INTRODUCTION

Animation has a relationship with drawing that is almost fundamental to its definition. The system of mark making directly on film or photographing artworks somehow seems to define the genus of an art form that, whilst having many visual antecedents, is not generally thought of as a medium rooted in sound. The development of the contemporary animated form, now mediated by computer, suggests that there are new ways to develop animated work. This process is not a new one as a culmina-
tion of technology led practices now means that animation and the cinematic product engage less with the lens-based and chemical process and more with mediation via digital machines. The move to treat cinema as a text, once considered itself as a radical move, has gained ground at a time when the audio-visual product is now mostly written to machines rather than photographed (Altman, 1992). This suggests revitalized production sets for traditional animation as well as a common grounding in machine-based production shared by proliferating entertainments. Mutations of any primary definition that might be based on the indexical nature of film may also need to be considered. The mediation of many film processes even if they currently originate on film stock, are also often digitally post manipulated. The implication for this sound and image relationship therefore is for it to evolve from its former specified indexed limitation. In addition, sound can then be considered with equanimity in the creative process both practically and theoretically with a greater symbiosis between them.

This chapter examines current and developing definitions of the relationship of sound to vision in the animated form. It also has inter-related aims. Firstly, one aim is to build part of a narrative derived from a scope of personal practice and research about sound and image whilst seeking to question the audio-visual marriage with a particular respect to animation on the understanding that evolutions of the form are now transgressing boundaries. The discussion reviews aspects of the animated form’s theoretical relationship with sound whilst acknowledging the facilitating role of digital production in the sound image partnership. Secondly, there is a consideration of the developments that are bringing new manifestations of animated work to be made such as the expansion of sound into other digitally facilitated areas that have animated content, such as games and virtual worlds. A consideration whether part of these differently structured sound spaces present challenges for the conceptual landscape of the sound-image contract based is also undertaken.

The chapter therefore forms a case for the pivotal function of sound in this process of recreation and that the Pythagorean principle of the acousmatic1 may be fundamental to engaging spectators for animated forms. The extension of this veiled sonicity in the moving image to animation and other animated and variable experiences, such as Virtual Worlds and Games is considered for its new potential where that off-screen principle might evolve. That is, sound, is the unseen mediator in the recreation of convincing animated encounters. In addition, the sonic is central to immersion for the spectator and is therefore traceable across related digital art forms as the desire to communicate and transport audiences is a key aim.

Acousmatic Sound

The notion of the acousmatic was researched by Pierre Schaeffer to describe a sound heard independently from its source and without knowledge of its origin. Extracted from its semantic Greek origins for the contextual discourse of musique concrete, it has connotations for the on screen/off screen use of all sound as well as the voice to which it originally referred. (Murray Schafer, 1977; Chion, 1983). Its origins describe the Akousmatikoi, a sect of Pythagorean disciples who would listen to the master speaking from behind a curtain so that the message would not suffer from visual distraction. This emphasis on listening not only had resonance for the development of concrete music and the modernist aspirations of the composers of the twentieth century but also suggests an implication for the original sonification of cinema and the animated form. From that point on from the possibilities of sound’s insertion into the animated film, experiments with synchronous and asynchronous sounds for their own sake, punctuating the visual, making time elastic and without an identifiable source became a source of regeneration for the cartoon film. “Both immersing and altering the graphic narrative along the way” (Klein, 1993, pp. 8-18).
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