, exigencies of film preservation, management crises, external critics and competition, and the continual challenge of funding exhibitions. Despite these obstacles, they have programmed an extraordinary range of films, whose breadth gives ample evidence that they are guided not by concerns of popularity, but those of quality. The film programs confirm that the Museum has long followed Eileen Bowser’s prescription that archives “should show films which would not otherwise be seen and in contexts which help people to understand and appreciate them, to make discoveries and find unexpected connections” (1991, 171-2).

The tastes and interests of MoMA’s curators have changed over the years, expanding greatly from Iris Barry’s day. No longer do they feel compelled to place each film into an overarching art historical framework, but instead offer eclectic selections of films within a variety of rubrics. Thus, the Museum has presented many facets of animation over the years: art and entertainment from American cartoon studios; animation

for propaganda and training; adult-oriented fare from international animation festivals and American independents; sponsored animation that displays artistry in serving clients' needs. In some cases, the fact that a film is animated is less important than the contribution it makes to avant-garde film, national cinemas, or some particular theme a curator wishes to illustrate. No permanent ghetto holds all films marked "animation" at MoMA.

The Museum's relations with its various patrons and film donors have changed over the years as it shifted from dependence on an initial base of wealthy trustees and their elite social circles to a mix of private, governmental, and corporate funding. No longer as wary of its threat as a competitor, studios now see the value of donating films to MoMA's film archive. The Museum offers film owners the use of its cultural capital in the form of a prestigious association with an internationally recognized consecrator of culture. Those film owners with economic capital provide funding for the association; those who lack it provide just themselves and their art. The Museum can circulate their films, but cannot provide an income from that circulation. Instead, its imprimatur may serve as the official recognition that inspires art funders to offer grants.

The Museum of Modern Art is but one player in the field of cultural negotiation, and its judgment of an object's artistic worth is subject to counter-appraisals from other art world authorities, be they museums, critics, collectors, auction houses, or scholars. To get a different point of view of the process of artistic legitimation, I turn now to examine the perspective of a corporate animation producer that has been the recipient of recognition from MoMA and elsewhere, the Walt Disney Company.



## Ch. 3

### A History of Disney Art Exhibitions

#### **Introduction**

The last chapter provided a longitudinal view of a single museum that included the Walt Disney studio among many animation producers it promoted. This chapter reverses the lens to focus on Disney as a recipient of approbation from different cultural legitimators. While scholars have begun to attend to the critical discourse surrounding Disney's animated films, one aspect of artistic recognition has been relatively overlooked: the exhibition of drawings, paintings, and other fine art created for the production of those films. These exhibitions make specific claims Disney animation's status as art that enriched the critical discourse surrounding the films. Thus, I will center chapter 3 precisely on this presentation of Disney rather than on the variety of film retrospectives, festival screenings, honors, and awards the studio has received over the decades.

As a means of illuminating the contributions of museum exhibits to aesthetic reputation, I will also briefly compare the exhibits during the 1930s and 1940s to the Disney studio's initial attempt at marketing animation art through galleries during this period. This initial marketing program lasted less than a decade and nothing similar emerged until the 1970s (although cels were sold as souvenirs at Disneyland beginning in 1955). I will save consideration of the more recent animation art market for chapter 4.

After reviewing the common stances critics have taken toward Disney films, this chapter will turn to early exhibits and gallery shows, paying particular attention to three exhibits: "Walt Disney: Creator of Mickey Mouse" at the Philadelphia Art Alliance in 1932; "A Retrospective Exhibition of the Walt Disney Medium" at the Los Angeles County Museum and seven subsequent museums in 1940-41; and "Walt Disney's *Bambi*: The

**Making of an Animated Sound Picture” at the Museum of Modern Art in 1942. Following that will be a section on the later portion of Walt Disney’s career, during which there occurred only one major exhibit. Called “The Art of Animation: A Walt Disney Retrospective Exhibit,” it was created by the Disney studio and was circulated around the country and abroad by the American Federation of Arts.**

**The next section will consider the era after Walt Disney’s death. The 1970s and early 1980s saw a number of exhibits, among which I will focus on those that accompanied Lincoln Center’s “Walt Disney 50th Anniversary Film Retrospective” in 1973; “The Artists of Disney” at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1976; “Building a Better Mouse” at the Library of Congress in 1978; and “Disney Animations and Animators” at the Whitney Museum in 1981.**

**The last section will note some recent exhibits since the Disney company’s resurgence under the management team of Michael Eisner and Frank Wells beginning in 1984. During this period the animation art market blossomed and collectors became new sources of Disney art for exhibition. Among the significant examples of these exhibits are the Philadelphia Art Alliance’s 1990 “Salute to Walt Disney Animation Art: The Early Years: 1928-1942”; “The Art of *Fantasia*” originating at the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco in 1990-1; the “Haring, Warhol, Disney” exhibit that the Phoenix Art Museum originated in 1991; the 1994-5 Indianapolis Museum of Art exhibit “Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Art in Its Making*”; and the Museum of Modern Art’s “Designing Magic: Disney Animation Art” in 1995.**

**I argue that exhibitions of Disney production art have contributed perspectives to the aesthetic assessment of Disney unavailable to those who view only the films. In particular, museums have long provided much greater contextualization of the art they displayed than have galleries, and thus have offered critics tools to break from the outmoded cultural categorizations of popular culture versus high art. They have presented**

glimpses of a complex production process that yields a communicative art some have claimed is uniquely American. A few writers who were given access to the Disney plant gained similar insights and I will compare their discussion of Disney's art when appropriate.

Over time certain trends have developed among the Disney art exhibits. Often, they conflated a chronological progression through the studio's output with a narrative of steps in the production process. In some, precursors to filmed animation offered an implicit evolutionary path culminating in Disney's most recent venture. In later decades the exhibits shifted emphasis from early predictions of Disney's continued aesthetic ascent to nostalgic reviews of the studio's golden era. However, the most recent exhibits have acknowledged new productions as masterpieces as well. Throughout the years, an increasing variety of individuals besides Walt Disney himself were given recognition. Also, the venues hosting the exhibits have broadened at times from art museums to other types of museums, civic centers, and occasionally department stores.

### **Critical Perspectives**

Before launching into the exhibits themselves, I would like to consider some typical perspectives that critics have used to evaluate Disney animation. Because the animated films of Disney are collaboratively produced commercial entertainment, a number of people have attacked them as examples of an essentially compromised popular culture. Guardians of high art disparage Disney films for lacking the formal novelty, complexity, and individuality characterized by elite cultural forms. When Disney films incorporate classical music, ballet, literature, and abstract graphics, these critics object to the studio's vulgarization of its source material (e.g. Hoellering [1940] 1972; Haggin [1941] 1972).

From another perspective, some critical theorists influenced by Marx argue that popular culture's subservience to capitalism dooms all its products to an ideological

straitjacket of bourgeois heterosexual conformity. To such critics, Disney films may exhibit formal variety and complexity, but these features mask an ideological uniformity whereby exploited consumers gain escape and catharsis rather than genuine critiques of their existence. For example, Harry M. Benshoff uses Theodor Adorno to critique Disney's "Silly Symphonies" for "their apparent alignment with dominant ideology" (1992, 69). The implied alternative is a radically innovative avant-garde of artists whose antagonism toward capitalist society allows them to resist the false consciousness embodied in social and artistic traditions.

What both critical stances share is a willingness to place cultural products into predefined categories on the basis of their field of production. Then, critics may project onto these products a set of essential properties derived from those categories. I listed in chapter 1 the following presumed characteristics of mass media materials that place them in the popular culture category: they result from industrial mass production rather than from the talent and genius of an individual; they are made for multiplicity and wide distribution rather than unique existence; they appeal to broad audiences for profit rather than narrow audiences for studied appreciation; they require little formal education for the audience to consume them as intended; they are less complex than elite art; and they adhere to existing artistic conventions rather than challenging them in the radical ways that the elite avant-garde does.

This assumes the superiority of elite art as presumably more innovative, more complex, and more individualistic than middle class and lower class popular culture, which is thought to be more simplistic, formulaic, and collectively based as one descends the socioeconomic scale. The ideology of the cultural hierarchy also believes innovations only flow from top down, to be assimilated into more mainstream forms.

Although I provided examples to counter these reductive distinctions and showed them to be historically bounded social constructions, many critics adhere to them. Early

critics seeking elite acceptance of Disney often praised the Disney studio insofar as its product could be distanced from popular culture. In particular, they often attributed authorship of the studio's films to Walt Disney rather than to the hierarchically divided labor within the studio. Similarly, many sought formal similarities between the Disney cartoons and elite art or claimed that Disney had created an entirely new art form. In either case, these critics downplayed the films' debts to fairy tales, comic strips, vaudeville, and other low art.

Other critics who wrote for broader audiences celebrated Disney as popular culture and even folk art. They, too, ignored the modern commercial context in which Disney's industrial production of art failed to fit into the categories of the traditional cultural hierarchy. Gregory A. Waller (1980) provides a survey of this range of critical strategies in use during the 1930s and early 1940s and Kathy Merlock Jackson's bio-bibliography of Walt Disney (1993) covers that period as well as more recent critical writing.

This chapter will examine the arguments made by exhibit catalog essayists and by critics who have viewed the exhibits or have seen the Disney studios. I will discuss how these writers sometimes have broken out of the above strategies to embrace a broader conception of art as communicative behavior that better accommodates what they know of Disney's complex production process. The fact that this process uses tools of the traditional fine arts and creates fine art by-products offers one means to recontextualize Disney animation as an art form.

When museums and other cultural organizations display this art, they provide a physical entry into the urban upper class art world that guards the dividing line between high art and popular culture. However, the Disney company has operated within mass media, pursuing heterogeneous audiences across boundaries of age, class, gender, and nationality. The urban elite art world, as represented by the Museum of Modern Art in the

last chapter, is a cultural domain of a much smaller scale. In part, its aesthetic authority rests on its ability to police its borders to maintain the exclusivity of its membership.

Thus, for those who proclaim Disney's right to enter this urban domain, much more than a couple of outmoded cultural categories must be discarded. Undergirding the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture are hierarchies of class, wealth, education, and ethnicity, which govern the distribution of power throughout society. Even as corporations have attained wealth on a scale greater than that formerly amassed by elite families, the latter still control the cultural capital called prestige. Yet, each museum that offered this commodity to Disney through an exhibit risked rejection from its core upper class audience for allowing such a debased art form as the cartoon to enter their sanctum.

Therefore, each of the following organizations presented particular rationales for their displays that accentuated the aesthetic value in the commonplace. As I've discussed in the previous chapters, Pierre Bourdieu argues that those in the upper class who control institutionalized sites for cultural sanctification can make "entirely prestigious cultural assets" of the banal by merely placing them in the same context as what is already legitimated (1984, 88). When successful, this placement seems a natural and unquestionable sign of good taste.

Walter Benjamin's conceptions of cult value versus exhibition value also play a hand in bestowing legitimacy upon these new entrants to museums. On the one hand, the individual objects themselves gain cult value as coveted collectibles. On the other, the museums emphasize the objects' exhibition value as contributors to the films. In the latter case the museum displays its discrimination in choosing objects that serve a broader pedagogic mission to solicit aesthetic appreciation for the entire animation process. The value of each object in this case is predicated upon its ability to illustrate that process. While this display strategy might downplay the autonomy of each individual item as a complete

work of art, it also strengthened each item's artifactual aura of authenticity as a captured moment from a film.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the the Museum of Modern Art maintained a balance between animation art's exhibition value and its cult value to such an extent that the aura of each authentic original was unlikely to "wither" in the face of multiple replicas. This chapter will show how other cultural organizations attempt to resolve the conflict between these two aesthetic values. Museums often share MoMA's approach through exhibits that illustrate how the fine art used in animation made the films into works of art.

### **Early Art Exhibits and Gallery Shows**

I begin with a chronology of museum and gallery exhibits of Disney art that were held in the 1930s and early 1940s. In 1932, the Philadelphia Art Alliance was credited with giving Disney "his first recognition from an art organization" ("News of Art" 1932). It subsequently traveled to the Milwaukee Art Institute and the Toledo Museum of Art (Krause and Witkowski 1994, 9). The Chicago Art Institute followed this with a December 1933 exhibit of 100 original pieces of Disney production art ("Mickey Mouse is 'Art'" 1933). Also, in 1936 the New York Public Library hosted an exhibit of Disney production art ("Original Mickey Mouse" 1936). Other than brief mentions in newspapers and press releases, I obtained no discourse about these mid-1930s exhibits.

Galleries sold Disney animation art as early as 1935, when the Leicester Galleries of London and the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston, England each held a Disney exhibit ("Mickey Mouse on Exhibition" 1935; "Walt Disney and His Animated Cartoons" 1935). However, a regular program to market Disney art in American art galleries did not begin until Guthrie Courvoisier contracted with Disney to distribute production art from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and other Disney films. Different galleries around the country participated in this art program as subsequent animated features were released, but

it diminished during World War II and ended officially in 1946 (“Dopey, Grumpy & Co.” 1938; “Pinocchio Originals” 1940; “The Art of Fantasia” 1940; “Events in the Local Field” 1941; “New Group and One-Man Exhibitions” 1942; “Through the Years with Walt Disney” 1943; Tumbusch 1989, 59-60).

The Disney studio was not alone in receiving such recognition, but it was honored in this way more than any other animation producer. Examples of contemporaneous exhibitions of animation art include the following. On 4 April 1934, the Society of Illustrators in New York hosted Winsor McCay’s final public appearance and a notice in the *New York American* stated: “NEMO AGAIN!—Little Nemo, delight of millions of children, will come back to life, with Flip and the others, when Winsor McCay shows the originals of his animated pictures at the Illustrator’s show” (Canemaker 1987, 201). The mention of “originals” most likely refers to production art on display.

I noted in chapter 2 that the Museum of Modern Art displayed abstract paintings for animation by Léopold Survage, Douglass Crockwell, Howard Lester, Horace Pierce, and Mary Ellen Bute in 1939 and 1940. These were works that obviously shared stylistic characteristics with other modern painting on display. However, production art from commercial cartoon studios used much more conventional representational styles.

As for art from cartoon studios other than Disney, I mentioned in chapter 1 that the Leon Schlesinger Corporation played a linking pin power role when it was formed in 1937 to license commercial tie-ins for the Warner Bros. cartoon characters (Adamson 1990, 66). Among the tie-ins were production cels with a stamp of Schlesinger’s signature on them. The sale of these cels did not last long and I found no record of museums or galleries purchasing or exhibiting them.

Before all of these gallery sales came the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit. It gave critics an opportunity to appreciate the meticulous graphic designs of Disney production art in the same context as other fine art. In so doing, it moved Disney from the domain of mass



culture to that of the urban high art world. The verbal descriptions the Alliance provided with the exhibit also emphasized the complexity of the animation process, forcing the displayed items to be considered as more than a collection of pretty pictures. Thus, they could not be reduced to the categorically defining qualities that usually distinguish popular culture from elite art.

### **The Philadelphia Art Alliance Exhibit**

The Philadelphia Art Alliance was a relatively young organization when it hosted the exhibition “Walt Disney, Creator of Mickey Mouse,” but it had already established itself in Philadelphia social circles. Founded in 1915 by Christine Wetherill Stevenson, it was largely funded by her father, manufacturer and real estate developer Samuel Price Wetherill. At the time of the Disney exhibit, Christine’s brother, Colonel Samuel P. Wetherill, Jr., was its president.

Stevenson saw the Art Alliance as an instrument to “create our own standards, not in imitation of those of Europe, but chiseled boldly out of our different experiences, traditions, and ideals” (quoted in White 1965, 28). Its early exhibitions presented arts and crafts, drama, engravings, oil paintings, water colors, sculpture, and music in an attempt to provide a space in the heart of Philadelphia for all of the arts. While modernist painters such as Vasily Kandinsky were exhibited by 1937, earlier exhibits centered on more traditionally representational works by the likes of Winslow Homer, Rockwell Kent, and N. C. Wyeth. Therefore, Disney’s representationalism was in good company at the Art Alliance.

The Disney exhibit ran for two weeks in fall 1932 and it featured animation drawings, background paintings, and paintings of characters and foregrounds on clear plastic ‘cels’ that overlay the backgrounds. It also included original illustrations created for Mickey Mouse books. Other artworks from the animation production process would be

displayed in later exhibits, including concept sketches, storyboards, character model sheets, and three-dimensional character models.

The exhibit's opening was marked by an evening of screenings and lectures, including one by art critic Dorothy Grafly titled "The Art of Disney." Grafly was the daughter of sculptor Charles Grafly and a board member of the Philadelphia Art Alliance, chairing its sculpture committee for a time. She and other critics covered the event in the local newspapers' sections devoted to "Society" and "Women." Their audience participated in fine art openings among many high society functions. More than merely convincing general readers of Disney's achievements, these critics justified the entry of the studio's products into elite art circles.

The Art Alliance's *Bulletin* gave a page-and-a-half announcement of the exhibit that opened with an aesthetic claim for the work: "From two points of view the exhibition is exhilarating, the excellence of the 'stills' per se and their unique character as adapted for moving pictures, for they are, possibly, the outstanding achievement in the world of an artist in the relatively new medium of motion—and as such, point to possibilities as yet undreamed of in motion pictures" ("Exhibitions of the Month" 1932, 3). After noting the popularity of Mickey Mouse once Disney adapted to sound, the remainder focused on the mechanics of producing Disney cartoons.

This announcement accomplished a number of things. It showed that the Art Alliance was mindful of art in all media, including motion pictures, and it isolated stills that shared qualities of the water colors and drawings it already exhibited. On the one hand, the Alliance claimed foresight in recognizing Disney as a harbinger of what was to come in a new artistic medium, and on the other, it provided continuity with familiar art forms.

In discussing the mechanics of cartoon production, the announcement offered a glimpse behind the on-screen magic. To convey how labor-intensive the process of animation was, it offered numbers: each cartoon short required eight weeks and between

8,000 and 10,000 drawings done by Disney's 25 or 30 associates. It also called attention to Disney's "wholly new idea of synchronizing [cartoons] to music." This presents a picture of technical innovation and collaborative labor that was often elided in critical appraisals modeled on romantic auteurist visions of Walt Disney.

The amount of labor involved in artistic production has long been a criterion by which to evaluate art. By detailing that labor the Art Alliance gave critics a means to assess the items on the walls not merely for their own charms, but as contributions to much grander overall art projects, the films themselves. For example, in recommending the exhibit, a column in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* employed the information from the Alliance *Bulletin*: "Those who know Disney only through the movies are here enabled to see how the camera trick is turned and how indefatigable must be the creator and his 25 to 30 assistants in making the many drawings for the resultant film." Therefore, the columnist suggested, "It's a privilege to be able to examine the Disney work closely and to realize how much beauty of design and line there is in his pictures" ("In Gallery and Studio" 1932). Similarly, an unsigned review in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* likened the displayed items to sketches for ambitious works like monuments and murals: "The true beauty of the Disney art... is found in the motion picture itself, and it is the motion picture, not the drawing, that is comparable to the completed canvas.... Yet every little figure is in itself an interesting note in the process of progression" ("Disney Has Debut" 1932).

While sometimes acknowledging the amount of labor required to create animated films, these exhibit reviewers saw Disney as the fount of creativity, according him alone among his "associates" the status of artist. The most one of these critics would concede was that Disney was like a mural artist who develops a "school" of artists around him. In making this analogy, the unsigned *Public Ledger* exhibit review acknowledged the input of Disney's artists by saying "the animated cartoon is a co-operative and collaborative problem, often enriched by the interplay of several minds."

This accords with the fine art world's tradition of locating value in individual artists. Howard Becker argues that even in art worlds that are collaborative (e.g. music, theater, dance), much effort goes into defining the "core activities" that distinguish the honored artist from the support personnel (1982, 16-7). Those core activities need not involve actual manipulation of artistic materials, but may be limited to producing the instructions that craftspeople follow, or, as in the case of Disney, guiding and reviewing the work of subordinates during every step in the production process.

In addition to her lecture at the exhibit's opening, Dorothy Grafly wrote an appreciation of Disney in the *Public Ledger* championing the studio's work in terms that echoed Christine Wetherill Stevenson: it was the birth of an American art that was not beholden to European aesthetics. In fact, she saw Disney as a restorative for the diseased modern painting that Europe had generated: "The reason why art has suffered a steady popular alienation may be found in its gradual and sometimes precipitate retreat from life, and its wandering on the borderlands of the psychopathic. The art of the animated cartoon is as healthy as that of so many of our modernists is sickly" (1932).

Grafly did not cast aside all of European art in her claims for Disney, but instead situated him within a long history of storytelling through pictures, from ancient Egyptian temples and cathedral bas reliefs to Cézanne and others who tried to capture motion in painting. She valued the communicative goals of this tradition, which she felt modern painting had largely abandoned.

She claimed that through the "Silly Symphonies," "The great mass of the people may yet be brought back to impulsive delight in the work of art, not because they are taught art in the schools, but because they share the delight of an art experience, and that delight is as natural to the human being, when art is capable of providing it, as pleasure in fields, sunshine and the sound of water." Thus, popularity, far from signaling an art form's baseness or commercialism, was instead a sign of successful communication.

Grafly advocated the productive novelty of Disney's synthesis of drama, music, and art over the "psychopathic" violation of aesthetic conventions practiced by modern painters. Snobbery among those who prefer the latter to Disney's whimsical cartoons was evidence to her that "such minds are still circumscribed by the four sides of a canvas and lack the very imagination that makes of a Walt Disney creation a new experience."

The threat of such snobbery was very real to Grafly and the other *Public Ledger* reviewer. Grafly bemoaned that although "we have witnessed the birth of an American art" in animated cartoons, "there are many among us who not only repudiate this rare gift but who would deny it any place in the art field." The unsigned review suggested that "even the high and mighty student of the painted canvas who, perhaps, will turn up his nose at a popularized art" could learn from Walt Disney "the good old lesson of composition, in which all rhythms are inherent."

What these critics had to combat was the urban high art world's preference that art express an artist's unique individuality rather than attempt to convey meaning or emotion. As artists seek to oppose their art to existing conventions in order to distinguish themselves from previous art, they increasingly discard communication as a goal of their artistic production. In contrast, Disney's innovations brought together many artistic fields into the mass medium of film for the purpose of entertaining. Thus, the studio's films were able to do what Larry Gross states the elite arts no longer do, "serve the central communicative functions of socialization and integration" (1989, 113).

Within the Disney oeuvre critics found examples of greater and lesser art. Grafly used the exhibit to occasion a critical ranking of the "Silly Symphonies" over Mickey Mouse. Grafly claimed, "less popular than the Mickey Mouse [films], the Silly Symphonies are more definitely an art form." She called Mickey "contemporary folk art" while she elevated the Symphonies to "where Monet and the Impressionists stood some decades ago." It is interesting that Grafly cited Impressionists rather than the 19th century

illustrative artists Wilhelm Busch, Gustave Doré, and Honoré Daumier, whose visual motifs and themes were direct inspirations for early Disney cartoons according to art historian Robin Allan (1989). Instead she links Disney to prestigious fine artists whose experimentation ceased to shock all but the most old-fashioned. The elite art world had value to her, if only it would open its gates to Disney and return to its central communicative functions.

To sum up the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit, this venue was actually well suited to introduce Disney to elite art circles because Philadelphia was a city whose tastes were conservative with respect to the latest trends in modern painting and sculpture. Its fine art world participants only needed to be shown that individual Disney studio drawings and paintings matched those tastes to a large extent, even if they served the lowly art of cartoon entertainment. Dorothy Grafly's attacks on the uncommunicative and alienating canvases emerging from Europe suited the sensibilities of Philadelphia's social register and paved the way for acceptance of Disney's more conventionally pretty designs. In addition, it served a sense of national pride to credit Disney with creating an art form indigenous to America.

### **Disney as an American Anti-artist**

Grafly was not the only one who touted animation as Disney's own art form, American to the core. While the Disney studio incontestably made immense contributions to the cartoon, claims that it produced the entire medium ignored the many other practitioners in the field. Neither Disney nor American animation in general monopolized the innovation of imbuing these stories and images with life. By 1932, animated films had been produced in many European countries, the Soviet Union, Japan, and even Argentina (Bendazzi 1994, 25-52, 101-105). Yet Disney became a homegrown real-life Horatio Alger hero, who fathered in Mickey Mouse not only a national mascot but an art as well.

Much critical writing about Walt Disney through the 1930s praised, analyzed and mythologized him in this light (Waller 1980; Jackson 1993). As he accumulated medals,

Academy Awards, and honorary degrees from universities spanning the globe, he became an symbol of the entrepreneurial American entertainment industry that had swept into international theatrical markets with films of seemingly universal appeal. Disney had by now developed a homespun wariness of pretension in his responses to various interviewers who sought his opinion on art whenever he received some form of recognition (e.g. Churchill 1938; “Disney Puzzled” 1938; “Disney Honored” 1938).

For example, when interviewed for the *New York Times* in 1938 after receiving honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale, Disney responded to the question “What is art?” by asking “How should I know?... Why should anybody be interested in what I think about art?” (Woolf 1938, 5). To another interviewer the following year he answered, “Art? You birds write about it, maybe you can tell me. I looked up the definition once, but I’ve forgotten what it is. I’m no art lover!” (Nugent 1939, 4).

Yet Disney was willing to express definite preferences for utilitarian craftsmanship: “I think someone who makes a bed with good lines, in which you can sleep comfortably, is more of an artist than the one who paints a picture which gives you a nightmare” (Woolf 1938, 5). And he valued representational styles that could convey emotions through caricature, praising these abilities in da Vinci, van Gogh, and Delacroix. In addition, one writer found that Disney’s artists studied Degas, Rouault, Cézanne, Renoir, and Sèurat for inspiration (Nugent 1939, 4-5). However, Disney often returned to the fact that his studio’s work “is accomplished not alone by means of drawing and sound but with the assistance of a thousand and one technical tricks.” Thus, he said, “We are not artists but only moving-picture producers trying to offer entertainment” (Woolf 1938, 5). While creating an art that defied categorization within the cultural hierarchy, Walt Disney believed in the hierarchy enough to disqualify animation as art on the basis of “technical tricks.”

In contrast, a few academic critics highlighted those technical tricks to proclaim Disney animation as a triumph of mechanized art. In some cases their insights into the

Disney studios came from actual on-site research and observation of the production process, which offered even greater context for assessing Disney art than did museum exhibits. At the Disney plant, the exhibition value of the films themselves dominated over the cult value of any particular production artifact.

The painter Jean Charlot had lectured at the Disney studio in 1938 and he displayed the knowledge he gleaned of the process when he wrote about animation (Canemaker 1982). His 1939 article in *American Scholar* magazine argued that Disney cartoons were able to solve problems depicting motion over time that such artists as Dürer, Duchamp, Giotto, and Picasso had long attempted to address. After invoking this fine art pedigree, Charlot claimed animation succeeded where Cubists failed in creating an impersonal art that “could be multiplied by mechanical means” so that “the world might rid itself of the idolatry of the ‘original’” and “resuscitate ancient collective traditions, Gothic and Egyptian.” The problem the Cubists faced was that “neither dealers nor collectors wished to endorse an art that was not for the few.”

However, Charlot claimed, “In [the animated] cartoon the impersonality of a work of art has been captured, the cult of the ‘original’ has been smashed. The drawings are manipulated by so many hands from the birth of the plot to the inking of the line that they are propelled into being more by the communal machinery that grinds them out than by any single human being.” He also noted that early animation roughs are “worthy of a Museum” for going “further into the alchemy of transmuting form into motion than did many of the Masters” but are “still not sufficiently purified for the severe standards of the cartoon. Personality is squeezed out through multiple tracings until the diagram, its human flavor lost, becomes an exact cog within the clockwork” (1939, 269-70).

For Charlot, this transformation is a triumph of artistic purification beyond that required for museum display. In the process, animation is made available to everyone as an “art-for-all.” He took impersonalization as an aesthetic virtue that could only be produced



through a technical and mechanized process. Accordingly, Disney's artists were successful to the extent that they eliminated idiosyncratic flourishes, the better to cohere into a unit that could precisely synchronize sound and images. Charlot argued that after centuries of striving to accomplish through painting what Disney now accomplishes, we should elevate animation from its status as "a nondescript bastard medium into which art critics will not dip" (1939, 262).

Another person seeking respectability for Disney was art historian Robert Feild, who was on-site at the Disney studio from June 1939 through May 1940 researching his book *The Art of Walt Disney*. He emerged to rail against the academy's narrow elevation of art from the past and its condemnation of the machine as the enemy of art. In his thorough examination of the studio's organizational structure, Feild gathered evidence that Disney "breaks down forever the barriers between the old bugaboo of the 'all-done-by-hand' and the machine as an instrument of artistic purpose" ([1942] 1947, 87). Feild noted a transformation similar to that described by Charlot, in which "the artist's individuality" in rough animation drawings must be "absorbed into the [motion] picture as a whole," resulting in the exchange of aesthetic appeal for a precision and consistency of line in cleaned up animation drawings ([1942] 1947, 254). Thus, he suggested that if the cleaned up drawings are studied "without the prejudice resulting from a too-long familiarity with 'still' drawings, a different sort of subtlety will be discovered and a technical proficiency that commands respect" ([1942] 1947, 259).

### **The Los Angeles County Museum Exhibit**

When *Fantasia* occasioned the Los Angeles County Museum's retrospective exhibit of Walt Disney's career, the exhibit would combine many of the above perspectives. The exhibit featured not only production art, but also technical items, like a cut-away model of a multiplane camera. Animators from the Disney studio were even on hand at times to demonstrate the skills involved in their jobs. However, only one name from the studio

merited mention in the exhibit materials: that of Walt Disney himself. Even Feild's book took pains to keep all but Walt and Roy Disney anonymous in recounting the staff's many and varied contributions to the films.

The exhibit, "A Retrospective Exhibition of the Walt Disney Medium," originated in the Los Angeles County Museum (LACM) before traveling to museums in seven other U.S. cities. The University Gallery in Minneapolis was the first stop of the touring exhibit, followed by the Cincinnati Art Museum, the St. Louis City Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Worcester Art Museum. Museum director Roland J. McKinney was responsible for the exhibit and wrote an introduction to the exhibit catalog.

According to an article in the art section of *Los Angeles Times*, "Roland J. McKinney took over the dual role of director general and director of the art department in June, 1939, and began infusing into that moribund institution the life which is making it one of the great museums of the country." Yet, McKinney "has threatened to resign unless provision is soon made to pay his \$10,000 salary" ("Disney Show Climax" 1940). This paints the museum as financially and organizationally troubled. McKinney's choice of Disney for an exhibit may have been made with at least one eye toward attendance. His imminent triumph on that score was noted in the same newspaper just prior to the opening: "The novel exhibition promises, on the basis of 2000 acceptances to preview invitations, to be one of the most popular offered at the museum" ("Mickey Mouse Exhibition" 1940).

Both the elaborately illustrated catalog for the exhibit and subsequent press coverage were gathered together in a scrapbook at the Walt Disney Archives on the Disney studio lot in Burbank, California. The scrapbook provides the primary source material for my analysis. The exhibit catalog deserves examination for its presentation of Disney to museum patrons and Los Angeles's elite fine art world ("A Retrospective Exhibition" 1940). The unsigned exhibit catalog essay began by claiming, "In twelve years Walt

Disney has elevated animated pictures from a crude form of entertainment to the dignity of a true art," but then countered, "Disney prefers to ignore that his craft has become an art. He will discuss it only in terms of entertainment." Finally, Disney's approbation is secondary to his achievements: "...whether or not Disney disdains the tribute, he remains a master artist by every definition." It is obvious that Disney accepted the tribute enough to fund the exhibit and copyright the catalog essay under Walt Disney Productions.

To shape this representation of Disney as an artist, the catalog selectively retold the Disney story. Although purporting to span Disney's entire career, the exhibit included no art from his cartoons prior to Mickey's inception. The catalog essayist mentioned that period briefly only to claim Disney "had discovered unrealized possibilities in his medium" even though he had not yet attained them. Thus, the essayist made Disney into a visionary in the retrospective glow of his subsequent achievements.

This claim entailed some historical revisionism. In 1928, a bitter contractual dispute with his distributor, Charles Mintz, stripped Disney of his star character, Oswald, and several key staff members. The essay transformed this into "the Declaration of Independence of Disney and the animated cartoon." In this version, Disney quit Mintz because "his artistic integrity and self-respect demanded that he be able to give the best that was in him to his job."

The essay also asserted *The Three Little Pigs* gave the studio a prestige that drew artists to Disney's employ, which omits Disney's aggressive recruitment of talent from other animation studios and art schools. The essayist cited artistic freedom rather than economic returns for Disney's entry into feature production: "The feature-length field offered an inexhaustible source of fresh story material" compared to the "galling ... limitation" of the shorts. All of these steps necessarily led to *Fantasia*, "the brilliant summation of twelve years of continuous growth."

The catalog's selectivity in presenting Disney's career yields a story linking one artistic triumph to the next; Disney's eight years laboring during the silent era constituted little more than an apprenticeship. The inception of Mickey Mouse at the dawn of the talkies was already the defining moment that lifted Disney out of obscurity and into the pantheon of Hollywood legends. Even when other contemporary writers, such as Paul Hollister (1940), discussed the pre-Mickey years, it was primarily to convey Disney's rags-to-riches saga rather than to extol the virtues of the silent era films.

The Los Angeles County Museum exhibit contextualized the production art on display by developing a narrative of two parallel paths of evolution: that of Disney's career and that of the multistep process of producing an animated film. Panels alternated between illustrating, for example, the "Layout and Background Relationship" and the "Development of Mickey Mouse." By the end of the exhibit, two stories intertwine: the ascent from inchoate inspirational sketches to camera-ready art informs the transformation from rudimentary cartooning to breathtakingly innovative animation. This effectively creates a teleological portrait of the studio's ascent to perfection modeled on the pre-planned succession of refinements that produce a finished animated film. The narrative smooths over the deadends Disney pursued and the reversals the company endured on the road to *Fantasia*.

The view behind the scenes extended beyond artworks to pieces of technology. A cutaway model of a multiplane camera allowed visitors to adjust the distance of cels from the camera and see how Disney created three-dimensional effects. Visitors during the weekends were treated to such Disney artists as Fred Moore and Wolfgang Reitherman demonstrating in person how animation drawings are made. Classical music from *Fantasia* played throughout the exhibition space and excerpts of various Disney animated films were also screened regularly. To show the primitive beginnings of animation before cinema, flip books and optical toys from the nineteenth century were included (Schallert 1940; "Mickey

Mouse on Parade” 1941). While the exhibit highlighted the art’s contribution to the final films, it also played up the quality of individual pieces as free-standing art, especially in the case of the three-dimensional models of characters that, according to one reviewer, were “displayed on velvet thrones like little queens in the galleries” (Greenman 1941). Overall, pedagogy triumphed over fine art elitism in this exhibit, even if the lesson was somewhat hagiographic toward Walt Disney.

The newspaper and news magazine art critics at each stop of the tour were generally enthusiastic about the exhibit, although *Time* was heartened by the exhibited items beyond the production art itself, because “considered simply as drawings and paintings, most Disney stills rate only a notch higher than Christmas cards.” However, in terms of animation, *Time* claimed “Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. is revolutionizing art faster than all the long-hairs of Greenwich Village” (“Mickey Mouse on Parade” 32).

In contrast, the *Cincinnati Enquirer’s* art critic, Mary L. Alexander argued, “In many instances the drawings in black and white and color are truly as much works of art as Mickey Mouse, Dopey or the Three Little Pigs are personages of moment to children and even grown-ups” (1941a). Alexander also highlighted those drawings that contained Walt’s written comments because “if one follows the drawings through, the Disney notations constitute a valuable criticism, for he actually visualizes every form and movement and is decisive in every little detail” (1941b).

Other critics shared Alexander’s interest in animation production methods. John K. Sherman, art critic of the *Minneapolis Star Journal* thought the exhibit provided “a clear and fascinating picture of how science, art and incredible attention to detail produce such delightful things as the Silly Symphonies and *Pinocchio*” (1941). The *Los Angeles Times* claimed, “The show is a tribute to Walt’s own genius and his singular gift of drawing out the best in his large group of associated artists and technicians producing their collective product,” which, not incidentally, “stepped up the art level of this region... by giving good

artists employment” (“Disney Show Climax” 1940). These critics were not bound by the cultural hierarchy’s categories, but accepted Disney animation on its own terms, as an art that is both mass produced and handcrafted.

### **The Museum of Modern Art Disney Exhibits**

As I noted in chapter 2, long before its 1942 Disney “*Bambi*” exhibit Museum of Modern Art had begun to include such hybridized industrial and handcrafted art as well. However, its interest in this art was guided by the underlying assumptions of the traditional cultural hierarchy. To a much greater extent than the Philadelphia Art Alliance or the Los Angeles County Museum, MoMA was committed to novelty as a defining characteristic of elite art and it sought that novelty primarily in Europe so far as fine art was concerned. However, when MoMA established its film collection, it found much to admire in Hollywood films in general and Disney cartoons in particular. It also followed a mandate to educate the public about modern art and its “*Bambi*” exhibit employed a format similar to that of the LACM, which illustrated the production process. The Museum of Modern Art’s longstanding interest in Disney also helped counter accusations during World War II that it had a Eurocentric bias.

Chapter 2 also noted that Walt Disney was among the attendees at a late summer dinner party that Mary Pickford threw on 24 August 1935 to let Iris Barry and her husband lobby for donations to start the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. Disney immediately accommodated their requests for prints of a number of his films as well as production art showing the animation process, according to a letter from Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. to the Museum of Modern Art Film Library dated 27 August 1935. This letter noted that in addition to the films themselves, it would provide “rough story sketches, scenario suggestions, followed up by the changes as they take place until it takes a sort of final form; scene layouts, completed scenes of animation with exposure sheets, and music sheets, and then the corresponding completed scenes with backgrounds.” The studio also

planned to turn over “painted celluloids ready for the camera from some piece of action on which drawings are furnished.”

Various newspapers ran news items quoting from a MoMA press release for 3 December 1935 covering donations from Disney, Twentieth Century-Fox, and the LeRoy Collection of films and memorabilia. The title of the press release, “The ‘Vamp’ and Mickey Mouse Join the Museum of Modern Art Film Library,” accentuated Disney’s star attraction. A number of news items dropped Theda Bara’s vamp to center on Mickey or Disney alone with such titles as “Mickey Mouse Is Made an Immortal,” “Mickey Mouse Becomes a Historical Personage,” and “Museum Gets Disney Process.” Walt Disney was quoted in the release as saying, “The aim and purpose of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library are highly commendable and it gives me great pleasure to cooperate by supplying certain of our cartoon films selected by you.”

The Museum may have first displayed Disney animation art in Alfred Barr’s “Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism” exhibit, which included a cel from Disney’s *Three Little Wolves* (1936) featuring the Wolf being trapped by the Practical Pig’s “Wolf Pacifier” (“Modern Museum a Psychopathic Ward” 1936). Disney appeared in the company of American satirists Rube Goldberg and James Thurber, but the overwhelming majority of displayed artists were Europeans, ranging from Hieronymus Bosch to Marcel Duchamp and Salvador Dali.

MoMA’s 1938 exhibit in Paris at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, “Trois siècles d’art aux États-Unis” (“Three Centuries of American Art”), included stills of films by Disney and others. However, these may have been photographic prints rather than original production art. Back home that year an exhibit “Walt Disney—Original Drawings” was listed as being in preparation, but I have seen no documentation that it came to fruition (“Program for 1938” [1938] 1967).

The Museum's largest exhibit of Disney animation production art during these early years appeared in the summer of 1942. "Walt Disney's *Bambi: The Making of an Animated Sound Picture*" was designed to coincide with the film's release. While the Museum did place the *Bambi* exhibit in its Young People's Gallery, the press release did not dwell on Disney's specific suitability for children. Instead, it quoted Iris Barry as saying, "Nothing more joyous or more genuinely American than the Disney cartoons has ever reached the screen. ... Their simplicity, their tremendous gusto and defiant disrespectfulness at once caught the public fancy and have steadily maintained it, despite some few flights into artiness and sentimentality in the longer experimental features" ("Museum of Modern Art Shows Original Material" 1942). Barry regarded the Disney studio's triumphs and excesses in terms beyond the circumscribed bounds of what was good for children.

Barry's exultation at Disney's Americanism was infused with more than the national pride of Dorothy Grafly (especially since Barry was British). In the midst of World War II, Disney provided MoMA with an art that helped counter the accusations I noted in chapter 2 that MoMA's Eurocentrism was un-American. This in no way detracts from the longstanding interest the Museum took in Disney, but it helps situate MoMA in the midst of aesthetic and political cross-pressures that pitted elite tastes in European modernist painting styles against nativist American populism.

The exhibit included a detailed narrative of the technicality of producing feature length animation the Disney way. In addition to drawings, cels, and background paintings, on display were "photographs of the Disney staff at work, exposure sheets, production schedules, the instruments and gadgets with which they produce sound effects, and even a three-dimensional block of the huge Disney studio in Burbank, California" ("How Walt Disney Works" 1942). This mode of exhibition was first used for the Museum's 1938 exhibit "The Making of a Contemporary Film."



The *Bambi* exhibit suggested a shift in the Museum's presentation of Disney. Iris Barry's notes for the circulating film program "A Short History of Animation" referred to Walt Disney alone in discussing his films, for example, noting "from the moment Disney added sound to his drawings, the whole medium gained new scope and vitality." In contrast, when the press release for the *Bambi* exhibit described the step-by-step process of production, it mentioned Walt Disney as participating with his "idea-men" only in the first step, "Visualizing the Story." In the subsequent steps, it instead discussed the work of artists, actors, musicians, background and layout men, animators, and the "200 girls" in the inking and painting department. In addition, the release described the Disney studio as being "built very much like a modern factory."

This open view of Disney's employees went beyond that of the Los Angeles County Museum's exhibit. A number of factors may have influenced the decision to increase that emphasis. As I will detail in the following section on Disney's later career, in late spring of 1941 a portion of Disney's employees staged a strike that lasted most of the summer before government conciliation settled it. This forcefully brought Disney's employees into public consciousness. More generally, preparations for war increased industrial production across the country and strengthened public support for organized labor; thus, artistic laborers gained recognition as well.

The Museum provided an in-depth view of the degree to which the Disney studio had segmented its production process into sequential, specialized tasks within separate departments. One critic, Emily Genauer, questioned the aesthetic value of this look behind the scenes. She argued, "I don't think the exhibition... can properly be considered an art event. ... It has no more significance as art than would an exhibition which showed you how canvas is woven, pigments are ground and camels hunted for the hair which makes an artist's brush" (1942).

In contrast, an *Art Digest* editorial cited the Museum's exhibit materials to bolster the claim that "[*Bambi*] should be placed in the column of films that support the contention of critics who evaluate the Disney art, not only as great, but as a democratic, group-created art which, in its use of both machines and personal talent, best symbolizes the 20th century" ("Disney's *Bambi* Rated" 1942). This editorial welcomed the Museum's evidence of "the backstage evolution of Disney films" as a means of categorizing the animated film as neither popular culture nor high art, but modern, 20th-century art.

While the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit began to break down the old divisions between high and low art, and the Los Angeles County Museum showed machinery alongside production art, the Museum of Modern Art offered even more details of how factories could produce art. MoMA had already displayed architectural models and industrially designed objects whose artistry was in no way compromised by the collaborative and technical processes of their production. While individual artists in Disney's factory remained anonymous in each exhibit, their importance to the process was increasingly emphasized.

This would not be the case when Disney marketed its own art under Walt's name alone. Galleries presented each framed piece of Disney production art as complete and valuable in itself. The Disney company participated in transforming these works from by-products of filming into art objects by selling cels of various characters with specially prepared presentation backgrounds. Thus, no longer did the cels represent a step in the filmmaking process; they became individual portraits of characters.

### Early Gallery Exhibits of Disney Art

The *New York Times* reported in 1939 that Walt Disney began the art marketing program with the Courvoisier Gallery to maintain staff levels: "He began making his composite drawings for the galleries so he wouldn't have to lay off any of his employees during the slack season. Instead of cutting his staff, he made work—assigned people to cut

up the celluloid drawings, mount them on backgrounds and wrap them with cellophane” (Nugent 1939, 5). This work began to cost more than the money the art generated. After the studio prepared art for *Pinocchio*, Courvoisier took over the preparation using artists from local San Francisco schools (Tumbusch 1989, 60). Most of these composites utilized hand-prepared backgrounds to highlight the cels. Only a few of them matched cels with their original background paintings as seen in the films.

According to Leonard Maltin, Disney’s merchandising representative, Kay Kamen, had already experimented with sales in a St. Louis department store before Guthrie Courvoisier wrote a letter to the studio saying, “I feel that there is a better opportunity to sell these celluloids through the channels provided by the fine art market than in a commercial way, such as through department stores.... Mr. Disney’s reputation as an artist of great importance will at the same time be maintained. The position he now holds in this respect is outstanding” (Maltin 1982, 57). Exhibits such as those held by the Philadelphia Art Alliance, Art Institute of Chicago, and New York Public Library offered a model for a more elevated mode of marketing than in department stores beside the Mickey merchandise I discussed in chapter 1.

Also, museums provided a potential market for the art, according to the Disney announcement for the first series of specially mounted art from *Snow White*. It stated that the studio began to offer the art “because of the overwhelming demand for the celluloids not only from the general public but from museums and art collectors as well” (“Dopey, Grumpy & Co.” 1938). New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art confirmed this demand when they purchased cels (Maltin 1982, 57).

The Disney marketing program stressed the art’s cult value as collectibles over their contribution to the Disney films’ exhibition value. Disney co-opted techniques employed in the elite urban fine art galleries that prized art “for the few,” in Jean Charlot’s parlance.

That meant altering the art so it was more easily displayable as portraiture and it meant creating scarcity out of ubiquity. The same Disney announcement mentioned above made clear that, “although 475,000 paintings were photographed during the making of *Snow White*, only about 7,000 of the most suitable will be marketed. All others... have been destroyed” (“Dopey, Grumpy & Co.” 1938).

The Julien Levy Gallery was the first New York gallery to offer the Disney originals. The invitation to the exhibit’s opening in September 1938 accentuated both the scarcity of the art and the aesthetic legitimacy already accorded it: “Museums, art connoisseurs and collectors are acquiring these celluloids as fast as they can before the limited selection is exhausted” (“First National Showing” 1938). To elevate the paintings into their own sphere apart from the films, the invitation quoted Dorothy Grafly: “The artistry of Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* does not lie in its story-telling, but, like all great art, in its picture-making. Divorced from their context such pictures are pure abstractions; for the abstraction on a gallery wall is little more than a thought or emotion severed from the continuity of experience. That Disney’s abstractions are recognized as such only by the most discerning is a tribute to his fuller and deeper appreciation for life.”

Typical of the enthusiastic responses to this initial exhibit was Melville Upton’s relief that the Disney art offering overcame the “danger that the boundless popularity of his creations in their animated film form might tend to overshadow their claims to consideration as really exquisite works of art as well” (1938). Some, like *Harper’s Bazaar*, incorrectly attributed that artistry to Disney’s own hand but presciently predicted, “they’ll undoubtedly grow more valuable with the years” (“Walt Disney Originals” 1938).

Peyton Boswell echoed this when he suggested about a later gallery showing of *Fantasia* art, “It’s a good bet to predict the growth of cult of Disney collectors, possibly along the lines of the Currier & Ives lovers, who today think nothing of trading the price of

an automobile for a colored lithograph that once sold for 20 cents” (1940). These prognostications eventually came true in the 1970s and 1980s. However, America’s entry into World War II interrupted both the Courvoisier marketing program and Disney’s critical ascent. For over a decade prior to that, critics who saw exhibited production art of the Disney studio gained better insight into Disney’s aesthetic achievements.

### **Disney’s Later Career**

The period that began with World War II and ended with Walt Disney’s death in December 1966 saw the Disney company meet a series of organizational, economic, technological, and aesthetic challenges with varying degrees of success. During that time it went from a chronically debt-ridden cartoon studio to a profitable family entertainment conglomerate. In the process, it adapted to labor difficulties, wartime exigencies, postwar recession, and television’s erosion of the film market. In the 1940s and 1950s Disney branched out into live-action fiction films, wildlife films, self-distribution through Buena Vista, television, and a theme park. Also, Disney re-released its old animated features and maintained a stream of licensed merchandise on a global scale (Gomery 1994, 75-77).

However, this period saw Disney’s reputation as an artistic innovator suffer a steady decline. The expansion into other areas reduced the resources and attention devoted to the company’s core business of animation, which some claimed had degenerated into a bland house style. The greater profit margins of Disney’s cheaply produced live-action films and television shows made it harder to justify the time and expense needed to produce lavish animation.

These concerns placed intense pressure on *Sleeping Beauty* to perform well upon its release in 1959. Its gestation took the greater part of the decade and its budget swelled to \$6 million (Maltin [1973a] 1995, 154). It was meant to return Disney to the forefront of aesthetic accomplishment in animation, as well as recapture the audience for fairy tales that

made *Snow White* a box office bonanza. The traveling exhibition, “The Art of Animation: A Walt Disney Retrospective Exhibit,” was designed as part of the promotional activity surrounding *Sleeping Beauty*’s release.

Before looking at the exhibit in detail, I wish to consider the years leading up to it insofar as they affected Disney’s critical stature. Given the difficulties the company faced, it engaged in far more artistic experimentation in animation than contemporary critics acknowledged. *Sleeping Beauty* was the culmination of these aesthetic risks, and when it failed to impress critics or the movie-going public, the company turned to much less ambitious animated projects. However, Disney’s ongoing conversion of hardships into opportunities was always innovative, as the war years proved.

### **Disney Battles Unions and Hitler**

World War II began to influence the Disney company long before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which prompted the U. S. military to commandeer part of the studio as quarters for an antiaircraft unit (Finch 1973a, 271). Even while the war was contained in Europe, it significantly cut into the foreign markets for Disney’s films, beginning with *Pinocchio* (Schickel [1968] 1986, 235). The loss of revenue hit especially hard because the company had used up profits from *Snow White* and gone back into debt to build a new studio in Burbank that opened at the end of 1939. Indeed, the expansion cost so much, the company was forced to go public and issue stock in 1940. In addition to monetary woes the new studio caused, it had the unintended effect of isolating the various production staffs from each other and destroying the sense of community that had built up at the old Hyperion Avenue studio.

In search of new income sources, Disney began producing war-related training and propaganda films for Lockheed Aircraft and the Canadian government early in 1941 (Shale 1982, 16). I noted in chapter 2 that Nelson Rockefeller’s Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs hired Disney to make films promoting hemispheric unity. As part of

this arrangement, Walt Disney and an entourage embarked on a tour of South America in late summer of 1941. Disney's departure aided the resolution of another situation to have serious repercussions within the studio.

Beginning on 29 May 1941 and continuing through the summer, a third of Disney's employees were on strike (Solomon 1989, 71). Earlier, Disney had proposed layoffs and wage cutbacks to stem the company's red ink, which added to employee grievances regarding long hours of unpaid overtime, arbitrary wage scales and benefits, and limited on-screen credits. Disney had tried to pre-empt a unionization drive by the Screen Cartoonists Guild with a company union, but the drive succeeded and the subsequent strike sought to standardize wage scales and benefits as well as align Disney with fair labor practices then being recognized by the National Labor Relations Board. While Walt Disney was on his goodwill tour of South America, the strike was settled through federal government mediation (Allen and Denning 1992).

The acrimony the strike engendered on both sides of the picket line never fully dissipated. Walt Disney grudgingly rehired union activists whom he had fired, but refused to speak to them. A number of top artists left the company to pursue careers at different studios and one group formed the nucleus of a new studio, United Productions of America (UPA), as I mentioned in chapter 2. Thus, the strike precipitated a drain on talent that had taken a decade to develop and it sapped much of the unified creative spirit that yielded *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Fantasia*.

As the United States entered the war, Disney released the last two of the feature-length animated films initiated in the prewar years, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*. The studio quickly converted 90% of its resources to produce training, education, and propaganda films under contract with various branches of the government (Delehanty 1943, 31). These made use of many cost-cutting measures, including extremely limited animation and re-use of old sequences, in order to turn out ten times the rate of footage produced during the pre-war

period. This wartime austerity was followed by postwar economic, political, and technological disturbances that I detailed in chapter 1: union struggles amidst a recession, anti-trust consent decrees, anti-Communist hearings, and the growth of television. All of these forced Disney, along with other Hollywood film producers, to adapt to a shrinking film market.

### **Disney's Mashed Potatoes and Gravy**

After emerging from the war years in need of cash, Disney was quoted as saying, "We're through with caviar. From now on it's mashed potatoes and gravy" ("Father Goose" 1954, 46). No full-length animated story would again be released by Disney until *Cinderella* in 1950; instead, omnibus pictures and live-action/animation mixtures proved more cost-effective. Yet, the critical tide began to turn against these films. Eric Smoodin documents how reviewers in popular journals expressed increasing dissatisfaction with such offerings as *The Three Caballeros* (1945), *Make Mine Music* (1946), *Song of the South* (1946), *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), *Melody Time* (1948), and *Cinderella* (1950). The reviewers raised questions of taste, racism, and even eroticism, as well as bemoaning the patchwork quality of the features and the literalist style of some of the animation (1993, 101-115).

In the case of *Cinderella*, that literalist style was the direct result of the cost-cutting measure of filming all of the human characters in live-action to lock in layout decisions early in the production process. This reduced the need to re-animate scenes that were unworkable, but it also resulted in earthbound staging governed by the placement of the live-action camera. To counter this, the film relied on copious injections of the sparkly special effects that came to be known as "Disney dust" (Solomon 1989, 188). Despite the above-mentioned lukewarm critical reception, *Cinderella* proved a box office hit.

Subsequent releases of feature animated films were separated by increasing time spans, as the following release dates show: *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953),



*Lady and the Tramp* (1955), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The production of theatrical short cartoons declined from 18 releases per year in 1950 to four in 1955. At the end of 1955, the studio disbanded its short-subject units and thereafter produced only occasional cartoon “specials” of featurette length (Maltin [1980a] 1987, 72, 366-9).

In the midst of this reduction in product, critics accused Disney’s animated features of retreating from the aesthetic innovations of the early years into a stylistic complacency. I noted in chapter 2 how such critics as Arthur Knight (1952), Gilbert Seldes (1952), and David Fisher ([1953] 1980) passed the torch of artistic leadership from Disney to United Productions of America (UPA).

By 1954, the tendency to denigrate Disney’s latest achievements was so prevalent that Edward R. Lubin titled his positive review of the studio “Disney Is Still Creative.” Lubin elaborated in the subtitle, “As His Imitators and Other Detractors Yap, Disney Continues to Innovate.” In defense of Disney, he championed the studio’s innovative use of Cinemascope in the short *Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom* (1953) and stereoscopy in the short *Adventures in Music: Melody* (1953). Both utilized variations on the simplified modern style popularized by UPA, which had also crept into cartoons of such studios as Warner Bros. and MGM. Lubin put these achievements in the context of Disney’s “pioneering with lighting, especially with shadows, silhouetting, and reflections, and the suiting of predominant colors to certain scenes” (1954, 116).

Indeed, one of Disney’s financial and critical failures of the early 1950s, *Alice in Wonderland*, displayed much of the pioneering vitality thought to be gone from this era of Disney films. Its original release was rebuked for the liberties Disney took with Lewis Carroll’s stories and Tenniel’s illustrations. For example, Arthur Knight complained that *Alice* was evidence that Disney’s “naturalistic tendencies have been pushed to their ultimate” because such characters as the Mad Hatter and the March Hare looked less like Tenniel’s drawings than their respective vocal artists, Ed Wynn and Jerry Colonna (1951,

32-3). Knight perversely chastised this infidelity as a sign that “*Alice* lacks desperately in imagination and invention.”

In a reappraisal of *Alice* occasioned by its videocassette release, Robin Allan (1985) elevates the film’s reputation in part by likening it to sections of *Make Mine Music* and *Melody Time* whose surreal designs were influenced by Salvador Dali’s brief tenure at the studio in 1946. Allan saw those omnibus films as no mere economy measures, but fertile soil for experimentation that bore fruit in the rich stylization and robust animation of *Alice*. What it may have lacked in coherence or cuteness, it made up for in virtuosic cartoon lunacy.

Disney again suffered critical slings and arrows upon the release of *Peter Pan*. For example, David Fisher charged of *Peter Pan*: “Disney brings to Barrie’s fairy tale his comic-strip mind and sentimental vulgarity” ([1953] 1980, 179). Yet, unlike *Alice*, it performed well at the box office. To stave off further comparisons to famous source material, the next Disney feature developed an unpublished story. *Lady and the Tramp* thus gave the studio breathing room to construct a Disney-style story in Cinemascope. It centered on dogs living in a human world and portrayed its characters and their surroundings in a detailed, realistic fashion. Critics were generally unkind, but audiences flocked to it.

By the mid-1950s, the Disney company was producing more live-action films than animated ones, as well as the television shows “Disneyland” and “The Mickey Mouse Club.” Work on the television shows and the Disneyland theme park pulled away many individuals who had been involved in animation and delayed production on *Sleeping Beauty* for two years. A *Time* magazine cover story on Disney noted the scope of Disney’s many endeavors, which overshadowed animation production. It discussed how the company used cartoons as “loss leaders” for the more profitable areas of the business (“Father Goose” 1954, 43).

Those profit centers displayed little of the aesthetic ambition characterizing Disney's early animation work. Instead, practicality drove the decision to make a series of live-action films in England to use Disney assets that the British required be spent within their borders. Characterized by low budgets and actors with little box office clout, the films led the way for Disney's entry into juvenile adventure and family film production. The only extravagant departure was *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954), whose elaborate special effects and high caliber stars James Mason and Kirk Douglas were well received by audiences and critics alike.

However, the rest of the decade was filled out by cheaply made live-action fare: westerns, historical dramas, fantasies, and special effects comedies. When several of these, especially *Old Yeller* (1957) and *The Shaggy Dog* (1959), yielded large profits from slim budgets, they pushed animation further to the sidelines in favor of sentimental family drama and slapstick comic fantasies (Maltin [1973a] 1995, 146, 157).

In addition, the initial success of the "True Life" nature short *Seal Island* (1948) eventually led to the series' expansion into feature-length films. An outgrowth of this series was the "True-Life Fantasy" feature, *Perri* (1957), which adapted Felix Salten's children's book about a squirrel using live-action footage enhanced by "Disney dust" animation and special effects. This took much less time and money than did the fully animated *Bambi*, the studio's previous Salten adaptation. As Derek Bousé (1995) argues, these nature films were informed by Disney's animated storytelling practices that anthropomorphized animals into heroes, villains, clowns, and members of human-styled families. Like the live-action films featuring humans, the wildlife films often made back their budgets many times over.

### **Sleeping Beauty and the "Art of Animation" Exhibit**

If Disney could no longer count on its animated features to immediately add to the balance sheets the way these films did, *Sleeping Beauty* offered a chance to reclaim some of the prestige formerly associated with the Disney name. Departing from the 19th century

sentimental illustration style of previous features, Walt Disney allowed color and design stylist Eyvind Earle to adapt motifs from Dürer, Bruegel, and van Eyck, along with medieval French tapestries and illuminated manuscripts (Solomon 1989, 195). The human characters were once again referenced to live-action footage and they were set apart from the rich backgrounds with sharply angular designs. Animator Frank Thomas later recalled that the designs were too austere to inject life into the characters (quoted in Thomas 1991, 105).

Walt Disney's approval of accentuating visual opulence over emotional involvement was evident when he said of *Sleeping Beauty*: "Our artists rose to the occasion and evolved new styles, new designs, new concepts and our animators developed the art of animation to a point where it can now truly be called 'The Art of Living, Moving Paintings'" ("The Art of Animation" 1958). In many ways the film paralleled the studio's earlier self-consciously "artistic" project, *Fantasia*. Like that film, *Sleeping Beauty* also featured expensive technological advances: Technirama 70, for improved wide-screen effects, and six-channel stereophonic sound. It even shared the strategy of premiering at elevated "road-show" ticket prices amidst an elaborate promotional campaign.

As part of this campaign, the studio hired Associated Press reporter Bob Thomas to write a book, *Walt Disney: The Art of Animation* (1958), that covered the history of the studio's cartoons and then described in detail the making of *Sleeping Beauty*. In addition, the studio designed and funded "The Art of Animation: A Walt Disney Retrospective Exhibit," which traveled with support from the American Federation of Arts.

The Disney studio actually prepared three nearly identical exhibits to allow a total of 19 cities to host "The Art of Animation" from December 1958 through November 1959 before traveling to England, France, Germany, and Japan ("First Disney Art Show" 1959). The San Francisco Museum of Art hosted the world premiere on 11 December 1958. The majority of subsequent venues were art museums, with the exceptions of the Smithsonian

Institute, the Los Angeles County Museum, the Buffalo Museum of Science, Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, Stern's department store in New York City, and the Philadelphia Trade and Convention Center. A scrapbook in the Walt Disney Archives that collected all the press coverage of the touring exhibit within the United States provides the bulk of my primary resource material on the exhibit.

Thomas mentioned the book's genesis in the acknowledgements to the revised and updated edition: "Walt Disney said to me in 1957: 'All these years I've been taking the bows for the cartoons and the animated features. I did that for a purpose: to establish the Disney name as a guarantee to the public of good family entertainment. Now I want to give credit to the guys who made all those pictures'" (1991, 6).

This marked a departure from earlier mentions of Disney studio employees by job description only. Walt Disney now gave them a degree of recognition that Robert Feild had earlier claimed they did not need when he lauded Disney's "great workshop tradition... in which the artist as worker is dedicated to the fulfillment of a purpose and is satisfied to remain anonymous" ([1942] 1947, 282). A contemporary reviewer of *The Art of Animation* considered this introduction to the artists behind the scenes "one of the most delightful facets of the book," noting how such personalities as scenic artist Eyvind Earle and animation director Ward Kimball enlivened the studio's story (Babet 1959).

The names of Disney's employees were also made available in the traveling exhibition. Newspaper accounts mentioned names like Eyvind Earle, background artist Art Riley, layout artist Ken Anderson, director Gerry Geronimi, and animator Marc Davis. Even technical staffers were identified. Dick Grills of the camera department, camera operator Eustace Lycett, and film editor Norman Palmer were all mentioned in a pictorial on the exhibit ("From Mickey Mouse to Sleeping Beauty" 1959). Some articles centered on technicians Ross Tyson, Ken Walkey, and Don Iwerks, who helped install the exhibits

(e.g. Sealy 1959; “Disney’s ‘Art of Animation’ Show” 1959; “Disney Exhibit Opens at Gallery” 1959).

The exhibit followed the 1940 exhibit’s precedent of simultaneously developing two narratives: “the development of the art of animation” and an illustration of “the techniques involved in producing an animated cartoon from first story conference to final music scoring” (“The Art of Animation” 1958). This time, however, Disney was presented as the culmination of a much longer history of animation and *Sleeping Beauty* was presented instead of *Fantasia* as Disney’s magnum opus.

Just like Thomas’s book, the exhibit began with a history of animation that reached back to ancient Altamira cave paintings through later attempts at telling stories via sequential images before beginning the tale of Disney’s ascension. The exhibit brochure noted that in addition to the Stone Age cave paintings, the show included examples of Egyptian wall decorations and Grecian urns that “tried to achieve a feeling of motion” using sequential drawings of wrestlers and runners, respectively (1958). Even Leonardo da Vinci’s circumscription of man by the circle and square was used to depict animation of limbs rather than perfection of human proportions.

The exhibit’s inclusion of art from ancient Egypt, classical Greece, and Renaissance Italy followed earlier critics like Dorothy Graffy and Jean Charlot in establishing a bloodline linking Disney to the highest achievements of previous civilizations. But by invoking the cave paintings, the exhibit asserted more than animation’s artistic ancestry; it declared animation central to humanity’s primordial urge for self-expression. The historical prologue thus positioned Disney as a legitimate heir to age-old cultural yearnings.

This historical lineage gave art critics a chance to claim additional cultural antecedents for Disney. For example, the *San Francisco Examiner*’s art critic, Alexander Fried, looked to elite modern art in noting Balla’s “Dog on a Leash” and Duchamp’s “Nude Descending the Stairs” as examples of how a Futurist and a Cubist, respectively, grappled

with conveying motion in painting (1958). *Seattle Times* drama critic Louis R. Guzzo merely appreciated that “the exhibition nods gratefully to the past” as a means to go beyond the notion that “the recent history of animation virtually parallels a biography of Disney” (1959).

The exhibit also presented fine art from other eras in another context: to indicate the visual inspirations for the Disney studio’s stylistic choices. Smithsonian curator A.J. Wedderburn interpreted the inclusion of such art as showing “the importance of research to insure authenticity in period and locale” (1959), which followed the Disney studio’s own stated explanation for its use of the sources. Denver Art Museum director Otto Karl Bach highlighted in a newspaper article not only the importance of Disney’s research for historical authenticity, but for its interest “from an art point of view.” Thus, he lauded Disney’s adaptation of Tenniel’s illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland*, 19th century steel engravings for the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and especially the Flemish painting “Passion of Christ” for *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The background paintings that resulted from such adaptation were much larger and more elaborate production artworks than were animation drawings or cels, and they displayed the skill and labor of their making more opulently. This aided the Denver Art Museum’s assimilation of them into its traditional display of fine art paintings.

The *Louisville Courier-Journal*’s art critic, Senta Bier, saw that if the exhibit self-consciously acknowledged such artistic inspirations as the Book of Hours of the Duc de Berry, she could speculate about other influences on Disney. She claimed, “Anyone familiar with modern art will realize that Walt Disney used suggestions from major works, such as Franz Marc’s ‘Deer’ for Bambi or Miró’s fantastic critters for Mickey Mouse” (1959). Bier’s orientation toward the elite fine art world overstated Disney’s actual association with that world, for it is unlikely that Walt Disney turned to these artists for character design ideas. However, such attribution is the logical extension of

recontextualizing Disney as museum-worthy art. Rather than vaguely comparing Disney's aesthetic concerns with those of Duchamp, as Alexander Fried did, Bier postulates Miró's direct influence on the animation producer, and, thus draws Disney more tightly into the elite world of modern fine art.

However, the exhibit also included mass cultural predecessors to Disney. As did the 1940 Los Angeles County Museum exhibit, this one provided working reproductions of 19th century optical inventions that created limited cycles of animated images. Also, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* was featured as the representative of motion picture animation prior to Disney. The "Disneyland" television show had previously paid tribute to McCay as part of an episode titled "The Story of the Animated Drawing." McCay biographer John Canemaker argues that this show brought the then-obscure pioneer animator before the public for the first time in a generation (1987, 209). The exhibit reaffirmed Disney's artistic debt to McCay.

Whereas several art critics drew on outside knowledge of elite fine art to contextualize Disney, drama and movie critics mentioned less lofty antecedents. *Denver Post* drama editor Larry Tajiri made it clear that the animation industry was firmly established by the time Disney successfully introduced Mickey, and he singled out silent cartoon stars Krazy Kat and Ko-Ko the Clown, the series "Aesop's Fables," and cartoon producer Max Fleischer as important contributors to that industry (1959). Similarly, the *San Francisco Examiner's* drama critic, Helen Heitkamp, nodded to folk culture by calling Walt Disney "a 20th century Aesop" for his creation of a "modern mythology" (1958).

The part of the exhibit devoted to Disney proper was filled with original artwork from many Disney animated films as well as film clips displayed on small-screen film projectors. Other similarities to the 1940 exhibit included a model of a multiplane camera and the playing of background music from Disney films. However, the Disney studio designed the 1958 exhibit using two other models as well.



First, the organization had gained much expertise developing the attractions at Disneyland as totalized multimedia experiences for visitors. Thus, the number of film projectors proliferated from the few that ran in the 1940 exhibit. As Walt Disney put it, "If we're going to send out a show, let's send one that moves" (Sealy 1959). One newspaper account acknowledged the exhibit's similarity to the theme park by opening, "Disneyland... will occupy the sedate galleries of the Toledo Museum of Art" ("From Mickey Mouse to Sleeping Beauty" 1959).

Second, the studio had begun to present on its "Disneyland" television show a series of behind-the-scenes looks at its films and the theme park. In fact, the documentary on the making of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* won an Emmy despite some complaints that it served as an hourlong commercial for the film (Schickel [1968] 1986, 20). At the grand opening of the "Art of Animation" exhibit, Walt Disney explicitly referred to its role in promoting *Sleeping Beauty* when he said, "This exhibit won't hurt the picture.... It's what we mean by commercial art" ("Disney in Town for Opening of Exhibit" 1958). Both of these models of presentation accord with Disney's ongoing attempts to fuse education and entertainment, as well as the studio's antipathy toward the elitist pretenses of the fine art world.

As early as 1941, with the release of *The Reluctant Dragon*, Disney learned that far from destroying the illusion of magic, a carefully constructed peek at the production process could actually increase people's interest in Disney animation. That film followed Robert Benchley on a fictionalized tour of the Disney studio, interspersed with animated shorts supposedly in production during the tour. The logical extension of this is today's Disney-MGM Studio theme park in Orlando, Florida, which conducts tours past actual glass-enclosed artists who are working on current Disney projects. In essence, Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of "backstage" behavior is now brought "onstage" to generate

income and entertainment through the exposure of how entertainment is produced. In addition, the stream of visitors act as panoptic monitors of employee productivity.

In San Francisco, where the 1958 exhibit had its premiere, the coverage heavily emphasized the glamour of Walt Disney's appearance at the opening. Whereas, earlier newspaper critics writing in the "Society" and "Women's" sections articulated aesthetic justifications for Disney's inclusion in the elite art world, this no longer seemed necessary. At this point, Walt Disney was, through his regular television appearances hosting the "Disneyland" show, a national celebrity. He traveled in the same social circles as San Francisco Art Museum trustees, one of whom suggested the creation of the exhibit to him on a ski vacation ("Disney Art Festival to Highlight Party" 1958).

Walt Disney's allure was such that in addition to his appearance at the Museum's Christmas Party that opened the exhibit, the society columns covered the preparations leading up to the event itself, including a flight down to the Disney studio for an exhibit preview (Moffat 1958a; Robbins 1958a). Columnist Frances Moffat genially noted that "the museum's devotion to modern art went by the boards" during the party because of Disney's contributions to the decorations: a blown-up photomural of a scene from *Old Yeller* and a Christmas tree with Disney characters as ornaments (1958b). Columnist Millie Robbins sided with Walt Disney's humorous skepticism toward an abstract sculpture awarded to him at the party "in recognition of his contribution to modern art" (1958b). Several articles dwelt on the people whom Disney brought as representatives of the talent that helped create *Sleeping Beauty*: artist Ken Anderson and actress Helene Stanley, who was the live-action model for Princess Aurora ("Disney in Town for Opening of Exhibit" 1958; Moffat 1958b; Muller 1958).

The attention these columns paid to Disney's appearance at the opening party for the exhibit also aided the San Francisco Art Museum in boosting attendance. Just as Walt Disney expressed his desire that the art exhibit would draw people into the theaters to see

*Sleeping Beauty*, a trustee of the museum remarked that the exhibit was “going to make the museum a lot of money” (“Disney in Town for Opening of Exhibit” 1959). As the 1940 coverage of Roland J. McKinney’s difficulties at the Los Angeles County Museum attests, these elite cultural institutions operated within financial constraints that made consideration of an exhibit’s popularity a factor in curatorial decisions.

Indeed, money was mentioned repeatedly in another context regarding the exhibit. First, the original brochure (“The Art of Animation” 1958) claimed that the exhibit included “more than twenty projection systems” and its total cost was “over \$100,000.” Subsequent press mentions inflated those numbers to 34 or 36 projectors and between \$200,000 and \$500,000. If these represent citations of figures from continuously updated press release material, they show the cost of mounting the exhibit climbing since the Disney studio published its original estimates. The frequent quotation of a dollar figure and description of elaborate display paraphernalia added to the luster of the show. It parallels publicity campaigns accompanying traveling exhibitions of famous masterpieces that highlight the how much the artworks were insured for in order to be allowed to leave their homes.

These were not the only numbers that writers cited. Just as the Philadelphia Art Alliance *Bulletin* announcement conveyed labor intensity through production figures, the 1958 exhibit provided information that newspapers could quote. Thus, Helen Heitkamp marveled at Disney’s 2,000 paints and inks and the 45,000 drawings needed to make a 700-foot animated short (1958) and Larry Tajiri noted the 300 artists required to create over one million drawings for *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Others instead tallied the attendance figures as a measure of validation for the exhibit. Otto Karl Bach noted record crowds at the Denver Art Museum (1959) as did Harry Ferlenger at the Philadelphia Trade and Convention Center (“Walt Disney Exhibit Is Crowd-Pleaser” 1959).

Whether it was because of low-prestige venues, or due to a lack of interest in Disney, Chicago papers did not cover the “Art of Animation” exhibit at the Museum of

Science and Industry and New York papers gave the exhibit's appearance in Stern's department store only brief mentions (Pryor 1959; "History of Animation" 1959). Even at Disney's alma mater, the Kansas City Art Institute, he merited only a short paragraph within a long article detailing the Institute's 75th anniversary festivities (Dickerson 1959). Indeed, a good number of stories that ran in various cities were primarily identical quotations from a press release on the exhibit.

I have cited above a number of art and drama critics who gave more personalized reactions to the exhibit, which were, on the whole, favorable to museums' recognition of Disney animation as an art form. Only a few writers expressed minor reservations. For example, Senta Bier noted the "certain stereotyped style" of Disney's cartoons, but forgave "this kind of compromise" as part of the large scale production process (1959).

An art critic for the *Los Angeles Times* rejected the notion that Disney cartoons had necessarily improved as the studio got more ambitious. The critic preferred Minnie Mouse to Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* because, "in an attempt to make cartoons more lifelike or realistic, the element of caricature so central to the humor of cartoons has now largely been eliminated. Disney's personal touch, which has made him justly famous has been lost in the complexity of the mechanics he has evolved" ("Walt Disney's Artistry on View at Museum" 1959).

There was surprisingly little of the bemused tone some critics affect at the latest instance of barbarian popular culture beating down the gates of elite culture. One exception was the drama critic in Seattle, who opened his review by saying: "Perhaps as another indication that anything can happen in this broad and broad-minded land, Mickey Mouse has been invited into the hallowed halls of the Seattle Art Museum" (Guzzo 1959). He went on to recommend the exhibit for adults as well as "Mouseketeers."

Instead, the general response joined playful approval with serious acknowledgment of the Disney studio's accomplishments. Some voiced high praise in terms that addressed

the aesthetic syntheses that the studio achieved. For example, the Toledo Museum of Art's director, Otto Wittmann, stated, "The art of animation demonstrates how 20th Century artists, combining long-recognized principles of art with modern technology, have in a unique manner created an entirely new popular art form" ("From Mickey Mouse to *Sleeping Beauty*" 1959). This appraisal aligns with those of earlier exhibits which departed from the ideology of the cultural hierarchy to accept mass media as aesthetically valuable.

As the above quotes indicate, the most lavish acclaim for the exhibit invariably came from museum representatives who were involved with presenting it: Otto Karl Bach of the Denver Art Museum, A. J. Wedderburn of the Smithsonian Institute, and Otto Wittmann of the Toledo Museum of Art. The orientations of these museums influenced how their representatives framed that approbation. Bach and Wittman stressed Disney's qualifications as a serious producer of art, while Wedderburn's position at the more pedagogically-minded Smithsonian gave Disney a seal of approval for making learning fun with "the perfect blend of fact and phantasy." In fact, Wedderburn admitted, "History is sometimes hard to take, even in small doses—but not Disney-style."

In sum, the "Art of Animation" exhibit seemed to succeed on its own terms of presenting the complex process of animation as both an art form and a vehicle of entertainment. The public attended and the critics praised it. However, as a publicity machine for *Sleeping Beauty*, it did not save the expensive film from posting losses. The exhibit and the film marked the last time during Walt Disney's lifetime that the studio would make such a self-consciously aesthetic claim for its animation.

### Uncle Walt Meets Pop Art

Between the debacle of *Sleeping Beauty* and Walt Disney's death in December 1966, the Disney organization grew enormously profitable from the revenues generated by Disneyland. At the same time, the folksy image of Uncle Walt became a guarantor of wholesome, escapist family entertainment rather than anything resembling art. Critical

discourse of the era often conflated Uncle Walt with the entire Disney corporation. Aesthetic condemnations focused on Walt's lapses in taste, while affirmations lauded Walt's moral fiber in the midst of decadent times. Among the signs of decadence were two artistic camps that appropriated Disney icons: Pop art and the counterculture. They deserve discussion not only for these direct appropriations, but for their expansion of what constitutes legitimacy in the elite fine art world. What irony and disrespect they showed toward the Disney ethos was balanced by their influence in stimulating aesthetic appreciation of representation, consumer culture, and mechanically reproducible media. The elite art world's increased openness toward these things helped renew interest in Disney animation as art in the 1970s.

Before considering these verbal and artistic critiques of Disney in detail, I turn to the company's own animated films and other aesthetic innovations of the period. By maintaining production of feature-length animated films, the Disney studio stood virtually alone against a tide of cost-cutting as animation studios abandoned theatrical cartoons for much cheaper television fare (Polt 1964). Walt Disney was personally involved in the production of three animated features in the 1960s: *101 Dalmatians* (1961), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), and *The Jungle Book* (1967).

*101 Dalmatians* was both financially and critically successful, seen as a return to form rather than a leap forward. Its use of caricatured humans and modern day setting complemented its technological innovation, xerography. Unlike Technirama 70, xerography was a useful and cost-cutting technology that photocopied onto celluloid, which eliminated the need for inkers. It required a thick pencil outline to ensure that the image was transferred intact and the film employed thick outlines in its flat stylized backgrounds to match the characters in the foreground. The Disney studio not only upheld its reputation for technical virtuosity by using xerography to animate so many spotted dogs,

but it also constructed a film whose plot and characters were engrossing enough to keep the audience's attention from wandering into considerations of virtuosity.

*The Sword and the Stone* was a pleasant but minor achievement for the studio that trivialized the Arthurian legend. *The Jungle Book's* appeal derived more from vocal talent and songs than from story or character development. Both films had enjoyable scenes of animation by studio veterans. The greatest film triumph of Disney's final years was unquestionably the live-action/animation combination, *Mary Poppins* (1964). A lavish and liberal adaptation of the P. L. Travers stories, it was the Disney studio's biggest grosser up to that time. Its many charms included winning performances by a large cast headed by Julie Andrews, catchy songs, humorous interactions between live actors and animated characters, art direction unified by a whimsical sense of fantasy, and great special effects. It was nominated for thirteen Oscars and won five.

During these years, the Disney organization was increasingly taken up by other matters. Walt Disney himself was consumed with plans for endowing what was to become California Institute of the Arts and developing the second theme park, Walt Disney World, and its offshoot, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT). Among the projects Walt pursued as part of the theme parks was the development of Audio-Animatronic technology.

Audio-Animatronics fulfilled the aspirations toward literalist naturalism in the studio's animated films. Mechanically reproducible motions were programmed into three-dimensional figures by sonically activating pneumatic and hydraulic valves. Synchronized with a vocal soundtrack, these actions simulated human behavior. The most sophisticated early model was an Audio-Animatronic Abraham Lincoln in one of the Disney exhibits at the 1964-65 New York World's Fair.

Christopher Finch, in his studio-authorized coffee table tome, *The Art of Walt Disney*, claimed this technology has "a technical sophistication that has never been

matched” and whose “impact was extraordinary” (1973a, 400-2). Richard Schickel, in his unauthorized biography, *The Disney Version*, agreed that the technology produces “astonishing fidelity” to human mannerisms, but he branded it “the dehumanization of art in its final extremity” and called the resulting simulacrum of Abraham Lincoln “a monster of wretched taste” ([1968] 1986, 335-7).

To Schickel and others voicing concerns about Walt Disney in the 1960s, the question of taste assumed increasing importance. Because of Disney’s privileged access to children, some in the field of education were especially critical. Retired librarian Frances Clark Sayers launched a campaign against Disney’s gimmicky vulgarization of children’s literary classics (1965a, 1965b, 1966). Others warned parents to protect impressionable children from some of Disney’s more intense scenes (e.g. Tucker 1968).

Often these critics equated Disney the man with an entertainment juggernaut that sought the least common denominator by trading on mawkish sentimentality and holding aloft moral righteousness in place of artistic innovation. Walt Disney biography informed critiques of Disney corporate culture and products. Critical judgments of these products’ poor taste called upon the image of Walt Disney as an unsophisticated, conservative, midwestern go-getter to explain what the organization had wrought. In some cases, admirers of the Disney company found its secret in Walt’s limitations. John Bright argued, “I think the man’s unique success can be understood only by reference to his personal *non*-uniqueness. Of all the activities of public diversion, Uncle Walt was the one most precisely in the American midstream—in taste and morality, attitudes and opinions, prides and prejudices” (1967, 303).

Attacks on the basis of taste are especially damning to the acquisition and maintenance of aesthetic legitimacy because taste carries so many tacit entailments and valences. Bourdieu argues that elite possessors of good taste “cannot conceive of referring taste to anything other than itself” (1984, 11). Taste is a sense of discrimination that is



second nature, operating as a screen against what Bourdieu terms the “lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile” (1984, 7). The tasteful need not explain the basis on which a perceived lapse of taste has repulsed them; the mere expression of repulsion is suitable evidence of their cultivated sensibilities.

Nor can one accused of tastelessness respond with an argument in one’s own defense; verbalizing such a defense destroys what is assumed to be ineffable, intuitive, and natural by linking it to the specific, rational, and artificial. To justify one’s taste with concrete knowledge, accepted categories, and regulations is to expose the pedantry upon which one’s tastelessness is truly based. Bourdieu argues that the strength of taste in maintaining class differences is precisely the way in which it eludes definition, but is presented as self-evident by those who possess it.

This may partially explain why defenders of Disney often used morality rather than aesthetics to bolster their arguments. They saw Disney as ammunition in a war against what they perceived as the moral disintegration of society. For example, California’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, Max Rafferty, called Disney’s films “lone sanctuaries of decency and health in the jungle of sex and sadism created by the Hollywood producers of pornography” (1965). Walt Disney himself was quoted as claiming that he made wholesome entertainment, which he preferred over films that were depressing, dirty, or abnormal (Schickel [1968] 1986, 354). Schickel argued the need for his analytic biography of Walt Disney precisely because Disney “became a kind of rallying point for the subliterate of our society, the chosen leader for the desultory—and ambiguous—rear-guard action they were trying to fight against a rapidly changing cultural climate” ([1968] 1986, 339). Schickel claimed that Disney continued to merit study as a social and economic phenomenon, if no longer as art.

The middle class was not the only segment of society to rue the cultural transformations afoot in the 1960s. Art critics were battling an assault on prevailing

standards of taste in the elite fine art world as Pop art overtook Abstract Expressionism. Pop art's ascendance provided new perspectives for evaluating the Disney oeuvre: it supplanted abstraction with representation; it gained favor first with enthusiastic collectors rather than critics; it emphasized the continuity between commercial art and fine art as commodities; it introduced a camp sensibility toward both consumer culture and the fine art world; and it directly appropriated such Disney icons as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in its art.

Pop art confounded critics who had advocated Abstract Expressionism for the purity of its formal experimentation, which shed the shackles of representation. In place of Abstract Expressionism's seriousness, Pop art displayed irony; in place of formal rigor, it offered pastiche. It centered on images appropriated from advertising and mass media, reveling in promiscuous juxtapositions from different cultural strata. This clashed directly with Abstract Expressionism's turn inward toward an ever more restricted set of concerns inherent to the medium of painting. Critics often viewed Pop art as a regression from the linear progress toward the purity of absolute abstraction. Pop art's immersion in the mundane and profane world of commerce prevented critics from assimilating it into the avant-garde's continually advancing forefront of artistic achievement; instead, many branded it kitsch.

Despite such critical denunciations, Pop art flourished throughout the 1960s. Christin Mamiya (1992) argues that its success reduced the institutional roles of critics as explicators and arbiters of taste. Pop art was pictorially accessible and its artists were willing to promote their works. Media covered the movement in much greater detail than it had previous art movements. Those critics who decried Pop art as the death of art were rendered irrelevant as it surged in popularity among dealers and collectors. It shared with Disney an appeal to audiences that bypassed critics' dismissals of it on the basis of taste.

Thus, critics turned to moral condemnation of Pop art when expressions of distaste failed, branding it decadent and its artists delinquents.

Among Pop art's sins was its embrace of technologies of reproduction that undermined the authenticity of the unique artwork. Not only was mass media the subject of much Pop art, but also the mode of its production (albeit often on the limited scale of the silkscreen or stencil). In addition, Pop artists employed the same apparatus of advertising to promote their work that provided its content. Rather than disregarding the public as avant-garde artists had previously done, Pop artists wooed it with unabashed sales pitches. These traits were shared by Disney animation's combination of handicraft and mass production and the company's promotional activities.

If Pop art succeeded in assaulting the carefully cultivated taste of elite art critics to triumph in the fine art world during the 1960s, what prevented Disney from doing the same? Considering that Disney icons were among the consumer culture sources Pop artists employed, what gave artistic legitimacy to the appropriation of such images but withheld it from the original images?

Pop artists operated as cultural producers who gained leverage within the fine art world through the increased exchange value of their products. Despite having backgrounds in commercial art and using motifs from it, they circulated their art in the elite fine art world. In overturning old conventions of the the art world embodied by the Abstract Expressionists, Pop artists behaved as all new artistic movements do in displacing the old. According to Bourdieu, artists who challenge established artistic hierarchies make their challenge an artistic act and thus claim for themselves "the monopoly in legitimate transgression of the boundary between the sacred and profane" (1986, 155). In other words, ascendant artists reinforce the exclusivity of the category of "art" by limiting its new territory to include only their particular transgressive creations.

When they trained their discerning gaze upon mass media and consumer culture, the Pop artists asserted their authority as connoisseurs as well as creators. They made the act of appropriation, rather than acts of transformation or *de novo* creation, their artistic contribution. By maintaining an ambiguous, ironic detachment from the culture they appropriated, they reduced the source material to elements of a shared cultural language. The Disney company, operating wholly within the realm of commercial art, had no such distance from its own products.

This is not to say that all Pop artists employed Disney images in the same way. Roy Lichtenstein's 1961 painting, "Look Mickey," for example, emphasized the impersonal style of the source comic strip featuring Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse (Mamiya 1992, 89). In contrast, Claes Oldenburg's 1963 poster for his show at the Dwan Gallery transformed Mickey's wholesome face into a lustful leer (Varnedo and Gopnik 1990, 208). The ambiguous stances these and other Pop artists took toward the consumer culture icons they employed left critics room for speculating as to whether the artists were critiquing consumer culture or contributing to its legitimation. Some critics constructed arguments that discerned in the art's commentary and formalism more complexity than its accessible images might suggest (Mamiya 1992, 151).

Pop artists' appropriations of Disney icons diluted the Disney corporation's control over its sanitized image even as they relied on the stability of that image to impart meaning to their work. Disney, like Pepsi, Volkswagen, and Campbell's, was a powerful symbol of American consumer culture. As the elite art world came to accept artistic expression based on such symbolism, Disney entered into that world not as artistic producer, but as subject matter.

Pop art therefore made room for Disney and other purveyors of consumer culture in the fine art world primarily insofar as they provided raw material for the Pop artists' appropriations. Yet, in diminishing the role of art critics in ratifying new art movements

and in emphasizing a continuity between commercial and fine art, Pop art blurred formerly distinct boundaries. The disposable became the coveted and popularity was no longer an automatic disqualification from the realm of serious or expensive art. If Pop artists sought the monopoly to legitimately transgress, they could not hold onto it. Museum curators, such as some of those I documented in chapter 2, sought new contexts for presenting an eclectic range of art, which they no longer felt constrained to justify by evincing a connection to established high art.

The 1960s and 1970s also saw Disney subjected to what were self-consciously illegitimate transgressions: the counterculture appropriated Disney icons in ways that were unambiguously subversive. The magazine *The Realist* included in its May 1967 issue a tableau of Disney characters engaging in stripteases, prostitution, sexual assault, fornication, urination, defecation, and drug use. In the background, Cinderella's castle radiated dollar signs. Norman Klein notes other appearances of what he calls "anti-Mickeys" in Chicago posters, San Francisco underground comics, and an anti-war animated cartoon called *Uncle Walt* (1967), which sent Mickey to a graveyard for the Vietnam War (1993, 249).

The Disney legal department vigorously protected its intellectual property from such copyright violations. Its lawsuit against an artistic collective shut down publication of their underground comic, *The Air Pirates*, which savagely parodied Mickey and other characters (Orth 1972; *Walt Disney Productions v. The Air Pirates*, 581 F.2d 751 (9th Cir.) 1978). Disney also sued a pornographer who included the "Mickey Mouse March" as background music to an orgy scene in the film *The Life and Times of a Happy Hooker*, in which the participants wore nothing but Mouseketeer ears (Montgomery 1975).

These satires of the scrubbed clean nostalgic Disney worldview seem almost sacrilegious because of the Disney company's embodiment of moral rectitude. That parodies of Disney could seem blasphemous is an indication of how far the corporation

traveled from its early days as a revolutionary presence within the marginal cartoon short industry of the 1930s. It had become the standard bearer for wholesome family entertainment. As it grew into a transnational conglomerate, the Disney company came to represent American mass culture in all its imperialist aspirations to saturate world markets. Thus, it was as much a signifier of the entire global capitalist system as it was a deserving target of lampoonery.

The debased cultural formats the counterculture employed in mocking Disney also deserve mention for their contribution to blurring boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate artistic media. The counterculture breathed new life into what were seen to be the most disreputable and disposable of media. To those who noticed them at all, comics had degenerated from the illustrious days of Winsor McCay and George Herriman to an artistically calcified collection of clichés, formulas, and stereotypes; they were remarked upon only for their insidious effects on children.

Yet, underground comics experimented with novel styles and content, serving up adult-oriented social critiques within a medium formerly consigned to youngsters. Their designs mixed psychedelic imagery with figures inspired by crude rubber-hose characters of 1930s cartoons. The countercultural styles had a great impact on a wide range of graphic arts and provided direct inspiration for two animated features that challenged Disney's stylistic and economic domination of the form: *Yellow Submarine* (1968) and *Fritz the Cat* (1972) (Solomon 1989, 259-61). Yet, Disney's marketing prowess overcame any disdain the company felt for the subversive counterculture. It re-released *Fantasia* in 1969 using a psychedelic style poster promoting the movie as a head trip.

Eventually, underground comics found their way into galleries, museums, and auction houses, as did more mainstream comic art. One of the most comprehensive of these exhibits was "The Comic Art Show" at the Whitney Museum's Downtown Branch in summer 1983 (Carlin and Wagstaff 1983). The space that first opened up for Pop art had

expanded to encompass some of its source materials as well. Thus, the Whitney Museum displayed a range of original comic strip and comic book art intermingled with paintings, sculptures, and other works inspired by them. The comic art was not merely presented to illuminate the fine art's gestation, but as worthwhile art with its own historical trajectories illuminated by several essays in the exhibit catalog. Disney art was represented in comic strip form, in screened cartoons, and as appropriated images in various paintings.

The elite fine art world's display of Disney art, Pop art, and underground comics together as equally vital is evidence that the boundaries between legitimacy and illegitimacy have become more porous. No longer is condescension toward popular culture a prerequisite for legitimacy; popular culture itself can be recognized as artistically viable. The following section considers how Disney art came to be reinstated in the elite art world at a time when the Disney company seemed unable to match the achievements of Walt's tenure.

### **Disney Exhibits after Walt**

In viewing the Disney art exhibits mounted during the 1970s and early 1980s, it is useful to recognize the commemorative functions that museums serve in the elite art world. Whereas gallery owners are best positioned to seek out potential talent that might flourish in the future, museums excel at summing up careers of proven artists and tracking trajectories of artistic movements from birth to morbidity. The 1970s were a time when the Disney company was ripe for such commemoration.

A number of circumstances within the company called for memorialization. Walt Disney's death in 1966 was the first occasion for appraising his lifetime accomplishments. The stable crew of oldtime artists was breaking up as they neared retirement age and their departure would signify an end of an era. The history of the Disney company could be traced back to Walt Disney's silent era, which made a golden anniversary celebration

appropriate during the 1970s. However, the Disney company's risk-averse corporate culture provided the primary internal impetus to look backward.

External to the Disney company were a number of factors favoring celebrations of the studio's past output. As I discussed in chapter 1, the market for animation had shifted almost completely to low budget limited animation for television. In chapter 2, I described how film buffs like Greg Ford and Leonard Maltin began to promote the idea of a golden age of Hollywood cartoons that lasted from the 1930s through the 1950s. Old Disney shorts joined those of the Fleishers, Warner Bros., MGM, and others in receiving renewed attention in articles and programmed retrospectives. Nostalgia also drove collectors in search of Disney artifacts from their childhoods. The Disneyana market was among the many collectibles markets to explode in the 1970s. Disneyana encompassed mass produced and specialty merchandise associated with Disney, including animation art.

I will consider each of the internal factors in turn. At his death, Disney was eulogized more as a tycoon than as an artist. As the headline of his obituary in the *New York Times* stated, he "Founded an Empire on a Mouse" ("Walt Disney, 65" 1966, 1). The *Times* obituary dwelled on the empire rather than its aesthetics, quoting Disney's own claim that he "never called this art. It's show business." However, the *Times* film critic, Bosley Crowther, did venture an artistic judgment of Disney, couched as consensus: "There isn't much question among artists that his most original and tasteful films were his animated shorts made in the nineteen-thirties" (1966, 40). Although Crowther was more restrictive than most, he was joined by many who grouped Disney's pre-war animation in a class apart from subsequent work. Disney's death turned a prolonged slump into a permanent decline.

The years following Walt Disney's death confirmed that assessment. *The Aristocats* (1970) seemed a rehash of story elements from *101 Dalmatians* along with an over-reliance on distinctive voice casting. The live-action/animated mix of *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*



(1971) recalled *Mary Poppins*, only in a darker register. *Robin Hood* (1973) cast the legend in animal garb with echoes of *Jungle Book*. One dance sequence was even lifted from *Snow White* as a cost-saving measure. The corporation's animation unit was full of aging artists who were candid about their growing complacency. As senior animator Frank Thomas acknowledged in the mid-1970s, "We are less experimental. [With Walt] every picture was completely different. We were always pushed into things that were exceedingly difficult to do. He was always asking us to rise above ourselves. Well, when he left it up to us, we quit that. We got old. We decided we were going to do the things that were fun to do" (quoted in Maltin 1976b, 83).

If the longtime animators had settled into a comfortable Disney style over the decades, they had also perfected their craft. The question that dogged the studio in the 1970s was whether new talent could be trained to that level or would the core of the Disney company be disbanded when the veterans left. Articles focused on Disney's "Nine Old Men," nine supervising animators who had long made up the studio's Animation Board. The Board assumed the managerial tasks required to produce the Disney style of personality animation as Walt Disney turned to other matters during and after the war (Thomas and Johnston 1981, 159-60). Walt gave them this sobriquet in jest when all were still young, but now the title fit. A recruitment drive and training program was instituted in the early 1970s, when *The Aristocats* and *Robin Hood* proved Disney animation could still work magic at the box office. The progress of the newcomers was monitored by several writers in arts journals and leading newspapers (e.g. Culhane 1975; Maltin 1976b; Canemaker 1978; Harnetz 1978; Ward 1981).

The influx of new talent did not come from the Disney-endowed California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) until the late 1970s. Prior to that the school had a reputation as a countercultural haven for radical politics and alternate lifestyles (Gottschalk 1972). Its experimental animation program, headed by Jules Engel, did not produce the potential

Disney animators that the company sought. Unhappy with the controversies emanating from Cal Arts and the lack of animators trained in the rigors of character animation in the Disney style, the Disney family cleaned house within the administration and faculty. In addition to Engel's program, a character animation program was set up in 1975 under a former Disney cartoon director, Jack Hannah (Smith 1977).

When *The Rescuers* (1977) topped the first-run earnings of previous Disney animated features, observers predicted a rosy future for the animation division. Mark Kausler ended his review of the film by saying "I think that any fears for the future quality of Disney animation, now that most of the old-timers have retired, are largely unfounded. The new animators... are all capable of producing animation that is, in many respects, a close match for that done by veterans" (1978, 51). However, this optimism was shattered by the exodus of a nucleus of those new animators in the fall of 1979. Led by Don Bluth, they set up a rival company that attempted to recreate the emotional depth of early Disney animation, which they claimed was missing in the studio's recent projects (Hollie 1979; Solomon 1989, 269, 279).

This set back the Disney animation production schedule by a year for its next release, *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) and several years for *The Black Cauldron*. The former was an unambitious exercise to prepare the artists for the latter's attempt to recapture the old Disney glory. By the time of its 1985 release, *The Black Cauldron* had spent twelve years in preparation and ballooned to \$25 million in budget. Much like *Sleeping Beauty*, the studio put its artistic chips into this one basket, ladling on dark atmospherics in place of a coherent story or memorable characters. Its failure at the box office heightened the gloom pervading the animation division.

The troubles of Disney's animation division were part of a much larger problem with the company's management. At the time of Walt Disney's death the company had become a financially stable major studio in a film industry undergoing downsizing,

takeovers, and other crises. In place were plans for expanding resort development, maintaining live-action and animated film production, and continuing television production. Walt's brother Roy O. Disney chaired the company on the basis of these plans until his death in 1971. Disney family members and longtime loyalists continued to steer the ship along this course, reaping enormous profits from Walt Disney World, while revenues from new live-action productions steadily eroded.

The corporation's management team increasingly operated as caretakers of what Bourdieu calls "consecrated cultural products," by which he means the early triumphs that have accumulated prestige over time. According to Bourdieu, firms can grow old by growing so big that the overhead of running the company reduces risk-taking in its new cultural productions in favor of exploiting its old products that have attained classical status (1986, 157-8). Promotions of the company's re-released animated films matched or exceeded those for its new productions, because the former continued to generate guaranteed revenues. Merchandising of Mickey Mouse and the rest of the characters from the 1930s shorts continued long after they stopped appearing in animated form (aside from a comeback featurette in 1983, *Mickey's Christmas Carol*).

Meanwhile the executives fell under the sway of the same romantic ideology that influenced critical discussions of Disney: only the aura of deceased genius Walt Disney's touch could sanctify the company's products. In his absence their decisions were often based on what Walt would have done ("Disney After Walt" 1973). This constrained most of their new cultural productions to slavishly imitate what had been successful under Walt, despite the continual changes in the entertainment industry since his death. In particular, they clung to the gimmicky slapstick family comedies for their live-action products, while the family audience fragmented and the adolescent and young adult audience ascended in box office potency. Revenues from the theme park business continued to contribute a

growing percentage to the company's bottom line throughout the 1970s but when income from that sector flattened, the film production division's weaknesses could not be ignored.

Given this capsule summary of the Disney company's faltering steps toward producing new cultural assets, it made sense for the company to cooperate with the cultural institutions that approached it to mount tributes to the treasures in the Disney vaults. Such tributes can be seen as weapons in the Disney public relations arsenal, as I discussed in chapter 2, but they reflect sincere attempts to assess the Disney oeuvre not only as entertainment, but as art. This was a form of consecration that the company could not bestow upon itself, a form of cultural capital that would soon yield economic capital as the animation art market blossomed in the 1980s. I turn now to the first of these tributes, held at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in 1973.

### **The Lincoln Center Retrospective and Exhibits**

The art exhibits held in conjunction with the the Lincoln Center's retrospective were a relatively minor aspect of the tribute as a whole, but the retrospective is worth examining for what it shows about the Disney company's orientation toward managing its consecrated cultural products. Disney management backed the retrospective with a range of resources and tied it into a 50th anniversary observance that culminated in the publication of Christopher Finch's mammoth book, *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms* (1973a). Both the retrospective and the book presented Disney in a light that demanded serious consideration, so I will review them together.

Two physical installations accompanied the Lincoln Center's four-week "Walt Disney 50th Anniversary Film Retrospective." The Walt Disney Archives provided "early movie posters, original animators' drawings, background paintings, artists' pencil sketches and color studies, and original animation cels" (Smith and Essoe 1973). The exhibits were situated outside the two sites for screenings: Alice Tully Hall and the auditorium of the

New York Public Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. The latter exhibit was titled "Walt Disney: Behind the Scenes 1923-1973" and marked "the 50th anniversary of Walt Disney's first animated short in 1923" (Lincoln Center Pub. Info. Dept. 1973).

The short in question was *Alice's Wonderland*, but it was not Disney's first. As I mentioned in chapter 2, that honor went to the sample reel Disney produced in Kansas City, *Newman Laugh-O-Grams* (1921). *Alice's Wonderland* was claimed as such because the Disney company only agreed to participate in the retrospective in order to celebrate a golden anniversary. Twice before, Lincoln Center representatives had approached the company with the idea, but were turned down (Frederick 1973). The date of 16 October 1923 was chosen to represent the founding of the company because on that date, Walt Disney signed a contract with distributor Margaret Winkler to produce a series of "Alice" comedies (Smith and Essoe 1973). The Disney company's reluctance to participate in the retrospective may have had to do with its highly controlled policy of recycling old films in theatrical re-releases and using excerpts of lesser films in its television show. Such a flood of its past productions, even within the New York market alone, might compete against current releases.

As the *New York Times* reported, not only did the Disney company hold out until an appropriate occasion could be properly exploited, but it also demanded 5% of the retrospective's box office grosses (Phillips 1973a). *Variety* judged this as yet another indication of Disney's business acumen, asking "What other company, in a period where stature is gained by permitting gratis retrospectives, would finally give in—but for a percentage of the take?" In contrast, *Variety* noted how both Warner Bros. and 20th Century-Fox did not charge to lend their films to retrospectives held by the Museum of Modern Art and the Los Angeles County Museum, respectively. The trade journal acknowledged that once the decision was made, Disney flew in animators from its studio to

lecture, it provided costumed characters to promote screenings, and it sent pristine prints of its films (Frederick 1973).

The retrospective presented a multifaceted view of the history of the Disney company. In addition to screening a wide range of animated films, Lincoln Center programmers included Disney live-action features and wildlife films. A series of special events was held that focused on such disparate topics as Disney's silent years, the war years, Disney and industry, Disney and education, Disney and television, the theme parks, Disney music, and the process of animation. Three of the Disney studio's veteran artists, Wolfgang Reitherman, Ken Anderson, and Frank Thomas, conducted a six-part seminar and workshop on the art of animation for qualified art students and film students.

The special event screening titled "Fifty Happy Years: 1923-1973" offered glimpses behind the scenes at the Disney studio that reinforced the pedagogic bent of the New York Public Library exhibit. It included footage of Walt Disney being interviewed, a shortened version of *The Reluctant Dragon* called *Behind the Scenes* (1941), and *Tricks of Our Trade* (1957). The last was a episode of a Disney television show that demonstrated on the elaborate techniques used to create special effects animation. The skills and technology on display offered audiences insight into the Disney studio's accomplishments beyond what could be gleaned from the films themselves.

The workshop series held by the veteran animators was an explicit attempt to spark interest among artists to become animators, according to *Variety* (Frederick 1973). Thus, in addition to fostering critical evaluation among viewers of animation, the Disney company sought to encourage its aesthetic legitimacy among artists themselves, who could replenish Disney's dwindling ranks. The Lincoln Center seminars were precursors to the character animation program at Cal Arts, which was a much greater commitment of resources toward essentially the same ends.

The special event titled "The Silent Years" did screen *Newman Laugh-O-Grams* and other shorts that predated Disney's contract with Margaret Winkler, so the truncation of Disney's history was not complete. The Disney company management, in choosing 1923 as the year of the studio's inception, did not prevent recognition of earlier examples of Walt's animation. This represents an advance over previous exhibits that hazily glossed over the pre-Mickey days. Instead, via films shown in the retrospective and the accompanying exhibit, Disney's silent era began to get its due. If the exhibit misinformed people about what Disney's first film was, the "Silent Years" screening set the record straight. This is similar to the Warner Bros. Golden Jubilee exhibit and film series at the Museum of Modern Art, which included screenings of several films predating the year 1935 upon which the 50th anniversary was based.

The special events provided another service to animation buffs and cinema historians by revealing Disney's contributions to wartime propaganda, pedagogy, and industrial communication. The wartime films and the industrial films were out of circulation for many years and the educational films were limited to classroom use in the 16mm educational market. Disney's reputation for animation was generally based on its theatrical shorts and features. However, when Lincoln Center screened films such as *The Winged Scourge* (1943), *Donald in Mathemagic Land* (1959), and *Steel in America*, it displayed how well Disney adapted animation techniques to convey particular messages. The retrospective focused on them as part of a grand filmmaking tradition meriting aesthetic appreciation. The same economy of expression and unity of design and function that made the entertainment films work so well was in evidence in these sponsored films.

John Culhane, the author of the program notes accompanying the "Disney and Education" special event, cited Disney's statements from a story conference to argue, "Simplification was a particular talent of Walt Disney, who must rank as one of the best story editors in the history of film. He put the Dwarfs [from *Snow White*] into *The Winged*

*Scourge* because he believed that entertainment is the spoonful of sugar that makes the information go down—but he never lost sight of the basic purpose of the educational film, which is to inform” (1973a). In a similar vein, the author of *The Art of Walt Disney*, Christopher Finch, contributed program notes as well. His notes for the special event “Cavalcade of Songs” pointed out that the tight synchronization of music and story was part of Disney’s animation from *Steamboat Willie* onward and reached a new level when *Snow White* employed songs to advance the storyline prior to the oft-credited breakthrough Broadway show, *Oklahoma!* (1973b).

The coverage of the retrospective acknowledged the adult interest in the Disney films. While McCandlish Phillips of the *New York Times* called Disney “hard-core cutesy entertainment,” he noted that extra evening screenings beginning at 10:30 p.m. were added to accommodate the adult viewers who could not see the animated features during the daytime showings. Still, Phillips spent much of his article interviewing mothers and children on line for a daytime screening (1973a). Robert Frederick of *Variety* also mentioned how both the public at large and the “more intellectual” filmmakers look down upon Disney as “family programming.” But he, too, saw a sense of respect for Disney evident in the late evening screenings and in positive responses to Culhane and Finch as both moderators and authors of program notes. Frederick also noted that Disney voice actors who were introduced, like Sterling Holloway, received standing ovations from the young adult crowds (1973).

The Lincoln Center tapped into a strong affection these audiences had for Disney animation, although the reporters of this affection judged it somewhat cynically. One serious critical appraisal of Disney prompted by the retrospective castigated such cynicism. William Paul, writing in the *Village Voice*, articulated a defense of Disney against all of those who campily extoll Disney as kitsch, those who see the films only as evidence of the country’s immersion in nostalgia, or those who consider Disney strictly children’s fare. He



found such condescending perspectives based on Disney's entrepreneurial success and the ghettoization of Disney product within the segment of the film market rated G, rather than on a fair assessment of the films themselves. He argued that Disney films "are wholly serious works of art in their own right, and a handful of them are as profoundly moving as anything the American cinema has yet produced" (1973).

The mix of emotional responses to the Lincoln Center retrospective was repeated upon publication of Finch's *Art of Walt Disney* in fall 1973. Outlasting the immediate reactions to the book was its tangible evidence of Disney artistry in page after page of full color high quality reproductions. Finch's background as former curator of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis added to the impression that the book was an art exhibit between covers. I would like to address its role in legitimating Disney art because of its prominence, along with the Lincoln Center retrospective, as one of the first indications in the 1970s of a growing respect for animation as an art form (Langer 1993, 127).

Finch stated at the outset that he would give the credit that is due to the many artists in Disney's employ, but that ultimate credit for all the company's enterprises goes to Walt Disney himself (1973, 16). Thus, as Richard Schickel attributed to the company a range of pathologies he discerned within Walt's own psyche, Finch made of Walt a more benevolent, if no less driven, guiding spirit of the company's many undertakings. Finch attributed what artistic failures he found to Walt's inattention rather than to any inadequacies of the man.

Finch devoted two of the book's four parts to animation, and within these, he concentrated on the years from Mickey's inception to *Bambi's* release. The many preliminary sketches and paintings also show how individual artists' styles were melded into a cohesive whole that, for better or worse, reflected "Disneyfication" of all source material. Finch named and gave voice to those employees who worked on the shorts and early animated features through numerous interviews and excerpts from story conferences.

He identified their specific contributions in his text and in captions that accompanied some of the production art that is opulently displayed throughout the book. Photographs identifying numerous employees are also abundant. As Culhane's (1973b) essay in the Lincoln Center retrospective catalog had done, Finch covered the many contributions of those who had left Disney's employ as well as the loyal "Nine Old Men." Some of the former, such as Art Babbitt and Vlad (Bill) Tytla, were involved in the bitter strike at the Disney studio in 1941 and they had not received the recognition they deserved until the retrospective and the book's publication.

Although the book was clearly approved by the Disney company, it did contain numerous criticisms of various endeavors. For example, Finch pointed out the conceptual weaknesses of some segments of *Fantasia* as well as *Bambi's* misguided mix of anthropomorphism with too great a degree of naturalism. He also presented Disney as a populist whenever he considered assertions that Disney sought cultural respectability. Finch exonerated Disney's use of classical music in the "Silly Symphonies" and in *Fantasia* from accusations that Walt Disney was displaying "pretensions toward high culture" (1973, 77, 228-9).

Finch's claim that Disney was exclusively interested in popularity rather than prestige is the only acceptable way to grant Disney that prestige, according to the cultural hierarchy's ideology. In that ideology, only disinterested aesthetic judgments carry true weight, for any act of aesthetic self-interest sullies the purity of artistic creation. Finch, as an art critic, assumed the right to recontextualize Disney's accomplishments in aesthetic terms by restricting Disney's motives to commercial terms. Had Disney crossed that line himself by "courting the intellectual community," he would have broken the taboo that Barbara Herrnstein Smith claims separates economic and aesthetic discourse.

Finch's publisher went even further to recast Disney's work in art world terms. The press release issued by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. described some of the book's illustrations

as “Tom Wesselman-like” and “Oldenbergian” (“‘The Art of Disney’ Published by Abrams” 1973). These Pop artists who were inspired by the aesthetics of Disney subsequently became adjectives to describe the very art they had appropriated. Their reputations in the fine art world no doubt were meant to convey artistic legitimacy upon Disney.

However, the reviewers of *The Art of Walt Disney* did not use fine art world fashionability to measure their responses. Instead, several of them wrestled with deep ambivalences they felt toward Disney. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt juxtaposed his uncritical childhood love for Disney with his adult disdain for Disney’s “WASPish ethnocentrism and cultural stereotypicality, and its denigration of sex and pleasure and celebration of Victorian ideals” as well as Disney’s “endless self-exploitation” (1973). For Michael J. Bandler, besides rekindling his childhood love for Disney’s animation, the book disappointed him with its “extended plug for Walt Disney World” (1973). Artist and animator R. O. Blechman alternately expressed admiration for and revulsion at what he saw as “art that ranges from the Inspired to the God-awful,” from the masterful integration of *Pinocchio* to the graceless reductions of great mythologies “to mouse size” (1973, 55-62).

Even novelist John Gardner’s superlative-laden Disney apologia (titled “Saint Walt: The Greatest Artist the World Has Ever Known, Except for, Possibly, Apollonius of Rhodes”) could not deny the “monstrous automatons” and other “obscenities” of Disneyland. But he argued that we have survived them rather than becoming “helpless Pinocchios dangling from the strings of Disney’s computerized muzak and mind-shushing ‘rides’” (1973, 70-1). Gardner argued that this realization of our strength represented a growing maturity within the artistic critical establishment, which could finally admit the validity of its childish passions and gut responses to Disney’s sentimentality. For Gardner, disinterested dissections of Disney’s technique ignore the studio’s true accomplishment of tapping into the power of Protestant Christianity’s moral universe.

Yet, the other reviewers could not discount technique so easily. The book's lavish art direction heaped attention on background paintings that were often submerged in the actual films behind whirlwinds of character action. Indeed, Bandler noted, "It is the background art that thrills—rich, vital, lush, exquisite and, I suspect, truly subliminal in the past as we watched Pinocchio, Goofy, Donald, Snow White and others at the expense of the setting itself." Blechman considered Finch's title *The Art of Walt Disney* a misnomer on grounds that echoed Emily Genauer's critique of the MoMA *Bambi* exhibit: Disney should be judged by what actually made it to the screen. Blechman contended, "To the extent that studies and isolated backgrounds make up the bulk of this book, it testifies to the author's eye, not Disney's" (1973, 58). Yet, these illustrations are what leave such a strong impression upon those who see the book. Even Finch's own text is overwhelmed by the meticulously reproduced Disney production art that warrants the book's steep purchase price.

The Lincoln Center retrospective and Finch's book offered some critics a chance to openly declare their emotional (and even childish) responses to Disney. This countered Bourdieu's theorized basis for acquiring tastemaking authority: the disinterested aesthetic gaze. Rather than the cool, cerebral appraisal of art's formal aspects championed by partisans of Abstract Expressionism, many stances toward a range of post-modern art emerged. After Pop art first eroded fine art's isolation from its cultural surroundings (as propounded by high modernism), the fine art world continued to increase its engagement with social, political, and emotional issues.

As Diana Crane illustrates in *Transformation of the Avant-Garde* (1987), the 1970s saw such art styles as Figurative, Photorealism, and Pattern painting coexist with Pop and Minimalism in the elite fine art world. Pattern painting, in particular, made greater use of traditionally low prestige materials associated with folk, ethnic, and women's crafts and motifs from non-Western art (Crane 1987, 59). Several of the styles reinforced the

resurgence of representation within the art world and resurrected aspects of earlier artistic traditions as well. This growing openness to nontraditional media and stylistic ancestry within the fine art world coincided with the commemorative functions of museums that I mentioned at the beginning of this section. They provided a context for Disney to be aesthetically resurrected as a venerable presence in our cultural landscape rather than merely a collection of icons to be appropriated. This presence, while far-reaching, was still subject to interpretation, as the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibit in 1976 demonstrated.

### The Victoria and Albert Museum Exhibit

The Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, England, originated a traveling exhibit titled “The Artists of Disney” in 1976. It included art from various stages of the production process and ranged historically from early “Mickey” shorts through *101 Dalmatians*. A portion of the artworks on display had been in the exhibit “Traumwerkstatt Hollywood” at the Amerika Haus in Berlin earlier that year. The exhibit title suggests and the catalog essay by John Russell Taylor confirms that this presentation of Disney did not take as a fundamental principle that Walt Disney’s visionary genius was the sole fount of the studio’s creativity. Instead, Taylor likened Walt Disney to other “Hollywood tycoon-producers: as an originator, coordinator, and sounding-board” (1976).

Taylor also departed from previous exhibits and books by taking into account the “haze of camp and nostalgia and chic” to consider “In what spirit were we appreciating Disney?” Taylor acknowledged that Disney rose from kitsch in the 1950s to “become one of the tutelary deities of Pop Art” in the 1960s but that transition obscured the stature of Disney’s own art. He also noted the growth of the Disney collectibles market and art gallery sales of Disney cels, but questioned what it signified: “Were we appraising it as wonderful-because-it’s-so-terrible, were we paying tribute to its vitality as genuine, unselfconscious popular art, did we accept that it was tasteless, and if so, were we liking it because of or in spite of?”

To answer this, Taylor embarked on an analysis of Disney artists' adaptations of art styles, claiming, "the [Disney] repertoire... is very much that of good, sophisticated commercial art at the end of the 1930s, using elements of the fine arts which had already been popularized in the cause of ready and immediate communication. There is nothing primitive about the Disney artists or their techniques; but there is not, either, the crippling self-consciousness of those bidding for cultural acceptance." He attributed to Disney's inspirational sketch artist, Albert Hurter, the infusion of European book illustration styles into what had been "Disney's original home-grown American," and suggested other influences including the unfashionable Arthur Rackham, Grant Wood, and Heinrich Kley.

One sees in this discussion a rounded attempt to place Disney filmmaking in its historical context as commercial art that is nonetheless art. In contrast, Christopher Finch positioned himself to bestow intellectual respectability on Disney by denying that Disney ever sought such respectability. Taylor instead concluded: "Corrupt popular art it may be, but if so it is because it has cunningly avoided treatment with the embalming fluid of ghastly good taste; and in corruption at least lie the seeds of new life." This overturns Richard Schickel's criticisms by revoking the authority held by Bourdieu's elite tastemakers. As Pop art's camp sensibility attacked the concept of taste, it aided the acknowledgement that art had always mingled with commerce and fine art was not so different from applied art.

A review of the exhibit affirmed Taylor's assessment, focusing on the fateful transition from well-assimilated commercial art to the mere verisimilitude of Disney's Audio-Animatronic robots: "The picture-book ideals (fully-fashioned animations of Rackham, Dulac, Grant Wood, Maxfield Parrish and other revered illustrators) were more or less replaced by Frankenstein visions and mastermind ambitions: to secure the keys to a clockwork universe" (Feaver 1976). Both Taylor and the reviewer focused their admiration

on the early achievements of the Disney studio and this focus continued in subsequent exhibits, such as the one held at the Library of Congress.

### **The Library of Congress Exhibit**

As I noted in chapter 2, the “Building a Better Mouse: Fifty Years of Animation” exhibit at the Library of Congress was one of many events included in the 50th anniversary celebrations for Mickey Mouse. However, like the Lincoln Center retrospective, this, too, originated within the host organization rather than the Disney company. Frank Evina of the Copyright Office suggested the exhibit two years before its run from November 1978 to February 1979 (Carrigan 1978).

The exhibit’s curator was animation fan J. Michael Barrier, who founded the magazine *Funnyworld* in 1966. The magazine was a labor of love that was produced only sporadically, despite several attempts to make it into a quarterly publication. Barrier wrote many of its articles and reviews, which dealt with the history of Hollywood animation, current animated productions, and the comics. Animators and animation buffs found in *Funnyworld* a place to discuss issues surrounding the art and business of cartoons and the magazine devoted many pages to interviews with animation workers from the early days of the industry.

Barrier resembled in some ways the MoMA guest curators I discussed in chapter 2, Leonard Maltin, Mark Langer, and Greg Ford. Barrier also attempted to legitimate his interest in animation through mainstream publication venues. As Barrier described in a 1977 issue of *Funnyworld*, he signed a book contract with Oxford University Press in 1973 to produce a history of American animated cartoons. His preparations for this long-delayed, much anticipated book included many interviews as well as research at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and other archives, including the Walt Disney Archives. Thus, he came to the attention of individuals at the Library of Congress and at Walt Disney Productions when the exhibit was first contemplated.

The bulk of the exhibit was drawn from the Library's holdings in its Copyright Office; Music Division; Rare Book and Special Collections Division; Geography and Map Division; Prints and Photographs Division; and Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. These holdings included character model sheets, first edition books, comic strips, posters, music scores, Disney film prints, and some original Disney production art. The exhibit included not only books produced by Disney, but original editions of books that Disney had adapted. The Walt Disney Archives supplemented these items with much more production art and other memorabilia, such as early Mickey Mouse watches and dolls. Eight monitors played excerpts from *Steamboat Willie*, *Three Little Pigs*, *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, *Bambi*, and others. The Disney company also provided a step-by-step explanation of how cartoons are made that the studio had prepared during the release of *The Rescuers* in 1977 ("Library of Congress Exhibit" 1978).

The venue and the range of objects do not bring to mind a strictly aesthetic claim for Disney. Instead, the Library of Congress provided a broader context for cultural consecration of the items: their historical and social importance, as well as their artistic contributions. Indeed, this exhibit can be seen in light of the growing interest in Disney memorabilia. The first Disneyana Collectors Club was organized in 1972 and Cecil Munsey published the landmark price guide, *Disneyana: Walt Disney Collectibles*, in 1974. Disneyland began to sell antique Disney collectibles in The Disneyana Shop beginning in 1976, but switched to newly produced limited edition items after having trouble maintaining its stock of older merchandise (Tumbusch 1989, 55). Coinciding with the Library of Congress exhibit was an auction of Disneyana held in the Paris department store Au Printemps that fetched \$1,500 for a 1929 Mickey Mouse doll and \$400 for a mid-1930s Mickey pocket watch (Anderson 1978).

Although the exhibit was rife with mass produced artifacts of Disney merchandising, Barrier mentioned them peripherally in his catalog essay (1978). He saw



such items only as a means to an end: providing extra income to finance Disney's aesthetic experiments using more elaborate animation techniques, color, the multiplane camera, and feature-length animation. In fact, a small newspaper covered the aesthetics of the Disneyana on display in greater detail, even consulting top collector, Mel Birnkrant, who discussed the impact of Mickey in graphic design terms (Park 1978). Barrier's only acknowledgement of ancillary media was his praise for Floyd Gottfredson and Carl Barks, whose respective Mickey Mouse comic strips and Donald Duck comic books he lauded, claiming "the comic book ducks were more interesting than the ducks on the screen." Barrier had devoted many articles in *Funnyworld* to aspects of Barks's career, which he later published in book form (1981).

Barrier's real concern was to trace Disney's rapid development of animation's potential, which he claimed Disney abandoned at the outset of World War II. He remarked that the extravagant praise heaped on Mickey Mouse in his early years was puzzling in light of the cartoons' crudeness. However, as the studio progressed through the 1930s, it created a golden age of animation, producing "cartoons... characterized by a balletic precision of timing" full of "musical gymnastics." Barrier analysed *Snow White* as a breakthrough in delineating personalities, citing contributions of individual staff members. While he noted aesthetic achievements in the subsequent prewar features, he also identified Disney's growing reliance on storytelling patterns that limited the potential to address adult audiences. Small, cute characters continually provided sympathy and comic relief and the strongest emotional appeals relied on children's separation from parents. This led to what Barrier judged to be "a striking mixture of shrewd observation and sticky cuteness" in *Bambi*.

Barrier summed up, "Looking at the early features now, it almost seems as if Disney was going to great lengths to avoid the questions his animators' ability had posed for him: Where was the animated feature headed? Would it continue to be a vehicle for

children's stories, or would it begin to deal with adult concerns in a distinctively animated way and so move into the movies' mainstream?" Indeed, Barrier mentioned the later cartoons only cursorily because they answered the question with the disappointing affirmation that Disney saw animation as kids' stuff. No production art from any feature after *Bambi* was included in the exhibit, although memorabilia from later years was displayed.

This sober and insightful analysis of Disney animation was little remarked upon in the media coverage of the exhibit. One person who responded to Barrier's arguments was Joseph McLellan (1978a), of the *Washington Post*. He accepted Barrier's statement in the catalog that the 1930s were animation's golden age and he bemoaned the current state of animation production. McLellan analyzed why two then-current animated releases, Martin Rosen's *Watership Down* and Ralph Bakshi's *Lord of the Rings*, were so lackluster compared to Disney's early features. These were films that took up Barrier's challenge to present stories for mature audiences. Yet, they had neither the budgets nor the technical virtuosity that the Disney studio had in the late 1930s. Even after mentioning Disney's upcoming animated films, McLellan did not anticipate that they could match the achievements of "vintage Disney." He concluded, "With each passing year, [Disney's] productions of the 1930s seem more and more unattainable—the product of a brief period in motion picture history that probably cannot be brought back again."

McLellan gave voice to a melancholy longing for a lost golden age that undercut the celebratory air the Disney company attempted to foster. The company's interest in exploiting its most consecrated cultural product was made clear by Donn Tatum, president of Walt Disney Productions, who called Mickey "one of the best money-getters in the history of the world" (quoted in Collins and McLellan 1978). However, this goldmine of a character had not been in a cartoon since 1953. One cultural observer noted an ironically appropriate sculpture that happened to be in Washington, D. C. at the time of the Library of

**Congress exhibit: a wooden Mickey Mouse mummy reposing in a box in an exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery (Freund 1978).**

Others responded to the exhibit itself by questioning the appropriateness of popular culture inhabiting the same rarified halls that housed the Gutenberg Bible and instruments by Stradivari (e.g. Bandler 1978; Beale 1978; McLellan 1978b). Librarian of Congress Daniel J. Boorstin, speaking at an opening reception, acknowledged that “some of our self-consciously intellectual colleagues look down on entertainment” but that “American civilization has been distinguished by efforts to make entertainment educational and to make education entertaining. Some would say this is a democratic weakness. Call it what you will; it does express our characteristic desire to fuzzy-up the edges of age-old distinctions, to keep life fluid” (quoted in Beale 1978 and Bandler 1978). Boorstin’s speech, in addition to bolstering Walt Disney’s oft-stated goal of mixing education and entertainment, makes a democratic ideal out of rupturing the boundaries between strata of the cultural hierarchy. It is only a weakness to the elitists who disdain entertainment.

Boorstin went on to suggest, “To understand ourselves, to enjoy what we have been and... might be, we of all nations must make our national library a multimedia encyclopedia” (quoted in Beale 1978). Here he confirmed what a Library of Congress spokesperson told an exhibit reviewer: “We are trying, among other things, to establish the point that the Library of Congress has a very diversified collection—not only the Gutenberg Bible and books and manuscripts in every language you can think of, but films, recordings, sheet music, posters, and cartoons” (quoted in McLellan 1978a). Thus, the Library of Congress was using the exhibit to remake its image by promoting its range of entertainment and mass media holdings in addition to the serious historical artifacts.

Several reviewers applauded this emphasis on multimedia. One unsigned review in *Bibliography Newsletter* called the exhibit “one of the potentially most influential exhibitions ever put together in this country” primarily because of its monitors playing film

clips. The reviewer argued, "These days research libraries talk about themselves as having gone beyond the book in their efforts to provide information about the present and the past. In general their exhibitions show remarkably little signs of such a declared expansion of collecting policies. Three cheers to [the Library of Congress] for leading the way" ("Mickey Mouse" 1979). While television reviewer John Mason appreciated the character sketches for showing the Disney artists' attention to detail, he, too, found that the film clips "let you follow the development of that art [of animation], particularly through the 1930's and '40's when the Disney Studios made their greatest strides" (1978). He took note of the related Disneyana as "reminders of the impact of the Disney creations on a whole generation growing up."

The "Building a Better Mouse" exhibit proved useful to the Library of Congress, the Disney company, and J. Michael Barrier for the opportunity to exchange different kinds of cultural capital: the Library of Congress gained popularity as a government organization that serves the public; the Disney company gained prestige from its association with the legitimated treasures of the Library; and Barrier enhanced his own legitimacy as an interpreter of Disney animation by curating the exhibit. However, the status of the Disney company's consecrated early works did not necessarily benefit its new productions because the exhibit contextualized the displayed items as artifacts of a tradition that J. Michael Barrier had pronounced dead. The exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City continued to present Disney animation as a lost art.

### **The Whitney Museum Exhibit**

In the summer of 1981, Disney was celebrated in a number of venues: Bloomingdale's department store held exhibits from the Disney animated features and co-sponsored a benefit for a boy's club in conjunction with the release of Disney's twentieth animated feature, *The Fox and the Hound*; the Museum of Broadcasting (now known as the Museum of Television and Radio) produced a five-week series of screenings devoted to

Disney television shows; and the Disney Ice Follies played Madison Square Garden (Cornwell 1981, 113). In addition, Abbeville Press published a coffee table tome by two of Disney's "Nine Old Men" called *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (Thomas and Johnston 1981). However, from the perspective of the New York art world, the opening of "Disney Animations and Animators" at the Whitney Museum of American Art eclipsed the other events, although the book's publication also sparked some interest. In terms of the history of art exhibits devoted to Disney, the Whitney's is probably the art world's crowning act of sanctification in terms of the exhibit's size and the responses it generated.

These simultaneous events offered the first good news about Disney animation since the departure of Don Bluth and other young Disney animators in 1979. However, some of the events called into question the future of the Disney company as an animation producer. Critics generally praised *The Fox and the Hound's* animation, and thus, the new generation of Disney animators, but they viewed its story and characterizations as formulaic (Solomon 1989, 269-70; Maltin [1973a] 1995, 275). The *Disney Animation* book included art from the new film, but it dwelled on the excitement of animating under Walt's personal supervision in the early years. The Whitney exhibit began with one scene from *The Fox and the Hound* to illustrate the "animation process from conception to the completed film" (Hanhardt 1981), but its main focus was "the highly innovative period from 1932 to 1942" ("Drawings and Films Show Art of Disney at Whitney Museum" 1981).

While I will center this section on the Whitney exhibit, I cannot overlook Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's *Disney Animation* book. Because the book contains many of the ideas that were distilled into the exhibit and its publication was an art world event in its own right, it deserves mention. Just as Christopher Finch's *Art of Walt Disney* presented a definitive statement on Disney as art in the early 1970s, *Disney Animation* was the last word on the studio's animation production methods and goals in the early 1980s.

The “Disney Animations and Animators” exhibit filled the entire second floor of the Whitney Museum and included approximately 1,500 pieces of Disney production art as well as 115 films screened in 20 programs over the course of the exhibit’s June to September run. Guest curator Greg Ford selected both the art and the films. He obtained most of the art from the Walt Disney Archives, supplemented by private and institutional collections. The Disney company provided pristine prints of its films. Whitney Museum film and video curator, John G. Hanhardt, co-curated the exhibit and wrote a brochure to accompany it.

I discussed Ford’s role in guest curating film programs at the Museum of Modern Art in chapter 2. In this exhibit, his encyclopedic knowledge of Disney animation was on display in the choices he made and the grouping of art and films into sections that illustrated aspects of the animators’ achievements. Hanhardt described each section in the brochure. Ford presented the art semi-chronologically, titling the first section after *The Fox and the Hound* introduction “Early Motion Ideas.” This section focused on animators Ub Iwerks and Norm Ferguson as two pioneers of the Disney studio who began to employ such concepts as “squash-stretch,” “overlapping action,” and “animation of weight.” They build on observations of how people and animals actually move to yield believably caricatured action. Thomas and Johnston covered these and similar ideas early in their book (1981, 47-69).

The following section of the exhibit, “Mickey Mouse & Silly Symphonies,” contrasted the psychologically based character animation of the former with the naturalistic tableaux depicted in the latter. The next section, “Animators,” concentrated on Fred Moore, Dick Lundy, Art Babbitt, and Vlad (Bill) Tytla as individuals who led the studio’s improvements during the 1930s. Of the six animators thus far mentioned, Thomas and Johnston analyzed three (Ferguson, Moore, and Tytla) in great depth over two chapters because they were named supervising animators on the first feature, *Snow White*.

The following sections of the exhibit, “Personalities” and “Nature,” highlighted how individual animators brought specific characters and forces of nature to life and showed Walt Disney’s method of “casting” animators in roles most suitable to their talents. After this was a section devoted to the “Nine Old Men”: Milt Kahl, Eric Larson, Les Clark, Marc Davis, Frank Thomas, Ward Kimball, Ollie Johnston, John Lounsberry, and Wolfgang Reitherman. Similarly, the *Disney Animation* book offered a chapter on this distinguished group of animators who became supervisors and keepers of the Disney tradition (1981, 158-83). The final section detailed the first five animated features (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, *Bambi*), further solidifying the reputation of this lofty group of films above Disney’s subsequent output. One room was a mini-theater running video clips that often alternated between filmed pencil tests of animation drawings and the final versions of the same scenes.

The film programs paralleled and subdivided the themes of the exhibit. Ford’s background as a film programmer was evident in his juxtapositions of short films to illustrate such topics as the discovery of personality, character relationships, animation of objects, variations on Mickey, animation of nature’s seasons, depictions of perspective, star vehicles, wartime cartoons, human movement, virtuoso scenes, mood musicals, animals movement, and transfigurations. In addition, the first five features were screened. The earliest film shown was Disney’s first, *Newman Laugh-O-Grams* (1920), and the most recent was *Susie the Blue Coupe* (1952), but the majority came from the late 1920s through the mid-1940s.

As I noted in chapter 2, the Whitney had begun to present historical animation by Winsor McCay and Otto Messmer in its “New American Filmmaker Series” in the mid-1970s. And, as I mentioned in this chapter, its Downtown Branch offered “The Comic Art Show” in 1983. However, these bows to mainstream popular culture were departures from its emphasis on screening avant-garde experimental films and exhibiting contemporary

American fine art. The Whitney biennial art shows have institutionalized the museum's interest identifying and sanctioning new artists and novel artistic ideas (Crane 1987, 124).

The exhibit "Disney Animations and Animators" departed from the Whitney's avant-gardism while reinforcing its tastemaking prerogatives in a number of ways. First, the Whitney commissioned an aesthetically oriented architecture firm to design the exhibit space, calling critical attention to the designers as well as to the Disney art on display. Second, the exhibit curators selected from Disney's stable twenty individual animators whose work they identified as especially praiseworthy. This moved the mantle of "auteur" from Walt Disney's own shoulders to those animators the curators recognized as singular artists. Third, the Whitney exhibit elevated the stature of animation drawings as art in comparison to the painted cels because the former were produced by the hands of Disney's true artists rather than low level ink and paint staffers. In each of these ways, the astute eyes of the curators uncovered the treasure buried beneath the flash of Disney's technical perfectionism to recontextualize it within the museum's own exalted framework.

Critics were divided among those who accepted Disney animation as art on its own terms within the entertainment industry and those who called it kitsch, but found the Whitney Museum's exhibit design worthy of comment. The celebratory reviews dominated the coverage in newspapers and mass market periodicals and appeared in specialized art and film journals as well. The dismissive reviewers wrote primarily for art and film journals or as art critics in more popular journals. The mass market journalistic critics did not hold the exhibit to the same kind of scrutiny that the specialized essayistic critics did, nor did they make reference to the fine artists and art movements that some of the latter discussed. There were fewer reviewers of the *Disney Animation* book, but they were similarly divided.

Newspaper and mass market periodical writers generally applauded the opportunity to see "the how and the why—as well as to [see] some of the creative personalities—of Disney animation" (Wolff 1981). Eleanor Blau of the *New York Times* warmly recounted



her tour through the exhibit with Greg Ford, Frank Thomas, and Ollie Johnston (1981). Richard Schickel, who had voiced numerous criticisms of Disney's early films in his biography, *The Disney Version*, evinced a new-found respect for them in his *Time* magazine exhibit review (1981). The exhibit's focus on the talents of individual animators appealed to him and most likely reoriented his interest from analyzing the films solely in terms of Walt's psyche. Schickel confirmed this admiration in his revised edition of *The Disney Version*, in which he said the Whitney exhibit was a "revelation" because "abstracted from the often banal story in which it was buried, freed from the often vulgar musical score that distracted from its draftsmanship, the best work of the animators could be seen, at last, for what it was—an exercise in pure cinema, untrammled by the demands of narrative or (for that matter) middle-class morality" ([1968] 1986, 375). Schickel separated his distaste for Walt Disney's vulgarity from the technical sophistication of his animators.

Schickel was not alone in continuing to question Disney's taste. However, the label of "kitsch," once wielded so devastatingly by Clement Greenberg (1939), lost much of its condemnatory bite after Pop art and subsequent movements gave kitsch an air of retro-chic. Some reviewers used kitsch and other derogatory words in celebratory fashion. Daphne Davis, for example, wrote that the exhibit and the book were "chock-full-of-propaganda" about Disney's "tyrannical control of mind and sophisticated emotion" and that the exhibit itself "must be making the master illusionist beam from his crypt as busy neophytes carry his kitsch to greater glory." Yet, she commended the "believability of [Disney's] images and ideas transferred through illusion" for evoking a "sense of wonder" and providing "a font of inspiration for animators" (1981). Davis's breezy style suggests an ironic distance from which to enjoy Disney's coercive tactics. This may be an attribute of her venue of publication, *Heavy Metal*, which is a glossy adult comic book that mixes high cultural aspirations with low cultural art forms and references.

Another critic thought twice about calling Disney “sentimental kitsch.” Kay Larson’s art criticism column in *New York* magazine (1981) linked simultaneous exhibits of 19th century French artists and drawings by Robert Longo to the Whitney Disney exhibit by considering the relationship between art and sentiment in each. She noted that serious art of the 19th century did not shy away from sentiment, but that in the 20th century the serious artists abandoned it to popular culture while pursuing pure intellectualism. Her own ambivalent conclusion was that Disney was “magnificent kitsch” but she chastised “pop-culture revisionists [who] have embraced Disney’s dyed-in-the-wool American genius” for ignoring his “towering sentimentality.”

Regina Cornwell, writing in the journal *Art in America* (1981), came down more strongly against Disney’s kitschy vulgarity. She accused Walt Disney of confusing technological progress with aesthetic development, bowdlerizing source material, and sublimating sexuality into anal imagery (e.g. *Fantasia*’s “Dance of the Hours” segment ending with a pair of hippopotamus rumps forming a heart). The Whitney exhibit’s design held more interest for her than did the Disney materials on display.

The museum commissioned the architectural and environmental arts organization SITE to design and install the exhibit. Theodore Adamstein and Patricia Phillips of SITE created a darkened space with large white framed panels to house groups of artworks in emulation of movie theater screens (Cornwell 1981, 116). This set apart the Disney artworks from other art displayed in the museum by grouping the individual drawings and paintings into a framework that explicitly showed each to be incomplete on its own, but merely a small contributing factor to the entire cinematic achievement.

Cornwell claimed the SITE design alluded to the 1960s Minimalist art movement and its reduction of film to its simplest elements. She saw the installation’s service to Disney’s “camps of anthropomorphized animals and cute, neutered humans” a disturbing contradiction to the “Minimalist ideas about purity, immediacy, the object, simplicity,

wholeness, and replication.” She preferred the intellectualism and austerity of Minimalism but saw it become subservient to the Disney mania for manipulated sentimentality.

Cornwell’s view that the exhibit’s design clashed with the Disney art rests on the interpretation that SITE was inspired by Minimalists rather than the cinematic vocabulary it claimed to be using. When Cornwell aligned the SITE designers with this art movement, she created the conflict in order to prove a point about Disney’s incessant urge to control ever more of the public’s consciousness. She saw Walt’s manipulations through cartoon shorts as the beginning of the Disney company’s current saturation of our culture, to the point that a museum’s aesthetically challenging exhibit display succumbed to the controlling effects of Disney kitsch.

Another reviewer who concentrated on the SITE design saw its movie theatricality as boldly appropriate to the subject matter. Jonathan Rosenbaum spent most of his brief article in the journal *American Film* (1981) describing the aims and means of SITE’s plans. Rather than mentioning Greg Ford’s goals, Rosenbaum quotes SITE’s self-described mission to consider “architecture as information and thought” rather than as “form and space.”

Cornwell was not alone in declaring the exhibit’s format at odds with its subject. Richard Flood reviewed the exhibit for the journal *Artforum* and was bitterly disappointed at what he called “an unremittingly gloomy installation” (1981). Although writing for an elite art world publication, Flood did not summarily raise the flag of kitsch against Disney. Instead, he praised Disney animation as a popular art that reveled in sentiment, engaged in wrenchingly Oedipal melodrama, and was shot through with a domestic utopianism that was “in synch with America” for decades.

While Flood’s tone is slightly condescending, he expressed genuine enthusiasm for the Whitney’s film series that brought Disney’s achievements to the fore. On the other hand, he rued the curators’ didacticism in turning every exhibit display into a lesson in

technique and he feared this stemmed from overcompensation: "It was as if the worthiness of the enterprise was in question and had to be justified by the sobriety of the presentation." He also found the notion of isolating the contributions of individual animators frustrating because their styles were difficult to distinguish. Instead, he favored an emphasis on how the Disney style melds those of many artists into one seamless whole. Flood is an example of a critic who uses the phrase "assembly line" in a positive manner and who accepts the goal of communicating emotion as a legitimate artistic pursuit. To him, no dry analysis of technical principles can do justice to the Disney films themselves as they unspool through a projector.

It is interesting that Thomas and Johnston's book escaped this type of criticism. Their chapters went to much greater lengths to dissect principles involved in personality animation than did the exhibit. However, because one of their stated goals was to preserve their methods for future generations, such technical discussion was seen as not merely acceptable but laudable. They also had more space to illustrate and explain the subtle differences among the various animators who worked at the Disney studio. The *Disney Animation* book was also as much a memoir and an art collection as it was a primer in animation techniques, so its pedagogy was softened by anecdotes and sumptuous illustrations from every facet of the studio's animated productions.

Film critic J. Hoberman, in reviewing the book for the journal *Film Comment*, found Thomas and Johnston's discussions of animation principles and techniques "among the best treatments of the subjects I've ever seen" (1982a). In fact, Hoberman disagreed with Flood on the Whitney exhibit as well because he valued the exhibit's deconstruction of the films. Brian Sibley, writing in the British film journal *Sight and Sound* (1982), also singled out the instructional aspects of the book as praiseworthy, claiming that animators looking to the future "would be well advised to study this challenging account of illusion-making at the Mouse Factory." Leonard Maltin considered the sequences of drawings that

illustrated particular episodes of action what “distinguishes this endeavor from other Disney publications” because they “bring to life the particular talents of various Disney animators as no individual drawings could do” (1981).

In contrast to Richard Flood, these and other film critics were interested in behind-the-scenes excavations of Disney’s animation. Both Tom Allen, writing for *Film Comment* (1981), and Ross Care, writing for *Sight and Sound* (1981-82), were happy to see individual artists receive credit for their long-anonymous contributions. The opportunity to see filmed pencil tests of the rough animation beside the finished product prompted Care to recall that Frank Lloyd Wright had once suggested that the drawings, rather than the inked and painted cels, be incorporated into the final films. Art critic Regina Cornwell also saw that the “crude and unfinished” drawings “reveal a vitality and sense of playfulness very often missing from work from the later stages” (1981, 116).

Cornwell also mistakenly believed the Whitney exhibit to be the first to show preliminary sketches and drawings rather than cels and backgrounds because “Disney and his organization felt that releasing sketches and drawings that had not been ‘cleaned-up’... would destroy the magic and mystique of the films” (1981, 116). As I noted about the 1959 “Art of Animation” exhibit, the Disney organization found ways to contain the preliminary art within a framework that made such backstage glimpses contribute to Disney’s illusionism.

Ross Care more accurately characterized the exhibit as “the first large-scale occasion on which the public could judge how the work of individual artists, separately displayed and identified, locked into the Disney-dominated studio/factory system.” Indeed, the exhibit broke ground in showing so many rough animation drawings by the lead animators rather than the cleaned-up drawings by assistants. The same reputation for assembly line production that Flood praised had contributed to Disney’s declining reputation in the 1960s compared to that of individualistic directors at Warner Bros. and MGM, according to film

scholar Timothy White (1990). In the 1970s Greg Ford had been an auteurist-oriented promoter of Frank Tashlin, Chuck Jones, and Tex Avery for their anti-illusionistic jokes that predated European New Wave innovations. Similarly, by highlighting those drawings made by top animators, Ford relocated authorial autonomy away from producer Walt toward the one group of artists whose skills were unique to the medium.

The Whitney exhibit also occasioned a serious appraisal of the aspects of Disney cartoon production that went beyond the animated drawings. Some artworks from other stages of the production process were exhibited, but they composed a much smaller proportion of the total number of items than had previously been the case. John Canemaker attempted to redress this with an article in the graphic design journal *Print* (1982). His orientation to the fine art world shows through his references to Degas, Daumier, Leonardo da Vinci, Arthur Rackham, Norman Rockwell, Grant Wood, and Edward Hopper. He was not only interested in relating Disney to the most sanctified of elite painters, but to a range of popular illustrators as well.

Canemaker subsequently collaborated on a book that is essentially an art portfolio companion to Thomas and Johnston's book. *The Treasures of Disney Animation Art* (Abrams and Canemaker 1982) presented art from each stage of the production process over the studio's entire history and Canemaker's introduction continued his argument for the aesthetic importance of Disney animation begun in the *Print* article. Similarly, the book's publisher, Robert E. Abrams, wrote a preface to *Treasures* that drew a parallel between Disney production art and preparatory sketches by Raphael for a planned fresco or tapestry. The preface even included reproductions of studies by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to further the analogy. As a publisher of expensive fine art books, Abrams was intent on showing that Disney's commercial art was actually "a combination of the fine arts and the performing arts" whose production art deserved "the status of fine art" (1982, 12).

In contrast, Thomas and Johnston employed references to famous fine artists sparingly, usually to illustrate a principle of personality animation. They reprinted Degas's "Rest Period" to show perspective; they reproduced three self portraits by Anselm Feuerbach, Jean-Baptiste Corot, and Käthe Kollwitz to identify how artists reveal their own personalities at different stages of life (1981, 238, 441). Indeed, references to Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Alfred Hitchcock appeared more frequently than did mentions of fine artists. All such examples invariably described how these artists found solutions to problems the Disney artists also shared. The brochure to the "Disney Animations and Animators" exhibit also kept references to a minimum, mentioning only Charlie Chaplin and Sergei Eisenstein. The Whitney provided lessons in animation theory that did not rely on creating bridges to more legitimate artistic traditions; the museum accepted the aims of Disney entertainment as legitimate in themselves.

The Whitney exhibit was the last major museum exhibit of Disney art before the Disney company's installation of its new management team, led by Michael Eisner and Frank Wells. Along with *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* and *Treasures of Disney Animation Art*, it represents a glorifying elegy rather than the anticipation of realizing greater potentials within the medium. Richard Schickel ended his exhibit review on a half-heartedly hopeful note regarding Disney's future: "With *The Fox and the Hound*, a new generation of animators has shown that they can strip away the adorable encrustations of three or four decades, but it is unlikely that a conclave of talent like the old one will again be assembled" (1981). A number of reviewers shared that feeling. The following section will discuss how subsequent exhibits focused on the venerated past until the successes of the late 1980s through the 1990s reinstated the optimism that was once part of every early Disney exhibit.

## **Exhibits During the New Disney Regime**

No major museum exhibits followed the Whitney exhibit for the rest of the 1980s. Instead, Disney art appeared with increasing frequency in elite auction houses, such as Sotheby's and Christie's, and in a growing number of art galleries devoted to animation art. I will discuss in chapter 4 these venues and their role in legitimizing Disney and other animation producers as artists. However, this section will concentrate on what new contexts museums have provided for Disney art in the 1990s.

The exhibits included in this period are: the Philadelphia Art Alliance's 1990 "Salute to Walt Disney Animation Art: The Early Years: 1928-1942"; the "Art of *Fantasia*" exhibit originating at the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco in 1990-1; the "Haring, Warhol, Disney" exhibit that the Phoenix Art Museum originated in 1991; the 1994-5 Indianapolis Museum of Art exhibit "Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Art in Its Making*"; and the Museum of Modern Art's "Designing Magic: Disney Animation Art" in 1995.

Of these exhibits, only the last relied exclusively on the Disney company to supply art. Most of the others were drawn primarily from collections amassed by individuals who have risen to the top of the animation art market. The Museum of Modern Art exhibit was also alone in devoting almost half of its space to Disney's most recent animated productions; the rest emphasized commemoration of Disney's early glory years. However, the "Haring, Warhol, Disney" exhibit was particularly bold in recontextualizing those years.

Before delving into these exhibits, I would first like to discuss how the Disney company transformed itself from a mausoleum of animation antiquities to a vibrant and profitable producer of new animation "instant classics." As I described in the previous section, the management team of the Disney company excelled at exploiting its consecrated cultural products while steadily losing touch with audiences during the late 1970s and early



1980s. Attempts to reassert Disney's leadership as a technological innovator, such as the partially computer animated film *Tron* (1982), were unsuccessful. The film division's revenues had dropped steadily since the late 1970s and in 1983 it posted its first losses (Flower 1991, 96).

By 1984 management infighting between Walt's men and those of his brother, Roy O. Disney, had come to a head. This combined with the company's flattened income and drop in stock price to make it an enticing takeover target. When Wall Street financier Saul Steinberg launched a buyout of the company, Disney's management threatened to sink the business rather than cede control. Their subsequent buyback of Steinberg's shares was costly and in the aftermath, Roy E. Disney (Roy O.'s son) succeeded in forcing the resignations of Walt's son-in-law, Ron Miller, as president and Ray Watson as chairman. In their places, Roy's team installed Frank Wells and Michael Eisner, respectively (Taylor 1987).

Eisner and Wells immediately took the company in new directions, releasing Disney's classic animation on video, entering the limited animation market of television cartoons, and producing live-action television series that did not rely on the Disney brand name. They increased admission prices at the theme parks and went ahead with plans to expand resort development. The Disney cable channel began turning an profit and the company greatly expanded its consumer products businesses. Eisner brought in Jeffrey Katzenberg, his protégé at Paramount, to chair Walt Disney Studios. They gave the animation division to Roy E. Disney, who was committed to revitalizing it. Katzenberg eventually increased his involvement with animated feature production when Roy proved the division was commercially viable.

After the loss incurred by *The Black Cauldron* in 1985, Disney animation began a slow climb back to success. First came *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986). It had modest box office earnings, but gained attention for a scene in which computer animation of Big

Ben's mechanisms was composited with drawn characters. In 1988 *Oliver & Company* updated *Oliver Twist* using dogs and a kitten. Aiming for an teenage audience, Disney employed the vocal talents of Billy Joel and Bette Midler to act and sing. *Oliver & Company* was Disney's most successful animated film in years.

That same year saw the release of an even bigger success for Disney, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. This co-production with Steven Spielberg's Amblin company was the most technically sophisticated match-up of live-action and animation ever attempted. Cameo appearances by Disney's stable of classic characters and those of other studios may have seemed aimed at children, but the film had an adult sensibility rife with sexual innuendoes. Teens and adult moviegoers helped make it a hit, demonstrating that animation could successfully target a much broader audience than the kiddie set. *Roger Rabbit's* animated successors would continue to tap into that expanded audience.

The next several Disney animated features were hailed as popular and critical successes that ushered in what some have called "Disney's second golden age." Revenues and acclaim climbed spectacularly with each of the following: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *The Lion King* (1994). *The Lion King* even became the number one grossing film of 1994. However, the 1990 release, *The Rescuers Down Under*, did modest business to lackluster reviews and 1995's *Pocahontas*, while one of the summer's highest grossers, could not top its predecessors. A number of the films boasted Oscar-winning music and lyrics by the team of Alan Mencken and Howard Ashman. Critics applauded Disney for creating the kind of musicals that Broadway no longer seems to produce and Disney seized the opportunity to mount a stage version of *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway. That film was screened as a work-in-progress at the New York Film Festival and its Oscar nomination for Best Picture was the first in history to go to an animated feature film.

Disney's commitment to animation burgeoned in other tangible ways. As I mentioned briefly in the section on the 1959 "Art of Animation" exhibit, the Disney company built a functioning animation studio in its Disney-MGM Studio theme park in Orlando, Florida. That studio opened in May 1989 and offered tourists a glimpse of artists at work on actual productions behind glass partitions. The company bought controlling interest in another animation studio outside of Paris to handle some animation for Disney television cartoons, direct-to-video releases, and later, theatrical projects. Disney also released animated films that departed from its traditional use of hand drawn animation. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) was based on a story that live-action director Tim Burton developed while he was an animator at Disney. It used stop-motion animation of three-dimensional models. Disney's production deal with computer animation firm Pixar (a spin-off from George Lucas's company, Industrial Light and Magic) resulted in the 1995 hit *Toy Story*.

Each successful Disney animated film adds characters to its stable for use in merchandising and ancillary media. In contrast, the company's earnings from live-action films and theme parks (especially Euro Disney) have been much less consistent (Mahar 1994). Disney's animated triumphs have inspired several other studios to build their own feature animation divisions in hopes that the market can accommodate more product. Disney's aggressive management has broken free of the previous dynasty's cautious exploitation of its consecrated cultural assets. Instead, new animation jewels have been added to the crown at a pace that outstrips any era in Disney history except the 1928-42 period of production of animated shorts and features.

That is not to say the new Disney team has been shy about reaping more profits from the treasures in its vaults. The company now combines its long-established cycle of rereleasing its older animated films with an immediate follow-up sale of each film on videocassette. Each title is released on video for a limited time only, in order to maximize

sales. Two consecrated films were promoted with greater fanfare than the rest: *Fantasia* in 1990-91, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1994. My discussions of the art exhibits devoted to these films will address their roles in the overall publicity campaigns orchestrated by the Disney company.

My argument echoes what I concluded in chapter 2: these museums begin with respect for the artistic accomplishments of Disney animation and in some cases, mount their exhibits with little or no involvement from the Disney company. Even Disney's participation and monetary support does not necessarily affect the content of the discourse the host institution produces for the exhibit. When the museum makes a commitment to launch an exhibit, it is predisposed to praise the art it displays. An exhibit that coincides with a large scale promotional campaign becomes a beneficiary of the interest that Disney generates; the exhibit's contribution to the stature of that campaign can be nominal. For such films as *Fantasia* and *Snow White*, additional museum exhibits add icing to an already tall cake; their reputations are well established. A critical backlash against a Disney exhibit in the 1990s requires quite a bit of controversial curatorship, as was the case with the "Haring, Warhol, Disney" exhibit. Outside of that instance, I will show that recent Disney art exhibits have met with nothing but warm regards.

### **Disney Returns to the Philadelphia Art Alliance**

Fall 1990 marked the 75th anniversary of the Philadelphia Art Alliance's founding. The Art Alliance chose to open that season with "A Salute to Walt Disney Animation Art: The Early Years: 1928-1942," an exhibit of over 100 pieces of animation production and publicity art drawn from the private collections of seventeen people. Jeff Lotman, a board member of the Art Alliance, organized the exhibit, which prominently featured works from his personal collection. In addition to the exhibit itself, the Art Alliance held an auction of animation art and hosted several of the "Nine Old Men" for a roundtable discussion of their experiences at the studio in its heyday. Two of them were Ollie Johnston and Frank

Thomas, who had written another book, *Walt Disney's Bambi: The Story and the Film* (1990) that they signed and sold.

This time around, the Philadelphia Art Alliance presented a nostalgic exhibit that commemorated its own prescience at having been the first cultural organization to display Disney art in 1932. In her foreword to the lavish 1990 Disney exhibit catalog, Art Alliance director Marilyn J. S. Goodman placed the 1932 exhibit into a long line of courageous Alliance events that introduced future luminaries to Philadelphia. Disney joined the ranks of such artists as Andrew Wyeth, Andy Warhol, Horace Pippin, and Henry Ossawa Tanner; such writers as e. e. cummings, Anaïs Nin, Edward Albee; such architects as Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Le Corbusier; and such modern dancers as Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, and Alvin Ailey. Goodman also noted the Art Alliance's connection to Disney's *Fantasia* through Alliance founding member Leopold Stokowski.

The 1990 exhibit reaffirmed the Philadelphia Art Alliance's interest in Disney, but it needed to make no argument in favor of animation's legitimacy, as the 1932 exhibit did. Instead, curator Jeff Lotman's catalog essay harkened back to the 1932 exhibit, justifying his 1990 exhibit in nostalgic terms: "To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Art Alliance, we chose to restage a similar exhibition." Lotman's acknowledgements mention that the Disney company's participation was limited to providing factual information and reviewing the catalog manuscript for historical accuracy. His essay even noted that the nephew of the original author of *Pinocchio* protested Disney's version and that some initial reviews of *Fantasia* panned its visual interpretations of the source music. However, he employed these anecdotes to illustrate that the films outlasted such criticisms.

It is interesting to note that, in discussing Walt Disney's collaborators, Lotman's essay mentions two musicians (Paul J. Smith and Leopold Stokowski) but only one animator (Vlad Tytla). His catalog listed the owners of each piece of art, but no names of individual artists who produced them. As I will discuss in the following section and in

chapter 4, attribution of authorship is a difficult, time-consuming process that has only assumed importance to a few people in the animation art market. Even exhibits drawn from the Walt Disney Archives do not always identify who worked on each piece; those drawn from many people's collections would face much greater obstacles in this regard.

Unlike the Whitney exhibit's focus on animators and their drawings, the Art Alliance emphasized painted cels over the other stages of production that were represented. While concept sketches, layout drawings, animation drawings, and model sheets were included, cels predominated. Those cels were often matched with the actual background paintings against which they were photographed during a film's production. These combinations, called "key set-ups," represent the peak of value in the animation art market, as the next chapter will show. The exhibit also included a number of cels with hand-prepared backgrounds that had been produced under Disney's original contract with the Courvoisier Gallery. These lack the artifactual fidelity key set-ups enjoy, but do show off the characters to great effect and are much more widely available.

The Art Alliance exhibit received brief but enthusiastic mentions in local papers and a collector's magazine ("A Potpourri of Exhibitions" 1990; "Philadelphia Art Alliance" 1990), though a review in the Philadelphia weekly *City Paper* dwelled longer on the simultaneous re-release of *Fantasia* and the elaborate restoration it entailed (Kellner 1990). Whether the excitement this re-release engendered increased attendance at the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit is open to question. Only a portion of the art on display was from *Fantasia*. In contrast, the Cartoon Art Museum obviously raised the visibility of its "Art of *Fantasia*" exhibit by timing it to coincide with the film's return to theaters.

### **The Cartoon Art Museum Exhibit**

The Disney company promoted the return engagement of *Fantasia* as a special event in a number of ways. First, it was timed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the film's initial release. Second, it publicized the state-of-the-art technology required to restore the

film's visuals and soundtrack to a point that actually improved on the original 1940 print (Hutchison 1990). Third, it announced that a semi-sequel was in preparation. Called *Fantasia Continued*, it would replace some existing segments with new ones, thus fulfilling Walt's dream of making a constantly evolving concert feature. Thus, the 1990 theatrical release would be the last chance to see the original *Fantasia*. During the holiday shopping season of 1991, Disney's sale of *Fantasia* videos and laserdiscs in regular boxes and 50th anniversary commemorative packages broke records in response to the prospect that the original version would be withdrawn forever to make way for *Fantasia Continued*. Despite the ubiquity of these videos, Disney created an aura of scarcity, not merely until the next release cycle, but permanently.

Amidst this hoopla, two museums devoted to cartoon art presented "The Art of *Fantasia*" exhibit in succession. The Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco originated the exhibit in late 1990, which then traveled to the Museum of Cartoon Art in Rye Brook, New York, in spring 1991 (The latter museum later moved to Boca Raton, Florida). Both museums favor printed comic art, but each has had a number of exhibits devoted to animation. For instance, I noted in chapter 2 that the museum in Rye Brook hosted an exhibit of Steve Schneider's Warner Bros. animation art before he pitched the idea to the Museum of Modern Art.

The "Art of *Fantasia*" exhibit was drawn entirely from the Mike and Jeanne Glad Collection, which also provided art to the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit. Mike Glad is the prime force behind the couple's collection and, as I will address in chapter 4, he is perhaps the premiere collector of animation art in terms of breadth and depth. The 74 pieces that made up this show illustrate Glad's interest in collecting for the purpose of detailing the history of animation. Art from all phases of production as well as from subsequent publicity campaigns are important to him for the sake of presenting well-rounded exhibits (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). Among those materials were drawings, cels,

storyboards, backgrounds, model sheets, conceptual sketches, thumbnails, and three dimensional character models.

Tony Reveaux's review of the exhibit in San Francisco for *Artweek* (1990) highlighted such formal aspects of the film as the "Nutcracker Suite" section's "fluid, romantic lyricism," the "Night on Bald Mountain" section's "Gothic expressionism," and the entire film's "liberated purity of color and form in space." He singled out artists Kay Nielsen, Vlad (Bill) Tytla, and Oskar Fischinger for their contributions, which were identified on the displayed art. Vivien Raynor's review of the exhibit in Rye Brook for the *New York Times* (1991) also lauded the some of these artists by name, but she assumed that one third of the artworks lacked attributions because "Disney's artists were content to work as a team, like the unnamed artisans who put up the Gothic cathedrals."

I've discussed above how such anonymity dissatisfied some artists, but Disney acceded to demands for screen credit only grudgingly. The fact that two-thirds of the pieces do have attributions is a testament to Mike Glad's research into such matters. His interest in ascertaining authorship is a form of connoisseurship practiced by the most avid collectors who learn to differentiate particular artists' styles within the overarching Disney style. For example, he argued "If you were trying to get the ultimate expression of the Devil [in *Fantasia*], you'd want to get Bill Tytla's. You wouldn't want somebody else's, say the clean-up artist" (personal interview, 16 March 1992).

However, both reviewers acknowledged that Disney produced *Fantasia* with a studio staff of over 1,000 people. Only a few of them attained such seniority in their respective departments to merit mention in screen credits and historical survey books. The exhibit wall labels relied on such sources, quoting, for example, from John Culhane's 1983 book on *Fantasia*, according to Raynor. This book and others I have discussed above have given readers an understanding of *Fantasia*'s complex artistic and technical demands, offering criteria by which to gauge the magnitude of its achievements.



By 1990, the reviewers of "The Art of *Fantasia*" could situate the film's innovations within an intertwining matrix encompassing elite art, popular culture, and technology. Reveaux called *Fantasia* "a unique and gallant synthesis of old-world craftsmanship and the progressive popularization of science and high culture. Released at war's eve, it marked a meridian between the passing of the old gods of art and the uncertain embrace of electronics and abstraction." Reveaux beautifully captures the traditional cultural hierarchy's inadequacy for categorizing Disney's amalgam of old and new, high and low, handicraft and machinery. Indeed, the mix of styles ranging from abstraction to cloyingly cute representationalism adds to *Fantasia*'s boundary-blurring effects.

Raynor confirmed the cultural hierarchy's inadequacy when she argued, "Jackson Pollock and the other Abstract Expressionists get the credit for putting American art on the world map. But it is likely that a jury unmoved by esthetic class distinctions would nominate Walt Disney, who pulled off the feat decades earlier." She did repeat the common assessment that *Fantasia* went unrecognized as Disney's magnum opus upon its initial release but she attributed this to a public preoccupied with war rather than to the romantic myth that Walt Disney's genius requires a time lag before it is appreciated.

This exhibit also reinforced the legitimacy of *Fantasia*'s production artifacts as monetarily valuable objects in another way. News quickly spread that five pieces of art from the exhibit had been stolen while it was in preparation at the Museum of Cartoon Art in Rye Brook, New York. The museum offered a reward of \$5,000 for information leading to the return of the art and exhibit director Brian Walker was quoted estimating the value of the stolen art at "well into six figures" ("*Fantasia* Art Stolen" 1991). As the "Haring, Warhol, Disney" exhibit shows, Disney's artistic legitimacy was more readily conceded than was Keith Haring's.

## **The “Haring, Warhol, Disney” Exhibit**

The Phoenix Art Museum originated an exhibit titled “Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, and Walt Disney” in the spring of 1991, which later traveled to the Tacoma Art Museum, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., and the Worcester Art Museum in 1992. Upon its arrival at the Corcoran, the exhibit was denounced by several art critics as “the shoddiest sort of secondhand fraud” (Burchard 1992), a “big and brainless summer show” (Richard 1992), and as evidence of “how desperate museums must be getting to develop popular attractions” (Sozanski 1992). What disturbed these critics the most was that the exhibit appeared to be using Disney and Warhol to elevate Haring, whom they thought unworthy of such respect.

This is a reversal of the position that Disney held in the art world of the 1960s as merely iconic raw material for Pop artists. As I discussed above, Pop artists gained acceptance for their transgressive appropriations of images and production techniques from commercial art by making such transgressions the acts of artistic innovation. However, by 1992 the artistic integrity of Disney was more widely recognized than that of his most recent appropriators, including Keith Haring.

Exhibit curator Bruce D. Kurtz acknowledged in the exhibit catalog that the exhibit grew out of his friendship with Haring and was originally conceived to be a survey of Haring’s work alone. However, Haring’s dealer feared that a solo show of his client’s art at the Phoenix Art Museum might preclude one by the Whitney or MoMA. Only when Keith Haring mentioned that Andy Warhol and Walt Disney were his heroes was this exhibit spawned (Kurtz 1992, 7-8). Each of the three artists had his own separate section in the exhibit and an individual essay in the glossy 240-page book that served as the exhibit catalog. The Haring section featured 77 works, whose scale dwarfed the 77 works in the Disney section. Warhol’s section, with 41 works, was the smallest. Thus, the exhibit

design reinforced the perception that Warhol and Disney were secondary to the show's central figure, Haring.

The skeptical critics questioned not only Haring's importance as an artist, but also the exhibit's arguments for connecting his work to that of Warhol and Disney in terms beyond one artist's hero worship of the other two. They each scoffed at the exhibit text's claim that the three artists were "the quintessential chroniclers of 20th-century popular culture." Paul Richard described the exhibit's unifying image by Haring as follows: "His 'Andy Mouse,' which gives Warhol's blank autistic stare to Disney's rodent, is a pretty pathetic stab at conceptualism. And merely as cartooning it is not far from inept."

Kurtz's opening catalog essay went further to tie the three artists together, pointing out that "they all collaborated with other artists, used mass media as integral parts of their art, used mass production to make quantities of their images, and took great interest in entertainers and entertainment" (1992, 14). Richard responded, "These connections are mostly mush. The truth of the matter is that Haring, Warhol, and Disney have in common next to nothing save their skill at marketing and their recognizability. The differences between them are more telling, more important, than anything they share."

One of those differences is that Disney worked in the realm of commercial art, in which mass media and mass production were the accepted tools of the trade. In contrast, Warhol's early use of these media and techniques broke boundaries of legitimacy within the fine art world. But by the time Haring did so, many others had preceded him. Richard also claimed that in order to highlight similarities among the artists, the exhibit ignored Warhol's more disturbing images (e.g. his electric chairs, race riots, tabloid headlines) to fit in with "Haring's goody-goody art and Disney's cotton-candy world." Instead, the Warhol section's works were drawn primarily from his silkscreens of celebrities and popular icons.

The Disney section of the exhibit contained animation drawings, concept paintings, and cels to represent art from the production process. Items came from the earliest "Mickey

Mouse” shorts and “Silly Symphonies,” the early features, and the 1990 Mickey theatrical featurette, *The Prince and the Pauper*. The Disney company loaned all 10 of the works from *The Prince and the Pauper* and a total of 31 artworks in all. It follows a trend that I have shown, whereby Disney’s participation in an exhibit often involves a tie-in to its most recent animation release. The rest of the artworks were drawn from private collectors and the Phoenix Art Museum’s own collection. Among these pieces were a number of posters and Courvoisier cels. In addition, a monitor showed Disney film clips.

One of the private collectors, Bruce Hamilton, was the primary author of the catalog essay devoted to the Disney portion of the exhibit (Hamilton and Blum 1992). It is interesting that Hamilton’s essay did not dwell on assessing the importance of Disney as art; that was a given. Instead, he considered a number of issues that were primarily relevant to readers who might wish to become Disney collectors. For example, he discussed how decisions to trim cels and mount them on Courvoisier backgrounds affected their authenticity as production art. He also delineated the differences between art that came from productions, official publicity (such as posters), and various kinds of souvenirs.

The exhibit attributed authorship to a high percentage of its non-celluloid Disney artworks and Hamilton identified both animators and inspirational sketch artists in his essay. He singled out two of the latter, Ferdinand Horvath and Gustav Tenggren, for their own special subheaded sections. The fact that he also lent the only two artworks by them that appeared in the exhibit raises questions of conflict of interest. While it is to be expected that a collector would know the background of his own pieces better than the rest, there exists the possibility that Hamilton was highlighting his own works over others in the exhibit. Such potential conflicts of interest come up in several places within the animation art market, as I will note in the next chapter. As Alice Goldfarb Marquis (1991) showed, such conflicts of interest are even greater in the elite fine art market, where large amounts of

money are exchanged on the basis of faddish shifts in artistic reputation that can be subject to surreptitious manipulation.

Disney provided what value these skeptical critics found in the exhibit. For example, Edward Sozanski noted that although “it may be difficult to think of Disney as an artist” because he was a cartoonist, “it soon becomes evident that he’s easily the major artist of the three.” That conclusion made the exhibit useful to Sozanski because “it raises the question of how much validity we should assign to distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art. The most valued art should be that which endures and speaks to future generations. In that regard, Disney will easily outlive Haring, and probably Warhol as well.”

It is interesting that Sozanski drew from Disney the lesson Kurtz hoped to impart through Haring. Kurtz argued that Haring’s cartoony style created a visual language that “embodied the possibility that the social class distinctions between fine art (upper class), popular art (middle class), and folk art (lower class) could be broken down” (1992, 150). Instead, a reviewer of the exhibit catalog argued, “Haring’s work looks cartoon-like because he couldn’t draw any better; his slack outlines lack the expressive vitality that characterize the work of a good cartoonist” (Solomon 1992).

The responses to “Haring, Warhol, Disney” show critics judging art in terms of communication, emotional appeal, and skill. Haring failed to offer them enough ideas to overcome the affectless simplicity of his style. Disney’s studio artists, on the other hand, demonstrated that cartooning was far from a mere simplification of elite art; it took great skill to evoke the most character expressiveness from the fewest lines. The Indianapolis Museum of Art’s “*Snow White*” exhibit presented Disney art on its own terms, without straining to link it to disparate art movements.

## **The Indianapolis Museum of Art Exhibit**

The exhibit “Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Art in Its Making*” at the Indianapolis Museum of Art shared certain characteristics with the “Art of *Fantasia*” exhibit of 1990-1. Both presented a range of production art from a single Disney film that came from a single private collection and both coincided with the Disney company’s own massive promotional campaign for the film the exhibit honored. However, the profile of the *Snow White* exhibit was much higher than that of the *Fantasia* exhibit. Its venue was not a specialized museum for cartoons, but an established art museum. The *Snow White* exhibit also produced a glossy book published by Disney’s imprint, Hyperion. The exhibit opened with a book-signing session that featured seven artists who had worked on the film. Newspapers as far away as Ohio and Kentucky covered the exhibit in feature articles.

For the Disney company, this exhibit was an additional source of prestige added to the sterling reputation *Snow White* already enjoyed. Its participation consisted of reviewing the catalog for factual accuracy and publishing it as a Hyperion book (Waller 1994). Indeed, one reviewer, in acknowledging all the sponsors of the exhibit did not mention Disney (Britton 1994b). Instead, Disney invested heavily in marketing its limited-time video release of *Snow White*. The company had long vowed it would be the one jewel in the vault that would never go to video. However, after the success of the *Fantasia* release (a reported \$220 million in revenues, according to Krause 1992), the company went ahead with a similar digital restoration of *Snow White* for its video release. Disney’s penchant for synergy also sent a *Snow White* version of its “Walt Disney’s World on Ice” show to Indianapolis just prior to the exhibit’s opening (“Elaborate Sets” 1994).

The Indianapolis Museum of Art exhibit was the brainchild of collector Stephen Ison, a resident of an Indianapolis suburb and one of the lenders to the Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibit in 1990. According to one account, “It took Ison seven years to convince

the Indianapolis museum to mount the exhibit” (Findsen 1994). He began collecting Disney art in 1984 and soon focused on *Snow White*. Four years after his first contact with the Indianapolis museum, Ison once again broached the idea of an exhibit. Martin Krause, curator of prints, drawings, and photographs, responded positively and suggested structuring the exhibit to match the order of the 16 sequences in the film. That sent Ison out to “fill in the holes” of his collection to adequately represent each sequence (Britton 1994a).

Just as Mike Glad altered his collecting choices once he became involved in mounting museum exhibits of his art, Stephen Ison responded to the structure that a museum curator imposed in order to round out his collection. In both cases, this meant collecting not merely for a piece’s aesthetics or market value, but for its contribution to a didactic display that illustrated the process of animation from start to finish. In the cases of Glad and Bruce Hamilton, a complete picture of animation included its ancillary media, such as publicity posters and comic book art. Early museum exhibits had set the pattern for this kind of pedagogic approach, which emphasized the relationship between individual artworks and the production process of which they were a part.

According to Ison, the exhibit was delayed several times until the final dates of December 1994 through January 1995 were chosen (Rand 1994). Then the Disney organization fortuitously decided to release *Snow White* on video 28 October 1994. It simultaneously decided to publish the exhibit catalog as a \$45 book full of reproductions of Ison’s collection (Krause and Witkowski 1994). In addition, its Hyperion publishing imprint reissued the 50th anniversary book on the making of *Snow White* that not only covered the film itself but ancillary products and images it generated over the years (Hollis and Sibley [1987] 1994). The breadth of the slender book’s coverage was aided by the authors’ own Disneyana collections, items from which were photographed for the book.

As I noted about Bruce Hamilton’s essay for the “Haring, Warhol, Disney” exhibit catalog, these books do stand to contribute to the market value of each contributor’s

collection. However, Ison's ability to add to his collection was compromised by the rapid escalation in prices in auction houses in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Findsen 1994). Several articles noted that Ison refused to let the exhibit travel for fear that fragile pieces might not survive and that he houses the entire collection in a special addition to his house built to museum standards of conservation (Britton 1994a; Findsen 1994; Fristoe 1994; Rand 1994). In his foreword to the exhibit catalog Ison expressed his dedication to maintain the unity of the collection, acting as a temporary steward for future generations (Ison 1994). These are all indications of how collectors separate the nobility they invest in their collections from monetary appraisals of the art's worth, as Belk et al. (1988) found.

The *Snow White* exhibit catalog itself is a scrupulous job of art historical scholarship. Martin Krause's 50-page essay on the film's genesis employs 150 endnotes, including references to interviews with Disney artists who worked on the film and citations from primary materials. The essay begins by quoting early critical praise for Disney from Dorothy Grafly and noting the 1932 Disney exhibit that originated at the Philadelphia Art Alliance. It then turns to an inside view of the film's progress, documenting which European illustrators' works were employed by studio artists. Krause also clarified the specific contributions individual staff members made, both in the essay text and alongside each reproduced piece of art. Another strength of the essay is how well it describes the intensive process by which the Disney studio honed the early exploratory character designs, personalities, plot elements, musical ideas, and stylistic motifs into a tightly constructed film of mutually reinforcing effects. After a section filled with lush reproductions of the artwork, Linda Witkowski provides a detailed essay on the conservation of animation art filled with technical information about the exact materials and procedures in use during *Snow White's* production.

Thus, the *Snow White* catalog is a model of how to present Disney animation as an art form within its historical context. One exhibit reviewer missed just this context within



the exhibit itself. Steve Mannheimer speculated, "There may indeed be vast subconscious implications beneath any or all of these characters and their story, not to mention deep historical roots of either the plot or the visual motifs employed. Uncovering these would certainly necessitate a careful examination of this or that single cel. But this exhibition does not brave such new worlds" (1994). Instead, he found only that the cracked and faded cels could not stand up to the vibrancy of the restored film, clips of which played on adjacent video monitors. To him this juxtaposition merely served "to authenticate the static art, proving this particular image on the wall... indeed became part of the movie and is, thus, worthy of collection, preservation."

Other reviewers noticed disparities between the original production art and the bright look of the film on video, but reacted quite differently. One complained, "Comparing the art on the walls with the images on the TV monitor, it is clear that the Disney Studio has destroyed the mood of the original motion picture. The colors—soft and dark in the original—are garishly enhanced on video. It is a colorized *Snow White*" (Findsen 1994). Indeed, these kinds of disagreements over the beauty of aging artwork versus the desire for restoration run through the animation art market. On the whole, most reviewers found the art and videos mutually complementary and they enthusiastically endorsed the exhibit.

Even Mannheimer moved from initial condescension to a final assessment of Disney similar to what Sozanski's was in response to "Haring, Warhol, Disney." Early in Mannheimer's review, he stated, "Unlike so many shows in so many museums, *Snow White*'s nostalgic innocence requires of the viewer neither art historical expertise nor the willingness to ponder the imponderable issues of contemporary aesthetics." By the end, he found in the exhibit's description of Disney's collaborative art evidence that "movies, even (make that especially) cartoons, are a more important, more complete cultural expression than, say, painting when it comes to understanding this century. From the retrospective

vantage of the next, it is more than likely that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* will loom larger than any Whitney Biennial.”

Mannheimer illustrates the conflicts many serious critics face in attempting to evaluate art that finds a large, enthusiastic audience. Is such art popular because it is undemanding or does it strike a deep chord that transcends the trendy avant-garde fads? Does the audience’s ability to enjoy art without a course in art history threaten to make the critic irrelevant to the production and consumption of such art? Is the realm of contemporary aesthetics so caught up in imponderable issues because it is disengaged from everyday life? The Museum of Modern Art in New York would illustrate once again, as it had in the past, the value of art that is communicative and emotionally involving.

### **Back to Disney’s Future at the Museum of Modern Art**

The final Disney exhibit I will discuss in this chapter was mounted by the Museum of Modern Art, an arena whose mix of avant-garde art and conventional art I have documented in great depth already. “Designing Magic: Disney Animation Art” was quietly mounted in the summer and early fall of 1995 and modestly covered in local papers. However, it offers a fitting capstone to this chapter.

Mary Corliss, assistant curator in the Department of Film and Video, curated the exhibit, which consisted of over 150 works borrowed from the Walt Disney Archives and the Walt Disney Company Feature Animation Research Library. After a wall of *Pocahontas* art in the entryway to the exhibit hall, the exhibit was roughly divided into two halves: the first explained and illustrated the steps required to produce Disney animation and the second showed art from four recent Disney films (*The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*). No attempt was made to incorporate an arc of the Disney company’s progress into the displayed phases of production. Each phase might be illustrated by art from as far back as *Steamboat Willie* (1928) to the recent *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990). Also, the famous films, like *Sleeping Beauty*, mingled with the less

well-known, like *Melody Time* (1948) and *Victory Through Air Power* (1943). The vast majority of the pieces were accompanied by identification of artists who contributed to them.

Corliss's main exhibition text panel set out a simple premise: "In revealing how artifice can become reality, Disney animation has shaped many moviegoers' first notions of what art is" (1995). As if to demonstrate the truth of that, newspaper reporter Michael Daly opened his story with the following account: "The plaque said 'artist unknown' and reported that the drawing dated to 1928, but 3-year-old Michael Nehmad recognized it right away. 'Mickey!' Michael said" (1995).

The exhibit was designed to reveal the craftsmanship involved in the artifice, which Corliss described as "at once hand-crafted and machine-tooled, intensely individual and necessarily collaborative." The range of styles in evidence within each phase of production of so many different films testified to the individuality of artists creating within what is often called a monolithic "Disney style."

The exhibit led the visitor past art from each stage in the production process toward a large monitor showing a video of supervising animator Glen Keane reiterating those stages. Only then did the visitor encounter separate panels devoted to each of what "the Disney Company refers to as its 'Renaissance' films." The exhibit design suggests that the visitor must learn how each type of art contributes to the whole and must absorb what has been achieved in the past before fully appreciating what is now being produced. Corliss described the innovation and continuity that ties the new to the old as follows: "a new team of artists and supervisors has reinvented the format with charm, wit, and fresh melodies that are still within Walt Disney's grand tradition." Daly tied this Renaissance to a new great man who took Walt's place: Michael Eisner. As "both a 'suit' and a 'creative,'" Eisner "decided that the company had to get back in the business of setting a child's eyes alight" (1995).

The MoMA “Designing Magic” exhibit articulates how much of a hybrid art form Disney animation is and how formative an artistic influence it is to so many people. The exhibit celebrates Disney animation’s strong emotional appeal, the skills needed to create this potency, and the organization to put those skills to use. As Daly noted, that organization depends on strong business management as much as on artistic vision to continue exercising aesthetic creativity.

### **Heigh Ho! Heigh Ho! Disney’s Neither High Nor Low**

Although the Disney studio produced animation within the realm of mass culture, urban elite fine art organizations singled it out for appreciation. Museum exhibits increasingly demonstrated how Disney animation defied the simplistic hierarchy of high art and low art despite the museums’ investment in aspects of the traditional cultural hierarchy. They showed that Disney films were at once communicative and innovative because the films experimentally adapted narrative and representational conventions to motion pictures. Museums revealed how animation joined the handicraft of unique fine art objects to sophisticated technologies and organizational hierarchies in order to create art on the theater screen. In response, critics increasingly expressed their enthusiasm for Disney art without feeling the need to make it fit into outmoded concepts of elite art.

In addition to museum exhibits, such behind-the-scenes books as Robert Feild’s *Art of Walt Disney* and Thomas and Johnston’s *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* revealed the true extent of the artistry involved. The gallery sale of production art also gave purchasers the chance to relish the craftsmanship and beauty of each individual cel that represented only a tiny fraction of what appeared on screen. Critics exposed to museum exhibits came to speak more appreciatively of the films in terms of aesthetics as well as entertainment.

As Disney diversified into live-action filmmaking, television, and theme parks, museum exhibits dwindled and production cels became souvenirs. Only in the 1970s did museum exhibits recur. Some took into account how camp sensibilities of Pop art and its successors appropriated Disney icons, but most looked back to the original Disney art with nostalgia for a time when American Hollywood animation had artistic integrity. The commercial domination of cheaply produced limited animation for television seemed to condemn the medium to an impoverished future. Disney's few productions during the 1970s showed signs of treading old stylistic waters as the veteran animators trickled out of the studio.

At the same time, Disney art exhibits gained wide acceptance as curators such as J. Michael Barrier and Greg Ford found new insights in old animation. A spate of exhibits in the early 1990s celebrating Disney's golden age offered collectors a means to organize and display their Disney art in art museums. Those curators who made dubious artistic claims, such as linking Disney and Keith Haring on the basis of their popularity, were roundly criticized. However, those who applied art historical methodology to track the influence of European illustrators on Disney's films made solid contributions to evaluating Disney's artistic innovation within tradition. Also, recent exhibits go to great lengths to give recognition to the formerly anonymous artists who contributed their own individual touches to the overall collaborative Disney productions.

Finally, by 1995, Disney's renewed commitment to producing new cultural products to surpass the achievements of its consecrated products was acknowledged in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibit. However, this was not the first art world acknowledgment of Disney's new films. An auction of *Little Mermaid* production art at Sotheby's exceeded all estimates of the prices collectors would willingly pay for current art. The following chapter considers how the developing animation art market has contributed to the aesthetic legitimacy of animation as a whole.

## **Ch. 4**

### **The Animation Art Market**

#### **Introduction**

In covering the Museum of Modern Art and the history of Disney art exhibits, the previous chapters gave several examples of animation enthusiasts who sought to legitimize their tastes within the institution of the arts through museum exhibits, film programs, and publishing. These enthusiasts subjected animation to a variety of scholarly and critical tools that have long been employed to analyze legitimate culture. Some people invested not merely time and effort to gain knowledge but money to collect artworks, which they loaned to various museums for exhibition. Now I would like to expand the scope of investigation beyond the museum field and Disney to look at the activities that cartoon fans engage in within the market that deals in animation art. This chapter details how the animation art market has grown out of the realm of collectibles to embrace aspects of the fine art market. I draw data from news and specialty publications that have covered aspects of the market as well as from interviews I conducted with 32 people who are involved in it in various capacities.

Most of the voices in this chapter contrast with those in the previous chapters because they do not speak as professional cultural evaluators. Instead, they are people who are financially and emotionally involved in the subject of animation; the terms they use to describe that involvement can differ markedly from the terms critics use to evaluate what they review. Some individuals within the animation art market do discuss animation in aesthetic terms, but many others prefer to couch their interest in terms of personal pleasure. As I have done in previous chapters, I will show in the following sections that animation

draws out contradictions in the traditional cultural hierarchy's disjunction between art and entertainment, appreciation and pleasure, aesthetic evaluation and monetary worth.

I will first clarify what the term "animation art" encompasses within the market. Then I review the history of animation art's circulation within and outside of official marketing programs. Both the popular culture collectibles market and animation art within it have moved from marginality to the mainstream, gaining respect within markets devoted to antiques and fine art. After noting a few landmark events that brought greater attention to animation art as its own market, I will examine what aspects of the collectibles market it retains and what aspects of the fine art market it has acquired. Among the aspects I will scrutinize are the differentiation of participants' roles within each market and the evaluative criteria each employs. I will end the chapter by discussing how animation art market participants perceive their activities in the terms of aesthetic and cultural respectability.

### **What "Animation Art" Means to the Market**

Although in earlier chapters I have used the term "animation art" to mean art contributing to the production of animated films, the market expands the term to encompass art also created for publicity, for sale, and for ancillary media. The primary type of production art sold is the cel. Given the mode of production I detailed in chapter 1, cels are much more common than background paintings, and have been marketed without backgrounds as well as with mismatched production backgrounds, hand-prepared backgrounds, and reproduction backgrounds. Cels with a background are often called "cel set-ups." When cels are overlaid on the actual production backgrounds against which they were originally photographed, the backgrounds are called "master backgrounds" and the ensemble is a "key set-up." Other production artworks that have entered the market include concept sketches in various media, storyboard drawings, animation drawings, layout drawings, character model sheets, and sculptures of both characters and sets.

Another portion of the market is devoted to art that was not involved in the production of any films or television shows. Numerous companies have gained licenses from character copyright holders to produce new art to supplement the dwindling supply of increasingly expensive vintage production art. The most prevalent form of new art is the limited edition hand-painted cel, usually with a reproduction background. Other non-production art includes scene cels, which are unlimited versions of limited editions; serigraph cels (also called “sericels”), which are silkscreened cels; and lithographs. The images depicted may be recreations of particular film scenes or new presentations of recognized characters. Other ancillary art includes cels created for publicity purposes and original artwork for posters, books, theme parks, comic strips, etc. The mass produced items based on this original artwork form the bulk of the Disneyana collectibles market.

### **Historical Review of the Animation Art Market**

The market for animation art has grown and changed over the decades since Disney first offered art through the Guthrie Courvoisier gallery in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In the last chapter I argued that Disney and Courvoisier altered the production art they marketed to produce portraiture rather than highlight the art’s role in creating animated films. Thus, the field of production that dictated the nature of the cels, drawings, and paintings on sale mattered less than the fact that they were authentic artifactual remnants of the mysterious process of animation. In addition, the press releases mentioned the way Disney increased the rarity of the cels by destroying all but a few of the best images of characters in the most pleasing poses. These two qualities—artifactuality and manufactured scarcity—made the art more valuable than the mass produced images based on the same characters that were sold as merchandise. The Courvoisier art marketing program elevated the cult value of rare, unique, handcrafted art objects over the exhibition value of the films to which these objects originally contributed.



However, the market for Disney animation art quickly dissipated, much as the fine art market for limited edition photographic prints failed to materialize when the Museum of Modern Art and others tried to promote it in the 1930s. In 1955, when the Disney company again began to sell production art from its animated films, it no longer offered the art through elite galleries, but as souvenirs in the Art Corner store in the Tomorrowland section of Disneyland.

Cels were offered on inexpensive paperboard mats, first without any backgrounds, and later with lithographed background art. Prices started at \$1.25, compared to the opening price of \$5 eighteen years before. The store sold cels from animated features and television shows and briefly sold high grade photographs of cel set-ups (Tumbusch 1989, 60). The store closed in 1966 and the sales of Disney production art eventually ended when the existing stock ran out.

This strategy of selling animation art as ubiquitous, affordable collectibles rather than scarce, expensive art transmutes some of the cult value of art for the few into exhibition value of art for many. This is especially true of the photographic prints. However, that did not prevent the market from later imbuing the survivors of this mass marketing program with cult value. In addition, this initial souvenir market introduced some of the most eminent collectors to the field, such as Mike Glad. He bought his first three cels in Disneyland in the 1950s when he was a boy (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). From this humble beginning grew his passion to represent the entire history of animation in his collection, including not only American cartoon studios but foreign animation and American independents as well.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a market for popular culture memorabilia began grow. The burgeoning field of Disneyana I mentioned in chapter 3 joined comic books, baseball cards, movie posters, toys, and many other kinds of items deemed “collectible.” Stephen Hughes argues in his guide to collectibles that the field was fed by: 1) the

explosion of a consumer culture based on the continual obsolescence of industrially mass produced items, and, 2) an inflationary economy beginning in the early 1960s that increased prices of such items while sacrificing quality (1984, 3-9). Both of these phenomena fed a nostalgia for a better time and the products of that time. Thus, collector interest caused items once considered merely utilitarian to be seen as much more desirable. Inflation also fed the escalation of collectible prices, as people exchanged their eroding monetary assets for increasingly coveted tangibles.

The collectible market created a range of unofficial sources for animation art to rival Disneyland. One longtime animation art collector remembered specialty conventions, toy and antique shows, and collector shops as early venues for animation art (Kleiman 1992, 16). A longtime dealer, Elvena Green, related to me how she entered the field in 1979 when she obtained and resold several boxes of art from Hanna-Barbera television cartoons at flea markets (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). Leslie Brooks, a longstanding collector who later became a dealer, claimed “This whole [animation art collecting] hobby is an outgrowth of collecting old comic books... originally in the ‘60s” (telephone interview, 26 March 1992).

Several people mentioned one location in particular as their introduction to animation art: the San Diego Comic Convention. For example, Ruth Clampett remembered accompanying her father, Warner cartoon director Bob Clampett, to this convention, where “he’d be treated like a god” (telephone interview, 17 April 1992). Dealer Mitch Manfred described his revelation at that convention when he learned that a dealer’s cel of the Hanna-Barbera character Top Cat was from the filmmaking process and not merely a portrait (telephone interview, 18 March 1992).

The collectibles market offered animation art along with a heterogeneous mix of items that were not necessarily considered in aesthetic terms. Nor was animation elevated above other kinds of visual art objects available. A top auctioneer of animation art, Howard

Lowery, began in 1973 by selling original art used in fantasy illustrations, animation, and comics without making much distinction among them. Only after the market for animation outstripped those for the other original art did it come to dominate his business (telephone interview, 24 March 1992).

Many pieces of art available through these venues had never been marketed through official channels, but were obtained from studio employees' collections, studio trash bins, or even poorly secured studio storage rooms. Collectible dealer Gary Darrow's family has run Darrow's Fun Antiques since 1964 and he remembered that "family and friends of animators would get their hands on cels and sooner or later, somebody would need money and they would come in" (personal interview, 19 March 1992).

By May 1972 the Los Angeles auction house Sotheby Parke-Bernet debuted its first auction devoted solely to Disneyana, which came from the estate of the Disney company's merchandising representative, Kay Kamen. It included several animation cels from *Snow White* that sold for between \$400 and \$575. However, the top price, \$2000, was paid for a Claes Oldenburg ink wash of Mickey rather than for Disney-created art (Cawley and Korkis 1992, 34; "Mickey Mouse in Parke-Bernet Debut" 1972).

The Disney company quickly resumed the official sale of production art from its new features in the 1970s. In 1973 Disney entered into an agreement with the Circle Fine Art Galleries chain to sell Disney pieces alongside its other art. Whereas Disneyland sold *Aristocats* cels for \$3.50, Circle charged \$45.00 for unframed *Robin Hood* cels and \$75 for framed ones (Kleiman 1992, 17). Disney's theme parks have continued to sell production art and a number of dealers who began as collectors cited trips to these places as their initiation into the market.

The 1970s also saw Disney return to a format it had pioneered in the early 1940s, the limited edition cel. Its initial foray into limited edition art offered cels of Mickey, Donald, and Donald's cohorts from *Saludos Amigos*, but production of such art was

suspended along with the rest of the Courvoisier program. In 1974, Disney offered 275 sets of four cels each, which recreated art from *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Cinderella*, and *Lady and the Tramp*. Each set sold for \$1395, a price the Disney publicity department justified with the claim that no vintage art from these films was known to exist (Altyn and Altyn 1991). The studio continued to produce high priced limited edition art after much more vintage Disney art surfaced.

In 1977, Gallery Lainzberg became one of the first galleries devoted exclusively to animation art. Its full color mail order catalogs and exhibits that traveled to college campuses exposed many people to animation art for the first time (Cawley and Korkis 1992, 37; Davis 1982). Animation director Chuck Jones also began to produce limited edition cels of his Warner Bros. characters that year. By 1980, these were being sold in galleries nationwide in small edition sizes ranging from 50 to 200 per design and priced from \$175 to \$295 each (Altyn 1991). Another steady source of animation art since the 1970s was the Hollywood chapter of the international animation association, ASIFA (French acronym for Association Internationale du Film d'Animation), which raised funds through annual sales of production art donated by studios (Cawley and Korkis 1992, 35; Wood 1982).

Other traveling exhibits and auctions occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s that helped spread interest in animation art. However one signal event in 1984 overshadowed the rest. In December 1984 Christie's East in New York City held an auction devoted solely to art used in the production of Disney features and shorts from the 1930s and 1940s. Prior to this, Christie's had begun to include a few pieces of animation art at the end of its auctions of American paintings (personal interview with Joshua Arfer, 13 May 1992). The nearly 400 pieces in the 1984 auction were all from the collection of retired Disney animator John Basmajian.

The sale grossed \$543,620, far in excess of the pre-auction estimates (Mehren 1984). It became legendary in animation art collecting circles as the pivotal event that legitimated animation as an art form worthy of serious consideration and monetary investment (e.g. see Solomon 1989, 299; Tumbusch 1989, 65; Zamora 1990). Since then a series of record-breaking auction bids stimulated press coverage as pieces of art that had once sold as souvenirs at Disneyland for under two dollars were suddenly commanding thousands of dollars, and prices were rising at an annual rate of 25% to 30% according to animation dealer Howard Lowery (O'Brian 1990).

News stories on the booming animation art market peaked after two long-standing records were set in 1989: the private-sale record of \$450,000 paid for artwork from the production of the 1934 Disney short, *Orphan's Benefit*, as well as the auction house record of \$286,000 for production art from another scene in the same cartoon (Egan 1990; Hadad 1991; O'Brian 1990; Peers 1991; Reif 1992b; Rohter 1990; Wasserman 1992; Zamora 1990). Both of the record-breaking *Orphan's Benefit* pieces were key set-ups. As of this writing, neither record has been broken and the latter piece sold for only \$88,000 when it was returned to auction in 1992.

The lower end of the market has continued to grow in volume despite the sluggish economy of the 1990s as more dealers and collectors become involved. The broad market sells pieces that range in price from less than one hundred dollars to thousands. The combination of price stabilization at auctions for high-end vintage art and an influx of collectors has removed from circulation much of the production art that the boom years had unearthed. Consequently, an increasing percentage of the market is made up of limited editions, sericels, and contemporary production art. After expanding from collectibles circles to art galleries, animation art now accompanies other merchandise in Walt Disney Studio Stores and Warner Bros. Studio Stores in shopping centers both within the United States and internationally.

## **Fine Art vs. Collectibles**

In comparing the animation art market to those of collectibles and fine art, I will consider what roles each market has developed and what criteria each uses for evaluating items. While there is some overlap in these aspects of each market, each highlights a different constellation of factors.

The growth of the animation art market has spawned a range of roles: dealers, collectors, auctioneers, appraisers, conservators, limited edition art publishers, and, of course, animation producer organizations that supply production artwork. In addition, writers on various aspects of animation are relevant to the market, whether as critics, historians, or reporters on the market itself. Some people play multiple roles that might transcend the boundaries of a single market.

All the markets are shaped by one means of judging value: money. Every transaction places a dollar amount on artwork as it changes hands. However, each market rests on its ability to transform profane cash into sacred objects. What grants animation art nobility is a nexus of factors. Some factors apply to production art, some apply to limited edition art, and some apply to both. Among them are the evaluative criteria Larry Gross argues are used for judging art: skill, labor, complexity, repeatability, novelty, and sincerity (1973, 117). Artifactual considerations regarding scarcity, authenticity, and condition of each work also combine with recognition of artistic reputation and the media employed. Above all, however, is the degree to which the art faithfully represents particular characters from various animation productions. This last factor can incorporate aesthetic appreciation of vivid characterizations or it may be expressed solely in terms of nostalgia or enjoyment of a character.

To illustrate how standards of evaluation and behavior are in flux in the relatively youthful animation art market, I will also discuss a few of its controversies and legal

conflicts. They show how animation's transition from marginalized art form to legitimate cultural capital has spurred dissent among participants about what items and what practices may be considered appropriate to the market.

## **Roleplayers in the market**

### **Auction Houses and Museums**

In many ways, animation art is circulated much like fine art is, within a network of dealers, collectors, galleries, auction houses, and museums. In some cases the very same organizations take part in circulating both fine art and animation art (e.g., Circle Fine Art Galleries and Christie's East auction house, as I mentioned above). Chapters 2 and 3 detailed how museums devoted to a wide range of art engaged in both temporary exhibitions and permanent acquisitions of animation art.

Of course, auction houses and museums also involve themselves with collectibles. Christie's East and Sotheby's now place animation art within specialty departments that also feature collectibles. Museums such as the Smithsonian Institute and the American Museum of the Moving Image collect and display movie and television memorabilia among other collectibles as valuable records of our nation's cultural heritage.

Museums sit at the pinnacle of the fine art market. A museum bestows considerable prestige on each piece it collects and it increases the scarcity of similar works once that piece is off the market (Becker 1982, 116; "More Money Than Art" 1987). As Alice Goldfarb Marquis argues, "For avid collectors there is no more felicitous final resting place for their treasures than a museum. It validates the passion for accumulation that is the hallmark of the true collector and offers him or her a tiny share of immortality" (1991, 290). This is true in the animation art market as well, where collectors such as Mike Glad and Steve Schneider loan items from their collections and guest curate temporary exhibits at

various museums. One collector, Jeff Lotman, has moved beyond these activities to raise funds to found a new museum devoted exclusively to animation (personal communication, 30 October 1994).

Dealers in the fine art market often scorn the crassness of auction houses even while some use them to buoy up prices of artists in their own stable (Marquis 1991, 239, 249). In contrast, several animation art dealers acknowledge that the auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's usually receive the top pieces and the dealers' clientele could not afford such works even if they carried them (telephone interview with Mary Anne Ergezi, 10 March 1992; telephone interview with Elvena Green, 16 March 1992; personal interview with Toni Volk, 26 March 1992). High-end collectors know to go to these auctions and bypass dealers for certain top pieces and many dealers also attend the auctions to acquire works and to renew contacts with other market members.

### **Collectors**

The animation art market has expanded to its present size because of an influx of collectors willing to spend anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars on individual pieces of art. Only a small elite spend the five and six figures for top pieces. Dealers characterize the buyers as ranging from children to senior citizens, but most are in their twenties through fifties. Males used to outnumber females, but the market is currently distributed more evenly between the genders. There is also a cross-section of occupations, both blue collar and white collar, although bigger spenders tend to be professional people or business owners. Warner Bros. collector Steve Ferzoco generalized aficionados of that studio as younger than Disney collectors (telephone interview, 23 March 1992).

A number of market participants mentioned that couples share in collecting. Purchases may be a joint decision or partners may pursue different interests. One collecting couple who also publish the animation art collector's magazine *In Toon!* diverge in their tastes in that the husband has come to specialize in production art from the era of World



War II while the wife collects what her husband “refers to as stupid little animals” (telephone interview with Dawn Altyn, 3 May 1993). However, there is no absolute gender division between those who collect cute images and those who prefer other qualities (e.g. evil, horror, violence) in their art.

The market is driven by collector desire in a way that much more closely resembles collectibles rather than avant-garde fine art. For example, a number of dealers have expressed preferences for production art but carry limited editions because collectors demand them. Many dealers described collectors who have “want lists” of art from particular productions featuring particular characters. This directly parallels want lists described by collectible dealers.

### **Dealers**

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) argues that the fine art market operates on a long-term cycle of economic profit in which only a small proportion of emerging artists will experience a dramatic rise in reputation. In the interim, dealers must disavow economic gain, cultivating instead the symbolic capital of prestige and authority by which they select artists who will eventually be recognized by the art world as geniuses. Thus, they engage in euphemized promotional practices to interest critics and important collectors in their stable of artists.

The practice of animation art dealers is fundamentally different because their clientele has a general knowledge of the cartoons and characters that are represented in the artworks. While collectors may understand the aesthetic conventions and meanings conveyed in much commercially produced animation, they often need guidance in understanding the artifactual basis for a piece’s value. Teaching collectors about the intricacies of the animation process and its history is a much more important aspect of dealing animation art than conveying artistic judgments.

Animation art dealers come from different backgrounds and play different roles in the market. Above I mentioned people who entered through comic book collecting and flea

markets. Others have fine art backgrounds. Toni Volk dealt in fine art prints from Surrealist, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco movements for over a decade before opening a store selling antique dolls and animation art as well as current toys (personal interview, 26 March 1992). Susan Spiegel first came into contact with animation art as a trustee of the Philadelphia Art Alliance, where she helped curate Jeff Lotman's "Salute to Walt Disney Animation Art" exhibit (personal interview, 14 March 1992). She met top collectors through that and began searching for pieces they requested. This led to a business she ran from her apartment until it grew enough for her to open a retail gallery.

Many of the dealers I interviewed began as collectors and still collect the art, much like a good number of collectibles dealers. The dealers felt they were able to shield their personal collecting activities from their business activities. However, dealer Toni Volk was frustrated that Linda Jones, who distributes her father Chuck Jones's limited editions, did not permit any dealers who carried his art to collect it (personal interview, 26 March 1992).

Other dealers maintained that they do not collect what they deal. Only one person professed abstention on the basis of conflict of interest and he deals in a range of collectibles. Chic Darrow took his father's advice in that regard so as not to do "a disservice to your clientele" by "keeping the best stuff for yourself" (personal interview, 19 March 1992).

In comparison, Marquis gives examples of how fine art dealers often buy a work from each show they put on as a form of support for their artists as well as a longterm investment. She claims that many make their money as sellers rather than middlemen by cultivating the monetary appreciation of their artists' works over the years that they possess them (1991, 239).

Animation art dealers can wear other hats as well. Some secure contracts with animation studios to monopolize a region within which to wholesale the studios' production art and limited edition cels to other galleries. For example, Ken Thimmel told

me he was both a proprietor of two animation art galleries and the East Coast distributor of Walter Lantz's art featuring Woody Woodpecker and other characters owned by Universal Studios (telephone interview, 12 March 1992).

Other dealers do not merely distribute such artwork, but obtain licenses to publish their own limited edition art. David Underhill secured licenses from King Features Syndicate to create new art using Popeye and related characters, from Turner Home Entertainment for new Tom and Jerry art, and from Warner Bros. for new art based on characters developed by their director Robert McKimson (e.g. Tazmanian Devil). In all cases the limited edition art was designed by artists who had worked on the original films: Myron Waldman, Marcia Fertig, and McKimson's brothers (telephone interview, 26 March 1992). Another dealer obtained a separate license from King Features Syndicate to create limited edition cels of Betty Boop drawn by one of her original animators, Shamus Culhane (telephone interview with Chris Surico, 19 March 1992).

### **Artists**

The animation art market is divided in its acknowledgment of artists. The growth of limited edition cel publishing gives certain animation artists an active role in the market that parallels how fine artists operate. However, the artists who make the transition from producing animation to creating limited editions are a select few who have been able to negotiate with the entities that hold rights to characters.

The above-mentioned animation artists all had either long associations with the characters they now recreate on limited editions or they achieved a reputation within the industry as animation directors or producers. For example, Myron Waldman directed cartoons for Fleischer Studios and its successor Famous Studios for years. Shamus Culhane worked at many studios before opening his own eponymous company to produce animation for commercials. Marcia Fertig rose to become an animation director in television

animation. She is the least known of these licensed artists and her association with MGM animating Tom and Jerry was relatively brief.

Tom and Charles McKimson were animators in their brother Robert's unit at Warner Bros. for a time. Thus, they combine artistic experience in the industry with consanguinity to a deceased director. Warner's autonomous units placed great authorial weight on directors, as I have discussed in previous chapters, and both Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng used the artistic stature they gained in that capacity obtain licenses from Warner Bros. to create their own lines of limited editions. Artists who became heads of their own animation studios, such as Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, also began signing production art and limited edition cels.

Whereas contemporary production art may be released bearing the signature of a studio head or famous creator, vintage production art offers no such seal of artistic authorship. Hollywood animation production is collective and hierarchic by nature. Thus, many pieces are sold with the imprimatur of a studio rather than an artist, and in some cases even the studio name is unidentified. Artists play a minimal role in these cases because their artworks were originally considered only piecemeal contributions to the final film or show. They were studio employees who were support personnel for those credited with artistic vision, the studio heads and some directors.

Awareness of certain artists has grown among sophisticated collectors of production art. I will discuss in the section on evaluative criteria which portions of the production process lend themselves to greater individual stylistic differentiation within the studio system. Such individuation is helpful to collectors interested in identifying artists. However, most buyers of production art take less interest in artists' names than do buyers of limited edition cels.

The anonymity of many artists who produced the market's production art parallels the collectibles market. That market accepts industrial mass production as the basis for the

items that are circulated. Disneyana dealer Bob Crooker argued that good artists were necessary for well-designed Mickey merchandise, but he did not know the names of any such individuals. Instead, he named the Fisher-Price company as a source of beautifully crafted toys (telephone interview, 10 March 1992).

### **Animation Studios**

Animation studios are active in marketing contemporary production art, licensing limited edition art, and protecting copyrighted and trademarked characters. Since the mid-1980s, many companies have instituted security measures to protect what production art might be deemed marketable and to destroy that which is not. They have little to do with art that escaped their custody before these measures to circulate among dealers.

I asked nearly every market participant the extent to which they thought the animation art market affected animation production decisions and most speculated that the effect was nominal. Some dealers argued that the studios realize that they have an added asset to exploit in the production art, but it did not seem to affect production decisions. In fact, dealer Pam Martin beemoaned that studios often take awhile to decide to market their art. They do not always have the staff or expertise to distribute it themselves and that is why dealers gain distribution contracts (telephone interview, 9 March 1992).

The one production executive I interviewed confirmed that the animation art market was a minor concern. Linda Simensky was in animation development at the children's cable station Nickelodeon at the time of my interview with her. I spoke to her after Nickelodeon first offered key set-ups from its series "Ren and Stimpy" at Christie's East auction house, where they performed well above their estimated sales ranges.

She said, "If [the] licensing [department] is going to go auction cels or not, that has no effect on what we're developing. I mean, because anything we do, we're going to stand behind it 100%. We still make the decisions first and then licensing is a support group" (telephone interview, 10 February 1993). She attended that auction with other Nickelodeon

executives from programming, business affairs, and licensing, and admitted, “We were very excited as it was going on, not so much because it was making so much money for the company but that we had done something that people cared so much about that they are willing to pay a lot of money for it. It seemed incredible that already we had had that much of an effect. It was really almost like a validation of what we were doing more than anything.”

The market, then, is a secondary consideration that adds to other measures of a studio’s success. This is confirmed by the increasing use of computers to replace hand painted cels as production costs drop. The selected by-products that may be sold to animation art collectors do not outweigh the savings generated by more cost-efficient production procedures.

### **Critics**

Critics play a prominent role in fine art markets by exhibiting self-assurance when pronouncing their judgments upon various artworks displayed in galleries and museums. Their words carry the weight of the highly cultivated taste that reflects their extensive experience with art. In performing a gatekeeping function at the the border of the fine arts world, critics contribute to decisions regarding the allocation of limited resources within that world (Becker 1982, 135). Given the ever-shifting terrain of avant-garde conventions, critics distinguish the charlatans from the visionaries by divining artistic sincerity and novelty in the absence of such obvious measures as skill, labor, or complexity (Gross 1973, 135-6).

The role of critics in the animation art market will be familiar from previous chapters. Reviews of Disney exhibits often attend to graphic aspects of the displayed art, but critical discourse tends to favor the films as the source of true aesthetic value. As I discussed in chapter 1, the reviewers of the Museum of Modern Art’s 1985 Warner Bros.

exhibit exemplified the critical tendency to bypass the pieces of art on the walls to focus on the films and their directors.

A good deal of what passes for aesthetic discussion in the animation art market is limited to broad generalizations regarding the recognition of animation as a legitimate field of art. For example, dealer Luigi Goldberg claims, "Animation is to art as jazz is to music, one of the few original American art forms" (quoted in O'Brian 1990, 5), a statement that reflects the ethnocentricity of the market as a whole. Specific aesthetic judgments often consist of nothing more than the declaration that a particular cel or drawing came from a classic cartoon, but what makes it classic is left to others to define.

When critics do consider the pieces of graphic art, the art's use to filmmaking is the paramount concern. For example, Steve Schneider, the critic and collector whose art collection formed the basis for the MoMA exhibit, based his critique of an earlier exhibit on its failure to illustrate the process of animation. He argued in *Art in America* that the 1981 "Moving Image" touring exhibit of production art was "marred by a 'suitable-for-framing' orientation," in which its "foursquare and self-explanatory" images downplayed the aesthetic choices entailed by animation's kinetic nature (1981, 123).

Similarly, Arlene Shattil judges animation graphics according to production constraints, arguing that the animator operates within a more restricted format than does the painter, because every line must count to define character emotion and action (1988). This echoes Robert Feild's ([1942] 1947) analysis of Disney animation that I discussed in chapter 3. These are useful contributions to aesthetic appreciation of animation art in terms of its own field of production. They do not impose ill-fitting criteria from other media just because the art has been isolated from the production process and hung in galleries amidst fine art.

Museum exhibits of animation art are the primary events that critics evaluate. They rarely make pronouncements regarding special events within the market such as auctions or

animators' appearances at galleries. Instead, these happenings are more likely to attract news coverage as entertainment features or business stories.

The portion of the market that does draw regular critical attention is limited editions. For example, one magazine devoted to animation art and Disneyana collecting runs regular reviews of newly released limited edition artworks. This glossy journal, *Storyboard*, has developed a ratings scale and criteria such as presentation, character representation, and quality of production. These criteria allow reviewers to compare new limited edition art to previously released art and to original designs of characters as they appeared in film and television.

### **Animation Historians**

One group of writers has influenced the animation art market more than any reviewer of exhibits or limited editions. Individuals who have written histories of animation were repeatedly cited by every kind of participant in the market as key sources of information. Among people I interviewed, more mentioned Leonard Maltin's history of American animation studios, *Of Mice and Magic* ([1980a] 1987), than any other book. The second most praised book is Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (1981).

Regarding the former book, collector Mike Glad said he read it repeatedly for both its scope and depth (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). Another collector, Amy Wong, detailed how the latter book helped her to appreciate the animation drawings of Goofy she collects for their depictions of gravitational force and emotional anticipation. It even spurred her to plan to take an art history course in the future (telephone interview, 30 June 1992).

Another book that is often mentioned is Charles Solomon's history of American animation, *Enchanted Drawings* (1989). In addition to retracing ground covered by Maltin, he gives his own critical reviews of films and divides his book by era rather than by studio, as Maltin did. This allows him to clarify aesthetic designations that have become useful in



the market, such as segmenting Disney's output into the studio's golden age (1928-1942) and its silver age (1946-1960), with the war taking up the intervening years. Previously, fans applied the term "golden age" to the whole range of Hollywood cartoons produced during the 1930s through the 1950s.

I noted above that outside of creating limited editions, animation artists have little active role in the market. As artists, that may be true, but as writers and interview subjects, they can have a great impact. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston combined anecdotes, astute analyses, and reproduced artwork to teach animation enthusiasts the names and styles of many individuals who worked at the Disney studio. *Memoirs by Shamus Culhane* (1986) and *Chuck Jones* (1989) added similar insights into the work of their colleagues.

People use these books and others as both historical references and critical barometers of various pieces of art in circulation. One historian, Joe Adamson, told me how his own writing seemed to have an impact on pricing (telephone interview, 18 November 1992). He had written the book *Tex Avery: King of Cartoons* (1975b) and included an extended critical commendation of one of Avery's MGM shorts, *Bad Luck Blackie* (1949). In 1991 Adamson saw a production layout drawing of a background from the film at a gallery. The piece had a price tag of \$1500, because the dealer claimed the film was a classic. Adamson's book was the first to argue for that designation and now a drawing of a background from it cost the same amount of money he was originally paid to write the book (not adjusting for inflation).

As more books are published, authors focus on narrower subjects: individual studio histories, particular artists, delimited eras, even single films. To these books must be added the stream of articles appearing in such animation-themed periodicals as *Animation Magazine*, *Animato!*, *In Toon!*, and *Storyboard*. Together they form a context for appreciating animation art that was unavailable to the original galleries participating in Disney's Courvoisier marketing program. Interview subjects in a variety of professional

roles within the market all told me the same thing: they consider it their primary responsibility to educate the public about the art form and part of that education is to suggest books for people to read.

### **Authenticators and Appraisers**

As prices climb, the concern over authenticity has grown. Dealers regard outright forgeries to be much less common than misrepresentation, in which a piece is claimed to be older, rarer, or in better condition than it actually is. Disney alone among major animation studios maintains an archive, which offers historical production information crucial to authenticating artwork. Archivist David R. Smith and his staff are often cited for their expertise at answering such questions as which peg-hole registry system was in use at a particular time, what water bond marks should appear, what sequence numbers correspond to which scenes, or what colors were used to paint each character (Brooks, 1990; telephone interview with Heidi Leigh, 25 July 1990). Additionally, Disney art has always had labels and seals of authentication since the first art was sold by the Courvoisier Galleries. Many other studios and limited edition publishers have followed suit; Hanna-Barbera even goes so far as to incorporate “broken-down particles of [Joe] Barbera’s DNA patterns” in the ink of the authentication sticker on new art (Benesch 1994, 57).

The lack of resources to authenticate vintage production art from studios other than Disney has led to the reliance on unofficial experts for identification of artwork. These may be collectors, animation historians, or animation artists. Thus, the current market must sometimes rely on disinterested assessments made by interested parties, whose very interest has gained them expertise beyond that of most dealers. However, some dealers seek no such assessments because of the risk that their art will lose historical importance, which translates into lower prices.

One attempt to rectify the lack of uniform professional standards among dealers is the founding of the Animation Art Guild in 1990, which serves as a central clearinghouse

of information about prices, legal issues, and ethics. Unaffiliated with any gallery or studio, the Guild builds collector awareness of unscrupulous business practices, issues bulletins about stolen art, and provides fair market range estimates for particular pieces. It is run by a couple of collectors, Michael and Pamela Scoville, who keep their collecting separate from the services they provide and who accept no advertisements in the Guild's newsletters. Since the early 1980s, they have been compiling a database that tracks prices of animation artworks attained at auctions and listed in dealer catalogs. This gives them the ability to give market ranges for pieces about which members inquire (telephone interview with Michael Scoville, 26 April 1992). At the time of my interview they were in the process of obtaining certification from an appraisal organization in order to make legally defensible appraisals. Other appraisers include the auction houses and conservator Ron Stark.

This growth of standards of authentication and professional ethics certainly parallels the development of systematic techniques of attribution in the fine arts world that are, in the words of sociologist Howard Becker, "a standard part of the value-creating activity" of art worlds (1982, 115). The necessity for experts in these roles grows with the amount of money people are willing to pay for the cult value of a unique piece of art. The fine art world offers many examples of how the high stakes tempt appraisers to make fraudulent estimates, overvaluing for insurance claims and undervaluing for tax liabilities (Sherman 1992).

While animation art has not reached the stratospheric heights of appraisals that some fine art has, it is expensive enough for fraud to incur serious legal penalties and for mistakes to cost dearly. Thus, corporations defer liability to credentialed experts. For example, the Disney company has called on Ron Stark "to make representations as to whether artwork presented on their behalf is studio property" that can stand up in court not only because of his years of conserving Disney art but because he is a designated member

of the International Society of Appraisers and a tax practitioner (telephone interview with Stark, 12 March 1993).

In contrast, the collectibles field relies on price guides written by certain reputable market participants who track prices at various venues. Because the items listed are mass produced, enough comparable items circulate for guides to publish generally agreed upon price ranges. The lone price guide exclusively devoted to animation art contains the caveat that “there is no way to establish an actual price guide for animation art” because “each piece of production art (as opposed to a limited edition piece) is unique unto itself” (Cawley and Korkis 1992, 155).

### **Conservators**

Paralleling the issues of authentication and appraisal is that of restoration. Older cels are particularly vulnerable to deterioration because they were made out of cellulose nitrate rather than more recent standard of acetate. They have a tendency to shrink, wrinkle, and yellow. Additionally, paint and ink can crack, chip, and become discolored. Some early cels were laminated to prevent dehydration, but this caused a variety of damaging chemical reactions to occur. Vintage Disney art benefits from the studio’s choice of a gum arabic paint binder, the expense and durability of which starkly contrasts with the cheap acidic casein binder that erodes many of the surviving vintage Warner Bros. cels (Halbreich and Worth, 1990).

Several restoration experts have garnered reputations for quality work while retaining different methods and solutions to common problems. Ron Stark’s S/R Laboratories utilizes the latest conservation technology to analyze damage and make repairs. He belongs to a number of professional organizations dealing with coatings, chemistry, color analysis, and art conservation (“Restoring Cinema Animation Art” 1991). He uses a chroma meter to analyze the original paint color on damaged cels and mixes new

paint according to original studio formulas to maintain what he calls the “chemological balance” of each piece of art (telephone interview with Stark, 12 March 1993).

On the other hand, Janet Scagnelli’s Chelsea Animation Company takes a crafts orientation toward conservation. Scagnelli relies on decades of experience as a cel inker and painter. She mixes paint by eye and offers clients the option of using longer lasting acrylic paint to replace original gouache paint on some older cels. She justified changing paint formulas by citing a museum conservator friend who was using contemporary plastic materials to restore an Egyptian mummy because it would last longer (telephone interview, 17 March 1993).

### **The Spectrum of Roles Resembles the Fine Art Market**

The animation art market has developed an array of roles that are more specialized than those in the collectibles market. They have grown to match the roles in the fine art market. The driving force behind much of this differentiation is the increased monetary value of individual pieces of vintage production art. What was once a pleasant souvenir is now a coveted artifact of history needing verification as to which production it was employed in; what formerly might have been discarded is now painstakingly restored. As more books are published on various aspects of animation history, market members take greater interest in locating their artwork’s place in that history. The following section will analyze historical contextualization along with other factors that contribute to the way market evaluates the range of art it circulates. Collectibles and fine art will once again serve as comparison markets.

### **Evaluative Criteria**

The animation art market re-evaluates art with each transaction, as new conditions of supply and demand adjust prices upward or downward. I will first review a general

hierarchy of pricing for various types of animation art and then consider what judgments contributed to that hierarchy. These judgments may be divided into those based on artifactuality and those based on aesthetics.

### **Hierarchy of Prices**

The top of the market is dominated by one name, Disney, whose golden age and silver age films have yielded key set-ups that often sell for tens of thousands of dollars. Several items from Disney's golden age have sold at auction for six figures, among them black-and-white key set-ups from the shorts *Ye Olden Days* (1933) and *Orphan's Benefit* (1934) and a color key set-up from the feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Such record setting prices were paid in bidding wars among very few wealthy collectors, including Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, Staten Island restaurateur Peter Merolo, and Canadian industrialist Herbert Black. For example, the record paid for a color key set-up is the \$209,000 bid in December 1991 at Sotheby's for the *Snow White* piece. The bid was the result of Spielberg's auction agent, Russ Cochran, outbidding Merolo (Solis-Cohen 1992). The number of people who compete in the five figure range is much greater and even the top production pieces from such contemporary features as *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *The Lion King* (1994) have sold at auction in this range.

Below Disney come such second tier studios as Warner Bros., MGM, and Fleischer, while Walter Lantz, Jay Ward, Hanna-Barbera, and many others follow. Lesser pieces of Disney production art and almost all production art from other studios sells for under \$10,000 (Scoville 1991, 83). The under-\$500 range is dominated by more recent television shows and commercials, as well as small studios, independent animators, and foreign studios.

Monetary comparisons across various artistic media used within the production process are best made using similar images of characters within a single film or show. Key set-ups of cels on matching production background paintings sell for much more than the

same poses of characters in animation drawings, model sheets, concept art, or storyboard art. Even cels lacking matching backgrounds outperform the other forms of production art. Sometimes background paintings alone may sell for high prices as well.

Limited edition cels generally sell for several hundred dollars, with a few, such as Disney's, in the low thousands. The smaller the size of the edition, the higher the price of each piece of art. Editions have ranged from one to 1,000, most commonly set at 500. Sericels have been published in much larger editions of 9,500 and usually do not include any kind of background art. Disney marketed sericels for a time through an American Express mail order promotion. Sericels usually sell in the low hundreds of dollars. This pricing structure results in opportunities to purchase vintage production art from a film such as *Bambi* for less money than it costs to buy a limited edition cel and reproduced background from the film.

The reasons for such anomalies in the market have to do with the different ways that art used in production is evaluated in comparison with that created expressly for sale. Aesthetic criteria relating to the depiction of characters and their settings apply to both production and nonproduction limited edition art, but artifactual criteria apply more strongly to production art. In this sense, production art is much more akin to the collectibles market while nonproduction art resembles the fine art market.

### **Character Representations**

Market participants I interviewed concurred with published articles on a number of aspects of character depiction that affect value. In general, artworks featuring main characters rather than secondary characters from a production are worth more. Groupings of several characters are higher priced than lone characters. Frontal character poses are more valuable than rear views or partially obscured views of characters. Open eyes are preferable to closed eyes unless the face is particularly expressive of an emotion with eyes closed.

The great majority of production drawings and cels created for animation must show characters in unflattering poses necessary to convey all aspects of motion and emotion. Characters blink and turn away; they squash and stretch into exaggerated positions; they cross behind objects; they move into extremely foreshortened perspectives. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (1981) devoted many pages detailing how such distorted views imbue characters with personality and vibrancy in the flow of the film.

However, these intermediary poses are neglected by collectors unless they are the only available or affordable images of a cherished character from a favorite production. Indeed, even an expressive pose may be unpopular if it depicts an emotion at odds with people's dominant memory of a character. For instance, Joshua Arfer, who was head of Christie's animation and collectibles department, told me, "You don't want Snow White looking mad; you want her sweet." He stressed instead that the market pays dearly for what he calls "magic moments" during a film's narrative, which capture the essence of the characters in memorable scenes. He gave the example of *Lady and the Tramp's* "Bella Notte" scene, in which the title characters share a spaghetti strand (personal interview, 13 May 1992).

Given the rarity of such ideal images, dealers Michael and Jackie Halbreich convert the necessities of the animation process into an aesthetic asset. They wrote in an article guiding new collectors, "A good production cel is not necessarily one which has the look of a posed portrait, but instead is similar to a candid photograph, capturing the spontaneity of life at a given moment" (Halbreich and Halbreich 1990).

The aleatory nature of candid photography finds a parallel in the market's haphazard salvaging of production artworks. This is especially true of art from films and shows predating the 1980s, at which time studios realized the benefits of securing their art and releasing only the best pieces while destroying the rest. In contrast, a lot of the available art



from earlier productions was rescued from the trash bin. Thus, capturing the right animated image means sifting through many pieces with an eye for one that conveys a spark of life.

The analogy to candid snapshots is telling because it illustrates how willingly audiences suspend disbelief to see living beings in the succession of constructed images onscreen. The emotional bond that audiences feel toward characters plays a central role in the high value placed on cels, the ownership of which is like “buying a heartbeat of Mickey Mouse” according to Disney art collector Peter Merolo (quoted in Zamora 1990).

If production cels offer candid photographs of characters, then limited edition cels offer posed portraits. One kind of limited edition centers on maintaining fidelity to filmic images. Recreating magic moments involves the task of searching through films frame by frame and studying surviving production art. This is aided immeasurably by the resources that Disney commands, including a pristinely preserved film vault, an archive, and an animation research library. The process amounts to artistic re-enactment, in which original drawings are once again inked and painted and a portion of the original production process is repeated.

Ruth Clampett is one publisher of limited editions in this mold who described to me what went into the process of creating each piece (telephone interview, 17 April 1992). Since that interview she has since moved on to oversee the creation of all Warner Bros. limited edition animation art. Her aim as an independent publisher was to go back to the cartoons of her father, Bob Clampett, and painstakingly recreate favorite images from them. Because he collected original art from his own productions and those of others, she had more than film prints from which to draw. However, the long process of researching a new piece involves considering what constitutes an ideal pose and how to reproduce original inklines and colors after the ravages of time have faded both graphic art and film prints.

The first concern pits the tastes of some fans and animators against the broader base of collectors that form dealers' clienteles. The former, such as animation director John Kricfalusi (creator of "Ren and Stimpy"), asked for some of Clampett's most extremely exaggerated images, such as Daffy's transformation into a giant shocked eyeball in *The Great Piggybank Robbery* (1946). However, to satisfy the broader market, Ruth Clampett has selected only those poses in which characters are readily identifiable and she favors upbeat expressions. She deals with ink and color by making comparisons among different artifactual source materials and by consulting Warner Bros.

Limited edition cels that present new tableaux of familiar characters are akin to star portraits in which a variety of costumes and settings are used to evoke different genres and topical references. For example, Chuck Jones created a limited edition cel of Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny dressed as competing Wall Street stock traders ("Traders" 1989) and one of Bugs and Elmer Fudd in Native American costume ("Dances with Wabbits" 1991) that spoofs the film *Dances with Wolves* (1990). Market participants judge these cels by how well the artist handles the depicted characters' designs and established personalities.

Chris Surico, a dealer and publisher of Fleischer Studio limited editions, argues, "When you have [artists] as talented as [Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng] and they create a scene [on a limited edition cel], it's almost as if they are directing another cartoon" (telephone interview, 19 March 1992). Surico accepted the liberties Jones and Freleng have taken with character design, costume, and setting because of their stature as longstanding directors at the Warner Bros. studio.

Some, like Warner Bros. production art collector Steve Ferzoco, disagree. He says, "To go out and buy a Chuck Jones limited edition of Bugs and Daffy selling bonds on the New York Stock Exchange doesn't evoke childhood memories for me. That's not the way I remember the characters. The ways they are drawn today for these limited editions I think are quite poor. They really don't capture the spirit or the essence of the character. ...

They're done solely as a business venture as opposed to when [the films] were done in the '40s and '50s, entertainment was their main motivation" (telephone interview, 23 March 1992).

Other market participants enjoy another kind of limited edition cel that offers group portraits of virtually all of a studio's major characters. Hanna-Barbera has issued some of the grandest of these because its output over several decades of television production is vast. For example, "Symphony" (1989) presents an orchestra of made up of nearly 50 characters under the baton of Fred Flintstone. Warner Bros. issued lithographs of its stable of characters standing with heads bowed around a microphone and an animation table to commemorate voice artist Mel Blanc and director Friz Freleng, respectively, after their deaths. The analogy to photography suggests that the market seeks mementos of favorite characters, and in these last cases, beloved animation artists. Pictures of such gatherings resemble those photographs taken at weddings, funerals, and other ritual occasions to historically preserve a record of attendance at the event.

The following section illustrates how people's emotional connections to animated characters drive much of the pricing hierarchy described above. The centrality of character representation to the market's evaluative activities departs markedly from the fine art market, especially for production art.

### **Artifactual Criteria of Value**

The fine art market professes to concern itself with aesthetic judgments while eschewing extraneous artifactual considerations of value. However, astronomical prices for original artworks by famous artists cannot merely be based on the aesthetic qualities of the image, which can be mechanically replicated, but on artistic reputation, scarcity, authenticity, condition of the work, and artistic medium. The collectibles market is much more open about identifying artifactual value in scarcity, authenticity, and condition.

## **Artistic Reputation**

The aspect of artistic reputation I consider artifactual is the value that a name adds to a work beyond that which might be accorded to it if no creator is identified. This aspect of reputation takes into account the work's place in an artist's career and the role that artist plays in historical evolutions of artistic styles and movements. Of course, it also attends to the history of monetary transactions for that artist's works. My concern with artifactuality accords with the quote in Marquis's book on the fine art business that collectors like to buy "biography" (1991, 206).

The animation art market generally recognizes the artistic reputation of studios rather than individuals, in contrast to the fine art market's romantic glorification of individuals as visionaries. In previous chapters I have discussed the manner in which people have tried to graft that romantic ideal onto animation by labeling studio heads (e.g. Walt Disney) or directors (e.g. Chuck Jones) as the artistic geniuses behind a studio's cartoons. When I consider different artistic media that the production process yields to the market, I will take up how other artists are identified and sought.

Regardless of whether the recipient is an individual or a studio, artistic reputation in the animation art market strongly depends on how closely a beloved character is linked in the public's mind to the production entity that created it. Walt Disney's monopolization of screen credit in the 1930s began the process of rendering his name synonymous with his studio's star characters such as Mickey Mouse. Similarly, when Bob Clampett left Warner Bros. and started his own company, his *Beany and Cecil* cartoon theme song mentioned his name along with the title characters.

Limited editions do base part of their prices on the reputations of the individuals who sign them. In the case of Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, they leave the designs of the art to others and provide only their signatures. However, other animation artists, such as Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Shamus Culhane, and Myron Waldman design the art they

sign. A number of dealers who specialize in selling production art had reservations about the prominence of the signatures. For example, Susan Speigel expressed concern that collectors might ascribe more importance to the famous signature on the limited edition than to the art itself (personal interview, 14 March 1992). However, these artists' reputations are tied to the characters they originally animated. The artists who have had success selling their own fine art in galleries are such individuals as Maurice Noble and Eyvind Earle, who specialized in background art. Noble has produced lithographs recalling the style of his abstract geometric backgrounds for Warner Bros. and Earle's landscape paintings resemble those he designed for *Sleeping Beauty*.

What is shared by both production and nonproduction animation art is that whether a piece is ascribed aesthetic value, artifactual value, or both, that piece is a beneficiary of reputation more than a contributor. In other words, the sale of animation art relies on reputations that were previously established as a result of films and characters already created. Whereas fine art dealers discover new talent, animation art dealers require collectors to recognize the depicted characters through prior exposure to films, television, and ancillary media. Thus, the animation art market is dependent upon the institutions of mass media production, distribution, and exhibition.

This dependence prevents animation art dealers from nurturing animators who are little-known, independent, or foreign. Most catalogs do not include any works by the likes of American independent animators Robert Breer, Sandy Moore, Sally Cruikshank, or Suzan Pitt, even though these very names are mentioned by curator John Carlin as artists whose work "may well be among the best art values around" (1990, 41). His advice is intended for neophyte fine art collectors rather than memorabilia collectors, yet he urges investment in "artists whose work you may admire but which does not fit within currently accepted notions of fine art—i.e., work by animators, cartoonists, graphic artists, and craftspeople" (1990, 41).

In contrast, Bob Bennett's advice to collectors of original cartoon art is: "Purchase the works of the most respected cartoonists or animators, not the unknown or neglected" (1987, 13). Dealer Toni Volk concurs, saying, "I could not advise [customers] to invest in Russian animation art" because its obscurity in this country will prevent it from appreciating on the market (personal interview, 26 March 1992). The basis of this difference of strategy rests on the collector's role promoted within each market. In the context of the fine arts market, such an investment may be valued as an act of daring, in that it attempts to redefine the boundaries of what is considered legitimate art. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that the success of such an act hinges on the investor's self-assurance in imposing legitimacy upon the artwork (1984, 92). No such aesthetic gambling is rewarded in the animation art market.

The reluctance of collectors to buy what is unfamiliar to them is reflected in the prices dealers charge when they do sell the work of independents and foreign studios. Gallery Lainzberg has carried production art by Sally Cruikshank as well as by Moscow's Soyuzmultfilm Studio. Elvena Green's One-of-a-Kind Cartoon Art has offered art by independents John Canemaker and Faith Hubley. Mary Anne and Dan Ergezi sell Japanese animation art and a range of art from commercials. All of them sell such works in primarily the under \$500 range except for a few pieces, and many are under \$100. About their selection of "oddball things," as she calls them, Mary Anne Ergezi said there is demand, but "I'm not sure how much people are willing to spend on it" (telephone interview, 10 March 1992). Elvena Green argued that selling art from films with limited exposure is "tough" because "people really don't know John Canemaker or Faith Hubley." She expressed hope that as more people see compilations of festival-winning films, like the *International Tournées of Animation*, their interest "may transfer, perhaps, to the artworks of the experimental films that they see and to the animators, but it's a slow process" (telephone interview, 16 March 1992).

On the other hand, the market is helpful to those independents whose work is sold. Sally Cruikshank claimed, "Probably the single most lucrative aspect of my films is selling the cels" (quoted in Segal 1992, 27). Also, a few avid collectors can elevate awareness of such animation when they sponsor exhibits of their collections, as Mike and Jeanne Glad did with their "Best of Soviet Animation Art" exhibit held during the spring of 1995 at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills (Smailer 1995). Yet, until such films get broader exposure in theaters and on television, their art remains largely a novelty.

The fact that such art appears in the market at all is a testament to its accessibility in comparison with other experimental animation. For the most part, it utilizes recognizable characters acting in narrative structures. The narratives do vary greatly and the characters are prone to wild metamorphoses at times, but such films are a far cry from the abstract, non-narrative films of someone like Oskar Fischinger. Art from such experimental animation exists outside any recognized market, or at the margins of the avant-garde fine art market. This makes it easier for such organizations as the Museum of Modern Art to acquire it in comparison with exorbitantly priced modernist paintings.

### **Scarcity**

Nicholas Xenos argues that the concept of scarcity took hold in the relative affluence of Western societies because material objects replaced the status markers of ancestry and rank of prebourgeois times. He notes, "It is not the scarcity of certain objects that determines their status as luxury items; it is their status as luxury items that renders them scarce objects" (1989, 94-5).

Prices such as the \$286,000 that Herbert Black paid in 1989 for a cel set-up from *The Orphan's Benefit* suggest that the art's relative scarcity was not the only factor involved in the bidding. At the time, no one knew exactly how many black and white cel set-ups from 1930s Disney cartoons might turn up. After the intensive media coverage

spurred several pieces into the market, longterm market participant Russ Cochran counted only ten such set-ups in all the collections with which he was familiar (1991, 46).

However, when animation drawings and other stages of production art are also counted, Disney production art from the early 1930s is not scarce at all. Only the status of the key set-ups made them scarce luxuries. Meanwhile, drawings of Mickey Mouse from the early 1930s have only inched up in price to between \$1000 and \$2000.

The role of status in rewarding scarcity with monetary value is clearly seen in the case of art from the obscure 1930s cartoon studio, Van Beuren. Collector Mike Glad owns the only key set-up and two posters from the Van Beuren studio that he claims are known to exist (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). But that studio does not generate market interest beyond Glad, who seeks to completely represent the history of the art form in his collection.

Disney's elite status in the market is assured, but other studios have grown in stature to the point where the scarcity of their art is also financially rewarded. For example, a great majority of vintage production art from the Warner Bros. cartoon studio was burned in the early 1960s to gain warehouse space. However, the Warner stable of characters were featured during a long period of theatrical production followed by continuous exposure on television. In addition, fans and critics took up their cause from the 1960s onward as artistic innovators defying Disney's stylistic hegemony (White 1990). This confluence of factors has boosted prices of Warner cels, drawings, and model sheets above those of all rival studios except Disney (Egan 1990; "That's Not All, Folks!" 1990; "Warner Goes Wacky!" 1991).

In the case of limited editions, the scarcity is planned into the art form. One consensus among animation publications I've seen is exasperation at companies that do not respect the need to manufacture scarcity to protect collectors' investments. For example, *Storyboard's* review of the market argued that editions above 500 are hardly limited and



therefore not “collectible” (“The Year 1991 in Animation Art” 1991-92, 10). A reviewer in *Animato!* complained about Hanna-Barbera’s penchant to re-issue popular limited edition cel images as sericels, prints, lithographs, and book illustrations (Krempa 1994, 18). *Storyboard* linked the quantity of Warner Bros. limited edition cels being produced by Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, the McKimsons, the Clampetts, and Virgil Ross with declining quality, especially because the artists draw the characters in radically different styles. The reviewing staff felt this much variation sacrificed historical accuracy by departing too much from the styles used in original films (“Second Annual Guide to Animation Art Collecting” 1992-93, 12).

All of these limited edition publishers received licenses to create their art from Time Warner and return royalties to the corporation. What restricts other organizations from creating limited editions based on characters is the ownership of copyright and trademarks. One company, Courvoisier Galleries, attempted to get around this when it created a limited edition cel based on a scene from the 1933 “Mickey Mouse” short, *The Mad Doctor*. The company was not in any way affiliated with the original Guthrie Courvoisier Gallery, but just used the name for its cachet among collectors. Advertisements for the limited edition stated, “This artwork is derived from public domain materials and no license or permission is implied.” However, in its civil suit, Disney charged that despite the film’s lapse into the public domain, the company retains copyright and trademark protection over depicted characters Mickey and Pluto. Disney sued on the basis of trademark infringement, false designation and advertising, unfair competition, and trademark dilution (Scoville and Scoville 1991).

Disney’s lawsuit protected not only its own proprietary interest in its characters but the legitimacy of hundreds of licensees who paid fees for the use of character images on merchandise (Gaines 1991, 228-9). Thus, the legal enforcement of intellectual property

rights allows the rights owners to strictly control supply of limited edition artwork as part of a much broader interest in guarding corporate assets.

An interesting counter example to Disney's tight control over the supply of its art is the case of Murakami-Wolf-Swenson's actions regarding its television show, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Originally the company had contracted with David Underhill of Toon Art to be the exclusive distributor of production cels to dealers. Dealers sold these for over \$100. Underhill told me the cels that he distributed were primarily "all four turtles, full body figures, eyes open, frontal views, nothing but the best" (telephone interview, 26 March 1992). However, Murakami-Wolf-Swenson cancelled this agreement and made a bulk sale of cels to the Toys 'R' Us chain to retail for \$12.99 each (Altyn 1991-92). Underhill claims these did not go through the same selection process and the new set-ups did not correctly match reproduced master production backgrounds with cels.

Most dealers thought of this action as reprehensible because it made every dealer who sold a cel at the higher price seem to be gouging customers. Dealer Mitch Manfred told me it has caused him to be wary about stocking art from any contemporary productions, because other studios might also dump large quantities of art on the market if distribution of limited quantities of selected art does not yield enough profit (telephone interview, 18 March 1992).

However, dealers in the higher end of the market were not so disturbed by the studio's action. Paul Burke, who sells vintage Disney art, argued that Toys 'R' Us was a new venue for young people to be exposed to animation art who might eventually become collectors of more expensive art (telephone interview, 10 March 1992). Gallery owners Jackie and Michael Halbreich said they "don't believe that the unloading of these cels on the market bears any relation to the viability of the established animation art market among serious adult collectors" (quoted in Altyn 1991-92).

Indeed, the market did not undergo any significant decline in prices for art from other studios, despite some dire predictions. The controversy does illustrate how pricing is more influenced by studio controlled availability of art than by judgments of quality. The Toys 'R' Us cels may have been inferior to those distributed through Toon Art, but their low price was a function of large scale wholesaling rather than reduced demand. When a studio deliberately floods the market with its production by-products, it does not treat them as art or collectible but merely as merchandise. The following section shows that when a studio discards its by-products, it has no claim over them when they become valuable.

## **Authenticity**

### **Misrepresentations**

Ian Haywood argues in his book on forgery, "The authentication of a text is a culturally determined process" involving "the totemic worship of the original act of authorial creation" (1987, 77). In this regard, the animation art market resembles both the fine art and collectibles markets because all three attribute monetary value to historical artifacts. Only the fine art market can routinely identify individual creators; the collectibles market makes due with recognizing companies that originate mass produced items. The animation art market falls in between them in employing incomplete historical sources to locate the origins of production artworks.

A number of difficulties in authenticating animation production art arise from the fact that the market trades in discarded by-products of filmmaking. This has led to legal disputes between studios and art dealers based not on authenticity, but on right of ownership. One such dispute was *United States of America v. Bill Carmen*, in which the Federal Bureau of Investigation confiscated animation art from dealer Carmen. He claimed to have found the art in trash cans his chocolate store shared with a Warner Bros. animation

unit that was renting space in the same building. All charges were eventually dismissed, but the legal action damaged Carmen's reputation and business (Altyn 1990).

Another problem is that while particular individuals created the various storyboards, animation drawings, cels, and background paintings, the value of these artworks was originally based on their utility within the overall process and records of each person's contributions were poorly kept. In addition, certain characters might appear in many different productions over the years, sometimes being licensed out to subcontracted studios for educational films and commercials. Thus, a cel of Mickey Mouse might be an authentic production artifact of a 1970s Hasbro toy commercial, but that does not necessarily mean that Disney studio artists actually drew the animation.

The minimum standard of judging authenticity in this market is to correctly identify which era a piece of art is from and what studio made it. Because many different small studios produced animated commercials (e.g. for Hawaiian Punch) and television series title sequences (e.g. "Bewitched"), such cels often go unattributed. The next level of authentication is to recognize the exact production to which a piece of art contributed. Joshua Arfer states, "Part of collecting animation [art] is freeze-framing your VCR and finding your cel or concept [sketch] or drawing in there" (personal interview, 13 May 1992). The first production involving a well-known character generally outweighs subsequent productions utilizing the character. Haywood suggests this criterion of evaluation combines notions of historical primacy and artistic origination in a manner that parallels religious "worship of the relic" (1987, 15).

Locating a piece of animation art within a particular production allows the greatness of the film as a whole to enrich the individual production pieces as art objects in their own right. As collector Bob Bennett states, "Aside from its artistic value, cartoon art that is essential or important in making an animated cartoon or strip, can have tremendous value" (1987, 16). This is the value of the time capsule from the initial filmic experience that first

captivated audiences. Vintage animation art embodies this history with its indications of age, resulting in what conservator Janet Scagnelli calls a “beautiful warm patina... created by the yellowed cel and faded colors” (1990, 2).

This artifactual criterion of value is based on an existential relationship between artwork and film rather than a representational one that iconically maps a sign to its referent. Animation art dealer Pam Martin expresses the lure of production art in the following way: “It is historical, a slice of an actual film. You wouldn’t have the buttons and pins and all the other animation memorabilia if you didn’t have the cartoon first” (telephone interview, 17 July 1990).

Therefore, when a piece of artwork is misrepresented as older or rarer than it is, it can be sold for a much higher price based on the value the market places on artifactuality. In one case, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) charged the company World Wide Classics with fraud for these actions in conjunction with claims as to the artwork’s investment potential. According to John Altyn, editor-in-chief of the animation art collector’s magazine, *In Toon!*, the company was selling cels of Popeye from a 1983 production by claiming they were from Fleischer studio productions of the late 1930s. Altyn stated that World Wide Classics was charging \$2500 for their cels while a reputable gallery that correctly represented the art sold theirs for \$95 each (telephone interview, 3 May 1993). The FTC publicized its suit with a press release that animation-related publications carried (e.g. Russell 1992; Scoville and Scoville 1992).

### **Forgeries**

The labor intensive nature of animation dictates that characters be streamlined into the fewest number of lines and colors necessary. Drawings and painted cels that depict animated characters are not difficult to trace and color. Indeed the collective nature of animation production requires artists and craftworkers to attain such competence at their tasks that they are interchangeable with others holding their job titles. This standardization

contradicts the deeply held romantic ideology that mystically links art to artist: “One is parented by the other, and exists as an offspring. This is a one-to-one relationship, not reproducible anywhere else” (Haywood 1987, 30).

The fact that animated characters can be so easily reproduced has displaced market evaluations onto nonaesthetic aspects of the art. For instance, June Schneider wrote of animation art, “There is no need to have taken an art appreciation course!” but immediately qualified that by warning potential collectors to “learn as much as possible” about how the art is produced “to protect yourself from a frustrating or costly experience” (1993, 42). In other words, the public can grasp the aesthetic conventions easily, but the artifactual criteria of value must be studied before investing.

A number of forgeries are so poorly done, some market participants can identify them by eye. However, this does not always stop them from circulating. One dealer, who wished to remain anonymous, saw what she considered to be a “hideous forgery” sell at auction. It was alleged to be a *Snow White* publicity cel that was not used in production of the movie, but created contemporaneously with it. The dealer said the image looked “grotesque; the colors were wrong; it was a bad copy.” She had no authority to call into question the legitimacy of the piece; she could only refrain from bidding on it.

More skillful forgeries can only be detected through the methods of authentication I mentioned above: attention to the materials and technical markings in comparison with historical records of production practices. For example, auction house representative Joshua Arfer helped break a case of forged Disney animation drawings that were on the authentic watermarked Management Bond paper Disney had used in the 1930s (personal interview, 13 May 1992). Arfer said the drawings looked good, but when he checked the sequence numbers with the Disney archives, it was clear that Disney retained the original drawings and these had been traced from a book that had reproduced them. The forger had found a cache of the paper and used it to recreate the drawings.

While poorly done forgeries may be aesthetically offensive, a well made forgery is even more threatening because it undermines the value of legitimate artifacts. It opens the possibility that many similar items will dilute the scarcity of the authentic relics from actual animation productions. Ted Hake identified the same threat in the collectibles market from what he called “repros” and “fantasy items” (telephone interview, 5 March 1992). The former are newly manufactured items that exactly reproduce specific old collectibles. The latter are new items that look like they might have been in a category of collectibles, but do not match any existing item. They would parallel paintings that are forged in the style of a famous painter, but do not replicate any one painting in particular.

Such “creative forgeries” Haywood finds particularly subversive because “the way they create authority is not a simple case of stealth or theft”; instead, they are original in their own right (1987, 10). Because production cels refer back to film or television productions as the source of their value, the market shows little interest in something like a novel drawing of Bugs Bunny purported to be done by Chuck Jones. A forgery of his doodle might instead fool collectors of signatures and original comic art.

Haywood also notes, “forgeries often expose the vested interests of those deciding on the status of the text” (1987, 13-4). Auction houses have a vested interest in maximizing their profits, which, in the long run is based on their reputation for reliability. After making some mistakes in earlier auctions, Dana Hawkes of Sotheby’s has turned to expert consultants, like animator and historian John Canemaker, to help identify and authenticate art (personal interview, 14 April 1992).

The vested interests of collectors who are unofficial authenticators are sometimes called into question. Avid Warner Bros. art collector Steve Ferzoco is regularly consulted as to what production a piece is from or whether an item is a forgery. When dealers obtain Warner Bros. pieces, they also approach him as a buyer because they know of his interest. Yet, because he has seen so much of the art and owns practically the entire output of the

studio on videotape, he sometimes disputes claims that dealers and auction houses make for an artwork's origin. This has led to accusations of conflict of interest. He told me, "People say, 'The reason Ferzoco says it's not from [the claimed production] is probably because he wants to bid on it. He's just throwing a red herring so people will lay off the piece.'" He assured me that his interest is in protecting naive collectors who might overbid on something that is of much more recent vintage than its description in an auction catalog states. He has already been priced out of the market for many items and is much more selective in buying what is offered to him. He claims dealers are less likely to offer him pieces they come across because of this and also because "dealers are afraid if they get a piece they think is questionable [and] they show it to me and I find out it is fake, then they can't sell it. So they try to sell it without having me see it" (telephone interview, 23 March 1992).

Dealers who do this serve their own interests by claiming high status for a piece based on willful ignorance rather than deliberate misrepresentation. Because this behavior is increasingly common, people I spoke with emphasized that a dealer should have a standard policy to take back a misattributed or forged piece for a full refund for as long as the buyer owns the piece. Collector Michael Schwartz related how a dealer sold him a nonproduction cel represented as a production cel. However, when Schwartz learned otherwise, he was able to return the piece without any problem. The experience drove home that what matters is "the integrity of the dealer as well as the integrity of the piece" (telephone interview, 30 June 1992).

There are some practices that might be considered forgery if they are combined with misrepresentation. Because so many more production cels exist compared to production backgrounds, many market participants have added their own backgrounds to complement the cel in an aesthetically pleasing way. If these are represented as key set-ups from a production, then the piece might fall under the category of forgery. Dana Hawkes used to



accept for consignment hand-prepared backgrounds and photographic reproduction backgrounds that accompanied production cels, but the Disney company halted that practice. The company representatives argued that it retains the authority to license backgrounds (personal interview, 14 April 1992). As both a source for authentication information and a consignor of art from its contemporary productions, Disney can exert ample pressure on Sotheby's to conform to its demands.

Long before the art became so costly, people altered it to improve its appearance. Some still do despite the market's increased interest in maintaining fidelity to original productions when possible. One dealer, Toni Volk, had no compunction about trimming a damaged color model sheet cel from Disney of a bumblebee and putting it on a background of a Columbia Pictures beehive. She stated, "I don't care if they're from the same studio or not if they function really well," and added that, as a color model sheet, the bumblebee did not belong in any relationship with a particular background.

Volk has also bought background paintings from Columbia and Hanna-Barbera cartoons and preliminary backgrounds from Warner Bros. cartoons to color xerox and use to complement cels. She claims that each of these pieces of art is not copyright protected because: in the case of Columbia, the studio is defunct; for Hanna-Barbera, they were not stamped as copyrighted and are "ephemeral backgrounds from relatively unimportant things"; and for Warner, "preliminary backgrounds have no prohibition on them, they're not stamped on the back, they're not sold with a prohibition, and they weren't [photographed] in a film" (personal interview, 26 March 1992). She has also xeroxed art from calendars to use as backgrounds.

In each case, Volk believes that the color xerox is sufficiently different from the original watercolor painting as not to be misrepresented by others who might buy from her and resell. A number of catalogs list artworks that are production cels "applied to an appropriate color print background." While Disney might object to such practices, it has no

control over dealers who specialize in production art circulated in the secondary market. It can only pressure galleries that are under contract to sell its new limited editions and contemporary production art.

Indeed, Disney has weathered criticism for selling production art from films such as *Beauty and the Beast* that required no cels for production. The company's use of computerized inking and painting since 1990's *The Rescuers Down Under* has made production cels obsolete for Disney's domestically produced feature animation. However, auctions Disney held at Sotheby's for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *The Little Mermaid* were great successes both monetarily and in terms of prestige. Thus, for auctions of art from *Beauty and the Beast* and subsequent films, the company created cels by hand to match background paintings that were actually used in production.

Rita Reif, who covers auctions for the *New York Times*, quoted "purists among collectors and dealers" who called such art "recreations" that would only "increase the desirability of vintage cels" (1992a). Considered from the aesthetic standpoints of skill, complexity, and labor, the backgrounds should be valuable as production art standing alone. Indeed, one couple who bought a cel set-up from the *Beauty and the Beast* auction told me, "The cel is in a drawer; the background is matted and framed, hanging on the living room wall. That's the art" (telephone interview with Dawn Altyn, 3 May 1993). Matching nonproduction cels with production backgrounds might be seen as reversing the original technique Disney used to market cels through the Courvoisier Gallery.

However, much market interest centers on production cels because they combine artifactual importance with character depiction. But when Disney removed the former criterion of value in the post-*Mermaid* auctions, many still turned out to buy. In fact, they paid prices comparable to those paid for vintage pieces at auction. These prices have not always been sustained upon resale. On the other hand, the original prices would not have been so high if the backgrounds were sold without any accompanying hand-prepared cels.

## **Condition**

The fine art world has long dealt with antiquities and forgives both art that has deteriorated and art that has been restored. Even some contemporary artworks fall apart with alarming rapidity because artists like Julian Schnabel and Anselm Keifer incorporate such ephemeral materials as pieces of crockery and straw into their paintings (Marquis 1991, 162-3). In contrast, the collectibles market has a definite pricing hierarchy according to condition in which mint “in the box” condition is most coveted and desirability declines in proportion to damage (telephone interview with Ted Hake, 5 March 1992). Animation art falls somewhere in between because aesthetic concerns mediate artifactual ones.

Animation art dealer Heidi Leigh and others claim that properly performed restoration does not lower the value, and can even raise it (telephone interview with Leigh, 25 July 1990; Worth and Stude 1990). As restorer Janet Scagnelli puts it, “Restoration can be a great asset to a piece of artwork when it is done correctly by professional art conservators” (1990, 2). Dealer Susan Spiegel was hesitant to claim that a restored piece would sell for as much as the original piece would have had it not suffered damage (personal interview, 14 March 1992). The collectibles market, on the other hand, generally accords a price reduction to those items that have been restored (Hughes 1984, 27-33).

I described above what kinds of deterioration can occur in animation art. But now I will turn to the question of when people decide that a piece of art is damaged enough to warrant restoration. Another issue that overlaps the realms of forgery and misrepresentation is how restoration changes the artwork’s status. Where is the line that divides acceptable restoration from recreation?

People hold conflicting views about when restoration should be attempted. Some want even the slightest crack in the paint to be fixed, while others wait until extensive damage has occurred. Collector Steve Ferzoco has shied away from restoration until a piece was “so badly worn” it could “fall apart” (telephone interview, 23 March 1992). His

hesitancy stems in part from his experience with a poorly done job of restoration in which the paint that was applied fell off after four months.

The conservators I spoke with seemed to feel that after a certain amount of damage, restoration becomes a questionable act. Ron Stark told me his laboratory has an agreement with the Disney company that if more than 50% of the original material is gone, then it is to be considered “a loss” (telephone interview, 12 March 1993). He acknowledged that it was a subjective call on his part to determine when 50% has been exceeded. Janet Scagnelli thought that repainting all the colors on a cel would be acceptable as long as the original inkline remained on the front (telephone interview, 17 March 1993). She considered the act of inking and painting the image onto a new cel to be outright forgery, and she said, “Even if you used the original cel and re-inked the front and repainted the back, I think we’re talking not so authentic.” She also thought that minor damage should be left alone.

One might argue that restoration acts to serve aesthetic integrity at the expense of collectible integrity, for the visual experience takes precedence over the historical authenticity of the ingredients. Conversely, the historical importance of certain key set-ups from cherished films places them in the position of benefiting the most from restoration. According to Sotheby’s animation expert Dana Hawkes, the value of restoration is reduced for lesser, more ubiquitous vintage art, such as the many *Snow White* Dwarf cels originally sold by Courvoisier in the 1930s. She claims their availability parallels that of mass produced collectibles, whose market operates on the assumption that an identical item in better condition may appear in the future (personal interview, 14 April 1992).

### **Medium**

Curator John Carlin reflects a widely held sentiment in the fine art market when he places painting and sculpture above drawing and the various methods of printmaking and photography, in part because he calls the former “the flagship media... of the history of art from the Middle Ages through the present time” (1990, 44). This judgment incorporates

such criteria as size, cost of materials, investment of time and labor, as well as an endorsement of uniqueness over multiplicity. The general tendency in the animation art market is to rank cel and background paintings above drawings, but such a dichotomy fails to account for specific conditions of animation production that have no counterpart in the fine art market.

The fine art market sells finished works by individual artists that are meant for display and consumption. In contrast, the most valuable animation art being sold is that which was meant to be a miniscule portion of a much larger work, the film itself. All artworks that are part of the animation production process are tinged with the reflected glow of the entire film, be they inspirational sketches, storyboards, layout drawings, character model sheets or statues, animation drawings, painted cels, or backgrounds. Those elements that are actually photographed, the matching cels and master backgrounds, are most highly prized, because they are what people see while watching the film or show.

The popularity of cels counters the fine art market's preference for works created by artists over those made by craftworkers. The staff of the ink and paint departments that prepare cels are historically among the lowest paid in the animation production hierarchy and have remained anonymous throughout the growth of the animation art market. The work done by the inkers was turned over to xerographic machines in the early 1960s and Disney is being joined by several studios in replacing cels with computer technology as prices for such systems drop.

The animation art market's pricing structure reveals much less emotional attachment to characters in the form of production drawings than in the form of cels. Lacking the vibrant color of cels, animation drawings do not sufficiently match the character's filmic appearance to warrant such high prices. However, many dealers and high-end collectors share the sentiment expressed by dealer Toni Volk: "The artwork of the drawings are going

to be what is here 200 years from now, what the museums will collect, as we go into the future. The cels are a by-product” (personal interview, 26 March 1992).

These sophisticated members of the market know about the hierarchy of artistic talent within the animation departments from head animators at the top, down through assistant animators, in-betweeners, and clean-up artists. The head animators create the extremes of character motion or emotion and successively less skilled artists fill in the positions between extremes. Finally, clean-up artists draw the exact character outlines based on the rough animation drawings. Certain animators, such as the famed “Nine Old Men” that Walt Disney anointed, are sought by the knowledgeable collectors, but the production methods in use did not record who did each drawing. Thus, the market has difficulty privileging individual artists even when collectors are interested in them.

Animation workers do not always value animation production art in the same way that collectors do. Some animators also collect animation drawings because they have an insider’s knowledge of the artists and artistry involved. For example, animator Andreas Deja, who has worked at Disney since 1980, began by collecting cels but switched to animation drawings because he “can get something out of them professionally and emotionally” (quoted in Cawley and Korkis 1992, 90). In addition to citing two of the “Nine Old Men,” Frank Thomas and Marc Davis, Deja singles out a third, Milt Kahl, as “a master draftsman.” Other animation artists (e.g. Beckerman 1991) express disbelief that cels are now so valuable, because they were done by low-level craftworkers and they were so ubiquitous during production. A former inker and painter at Disney, Phyllis Craig, distinguished between the superior skills required for hand inking versus the relatively simple task of painting. She called the former “really an art form” (quoted in Cawley and Korkis 1992, 77-8).

Background paintings have been accorded much greater monetary validation in the market than have drawings, for reasons that fit both fine art and collectible evaluative

criteria. The high ratio of cels to backgrounds allows much more detail to be included in background art than would be economical for cels. This encourages wider stylistic variations in background paintings than are available for character designs, especially in a studio like Disney with its adherence to naturalistic animation. Thus, it is easier to identify individuals in the layout and background departments that are responsible for specific paintings. In addition, the scarcity of backgrounds in comparison to cels makes an unadorned background a target for a buyer who hopes to find a matching cel in the future. Among sophisticated collectors who have studied the Disney productions, particular backgrounds by such well regarded artists as Gustaf Tenggren, Sam Armstrong, Eyvind Earle, and Claude Coats will stir considerable interest, but it is still the cel's marriage to a master background gives that background a degree of desirability it would not otherwise attain.

This is not to belittle the personal connection people feel to the scenes depicted in background paintings. Just as characters on cels carry emotional weight for collectors, backgrounds can elicit similar responses. Collector Steve Spain told me, "I like in background paintings those that create an instant mood where you could step into this little land where the story took place. ... They just move me" (telephone interview, 30 June 1992).

The market considers limited edition cels to be a different medium than production cels even though both may have been handpainted by anonymous craftspeople based on designs by animators. The underlying artistic medium of all production art is the completed animated film or show. In contrast, limited edition cels are stand alone objects. Thus, production art is part of a much more complex artistic project and benefits from aesthetic judgments regarding the project as a whole.

Some dealers who only carry production art claim that limited editions should not be characterized as "animation" art. As Elvena Green put it, limited editions are "pieces of

junk for collectors” (telephone interview, 16 March 1992). A writer for a toy collectors’ magazine referred to them as “animated character merchandise” that should not be confused with production-based animation art (Streten 1993, 8). The disdain for limited edition cels and other non-production art increases among market participants in the high end of collecting. These individuals see limited editions as products of “the pop end of the scale,” which “serious collectors scrupulously avoid” (Egan 1990, 77).

This mirrors the feeling among collectibles dealers that limited edition items in their field are “instant collectibles” lacking “collectible soul,” which must be built up in the gradual transition from discarded utilitarian item to something a base of collectors begins to desire (Hughes 1984, 13-16). Ted Hake stated, “I only deal in original collectibles; I just like to handle the real thing” (telephone interview, 14 July 1990). Disneyana dealer Bob Crooker echoed this sentiment in his claim: “Something that was produced as a collectible, 1000 pieces or 100 pieces, limited editions, serigraphs, to me it’s not true Disneyana” (telephone interview, 10 March 1992).

Yet, the limited editions may find redemption as art rather than as collectibles. For instance, now that animation fans recognize Chuck Jones as a consummate artist, his limited editions are current evidence of his artistry. Regarding Disney limited editions, Hake acknowledges, “Disney is a magic name; you’re able to call it art. It has the potential of attracting more people, as opposed to Hopalong Cassidy memorabilia. No matter how nice the design, no one calls that art” (telephone interview, 14 July 1990).

### **The Aesthetics of Emotion**

The ideology of the avant-garde art world was based on the notion of continual artistic progress. This drove modernist art to distill out impurities until its subject matter and form were the essence of art itself. Nostalgia had no place in this realm, for there was no reason to long for the impure past in the face of such perfection in the present. Pop art and its successors overthrew this ideology in the elite art world with the promiscuous



mixing of old styles and new, abstraction and representation, low (commercial) art and high.

When the fine art world again opened its doors to representational art, it offered re-entry to its many communicative conventions for evoking emotion and conveying meaning. These conventions are by no means monolithic or eternal. Within them is much room for originality, that magical road to success Marquis calls “the Holy Grail for artists” (1991, 55). However, the animation art market is less concerned with originality per se as an indicator of aesthetic value. The necessary fact of the animation art market is that it exalts commercial art, originally produced for immediate economic returns as popular entertainment. Although the individual pieces hang in galleries, framed like those in the fine art market, they were created in a different field of cultural production.

The continual violation of conventions that drives the fine arts market is lacking in the animation art market, for commercial animation is widely distributed and must operate within the aesthetic conventions shared by a broad audience. Thus, a large portion of the public can feel competent in the aesthetic codes that are utilized in animation; it can communicate meaning to them in a way that much avant-garde art does not. In addition to institutional barriers that exist against distribution and exhibition of experimental animation is the barrier of audience incomprehension; many people cannot decipher films without some familiar codes of representation or narration.

The market participants who specifically address the aesthetics of animation art most often emphasize its strong emotional impact on generations of viewers. For example, dealer Susan Spiegel’s background in fine art initially caused her to dismiss animation out of hand, but she later came to appreciate it. In reference to the Philadelphia Art Alliance’s 1990 Disney exhibit, she said:

When I first learned that we were doing that show, I thought of it as being very stagnant. Animation wasn’t an art as I think of art: breaking new ground and new areas of expression and mixing mediums and reinterpreting. I thought of this as just something pretty much almost like a craft. But my ideas have changed. And I was

really impressed and overwhelmed by the success of the show, because if art provokes a response in people or makes them think or mirrors society or does any of these things, then animation certainly does that. ... Animation art does something that most of the other art doesn't do. It reaches more people. ... There is so much emotional response. (personal interview, 14 March 1992)

Collectors experience emotional gratification through viewing the cartoons that is easily transferred to the artworks they purchase. This is in direct contrast to the disinterestedness that Kant claimed was necessary for aesthetic judgments. The interest of neither pleasure nor moral reason can interfere with such pure judgments in his scheme, and the repercussions of his constraints are felt in the disavowals of interest that Bourdieu identifies in the fine art market.

An important component of enthusiasm for animation rests on the strength of the narrative and the characters. The art must serve these ends to garner interest among collectors. One example of this contingency within the market is the lack of enthusiasm for production cels from Don Bluth's film, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, although the dealers Michael and Jackie Halbreich were not alone when they observed, "The artistry, color, and vitality of these cels will impress the most discriminating animation art collector" (1989, 17). Pam Martin contends that even the extensive art marketing program conducted by the Sullivan-Bluth Studio could not overcome the fact that the film received mediocre reviews and failed to live up to box office expectations despite the favorable comparisons of its artwork to that of Disney (telephone interview, 17 July 1990).

Immersion in the story and identification with the characters are hardly goals of those who propound an ideal of disinterested aesthetic judgment. Bourdieu associates such spectator participation with working class culture (1984, 34), but the range of class and education among animation enthusiasts belies this reductive equation. Nonetheless, some animation art market participants resist the art's association with sentimentality and nostalgic longing for childhood.

Many will readily call animation a nostalgic art form. This is similar to the collectibles market, a driving force of which is to recapture the past. For example, Ted Hake described his customers in these terms: “The motivation is really their own personal history, not really a sense of aesthetics or a financial interest or historical interest; it's really collecting things that mean something to them on a personal basis” (telephone interview, 5 March 1992). He even pinpointed the age of twelve as the most common point in that personal history for developing an interest in a particular area. Indeed, it is true that younger collectors are turning to art depicting 1960s television characters such as the Flintstones not only because the cost of the older works of Disney are climbing out of reach but also because they grew up watching the Hanna-Barbera shows.

However, animation art dealer Michael Halbreich strongly argues against such a narrow conception of his field. He states, “If [collectors] have been told this is a fun item, a memory, a novelty, a collectible, any of those things, somewhere down the road their appreciation is liable to wane. But when you have something that you can appreciate for the artistry, quality, craftsmanship of it, that's something that's going to stay with you longer and is going to be passed down in terms of how people appreciate it. It's very hard to pass on a memory” (telephone interview, 24 March 1992).

### **Animation as a Hybrid Market**

If some animation art market participants do not think in terms of aesthetic legitimacy of the art form, it may be the reputation that elite avant-garde art has earned for being opaque, formalistic, and exclusionary. Auction house representative Joshua Arfer states, “Many big buyers collect this material not because they consider animation an art form, but because the Disney films mean something to them” (quoted in Solomon 1989, 299). In this view, animation art collectors begin knowing what they like and proceed to buy that, unconcerned whether they have bought art or not. However, the sites where they

buy the pieces have changed from informal swap meets and flea markets to galleries and auction houses, which provide a context for imbuing the pieces with aesthetic legitimacy. Gross argues that this framework sets up the pieces as candidates for aesthetic appreciation, predisposing buyers to grant the works legitimacy as art as a precondition for making judgments of quality as well as personal taste (1973, 122).

In the final analysis the animation art market accentuates aesthetics more than the popular collectibles market does and acknowledges artifactual evaluation more than the fine art market does. Thus, it is most comprehensible as a hybrid, an elite collectible market and a popular art market. Part of its hybrid nature derives from the dissimilarity between production art and non-production art that it circulates.

In some ways, the portion of the market devoted to limited edition cels, sericels, lithographs, and prints shares more traits with the fine art market than does the portion devoted to production art. Artists actively produce novel artworks for sale and display; reviewers judge the merits of newly produced art; individual artists claim authorship and their signatures are valued; the scarcity of limited editions is planned in the same way as fine art prints, lithographs, and photographs.

In contrast, production art shares traits with collectibles. It acknowledges that artists and craftworkers labored collectively and often anonymously to produce the items; critical discourse centers on larger cultural phenomena of which the items are only a small part; the items were not originally made to be collected but served a utilitarian purpose; market members frankly discuss the artifactual basis of the items' value. However, because each piece of production art is unique (if only minutely different from preceding and succeeding cels or animation drawings), it can be treated in ways that fine art is. It is more difficult to price than collectibles, in which each item exists as one of a mass produced set. Pricing of animation art is susceptible to fluctuations in fashionability, taste, speculative interest, and fraud.

Production art is artifactually linked to animated films and shows; non-production art is conceptually and emotionally dependent on characters from those films and shows as well. The entire market remains an appendage of the animation industry and its secondary status is confirmed by the low volume of revenue it generates compared to the multiple markets for the productions themselves and the enormous profitability of merchandising. In addition, the industry operates on the basis of cost-effectiveness, replacing inkers with xerographic machines, substituting computer-based imagery for cels when prices for the technology drop below labor costs.

Thus, the animation art market differs from the fine art market in that it is the beneficiary of artistic reputation gained elsewhere, it is not the site where reputation is forged. The animation art market serves to reaffirm prior mainstream canonization of films whose reputations were built through theatrical runs, airings on television, industry awards, and, more recently, publication of books and journals devoted to them.

While the activity of the market as a whole may serve to focus more attention on the medium animation as an art form, it remains to be seen whether this renewed interest spills over to independent and foreign animation. Presently too many institutional barriers exist for them to get the widespread American distribution that benefits every piece of animation artwork now being sold.

### **Aesthetic and Cultural Respectability**

If money were the sole arbiter of respectability, then the animation art market would possess it in abundance. The prices that collectors pay for their vintage production cels reflects the desire to retain the aura of the original work of art that Walter Benjamin predicted would wither in the face of mechanical reproduction ([1936] 1979). The animation art market reclaims the film's cult value by sacralizing the few remaining prefilmic constituents that can be called unique and handcrafted. As these techniques give

way to computer animation, the once-discarded artifacts of cel animation will be subject to even greater bouts of speculative investment than is now the case. However, Disney has already gotten around this with its hand-prepared cels to match production paintings. In addition, limited edition prints of computer animated images, such as Coca-Cola's polar bears, are also appearing on the market.

Just as the pinnacle of the fine art market drowns out aesthetic discourse with exchanges of vast amounts of wealth, so too might the animation art market succumb to capitalist excess at the expense of the art form itself. However, separating aesthetic responses from those based on owning artifacts might allow non-production art and reproduced images in books to yield similar aesthetic experiences as the vintage production art at a much lower cost. In addition, videotapes and laser disks provide access to somewhat degraded versions of the original films and shows, with all their exhibition value intact. Edward Banfield suggests when their quality approaches that of the original, reproductions threaten an art world which fetishizes the original as the site of capital accumulation (1982). Marquis concurs, arguing that true connoisseurship appears more often in shopping mall chain stores, where people buy what gives them aesthetic pleasure, rather in the elite fine art market, where that pleasure "mingles with snobbery—false pride in ostentatious spending—and greed—hope that the value of this 'investment' will grow" (1991, 339-40).

I found very little snobbery among collectors I spoke with at both ends of the monetary scale. The high-end collectors, such as Mike Glad and Jeff Lotman, do actively pursue opportunities to promote the works in their collections as legitimate cultural assets through museum displays. Steve Ferzoco finds his expertise in Warner Bros. art valuable enough to be consulted by top auction houses. The nobility that Belk et al. (1988) say collectors seek to impose on their acquisitions is recognized by others in the market.

Other collectors of more modest means have found ways to share their interests with others. Steve Spain, a collector of Disney production art, is part of an animation club in his town of Peoria, Illinois. They meet monthly to discuss the art and display new acquisitions to each other. In addition, they displayed their art at the local library and gave a seminar about the animation process. However, when he began collecting the art, he was unsure of its legitimacy. He told me, “When I first got into this, I thought this is something I like but I’m kind of an oddball, eccentric guy; surely nobody else in the world is interested” (telephone interview, 30 June 1992).

A similar fear haunts collector Amy Wong, who told me she refuses to let dealers fax her photocopies of art to her job because “the guys at work won’t understand. They’ll give me a lot of grief about it and I don’t want to deal with that” (telephone interview, 30 June 1992). As an isolated collector, she says, “What I really miss is that I don’t have anybody in general [with whom] I can kind of discuss the idea of collecting. I know my friends have heard a lot more than they’ve wanted to hear already. It’s like, ‘Oh, no! You bought another piece?’”

Even a dealer such as Michael Halbreich, whose professional reputation rests on his promotion of animation as fine art, related to me, “The problem animation fights with respect to being recognized and appreciated as fine art is that the characters or images that are painted are cartoon characters.... On the one hand, you’re dealing with people and are trying to explain the fine art aspects of it, but at the same time, you’re pointing to Goofy. It’s pretty hard to use the words fine art and Goofy in the same sentence. But the fact of the matter is that Goofy is fine art” (telephone interview, 24 March 1992).

These market participants are fighting the vestiges of a cultural hierarchy whose rigid categories and values do not allow for the flux of cultural production and consumption via mass media. Writer Joe Adamson has advocated the aesthetic and cultural legitimacy of animation and classical Hollywood comedy films since the late 1960s. He argues about his

own activities and those of others, “In an inadvertent attempt to bring the movies up to a higher level, movies got up to a higher level, but what happened was the concept of what a higher level was just sort of dissolved” (telephone interview, 18 November 1992). In the concluding chapter I will take up this altered cultural landscape and discuss how animation and other popular art forms have shaped it and been shaped by it.



## **Ch. 5**

### **Animation Emerges from the Margins**

#### **Introduction**

I have presented three overlapping realms of aesthetic appreciation of animation: the Museum of Modern Art, museum exhibits of Disney art, and the animation art market. They are only some of the activities that constitute such appreciation, but they occur in museums and art galleries, where our society most often looks for guidance regarding aesthetic legitimacy.

I originally asked: What happens when cultural organizations recognize a marginalized medium (in this case, animation) as a legitimate art form worthy of adult appreciation? I broke this down into three areas: What barriers must such organizations overcome? What strategies are entailed in legitimation? Whom does it affect and how? I will address each question in turn, discussing where my data have provided answers and where more work should be done. Then I would like to reconsider the meaning of aesthetic legitimacy in our current cultural landscape and discuss why some adults turn away from mainstream legitimation of their tastes.

First, I will provide evidence that animation has emerged from the margins of the American entertainment industry, the global film festival circuit, and academia. More money is pouring into animation production than ever before and producers are seeking audiences beyond children. New festivals devoted to animation proliferate around the world. Academic attention to animation has grown and become institutionalized. This background will provide the context for concluding what role museums and the animation art market have played in legitimizing animation's aesthetic achievements.

## **The Current State of Animation**

### **The American Animation Industry**

It is clear from a casual perusal of media industry trade publications, news periodicals, and various shopping centers that animation is no longer a marginalized, minor aspect of American culture. For example, Time Warner, the corporate owner of Warner Bros. cartoon characters, "has more technical communication power than most governments. Its assets are greater than the combined gross domestic product of Bolivia, Jordan, Nicaragua, Albania, Liberia, and Mali. It is the largest magazine publisher in the United States, with *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*, among others. Its aggregate worldwide readership exceeds 120 million. It is the second largest cable company in the world and one of the largest book publishers" (Bagdikian 1992, 240). Its reach extends to music, theme parks, home video, interactive technologies, as well as non-communication enterprises.

Time Warner has not buried its classic cartoon characters, but triumphally marketed them with vast investments, such as the yearlong series of promotions for Bugs Bunny's 50th birthday in 1989-1990 (Magiera 1989; Horovitz 1989). The characters also appear in elaborate high-profile commercials and station identifications: the Coyote chases the Ever-Ready Bunny in Energizer battery commercials; Michigan J. Frog of *One Froggy Evening* (1955) hosts Time Warner's WB network; and Bugs Bunny has teamed up with basketball star and top celebrity endorser Michael Jordan for a series of Nike commercials, to be followed by a feature film. In addition, the company has successfully launched several cartoon television shows, most prominently *Tiny Toon Adventures* and *Animaniacs!*, that feature new characters and offer new merchandising opportunities.

Character-based merchandise for adults and children and animation artworks are available at a growing number of Warner Bros. Studio Stores in malls and upscale shopping districts, like New York City's 57th Street and 5th Avenue. At that flagship

store, “for \$4,500 you can get an 11-1/2 inch bronze sculpture of the Road Runner being chased by a fork-wielding coyote, or for only \$450, a sequined *bustier* picturing Tweety in his cage, haunted by putty tat’s shadow” (Sedaris 1994, 32).

One business analyst commended Time Warner’s 1995 planned acquisition of Turner Broadcasting System (still facing antitrust challenges and government review at the time of this writing) as savvy in part because it would consolidate the companies’ cartoon holdings (Fabrikant 1995). Warner would once again own all of its back catalog of cartoons and it would have Turner’s Cartoon Network on which to air them. In addition it would gain Turner’s own extensive library of MGM and Hanna-Barbera cartoons and the Hanna-Barbera studio.

In chapter 3 I discussed Disney’s phenomenal growth during Michael Eisner’s tenure. This has culminated as of this writing in the acquisition of Capital Cities/American Broadcasting Company, which was approved in February 1996 by the Federal Communications Commission (Harris 1996, 24). Disney is more closely identified with animation than Time Warner, but even prior to the deal with CapCities, it owned live-action film production and distribution divisions, television and telecommunication divisions, Disney TeleVentures (in alliance with Ameritech, Bell South, and Southwestern Bell), theme parks and resorts, consumer products divisions, and sports teams (Peers and Robins 1995, 46). Disney preceded Warner Bros. in mail order catalog merchandising and in developing a chain of retail stores.

These two companies lead a growing pack of media entities that are expanding both the quality and quantity of animation production. Looking back at the 1980s, some landmark events presaged this growth. With the backing of Steven Spielberg, Don Bluth successfully challenged Disney on its own turf of lavish children’s animation with *An American Tail* (1986). The film set a box office record for an animated feature, earning over \$45 million (Solomon 1989, 282). Disney soon began a spate of phenomenally

successful features beginning with the live-action/animated hybrid co-production *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989). As I discussed in chapters 3 and 4, these generated not only box office profits, but a sense in the industry that animation might again be attracting a mix of children, teens, and adults. That was confirmed by the success of the Fox network's primetime series, "The Simpsons."

Other studios, from independents like Colossal Pictures, Kroyer Films, and Hyperion to major entities, like MGM, Time Warner, Fox, Turner, and Nickelodeon, are making feature animation on budgets much greater than those of the product-based features of the mid-1980s. Another newly formed studio, DreamWorks SKG, was created by the union of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen. It has made headlines with high profile raids on Disney for animation talent. Whereas Time Warner had offered salary hikes to defectors, DreamWorks upped the stakes with profit participation plans and flexible contracts (Brodie 1995, 48).

The aggressive expansion of so many studios into big budget feature animation was spurred on by Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*, which successively pushed grosses farther past the hundred million dollar mark per picture. In addition, theatrical features and television series are finding great profitability in re-release and on cable and video after initial exhibitions. The new animation market of direct-to-video is also growing rapidly (Deneroff 1994, 18).

It unclear to what extent this current boom in feature film production targets adult animation enthusiasts rather than adhering to the established children's audience. For example, DreamWorks announced that its initial project will be a musical adaptation of the story of Moses and Time Warner is planning a musical version of the Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail (Brodie 1995, 48). These productions suggest that newcomers are staying within Disney's mold by appealing to a wide age range including children. Songs have

become such an integral part of the formula for Disney's success that neither rival studio can afford to omit them.

Cable television hosts the bulk of animated shows appealing to teenage and adult viewers. When "Ren and Stimpy" gained an adult following, Nickelodeon's corporate parent, Viacom, added it to its evening MTV line-up. However, this kind of crossover appeal raises controversies. Adults who select children's media for their own pleasure rather than in the guise of paternalism are suspect for crossing categories defined by social and economic structures. Interloping adult fans are an easy target to blame as contaminants of a children's medium who give animation producers an incentive to increase levels of violence and sexual content beyond what is "safe" for impressionable young audiences. This was part of the argument made to restrict both content and air times of the show "Beavis and Butt-Head" on MTV after a five-year-old set fire to his trailer home allegedly in emulation of the show (Katz 1994, 43). The show was planned for an older audience but because it is animated, children are assumed to be its natural audience.

After this public relations debacle, both MTV and the USA cable network have taken care to schedule other adult-oriented animation, such as "Liquid Television" and "Duckman," in evening hours. The shows have helped the cable stations carve out profitable niches in the cable spectrum. Joseph Turow argues that such adult animation "is signature material that helps define the tone and the audience of a particular cable channel. A signature program invites people in who are of the proper demographic for the advertising environment while distancing people who are not" (quoted in Clark 1994). The shows position themselves on cutting edge of hipness in part by repulsing mainstream guardians of taste.

Another form of adult-oriented animation has experienced a great upsurge in the past decade: computer animation. Technology advances rapidly in this field, allowing many special effects to be produced more cheaply using computers than through the use of optical

printing and models. Computer animation has become integral to producing a wide range of live-action films, television shows, commercials, video games, and interactive multimedia. The industry needs so much new talent that recruiters from visual effects companies and Hollywood studios alike descended on the Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics (SIGGRAPH) '95 convention to hire computer savvy art school graduates at entry level annual salaries ranging from \$40,000 to \$55,000 (Stalter and Weiner 1995, 27).

Yet, animation has undergone previous boom and bust cycles. Newspaper pundits during the early 1980s predicted a renaissance of animation (e.g. "Animation: It's a Big Draw Again" 1982), which fizzled as poorly done features received minimal distribution and lost money at the box office. By 1985 film critic Charles Solomon would ask in an article's title "Are Animated Films Drawn into a Corner?" only to happily reverse himself in 1990 with an article titled "Toon Town Is Boom Town." Outside of Disney, recent animated features, such as *Ferngully*, *Pagemaster*, and *Thumbelina*, have not made great inroads at the box office despite high production values. If the upcoming films fail to make the money that is expected of them, the animation bubble might burst once again.

The American animation industry is hardly synonymous with the medium's entire range of expression, but it is financially and culturally influential on a global scale. It has repercussions for independent animators in this country and for animators working in other countries. I turn now to the most visible forums these animators have for circulating their work, the festival circuit.

### **The Animation Festival Circuit**

Chapter 2 gave numerous examples beginning in the early 1970s of how the Museum of Modern Art and other cultural organizations made use of animation festivals as sources for screening programs. Since 1960, when Annecy became the first international animation festival, numerous cities around the world have attempted to host such festivals and others include animation in more broadly constituted festivals. A good number of these

festivals have collapsed under the strains of logistics and funding. Along with Annecy's festival, Zagreb's has evinced remarkable staying power even during the war in the Balkans in the 1990s. Animation festivals at Ottawa and Hiroshima have also endured since the late 1970s and mid-1980s, respectively. They all operate on a biennial schedule.

Other cities playing host to animation festivals over the years include many in the United States. Los Angeles was the first American city to host an animation festival in 1965 (Bart 1965) and again in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Seibel 1991). New York followed with several festivals in the 1970s (Thompson 1974; Culhane 1975; Weiler 1977). Other U.S. cities that have attempted such festivals include Chicago, San Francisco, Miami Beach, Boston, and Portland. The New York chapter of the International Animated Film Association (French acronym ASIFA) also holds an annual competition and the Hollywood chapter bestows annual "Annie" awards in categories that recognize members of the American animation industry.

In Europe, England weighed in early with the Cambridge Animation Festival starting in 1967 (Eason 1968-69), which continues in Bristol. Stuttgart's International Trickfilm Festival, begun in 1980, specializes in experimental animation. Other sites of recent animation festivals have included Shanghai, Brussels, Utrecht, Kiev, Torino, Espinho, Cardiff, and Rio de Janeiro. The formats may include competitions in various categories and retrospectives honoring individuals, studios, and national cinemas.

In order to ensure some uniformity of standards and procedures, ASIFA endorses only those festivals that meet a set of criteria. Its membership is dominated by those active in animation production across the globe and the festivals represent a chance for many practitioners to gather and see each other's work. Judging panels are usually made up of people who have gained respect within the international animation community as animators, film curators, writers, or in other capacities.

One festival juror whom I interviewed discussed her judging criteria as follows: "I look a lot at technique and storytelling, or if it's not a storytelling film, then technique and emotion.... For me the first step is separating yourself from the fact that you know the people that did the films" (telephone interview with Linda Simensky, 10 February 1993). She is president of the New York chapter of ASIFA and was an animation development executive at the Nickelodeon cable channel at the time of the interview. She pointed out the degree to which people who travel on the international animation festival circuit form a relatively small, sometimes fractious, community.

The festivals generate reputations with their prizes. News coverage of winners is carried in a variety of journals that cover film, animation, and art. So, too, are reviews of the festivals. Often, a win in one festival will increase the chances that the same film will be awarded prizes at later festivals and be considered for an Academy Award nomination. Thus, momentum can build from a cascade of critical consensus.

Translating aesthetic reputation into a viable source of income is very difficult in the international animation field. Increasingly, the festivals are important for the chance they offer animators to gather and brainstorm about both aesthetics and business. One example is Annecy's creation of the International Animated Film Market in 1985. This film market runs concurrently with the festival to place a wide range of animators in close contact with industry representatives to generate new economic opportunities for the animators and new aesthetic possibilities for commercial animation (Ferriter 1995, 19). This is similar to the film market that runs in conjunction with the Cannes Film Festival.

Commercial studios are seeking out animators through these festivals, but only if they work on projects already in development at those studios, which fit commercial niches. For example, Warner Bros. Feature Animation hired the director of the Ottawa International Festival to be recruiting manager for its planned productions (Deneroff 1995, 23). This recruitment parallels live-action studios that offer production deals to



independents who achieve success at festivals and produces the same mainstreaming of filmmakers' individuality.

Other markets are opening up for the films the independents have already made. Compilations of festival-winning films do travel on the art house theater circuit and some broadcast and cable stations in various countries find ways to program the films into their schedules. In addition, video and laserdisc provide formats for people to buy or rent a growing range of independent and foreign animation. Profits from such ventures are limited, as are the slots available within each program.

Festivals are sites for consolidating aesthetic reputation, gaining access to business opportunities, and building a sense of community among those involved in animation. They also provide forums for academics to interact with practitioners. Retrospective screening programs at the festivals are often coordinated by film scholars. Academics build on relationships developed at the festivals when researching and publishing scholarship on various aspects of animation. I turn now to those who subject animation to scholarly study.

### **The Academic Study of Animation**

I noted in chapter 1 that college programs in animation production are limited. However, within film study programs, animation is receiving more attention in courses devoted to animation history. In addition, a growing number of scholars have begun to treat animation as a worthwhile subject to examine. The territory has been mapped out with reference works such as encyclopedias, filmographies, bibliographies, and other compilations. Many reference books on film and television include entries on animation, and there are a few that are devoted exclusively to animation. Annotated filmographies continue to appear on specialized areas within animation, such as animated cartoon series, cartoons from particular eras, the output of individual studios, biographical bibliography, and animation of particular countries.

Animation-related scholarship has developed within at least two academic disciplines: film studies and mass communication studies. The former developed primarily within the humanities, whose study of literature, drama, and art provided a frame of reference geared toward interpretive criticism (Bordwell 1989, 17). The latter grew out of social scientific concerns about mass media effects on audiences, particularly the effects of cartoon violence and animated advertisements on children as well as the educational applications of animation (Hoffer 1981, 59-65, 79-87; Rice et al. 1983; van der Voort 1986; Gunter and McAleer 1990). Rather than foregrounding animation, this area of research usually considers it merely one of an array of stimuli working on young audiences.

Film studies programs encompass numerous theoretical approaches, subjects, and methodologies, which offer ready-made categories for animation scholarship to employ, particularly with regard to criticism and theory. Thus, one finds applied to animation such interpretive frameworks as auteurism, formalism, structuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, deconstructionism, and postmodernism.

Another adaptation from film studies is the scope of subject matter broached within scholarly works: close analyses of single films; oeuvres of individual animation workers; series starring particular characters; outputs of particular studios; animation appearing within an era, a genre, an industry, or a nation. Techniques of production (e.g., cel animation, object animation, cameraless animation, pixillation, computer animation, etc.) offer another means of delimiting research, as do work organizations (hierarchical commercial firms, communal cooperatives, individual independent animators, state-run studios, animation schools, etc.).

Other approaches that have recently crossed over from film studies include historical research into institutional, economic, and political aspects of animation production; issues of representation of gender and ethnicity; and aesthetic and narrative

styles and influences. Some scholars offer explicative interpretations of artists' intended meanings while others symptomatically interpret animation in terms of broad socio-political contradictions. While many of these scholars do not provide explicit aesthetic evaluations, they treat animation as a serious subject for study and, especially when using the former mode of interpretation, they contribute to animation's stature as an art form by holding it up to aesthetic scrutiny.

Such academic journals as *Film History*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, and *Velvet Light Trap* have all had special issues devoted to animation. Numerous academic film journals also publish individual articles on animation. The Society of Animation Studies (SAS) was founded in the late 1980s and held its first annual conference in the fall of 1989. One of its members subsequently founded the refereed academic publication *Animation Journal* to provide a forum for animation research articles, book reviews, and other information pertinent to animation scholarship. The SAS has consistently sought to encourage interactions among animation industry professionals, independent American animators, foreign animators, and scholars. Many of its members also belong to ASIFA and participate in animation festivals. On at least two occasions, the SAS has scheduled its annual conferences to coincide with animation festivals as a way to spur cross-fertilization.

Thus, the current ferment in the field of animation has interconnections between commercial and noncommercial sectors of production, venues for aesthetic evaluation, and academia. Now I would like to consider how these thriving activities relate to the histories of museum exhibitions and animation art sales that I have presented. I will first discuss the barriers facing museums and galleries that first championed animation as art, then summarize the strategies they used to legitimize animation.

## **What Aesthetic Legitimation Entails**

### **Barriers to the Acceptance of Animation as Art**

The Museum of Modern Art and other art museums share the benefits of residing at the top of the cultural hierarchy as repositories of all that is most valued of our cultural patrimony. These museums hold authority as arbiters of what merits permanent preservation for the benefit of future generations. They have, by virtue of the status the institution of the arts grants them, great stores of cultural capital.

When these organizations first opened their doors to animated films and animation production art in the 1930s, they invested that cultural capital in what was considered illegitimate culture by many members of the elite art world over which they presided. MoMA's film curators even found this attitude among Hollywood producers of the very mass media they wished to collect and exhibit.

I have argued that this attitude is based on an outmoded cultural hierarchy that finds value only in elite art forms that are usually unique, handcrafted, nonutilitarian items by singular, visionary individuals. Middle and lower class art forms are seen as increasingly derivative and formularized, serving utilitarian purposes ranging from moral instruction to escapism. As the industrial revolution made the production of cultural items on a vast scale possible, these mass produced, technologically engendered, utilitarian items took on the negative connotations of low art from earlier eras. In this scheme, elite art can only be appreciated by those with highly developed tastes, while popular middle and lower class culture allegedly panders to demands for unchallenging, immediate gratification.

Museums and animation art dealers also face a belief that animation is a children's medium and, thus, inferior to mass media that address adults. As such, it is assumed to adhere to conservative conventions of narration, characterization, and plot. Its graphics are thought to be subservient to story so that frivolous comic fantasies and simplistic moral messages may be clearly conveyed to immature minds. Under pressure from citizen

advocacy groups and government officials, the American entertainment industry has instituted mechanisms for self-censorship that have excised sexual innuendos, violence, and other topics considered harmful to children. This has restricted the subject matter that commercial animation producers even consider broaching, which then confirms the stereotype of animation as aesthetically compromised by its audience's alleged limitations.

Both of the above characterizations of animation misrepresent its range of expression and artistic accomplishment, but their wide acceptance has limited the entry of alternatives into broad channels of distribution and exhibition in this country. Even those animated films and shows that are screened and aired through commercial channels are not so narrowly cast.

Similar prejudices denigrate those aspects of aesthetic appreciation that yield too greatly to emotion. Rather than praise the evocation of emotional reactions as an esteemed goal of art, the ideology of the cultural hierarchy has elevated formal novelty, complexity, and uniqueness as qualities of the most important art. Direct appeal to emotion is vulgar in this view, an easy effect that cheapens art. However, according to a communications view of art, emotional appeals work precisely when audiences learn aesthetic conventions well enough to tacitly employ them to interpret a work of art, without consciously needing to decipher the codes in use.

For those who have overcome these prejudices to embrace animation as an art form still are faced with physical characteristics of mass media. Film prints, film negatives, and videotapes all deteriorate to varying degrees. Even digital storage media are hobbled by decomposition and rapidly changing file formats. Animation production cels are also prone to severe decay. All of these media require elaborate conservation and restoration techniques to maintain their integrity.

Yet, the ubiquity of so many identical copies feeds the prejudice that such works are of little value, for they lack the cult value of unique artworks that collectors and museums

can monopolize. Indeed, collecting mass media is complicated by intellectual property issues, in which owners of symbolic content can protect their right to copy, distribute, and profit from that content, while owners of its physical manifestation may be legally circumscribed in their use of that content. Thus, mass media's nature as commodity cannot be so easily effaced as it can for unique works of elite fine art. The latter art may be enveloped in a mystical, even religious, aura that obscures their exchange values on the market.

### **Strategies of Legitimation**

There are several strategies that museums have used to make animation an acceptable art form for exhibition and that sympathetic critics have also used in their favorable reviews. One strategy involves elucidating links between the exhibited animation and legitimate art. Animation advocates have based such links on formal similarities, art historical genealogies, shared artistic personnel, and comparable aesthetic aspirations, materials, and accomplishments. In addition, museums and critics often focus on finding a single artistic visionary genius responsible for each animated production.

Such strategies are easily implemented when promoting independent experimental animators, but sometimes the Museum of Modern Art and other organizations promoted these artists as avant-gardes aligned with modernist fine art movements rather than as practitioners of animation. Thus, the artists were distanced from the medium in which they worked in order to better situate them within elite art circles. However, MoMA also screened international and American noncommercial alternatives to U.S. commercial animation to suggest the use of animation for adult education, propaganda, and other communicative purposes.

Singling out the core activities of the true artist requires some conceptual leaps when applied to commercial animation studios. In the case of Walt Disney, exhibits sometimes conflated the story of his career with both the development of animation as an

art form and the steps in the process of creating an animated film. The metaphor of evolution mixed with the preconfigured phases of production to yield a story of a genius's inevitable aesthetic ascent.

Rather than base links to legitimate art on the exhibited animation itself, some museums and critics have validated it by citing authoritative tastemakers who have already sanctioned it as art. In this way, the distinctive 'eye' of someone with cultural capital is as important as that which is captured by the cultured gaze. The way that such tastemakers contextualize animation shows how astute their perception is at recognizing value in what others might dismiss. This tastemaking role may be played by cultural organizations such as film festivals, to whom others in the art world defer for institutionalized discrimination.

Another way museums and critics have validated animation is by championing it on the basis of other positive qualities that elite art lacks, but popular culture possesses. This strategy is particularly useful to participants in the animation art market. Many people tout animation's ability to appeal to sentiment and offer entertainment. Early supporters of Walt Disney were especially happy to attribute to him the creation of a new folk art that was uniquely American. In contrast, American fine artists seemed unable to compete with the European avant-garde in the 1930s. By commending the popularity and comprehensibility of selected animation productions, animation's cultural sponsors reaffirm art's communicative purposes, which are often lost in the welter of innovations produced by avant-garde artists. This does much to counter the assumption that popularity is an automatic badge of aesthetic dishonor to be avoided by artists hoping to be taken seriously.

These strategies adhere to the cultural hierarchy to the extent that their praise is accompanied by categorization of animation as either high art or low art. In general, those critics who have written for elite art audiences have felt compelled to fit animation into such categories; whereas, those critics writing for mass audience publications departed from the hierarchy more often in their reviews. I have shown how pedagogic structures of a number

of museum exhibits have helped convey how technology and hierarchic studio organization have created art that cannot fit so easily within these outmoded categories. Thus, even if curators attempted to show Walt Disney as a singular visionary, the mode of production they presented in the exhibit undermined what was claimed in catalog essays.

Some critics have extolled animation as a democratic, mechanized, even dehumanized art based on this organization of work and the reproducibility of its final products. Yet, even as more individuals in the Disney studio were given credit for their artistry, some people merely assimilated these artists into an auteurist framework by relocating the source of authorship from producer Walt Disney to his top animation directors.

In contrast, many people involved in the animation art market base their interest not on particular artists' reputations, but on their emotional attachments to depicted characters and the stories in which they appear. For some collectors, animation's status as art weighs little to their appreciation of it. Their focus on the cult value of the individual pieces of art that they own is directly tied to the exhibition value of the films and shows they've watched. These two kinds of value are mutually reinforcing: the enjoyment of owning a cel is enhanced by its role in the overall production; the enjoyment of a film is enhanced by locating the cel one owns within the unfolding narrative. The artifactual link between the two and its attendant notions of scarcity, authenticity, and condition make the cel expensive, but its price is dependent on the relatively affordable and available exhibition value of the animation production itself.

Because this dissertation has concentrated on adult appreciation of animation, I have not focused on arguments for the aesthetic legitimacy of animation designed for young audiences. The Museum of Modern Art has presented animation that was made with this intent and it has selected films for children's programs that were not so intended but that curators thought would appeal to youngsters. Future research might embark on a more



thorough examination of the artistic challenges particular to this portion of animation production and how such productions are evaluated. Given the censorship I discussed above, aesthetic appreciation may center on animation producers' ingenuity in negotiating a minefield of sensitive issues while serving up entertaining pedagogy.

### **Effects of Legitimation**

Given the above-mentioned barriers to accepting animation as a legitimate art form, and the strategies that were employed to overcome them, what has been the effect on animation's status? Can I claim that the current lively state of animation is a direct result of museums and art dealers promoting animation as art?

My research was primarily limited to activities of reception rather than production. My conclusions regarding the impact of this reception on production must be inferred from documentation of how animation producers have interacted with cultural organizations that have promoted their work as art. Other beneficiaries of these activities of legitimation include animation enthusiasts and, in particular, the subset of those enthusiasts who have participated in the legitimation process. Also, museums and professional participants in the animation art market have gained from their promotion of animation.

The Disney company has received the most sustained critical acclaim of any animation production organization in the world. Yet, I have documented the ambivalence that Walt Disney felt toward artistic honors. Further research into Disney production material and story conference notes might determine whether aesthetic legitimation was ever mentioned as a factor in such Disney innovations as the creation of the "Silly Symphony" series, the use of Technicolor, the institution of drawing classes at the studio, or the development of the multiplane camera. Mark Langer (1992) has argued that these innovations may best be seen as attempts to differentiate Disney's product in the market against competitors, and that together they provided the means for Disney to produce feature length animated films.

The production notes for *Fantasia* (1940) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) would be particularly interesting sources to search for mentions of artistic aspirations associated with classical music and art historical authenticity, respectively. While the the museum exhibits that highlighted these films were critically and popularly successful, this success did not translate into box office receipts for either film and both were followed by periods of less experimental filmmaking at the studio.

This points to my finding that the Disney company seemed to judge museum exhibits and other honors for their efficacy in aiding its public relations and merchandising ventures, rather than accepting aesthetic legitimacy as a valuable end in itself. Museum exhibits of Disney production art provided a model for selling that art in galleries rather than in department stores. The company supported exhibits and retrospectives by lending art and film prints and by subsidizing exhibition costs, but it timed the exhibitions to coincide with its latest animated film release and it supplied production materials from the film in release to lead off several of exhibitions. Similarly, Warner Communications, Inc. supported the Museum of Modern Art's exhibit and screenings devoted to its cartoons when it was able to tie the museum's activities into a golden anniversary celebration that launched a series of videotapes. These commercial animation producers convert the specific artistic claims made on their behalf into a generalized sign of prestige, which may be included in subsequent promotional activities that tout the studio's animation.

As for the effect of the animation art market's interest in production art from commercial studios, my minimal contact with industry members suggests that they see it as an affirmation of earlier production decisions, but it has little effect on future decisions. Obviously, such decisions must take into account potential theatrical ticket sales and television advertising revenues to a much greater extent. Because the commercial studios often treat the release of animation art as part of their licensing divisions, future research might study how licensing considerations affect decisions to produce particular projects,

and to what extent the potential prestige of art sales differs from the potential sale of other merchandise in the that decision-making process.

Retrospective exhibits and film programs draw the public's attention to the full range of an animation producer's oeuvre in a way that the normal flux of theatrical releases and televised airings do not. This effect of concentration may be distributed when the retrospective travels to other sites. Further, memory of the event may be kept alive through press releases, exhibition catalogs, and news coverage of subsequent events that mention the retrospective as background information.

Another area that deserves more research is how independent animators are affected by museum and festival recognition. My speculation is that these animators depend on museums and festivals to a much greater extent than do commercial studios. The latter have their own systems of distribution and exhibition and already profit through these avenues. In contrast, independent animators depend on festivals and cultural organizations to gain exposure and establish aesthetic reputations. These form a currency that may be converted into commercial distribution deals and prestigious résumé items on grant applications to gain funding from private arts foundations, corporate funders, and government arts councils.

An example of how nonprofit cultural organizations may lead the way in developing commercial markets is the Museum of Modern Art's pioneering creation of a circulating film library. This service helped establish the educational and nontheatrical film market. Subsequently, a number of distributors have entered the market and have provided a means for experimental animation to be disseminated. However, these firms tend to return little profit to the animators whose work they distribute.

In each chapter I have given examples of how enthusiasts have contributed to the mainstream acceptance of animation. These individuals have shown their enthusiasm by collecting and selling animation art, gathering in various kinds of associations, curating

exhibits and film programs, researching animation history, interviewing animators, and writing in a range of publication formats. Often, their initial contact with one cultural organization led to involvement with even more prestigious organizations and also gained some greater access to the animation studios they have championed. Some were granted use of copyrighted material for publication, some gained full employment or part-time consulting positions with the production companies. Collectors have seen the monetary value of their animation art collections grow and some have gained the status of experts within the market. Some enthusiasts have gone on to pursue academic careers in which their publications on animation have contributed to their research records for gaining tenure within various colleges and universities. Because the very same individuals are often involved in festivals, scholarship, and animation exhibitions at museums, they have a direct effect on the current state of animation reception that I've detailed above. Those that have crossed over into production bring their sensibilities with them.

Adults who enjoy animation without seeking mainstream legitimacy of their tastes have also gained. These fans have seen their tastes ratified to the extent that new television shows are designed to appeal directly to them. In the past, they appropriated cartoons that targeted children and chose sophisticated ways to appreciate them, marking their distinction by resurrecting increasingly obscure films, shows, and commercials. Now, such shows as "Ren and Stimpy" have been created by animators who are lifelong enthusiasts of the medium. They make references to those bits of animated ephemera as a way to reward the portion of the audience that is well versed in such cultural detritus. At the same time, these shows work to exclude those who cannot decipher the range of allusions (Langer 1993, 131).

This shows that animation producers and exhibitors have found profitability in targeting teens and young adults to the exclusion of children and older viewers. Live-action film and television have long been able to aim narrowly at a particular demographic because

the total audience for these commercial media is large enough to divide. Recently this has become true for animation as well.

A future area to investigate is how the accumulation of aesthetic legitimating activities can contribute to a sense of brand loyalty among enthusiasts of a celebrated studio's cartoons, who see their own tastes ratified by elite cultural sanctifying organizations. As I will take up in the next section, elite sanctification and mainstream acceptance may have the opposite effect on those who employ their interest in marginalized media as a social marker of hipness and exclusivity with a small taste group.

The museums, galleries, and other cultural organizations I have discussed in this dissertation rarely received much critical backlash for displaying animation. On the few occasions that critics chastised them, it was for presenting production art as complete and independent works on their own, or for tarnishing animation producer Walt Disney by associating him with the lesser talent of Keith Haring. Instead, many critics welcomed the opportunity to consider the aesthetics of animation by studying its constituent artworks apart from the flux of onscreen motion. Another avenue to explore further would be whether those critics who first recognized animation's potential ever gained in reputation as animation's acceptance grew.

Meanwhile, many of these cultural organizations, in lending their cultural capital to animation, increased their attendance receipts, gained news coverage, confirmed their commitments to American art, and broadened their purview over a wider range of culture. Indeed, the Museum of Modern Art's attention to animation served its mission to acknowledge 20th century arts of all kinds, whether they possessed the cult value of collectibility or not. Cultural organizations that include exhibitions and departments devoted to mass media have found a way to maintain relevance to the public as these media have overtaken fine arts and live performance to dominate the current cultural landscape in terms of volume and influence, if not prestige.

## **Alternatives to the Authority of Legitimacy**

In contrast to the institution of the media, the institution of the arts has gradually moved to the peripheries of Western society. As Larry Gross argues, both the arts and religion exist in “cultural ‘spaces’ that real people may *visit* in their spare, fringe time but that only spare, fringe people inhabit in their *real* time” (1989, 113). Along with the arts and religion, such traditional sources of authority as government and the educational establishment have seen the erosion of their power to enforce legitimacy in the past several decades. Local urban centers no longer have the power to enforce a cultural hierarchy led by elites, nor can they provide the economic incentives to hold their populations, nor even the basic services such as education and security that are prerequisites for cultural life to flourish. Populations that spread into suburbs increasingly partake of mass media culture, whose broad geographic coverage removes regional identity as part of their content.

The museums I have discussed in earlier chapters are among the local urban cultural authorities that can grant legitimacy to aspirants within ever more restricted spheres over which they still retain control. As the resources commanded by these cultural authorities dwindle, their enforcement of legitimacy diminishes as well. Meanwhile, media organizations grow into transnational conglomerates, tempering their content to appeal to an ever wider swath of humanity.

This description of the changing cultural landscape offers an introduction into an area of future research that follows naturally from this dissertation. The focus of this research would be those adults whose appreciation of animation does not depend on such art world organizations as museums and galleries. Loose networks of animation fans interact in a variety of ways, through publications called fanzines, via computer networks such as the Internet, and in face-to-face gatherings, sometimes in the form of conventions. Some purchase merchandise, such as clothing and videos; some create their own artworks

based on favorite animated characters; some even sport animation-themed tattoos. This is a heterogeneous and geographically disbursed community of people who share a love for animation, though individual tastes for particular cartoons run the gamut from the experimental animation of, say, Paul Glabicki to the sex-and-violence of Japanese “anime” to 1950s commercials featuring Burt and Harry Piels.

Museum exhibits I have discussed often stressed scholarship, formalism, pedagogy, and cultural significance in their promotion of animation. They reframed animation in terms congenial to their elite art world. In contrast, the animation fan community confronts others with signifiers of affinity to cartoons, through bodily adornment, decoration of personal areas, and discussion of favorite shows or characters. Those involved in the refined sphere of appreciation may see in them stereotypical behavior, such as childish fantasizing or obsessive pursuit of trivia. Fan community gatherings may respect none of the gentility that allegedly characterizes animation art collectors.

Research into animation fandom would consider how marginality offers certain benefits: a freedom from the scrutiny that legitimate culture must bear, the perverse pleasure in valuing the devalued. Adult cartoon fans can take refuge in what is often benignly neglected as trivial kid’s stuff, riding out the periodic accusations that the medium reeks of commercial exploitation, anti-social values, and violence. In fact, such accusations provide an illicit thrill to those seeking what’s allegedly bad for them.

Conversely, elite approbation may mark a cartoon’s passage from the exclusive domain of a few pioneers to the larger realm of dull establishment respectability. In this case, elite veneration means vitiating the qualities that drew fans to cartoons in the first place. When alerted by the proper tastemakers, the rest of society seeks access to what had been the fans’ private discovery. The fans then may either embrace the mainstream tide of interest or seek ever more marginalized items of culture to maintain their distance from the

dominant societal institutions and values. Mark Langer argues that those who reject mainstreaming of their tastes do so to maintain hipness: "Hipness becomes a game of displaced authenticity that often derives its meaning and value from the exclusive nature of the code used by a particular taste group. Once the code is decipherable by the total culture, it ceases to be exclusive and loses its value to members of the group" (1993, 128).

Research into animation fandom may also find that the criteria fans use to validate animation are at odds with criteria elite art world members use to confer legitimacy, especially if the elites exclude what fans love the most. While elites may seem to legitimize fans' avid interest in animation, they may do so by emphasizing virtues more common to the fine arts world in a manner that condescends to animation's humble roots. In effect, fans may resent being told that they like animation for the wrong reasons. Dick Hebdige argues that such mainstream reclamations of subcultures fail to acknowledge that "subcultural styles do indeed qualify as art but as art in (and out of) particular contexts; not as timeless objects, judged by the immutable criteria of traditional aesthetics, but as 'appropriations,' 'thefts,' subversive transformations, as *movement*" (1979, 129).

A particularly interesting aspect of fandom is that fan communities do not merely engage in intensive reception of shows and films. They also produce their own culture based on them. These can be in a range of media: paintings, sculptures, fiction, songs, poems, videotapes, costumes, games, and skits. As consumer activists they may also contact producers of their favorite shows to voice opinions, make demands, offer suggestions, lobby to save programs from cancellation, and write fan mail. They build their own communities through meetings, conventions, newsletters, amateur press associations, Internet newsgroups, Web sites, and other online communication via computer (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992).

The empowerment and community organizing that occurs in fandom offers a means to intermingle activities that are often conceived as separate: artistic production and



reception. To the few artists who create for large audiences can be added fans who build on what is offered to them. As communication firms grow larger and distribute their materials more widely, productive fans make a multivocal conversation out of a monologue. Indeed, some fans' creative and appropriative acts violate intellectual property laws and subvert the values animation producers intended their work to embody.

## **Conclusions**

This dissertation is a tentative step toward understanding a larger process by which artistic reputation is forged across cultural boundaries. It offers some perspectives on animation's reception to complement the growing body of research on its production. I have analyzed animation's status in terms of resource dependency, examining how the resource of aesthetic legitimacy was exchanged for other resources. I have shown that art intermingles with entertainment, appreciation with pleasure, aesthetic value with price, and cult value with exhibition value. By arguing for their separation, the ideology of the cultural hierarchy favors entrenched elites who have privileged access to means of legitimation. However, because so many people have been trained by early exposure to mass media, they tacitly comprehend the codes employed in commercial animation. Therefore, they competently apprehend its meaning and respond emotionally.

Museums that provide a venue for animation to be considered art reinforce people's self-assurance in expressing connoisseurship. The animation art market furthers that self-assurance, offering the opportunity to seriously invest in sources of pleasure. Thus, both mass media producers and consumers make use of the prestige available from cooperative elite cultural organizations to legitimize what otherwise could have remained marginal. And those cultural organizations use the popularity of animation to help reorient toward the broader public as their financial needs have outpaced the ability of their elite patrons to support them.

Animation of a more experimental nature remains at the margins of the animation art market and is exhibited by few museums, of which the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art are notable examples. Its primary venues are film festivals, film programs at educational institutions, and art house theaters. It has gained recognition within the experimental film and video community, which itself is marginalized in terms of funding and size of audience.

Future research might determine how various modes of reception actually influence the ways animation is produced and circulated. As I mentioned above, this might involve investigation of animation festivals as sites for animators seeking aesthetic responses to their work. Similarly, industry awards, such as the Oscars, and arts grants might be examined systematically for the effects they have on recipients and nominees as well as on those omitted from consideration. The impact that animation scholarship has on the stature of animation is another avenue of exploration, as are some of the more marginalized forms of appreciation practiced by animation fans. Such research would help situate animation in the variety of cultural arenas where contesting groups stake claims for the legitimacy of their tastes, desires, and identities.

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