

ANIMATION AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

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**Presented at the First Annual Conference
of the Society for Animation Studies
UCLA, October 27-29, 1989**

CLICK CLICK move move CLICK CLICK move move CLICK
CLICK CLICK move move CLICK CLICK HOLD...cycle...and move.

Black Frame short

breath surprise and move. Jazz-like schizoid fragmentizing run toward illusory lifedom. Shutter makes a backbeat bebop echo to the picture/image notes, flashdown hyperviews of inner dreams and logic turned down, turned out, exposed...projected. One's mind, one's creativity, takes the highway of frames constructing each view like a sped-up, slowed-down architecture building a long dream of flashing windows for other eyes to see...in...split-second melted time flowing with slightness of rain or jangling the brain with confusion and surprise. CLICK move CLICK move CLICK move move: this is the rhythm of the independent, the experimental animator let loose, let free, usually alone, usually without support, followed by a small audience, making personal visions come to life on a movie screen. There's hardly a nickel to be made, but no time to reconsider once the hook is in, the idea set in the mind, the will to be tested, the beauty to unfold. I hear the single-frame shutter at night, sleeping, straining to make the perfect arc with my cut-out butterfly, holding my breath.... Don't let the wings touch the clouds, don't forget to alternate the wings to make just the right staccato...vibrato...nervousness.

I asked some other experimental animators how they work: Larry Jordan, Sally Cruikshank, and Victor Faccinto.

Last year Larry Jordan completed a ninety-minute animated feature titled Sophie's Place. I believe this is the first feature-length animation made entirely alone by an American independent filmmaker. Larry Jordan thought it would take him ten years but it only took five with a year and a half to prepare the artwork. He says of the film,

"Sophie's Place is literally an in-camera film; I didn't cut anything...that's how it came out of the camera and I literally didn't know from one frame to the next what was going to happen. The rule was: I'd look through the viewfinder; whatever idea came first, no matter what it was, I had to do it--no matter if it took six months or two days; that's what had to be done. So I couldn't judge it...I couldn't equivocate...I couldn't say, well, that's a dumb idea.

I usually have a little game or a set of rules that I'm playing on a film. I think that's where the style for a particular film comes from. So that's the rule..walk into the studio, don't think about it any other time except when working on it. I didn't know at first it was going to be an uncut film. I thought it would be like any other film...I'd get a mass of material and then I'd have the headache of cutting it. But after viewing about seven rolls, I knew I couldn't do any better cutting it. So then I began to be more careful and adhere to the guideline even more strictly: It's going to be the way it comes out of the camera."

Larry Jordan's Sophie's Place unwinds its ninety minutes, its one hundred and twenty-nine thousand and six hundred hand-moved,

hand-cutout, single frames like a masterful ballet of surreal places, silent dramas, and occurrences which seem to be born on the screen before you. He says,

"I want the film to happen on the screen; I don't want it to be a record of something that time passed--something that happened before."

And in this way he has achieved a 90-minute duality: on one level the film acts itself out spontaneously and we are allowed to perceive its life--on another level we are relieved perceptually of having to force our attention upon it and are allowed to have our own imaging and our own thinking enlivened through the filmic experience. We are given a long languorous daydream. Larry Jordan says,

"What I want to happen is for there to be an interface between what I put up on the screen and your own memories and associations and you make an incident or not, as it pleases you. I don't want to show you a story or a state the way it is in my mind."

From the CLICK move CLICK move rhythmic emerge supernatural movie personas who move in impossibly difficult and complicated dances of expression. Move move move...and spilling forth out of darkness appear creatures and worlds limited only by the energy and technique of the animator. These animated creatures, phantoms of illusion, granular spirits, transport us physically by enlivening and kinteszizing a wealth of fantasy already existent within us. We respond empathetically, vicariously, unbounded by laws of weight, gravity, or time. We are released to delight and co-exist with

figures who freely disengage autonomy from propriety. Like the loss of restriction in a waking dream, the animated film flies against reality, beating its alternating CLICK-frame wings against the window of our imagination.

Sally Cruikshank just sits you down in your seat and says, "Here we go...sit down...here we go." No safety belts for her weird and wonderful adventures where Betty Boop turns psychokinetic in the form of Anita and Donald Duck is a quasi duck-faced self-centered hipster in an animated musical world more mad than any LSD adventure.

Sally Cruikshank says about her creative process,

"I don't care about the audience...I find music I like and in it I see a real strong motion that creates this weird feeling...I can picture motions and crazy cuts...I can almost turn the music inside out so this weird picture is going with it...there's this breathless crazy feeling I'm trying to achieve.

When I finish a film I can't remember what I was ever thinking when I started it. I think animation is such a direct process that you don't want to filter your images by being that self-conscious about them at the time...I don't want to analyze my characters because I'm creating them.

In another way the characters and the worlds are like grooves that were formed early in my head, created in childhood playmates and stuffed animals and lengthy dialogues with imaginary friends...and they come out again in the films as dramas enacted and reenacted."

In Quasi at the Quackadero, Face Like a Frog, Chow Fun, and others, Sally Cruikshank's films are cult favorites that reflect a sensibility which loves the "real" cartoons of the thirties but can't

quite swallow the too cute, too bouncy, just too clever mentality. Her films nearly parody the cel-painted glisten and all-out studio effort to please in many cartoons of the Fleischer and Disney genre. They hype up, turn up reality with colors and motions intense enough to jive a more media-experienced audience brought up on MTV. Her cartoons are macabre, contrary, and never hesitate to dig at the human race. They typify the best of the animation avant garde because they are unique and passionate visions forever loyal to their maker's imagination. Her films are funny and satirical but in their "not-aim-to-please" sensibility they are not cartoons, merely, but artful works which dig and stir as well as entertain.

Down in the darker rumble of the time-frame spaces of the animator's dream crawls the subterranean bad-behaved, ill-mannered, sexually rampant, socially incompatible, seriously radical, impetuously obsessively odiously ugly undercore...an undercore that Victor Faccinto explored in the early seventies with a series of animated films about a character he called Video Vic. Barbara Scharres noted about him, "Victor Faccinto is an atypical artist among animators in that he makes no concession to the preconception that animation should be funny, fun, or suitable for children."

Mr. Sandman, Filet of Sole, and Shameless are the most violent "bad boy" animated films around. They make audiences marvel and cringe with quickly alternating feelings of shock and seduction as cut-out figures are pierced, slashed, murdered, and disfigured in a violent tantrum of a society lost, without control or hope. The seduction comes from the beautiful cut-outs of a "Hairy Who" Chicago variety where no detail has been spared to set the scene

appropriately, and the shock from the surprise of seeing such themes as sex, violence, and death so blatantly enacted in a medium usually reserved for the lyrical, poetic, or simply funny.

Victor Faccinto says,

"As time passes, it becomes harder and harder for me to rationalize and explain the Video Vic films. They were definitely about the moment. The late sixties and early seventies were blurred together with a post-hippie cynic blues, Charles Manson and all. I found out what I should already have known: let loose to wonder, one's imagination may generate negative energy. Video Vic does have a conscience; however, his environment does not. California in the post-positive hippie era became very negative and the films came out in relation to the disappointment everyone around me was feeling, their world was crumbling and I became cynical. The films allowed me to get out all my instinctual feelings any way I wanted. I could act out everything without having to deal with it in real life. The films have a lot of behavior which you normally can't express openly in public. In animation you can do anything you want...."

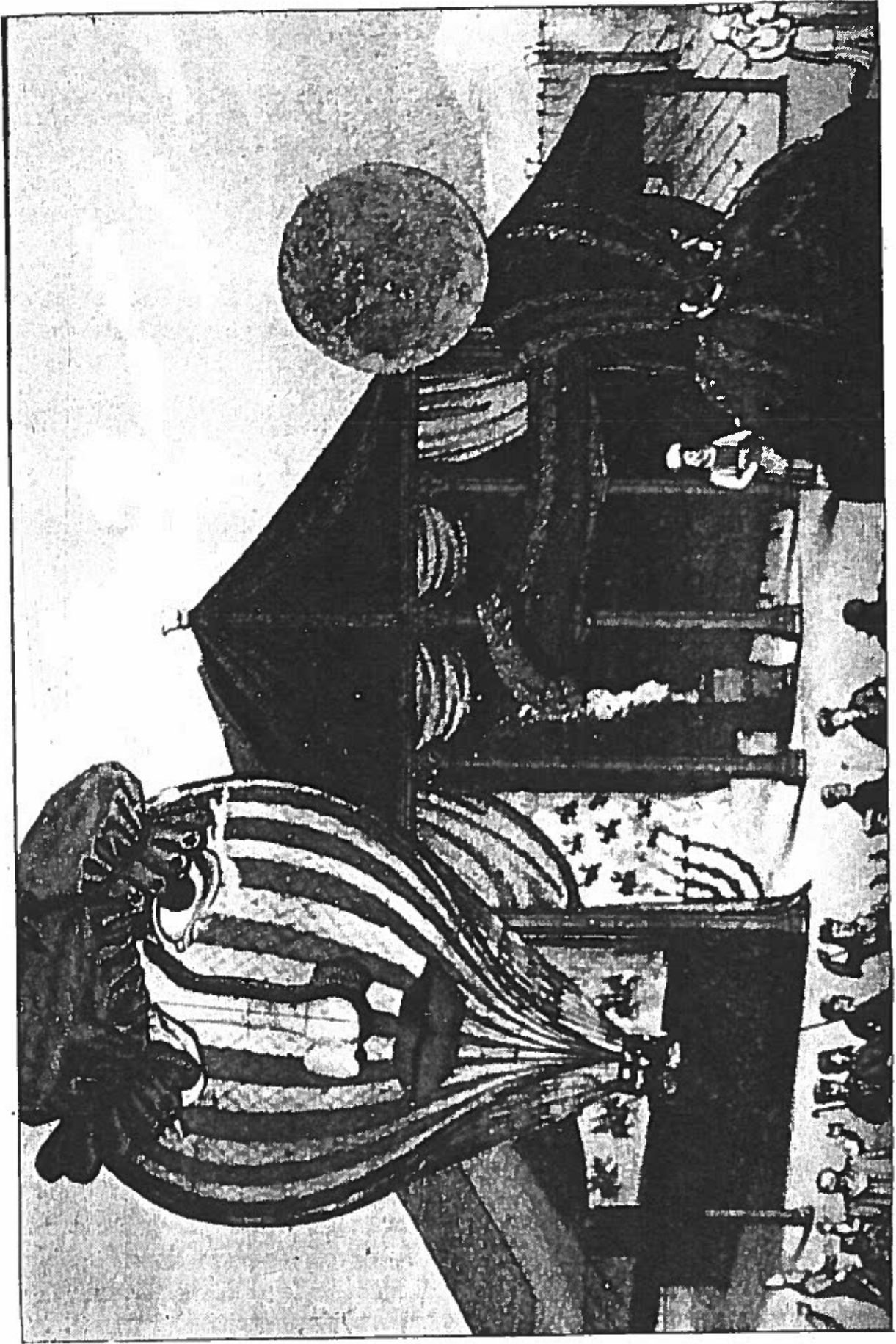
And what about the audience, Victor?

"I didn't mind seeing my films going out and causing a stir...the films were censored, taken out of festivals and showings--which didn't really bother me because it was just important to me that the films had an effect at the time and that was my main motivation--was making something that people were really affected by and it didn't necessarily have to be a positive feeling...the films dealt with a lot of issues people didn't want to deal with."

Fade Pop Dissolve...the shuttered emulsion holds the intermittent BLACK/image BLACK/image move...compulsion to express in tiny increments...thrown forward with light speed, falling toward the audience (surprised? delighted? woken up?).

Magician, medieval light-thrower, cave painter, hidden animator hands fly in the shuttered darks. Hands working in the structural underlayment of cinema concrete. Jazz keyboard of sharp/flat note frames: ca-click BLACK ca-click WHITE ca-click MOVE...The animator, life-giver, kinetisizes intermittence, welds wish and form, breaks through the known into the suspected, mouth on dead form breathes life to the image.

Author's note: Quotes from Larry Jordan, Sally Cruikshank, and Victor Faccinto are transcribed from telephone interviews: Larry Jordan from San Francisco on October 3, 1989; Sally Cruikshank from Los Angeles on September 30, 1989; and Victor Faccinto from Winston-Salem, North Carolina on September 26, 1989.



Larry Jordan