

Animating Gender: A Medium Drawn to Transness

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis puts animation studies and transgender studies in conversation with one another, resulting in a mutually beneficial dialogue for both disciplines. Though these fields may seem entirely unrelated, they bear many similarities. Animation studies' central subject, animation, has (somewhat paradoxically) yet to be clearly defined. Karen Redrobe notes, the term animation is "rarely clear," and this indeterminacy is largely attributed to the medium's broad boundaries and numerous forms (255). Notably, trans studies' relation to gender is similarly broad and ambiguous. During a recent seminar, C  el Keegan responded to a question asking for a trans studies definition of gender by saying, "I usually tell my students, 'We don't know what gender is; we just know some things about it'" ("Getting Disciplined: A Conversation"). The similarities do not end there, as both disciplines also share contempt for deterministic logics, complex relations between performance and materiality, and debated links to reality/realism. My research uses these commonalities as a starting point for a dialogue between these fields of study so as to see how their respective insights and scholarship may benefit the other, with a focus primarily on the ways animation may contribute to trans studies' understanding of gender. By employing a methodology similar to that of Thomas Lamarre's *The Anime Machine*, I focus on the tendencies and inclinations of animation to demonstrate how the medium enables astute explorations of gender's mechanisms, thereby yielding valuable insights into how traditional gender roles are maintained *and* how they may be reimagined... or perhaps, redrawn.

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Introduction

How does animation *think* gender? This guiding question for my thesis is largely inspired by Thomas Lamarre's *The Anime Machine*, in which Lamarre explores the ways "anime (or animation) thinks technology" (xxx). My thesis reframes Lamarre's consideration of animation to focus instead on the ways the medium conceptualizes and reexamines the gender construct, giving particular attention to the medium's malleable affordances and fluid, creative portrayals of bodies, as well as the ways the labor behind animation's production parallels the labor of gender construction and maintenance. In Disney's most recent Pixar film (at the time of writing), *Elemental*, Disney introduced its first-ever canonically nonbinary character, a "Water element"—or alternatively, a gender-fluid fluid—named Lake (Monteil). While Lake continues what has become a tradition of Disney proudly claiming representation with characters who barely get any screen time, let alone make a notable contribution to the film's plot or storytelling (Monteil), they nonetheless still exemplify the intersection between animation's elastic aesthetic tendencies and the elasticity of gender as conceptualized by trans studies scholars. And yet, despite Lake's representational benefits, perhaps the other Water elements in *Elemental* may prove more valuable for a trans-oriented reading of the film. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Disney's first gender-fluid character is *literally* a fluid, and while Lake may not get much screen time, the animation of other Water elements in the film continuously embraces an aesthetic of malleability present in animated works since the medium's emergence, as well as numerous animation educational texts.

My thesis will explore animated works, guides, and scholarship to consider how the medium of animation *thinks* gender, ultimately demonstrating that many animated works, regardless of any explicit consideration of gender, offer valuable insights into processes of gender embodiment and gender (re)construction. As I will discuss more thoroughly below, many scholars have considered animated works that narratively feature or address queerness and transness; however, my research grants greater attention to formal analyses of the production practices that inform the construction of animated bodies. Once again calling upon Lamarre's analytical framework in *The Anime Machine*, I am interested in the effects of animation's *animetic*¹ qualities on its representation and conception of gender. Thus, my research considers

¹ Lamarre defines animetism, as well as cinematism, as the properties which the mediums of animation and cinema respectively are inclined to embody. Importantly, Lamarre stresses that these are not deterministic qualities of either medium, but instead are simply indicative of aesthetic *affordances* each medium *offers* its creators, rather than *limitations* the mediums *impose* (9-10).

a wide array of film and television objects that, for the most part, provide only *implicit* commentary on gender's lived reality. In fact, I will ultimately argue that in some instances *more* can be gained from animated works that unintentionally enable insights into processes of gender construction and maintenance, rather than from explicit, representation-oriented depictions of non-traditional forms of gender embodiment.

By focusing on texts that are not explicitly trans, my research follows in the steps of C  el Keegan's article, "Revisitation: A trans phenomenology of the media image," which champions the development of trans media archives composed of media that "unintentionally support transgender embodiment as a possibility in the world" (26). I will discuss Keegan's work at greater length later in this introduction, but at its core Keegan's interpretation marks a path toward a trans analytical lens grounded in trans subjectivities rather than trans representations. Keegan asks, "What happens during that moment when a text that is not about us or designed to permit us any identification 'slips' and offers it to us nonetheless?" ("Revisitation" 28). The question guiding my research lies at the intersection of Keegan and Lamarre's central questions. I wish to determine whether or not animation can similarly *think gender* such that it illuminates and *informs* nonconforming relations to and conceptions of gender, even through works that have no intention of doing so.

As I note above, I believe that the medium of animation is particularly well-suited for explorations of gender thanks to its malleable propensities, and while I would be interested in considering animation's handling of gender on the widest scale possible, the scope of this project does not allow for that. Consequently, most of the animated texts I consider are works from film and television, paired with only a few, brief mentions of video game characters. However, in an effort to understand animation practices on a foundational level, I have also devoted a significant portion of my research to the ways students of animation are taught. I explore this by analyzing educational texts in addition to animated works. I do so with the intention of highlighting the ways animation *production practices* think gender, so as to better align my focus with animation's formal qualities, as opposed to the narratives the medium portrays. Additionally, my research focuses largely on Western animation practices—I fully recognize that this limitation excludes an immense portion of animated works, but I hope that by focusing my research on just a subset of animation practices worldwide I will be able to offer a more thorough analysis of the ways these works think gender, whether they intend to or not. On that note, in order to make the most compelling case possible for the potential of trans readings even within texts that do not intend to offer these readings, most of the texts I analyze come from leading, dominant studios or television networks (e.g., Disney, Nickelodeon, Cartoon

Network). As a result of the wide breadth of target audiences each of these studios aims to serve, the animated works they produce undergo far more pressure to align with widely accepted social constructs (e.g., gender) than those of smaller, independent studios—as Gael Sweeney writes, Disney “virtually invented the term ‘family-friendly’” (130). I hope that by focusing my attention on these recognizable giants within Western animation I will be able to more effectively demonstrate animation’s innate inclination towards thinking gender.

As I explore the intersection between two notable disciplines—animation studies and trans studies—I have a few goals for my thesis worth mentioning as they pertain to my handling of their scholarship which I will explain in further detail in the following paragraphs. They are:

1. Ensure reader accessibility
2. Avoid deterministic logics
3. Leave space for an array of gender identities
4. Value experiential knowledge

Given the wide gap between these two fields of study, my work gives great priority to the accessibility of its language. I recognize that few scholars would consider themselves experts in *both* of these disciplines and so my research strives to avoid excessively technical language whenever possible. This aspiration is further compounded by my desire to reach a *non-academic* audience, trans and nonbinary individuals seeking to form their own archive of media objects that serve a purpose akin to Keegan’s. That is, an archive that can “speak more directly” to one’s “transgender affect” (“Revisitation” 28). I hope that by prioritizing readability, my research will be more readily accessible to both animation studies and trans studies scholars, as well as my trans and nonbinary audiences.

Interestingly, these two disciplines share a core quality: a disdain for deterministic generalities. As a discipline founded upon a desire to combat oppressive labels and homogenizing constructs, it is no surprise that trans studies’ scholarship frequently avoids prescribing strict definitions or definitive classifications. Similarly, animation studies frequently must combat impulses to reduce the entire medium into a single genre, thereby stripping it of all its varied possibilities and forms. Yet, my thesis sets out to propose that the entire medium of animation bears a significant inclination toward representing trans aesthetics and ideals; how could I possibly go about demonstrating this without embracing the deterministic logics each discipline abhors? For the purposes of my research, I ground my conclusions not in a supposed definitive conception of trans-ness or animation, but rather in their mutual *inclination* towards fluidity. Importantly, this is not to say that either *will* embrace or exemplify fluidity, but rather that the underlying principles of each lend themselves to similarly fluid manifestations.

Building on the importance of embracing fluidity, when writing about trans issues, problems that affect a community that has historically been dismissed and erased through homogenization and generalizations, it is imperative that one uses language that is simultaneously clear and respectful of a myriad of identities and beliefs. I have put great effort into maintaining this balance, and this effort is perhaps most frequently present in my use of the subject-phrase “trans and nonbinary.” Within the transgender community, the term “trans” can often have varied implications. In many instances, it can refer to all gender non-conforming individuals who do not identify as cisgender (i.e., do not identify as their assigned gender at birth). In *Transgender Studies Quarterly’s* first issue, Avery Tompkins writes that the term transgender has “been used since the early 1990s as an umbrella term to cover the widest possible range of gender variation” (27). However, there are also instances where “trans” is used as an abbreviation of trans-binary, meaning those who both do not identify as cisgender *and* specifically identify as one of the two genders in the gender binary (male or female) (Tompkins 27). Thus, in an effort to avoid confusion, my writing uses the phrase “trans and nonbinary” to account for all gender non-conforming individuals. I chose this phrasing over simply writing “gender non-comforming individuals” in order to preserve the distinction between those for whom the gender binary remains a very real part of their experiences and subjectivities, and those who instead seek to exist outside of the binary entirely.² At this time I would also like to note that I by no means claim to be a spokesperson for these distinctions, nor do I intend to propose that these definitions or delineations speak for the entire transgender community. I would like to echo Leslie Feinberg’s 1992 pamphlet, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, in which she provides a disclaimer that “[t]he language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes—a wonderful problem” (6). Similarly, I have done my best to use the labels and terminology championed by the transgender community and movement, particularly within the United States and Canada, but as these collectives rapidly expand, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to always use language that pleases everyone. I hope that my research has treated all gender identities and beliefs with the utmost respect.

Lastly, in my handling of gender, I faced several obstacles that greatly informed my approach to the accepted “knowledge” of trans studies and gender studies, leading me to embrace an at times more ambiguous conceptualization of gender as well as trans and

² Later I will discuss at greater length trans studies discourses regarding the ways gender is and is not “real” (see, for example, Stryker’s, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” and Keegan’s article, “Getting Disciplined: What’s Trans* About Queer Studies Now?”), but for the moment it is just important to preserve the distinction between trans-binary and nonbinary individuals.

nonbinary ideations. In her article, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” Susan Stryker, one of the most prolific early trans studies scholars, writes that “experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other, supposedly more ‘objective’ forms of knowledge, and is in fact necessary” (12). Trans studies makes consistent efforts to include non-conventional subjectivities in its processes of knowledge formation. As a result, throughout my research, I have tried to embrace this value by citing not only notable trans scholars but also the lived experiences of trans and nonbinary individuals more widely.

Realism and Reality

Here I would like to note the first of many similarities between discourses surrounding animation and those surrounding gender: a complex, controversial, and, at times, paradoxical relation to realism. Firstly, with regard to animation, scholars of both animation studies and media studies more broadly have continuously debated the medium of animation’s relation to realism. Similarly, within trans studies, scholars have put forth many views regarding whether or not (or to what extent) gender is “real.” This section will highlight just a small sample of the vast and dynamic scholarship surrounding these debates with the intention of providing a brief overview of current discourses *and* establishing my own approach to animation and gender’s ties to realism/reality.

As Marc Steinberg notes in his chapter, “Realism in the Animation Media Environment: Animation Theory from Japan,” from Karen Redrobe’s book *Animating Film Theory*, the term realism is “much more closely associated with film than with animation” (Steinberg 287). Film studies has long been occupied with discussions regarding the medium’s capabilities of “capturing” reality, with some of the most notable examples being André Bazin’s, *what is cinema?*, Dudley Andrew’s, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and Its Charge*, and Lev Manovich’s, *The Language of New Media*. These considerations of realism stem from film’s kinship with photography, which has led the debate to largely be centered around the question: How does film *not* resemble or recreate reality? For animation,³ however, discussions of realism primarily are concerned with the converse of this rhetorical question: How *does* animation resemble or recreate reality? Paul Wells proposes that a defining practice of animation is the

³ Even the limits of the term “animation” are widely debated. In “The Worries of the World(s)” Karen Redrobe cites several proposed definitions of the medium from notable scholars such as Suzanne Buchan, Alan Cholodenko, Lev Manovich, and Tom Gunning (Redrobe 254). For the purposes of my research, I employ an understanding of animation aligned with Gunning’s definition: “moving images that have been artificially made to move, rather than movement automatically captured through continuous-motion picture photography” (Gunning 40).

way “it prioritises its capacity to *resist* ‘realism’ as a mode of representation” (Wells 25). And yet, Wells also notes the many examples of animators (and animation studios) striving to recreate realism—namely Disney with its films like *Bambi*, which Wells describes as embracing the aesthetic of “hyper-realism,” a term they borrow from Umberto Eco (Wells 25). Consequently, Wells characterizes animation as a medium that at once bears the potential to resist representational realism *and* has exhibited a tendency to embrace realism aesthetics.

Even still, Steinberg points to two *more* conceptions of realism within animation—“second-order realism” and “perceptual realism” (Steinberg 288)—that further complicate the medium’s relationship to realism aesthetics. For Steinberg, these terms highlight the tricky nature of realism representations of the supposedly “real-world” referents of animation. They write that Stephen Prince’s term, perceptual realism, is concerned with the ways “nonindexical, nonphotographic images could still seem to us to be *perceptually real*” (Steinberg 288; emphasis added). Andrew Darley’s term, second-order realism, builds on this concept to also account for animation’s occasional adoption of aesthetics that emulate photography’s processes and artifacts (e.g., lens flare, perspectival depth, and motion blur) (Steinberg 288). Ultimately, both of these understandings of animation’s relation to realism demonstrate that animation’s attempts at producing realism are still relegated to a second-order or perceptual realism, even when animation succeeds in emulating reality to the point of indistinguishability from live-action moving images.⁴

Nevertheless, while the referents animation aims to “reproduce” may not be real, Donald Crafton contends that images of animation still possess an element of reality. They propose that while animated subjects are not, of course, “real” in a corporeal sense, the ways in which animated characters and environments intersect with our understanding of the world we inhabit—as well as the times and spaces we use to view these animations—should not be overlooked (Crafton 72-73). Compounding this intersection with reality, it is important to note that animation production techniques, both traditional and contemporary, frequently have physical components. Cel animation often utilizes a physical sliding of layers horizontally and vertically to create a sense of movement, stop motion relies heavily on physical objects or sculptures as its primary subjects, and even some digital animation techniques include sculptures that are scanned into digital environments as a starting point for digital characters or objects. Finally, even computers themselves are powered by material processes such as energy consumption *and* human input. Just as animation’s approach to realism is inherently limited, it

⁴ CGI has arguably long escaped the uncanny valley and animation’s use in images such as deep-fakes illustrates the impressive extent of its capabilities to manipulate so-called reality (or at least live-action images of reality).

also is inherently linked to reality, both through the contexts of its screenings and the materials of its production.

Clearly, the nature of animation's relation to realism (or lack thereof) is, at the very least, complicated. Instead of attempting to resolve this complexity or propose a simple alternative, my research finds value in animation's seemingly paradoxical relation to realism. As I will momentarily discuss at greater length, trans studies has adopted a comparably complex understanding of gender's relation to reality. I believe that through animation's navigation of its ambivalent relation to realism, the medium offers valuable tools to similarly navigate gender's ties to reality in a manner that enables animation to more effectively think gender.

Moving on to trans studies' discussions regarding gender's ties to reality, these debates are based less in trans studies scholarship specifically, and more in broader discourses regarding trans studies' place amongst its two nearest disciplines, feminist studies and queer studies. Judith Butler notes at the beginning of the first chapter of their foundational book, *Gender Trouble*, "For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women" (3). Here Butler points to a longstanding question for feminist studies: What is a woman? The first chapter of their book explores in great depth what does and does not constitute the category of women, but ultimately concludes that "gender proves to be performative" (*Gender Trouble* 33). This characterization of gender as performance rather than fact has since become a central touchstone for queer studies' conception of gender but has also prompted criticism from trans individuals and scholars.

Stryker notes that some critics of this characterization of gender take issue with Butler's performance-centered definition, arguing that it implies that gender is not real. Stryker writes, "[Butler] is criticized, somewhat misguidedly, for supposedly believing that gender can be changed or rescripted at will, put on or taken off like a costume, according to one's pleasure or whim" ("*(De)Subjugated Knowledges*" 10). Stryker goes on to explain that a conception of gender that is solely grounded in a performative choice undermines the felt realities of many transgender individuals for whom their gender identity is "ontologically inescapable and inalienable" ("*(De)Subjugated Knowledges*" 10). Reflecting on the resulting dialogue between trans studies and queer studies, Keegan notes that trans studies must assume a position of contradiction in relation to both fields of study. In response to feminist studies' "foundational schema of sexual subordination (M > F)," trans studies must insist that gender is "*not real like that*" ("*Getting Disciplined*" 387). Conversely, trans studies must also respond to queer studies' persistent attempts to completely deconstruct gender by insisting that "gender is *real like this*" ("*Getting Disciplined*" 387). Thus, Keegan's articulation of trans studies' difficult position

amongst feminist and queer studies renders apparent the similarities between trans studies' and animation studies' approach to realness and realism, respectively.

Both animation studies and trans studies share a complicated relationship with reality. The two disciplines are simultaneously aware that their subjects—animation and gender respectively—are at once grounded in and inextricably linked to the real, yet also profoundly influenced by artifice and performance. Through this shared, paradoxical relation to reality, the two fields are uniquely poised to aid one another. My research utilizes this commonality to explore the ways animation's simultaneous realism and artifice can prompt animated works to think gender by highlighting gender's complex nature, rendering it prime for closer inspection.

Trans Media Studies

At this point, there are two primary discourses within media studies scholarship that are relevant to my research on trans animation: trans (and gender non-conforming) readings of (1) the narrative properties of animated texts specifically, and (2) the formal properties of moving images and digital images on a broad scale.

Most scholarship on non-normative representations of gender in animation has focused on queer or trans-coded narratives over the formal properties of animation. Moreover, often when scholars make an effort to consider the *medium* of animation, the narratives of the texts they analyze ultimately play a central role in their argument. In “‘What Do You Want Me to Do? Dress in Drag and Do the Hula?’ Timon and Pumbaa’s Alternative Lifestyle Dilemma in *The Lion King*,” Gael Sweeney examines the ways *The Lion King* characters Timon and Pumbaa are coded as queer. As Sweeney’s title suggests, a central piece of evidence they cite is Timon’s (recurring) drag performances. Similar to Sweeney’s writing, in “‘Gunter’s a Woman?!’— Doing and Undoing Gender in Cartoon Network’s *Adventure Time*,” Emma Jane uses a narrative focus paired with a consideration of representational politics as they examine the television series *Adventure Time*, a Cartoon Network show, revealing the various ways the series employs more positive representations of a diverse set of gender identities. However, in each scholar’s analysis, they grant animation’s formal traits little to no attention.

Jake Pitre’s writing on *Steven Universe* acknowledges animation’s formal connections to fluid conceptions of gender and sexuality, but they do not offer a truly in-depth analysis of this similarity. In their piece, “Queer Transformation, Contested Authorship, and Fluid Fandom,” they note that animation is “unfixed and endlessly malleable” (23) and even go so far as to write, “the fluidity of the cartoon as a medium is the perfect territory for exploring the fluidity of identity,

sexuality, and gender” (24). Additionally, they consider the role of “fusions” in the series, but their analysis is primarily focused on the narrative role of fusions, rather than the formal qualities they embody. Like Pitre, Gwendolyn Limbach’s article, “‘You the Man, Well, Sorta’: Gender Binaries in *Mulan*,” begins to approach a formal consideration of animation’s handling of gender, but ultimately refrains from going beyond a narrative analysis of Disney’s *Mulan*. Their writing provides an excellent analysis of the role of gender in Disney’s *Mulan* film by closely critiquing the various ways in which Mulan’s supposedly rebellious acts actually serve to reinforce the gender binary by implying that gender is inherently sex-based. When breaking down the film’s opening number, “Honor to Us All,” Limbach describes the various modifications forced upon Mulan, and in doing so wonderfully highlights the ways the narrative illustrates the constructed nature of gender. However, I would add that the characteristics are not only fabricated on a narrative level but also on a formal level.

Moving now toward texts that begin to consider formal traits of animation handling of gender, as well as sexuality, the journal *Synoptique*’s issue, *Animating LGBTQ+ Representations: Queering the Production of Movement*, outlines a path forward for queer animation studies⁵ that places greater focus on the formal propensities of the medium. In their introduction, Kevin Cooley, Edmond “Edo” Ernest dit Alban, and Jacqueline Ristola propose that “queerness can be found not just at the level of narrative, but in the very production of animated images themselves” (2). However, despite these opening remarks, the articles within the issue never truly dive into the potential for animation’s ties to queerness (or transness) on a formal level.

Beyond this journal issue, two of the editors, Jacqueline Ristola and Kevin Cooley, also wrote analyses of *Steven Universe* for the book, *Representation in Steven Universe*. Ristola’s chapter, “Globalizing Fandoms: Envisioning Queer Futures from Kunihiko Ikuhara to Rebecca Sugar,” explores anime director Kunihiko Ikuhara’s influence on *Steven Universe*, and in doing so calls upon Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* to explore how the animated bodies in *Steven Universe* envision queer futures outside of traditional gender embodiments. Ristola writes, “The Gems’ power [in *Steven Universe*] to fundamentally change the boundaries of the physical body envisions a new queer future where bodies have the full freedom to exist however they want” (Ristola 100). In his essay, “Drawing Queerness Forward: Fusion, Futurity, and *Steven*

⁵ While there are undoubtedly many points of tension between queer studies and trans studies, both historically and ideologically (see Stryker’s chapter, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies”), there are still many similarities between the two disciplines. Moreover, given trans studies’ relative newness (the discipline’s origin is typically dated around the late 1980s), much scholarship relevant for trans studies can still be found within disciplines denoted as “queer” rather than “trans.”

Universe,” Cooley also considers the power of the Gems in *Steven Universe*, though his analysis gives greater attention to animation’s formal qualities as it explores the malleability of animated bodies exhibited during the show’s “fusions.” His argument ties in animation studies as well as queer theory, citing Judith Butler, José Esteban Muñoz, and Lee Edelman to establish a working definition of “queer futures” (47). Cooley defines this concept as queer discourse’s focus that is “perpetually on the horizon” (47). Tying this notion of a “queer future” to animation’s inherent malleability, Cooley lays out his central argument as follows:

In this essay, I contend that the cartooned body is able to materialize what we might call a queer future in that: (1) it is always in flux, (2) it only masquerades as having a grounding in material reality, (3) it is an abstract and arbitrary thing with only a fuzzy resemblance (if that) to that which it seems to depict, and (4) its cartoonish re-rendering of the real mirrors the socially constructed nature of all bodies and all sexual orientations. (46)

Here, similar to the introduction to the *Synoptique* issue on queer representations in animation, Cooley proposes an outline that would closely consider the formal traits of animation that lend it to queer analysis. Cooley’s emphasis on the animated body’s inherent malleability highlights its relevance for queer (and trans) themes, but contrary to this astute observation, Cooley’s analysis still primarily cites evidence grounded within the text’s narratives.

Ultimately, then, the current discourse regarding trans themes in animation predominantly features scholarship grounded in the texts’ narratives rather than their formal qualities. My research strives to fill this gap, or at least begin to explore it. As mentioned above, several scholars have noted animation’s formal similarities to non-normative gender identities. Do these qualities of animation yield animetic propensities towards transness? If so, how do these tendencies inform trans understandings of gender? To begin to consider these questions, I now turn to the second relevant discourse: trans media scholarship.

Many trans media scholars—as well as trans studies scholars more broadly—have drawn parallels between the lived experiences of trans people and the formal qualities of moving and digital images. Starting with traditional, analog filmmaking practices, Keegan notes that the practice of cutting and reassembling film reels is analogous in ways to the transexual surgical practices of the late 1960s (*Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 71). Additionally, in her essay, “Transsexuality: The Postmodern Body And/As Technology,” Stryker compares the transsexual body and the camera, noting that both can serve as critical tools for constructing alternative understandings of time, space, and—most importantly—embodiment. She writes that “just as the camera offers a means for externalizing and examining a particular way of constructing time

and space, the transsexual body—in the process of its transition from one sex to another—renders visible the culturally specific mechanisms of achieving gendered embodiment” (“Transsexuality” 592). Keegan also argues that the nearly worldwide transition from analog imaging to digital imaging serves as a powerful analogy for the evolution of the term “transgender,” noting that the shift better “prioritizes ideation over preexisting material forms,” a core tenet of trans and nonbinary beliefs today (*Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 28).

For the purpose of my research, these production parallels to the history of trans identities and beliefs can also be applied to histories of animation. Before the advent of digital animation, analog animation practices *also* included cutting and reassembling in the editing room. Additionally, traditional filmmaking practices certainly embody the qualities Stryker calls upon, but animation arguably champions these same qualities in a far more pronounced manner. In live-action filmmaking, actors typically recreate gender constructs and norms (as well as other societal constructs) through their performance and costuming, but in the case of animation, it would be more accurate to say that animators *reconstruct* gender as the characters and performances they portray must be built far more deliberately. Lastly, I would argue that animation, even during its analog stage, ultimately serves as a more effective embodiment of the primacy of ideation over “preexisting material forms” (*Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 28). There is certainly an argument to be made for the ways digital images yield this aesthetic (and Keegan’s argument is a compelling one!), but animation has always possessed this aesthetic quality. The traditional art of cel animation and the modern production of animation both parallel trans and nonbinary emphases on the power of ideation over material limitations by enabling creative representational liberties far more than live-action filmmaking does.

My research explores the intersection of these two discourses. As I stated earlier, many scholars have noted animation’s frequent *narrative* considerations of queerness and gender, but few have considered this connection through a formal lens. Conversely, trans media studies has found value in filmic practices as well as theories of the digital image, but once again has not yet applied these practices and theories to animation—a medium that, in light of my discussions of realism above and as I explore more fully in my subsequent chapters, is arguably even better suited for comparisons to trans histories and experiences. I believe that by bringing together these two discourses both animation studies and trans studies will greatly benefit. A more thorough understanding of the inherent kinship between these two disciplines has great potential to enable the two fields of study to share findings and thereby think gender and perhaps even think animation.

Structure

In the following three chapters, I will set out to provide an exploration of the ways animation approaches and conceptualizes gender on a formal level. My writing is divided into three chapters with the following foci: the influences of animation production's affordances and philosophies on its portrayal of gender in Chapter 1; the potential to reinforce *and* distort the gender binary through animation's frequent employment of repetition and stylization in Chapter 2; and the capacity to embrace animation's unique capabilities to undermine the gender binary's oppressive limitations in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1 offers a thorough engagement with animation theory in a broad manner, so as to form the foundation for a dialogue between animation studies and trans studies that I will further explore in the following chapters. Throughout Chapter 1, I consider many examples of animated texts and animation texts, in that I analyze both completed works of animation as well as guidebooks and educational materials regarding the production of animation. This chapter serves to demonstrate the theoretical alignment between the core principles of animation and non-conventional gender identities, and as a result, it more frequently offers a breadth of brief examples rather than a more selective sampling of meticulously examined examples. Here I consider the similarities between trans studies and animation's complicated relations to established norms and conventions. Both trans studies and animation offer greater liberties and affordances than their conventional counterparts (the gender binary and live-action film practices, respectively), similarly championing expressionist freedoms and imaginative possibilities. On the other hand, both practices are also in some ways bound to these same counterparts. Trans studies does *not* advocate for the destruction of gender, but rather of the systemic power it wields, and while animation can, and frequently does, embrace its apparent artificiality, its real-world referents still preserve at least some degree of realism. This comparably ambivalent relation to convention on a theoretical level situates trans studies and animation in parallel to one another, offering an opportunity to put the two practices in conversation with one another. Chapter 1 goes to great lengths to thoroughly establish this theoretical dialogue so as to yield a strong foundation for the textual and formal analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters.

In my second chapter, I apply the theoretical frameworks I define in Chapter 1 to demonstrate the ways even stereotypical, reductive depictions of gender within animation still offer valuable insight into the mechanisms behind gender's construction and maintenance. Whereas in other chapters I cite animated works from a variety of studios and artists, in Chapter

2 I focus my attention on those produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar. Disney's monumental target audience and historical focus on traditional family values have resulted in a filmography with a strong tendency to avoid unconventional themes or messaging, especially regarding gender. The Disney Princess archetype is perhaps one of the most frequently cited examples of popular media perpetuating archaic conceptions of femininity, and yet, I believe that even these reductive portrayals of gender roles yield valuable contributions to discussions of gender, largely owing to the ways animation production practices affected the texts produced. The production processes behind the creation of Disney princesses (as well as other gendered characters) closely parallel the real-world labor behind the social productions and reproductions of gender. On its own, this observation may be interesting to some but is not particularly notable. However, we can go one step further and ask ourselves: If animation can reproduce conventional conceptions of gender, does it not also have the power to upset the gender binary's supposed naturalness? Can animation's methods of gender construction offer a blueprint for trans and nonbinary individuals to (re)construct their own gender identities? Chapter 2 only begins to answer these questions, turning to characters like WALL-E (in the film of the same title), Carl and Eleanor (*Up!*), and Lightning McQueen (*Cars*) to determine if even traditional animations of gender can enable animation to *re*-think gender by distorting its boundaries, and consequently further the dialogue between animation and trans studies as well.

Finally, Chapter 3 seeks to provide a more thorough exploration of the questions Chapter 2 raises. Whereas Chapter 2's animated works serve to problematize the gender binary's assumptions regarding anatomy's relation to gender, Chapter 3 considers characters like *Adventure Time*'s Lumpy Space Princess (LSP) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s Shinji to demonstrate ways animation can embrace a complete indifference to and/or deliberate rejection of the gender binary's prescriptions. *Adventure Time* portrays LSP as an amorphous cloud who is unequivocally treated as a girl, and in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, a boy's body unravels and morphs beyond recognition, and yet his identity as *Shinji* manages to remain constant. As a result, these texts upend the material determinism that the gender binary upholds and instead embrace an understanding of gender that prioritizes the individual rather than the anatomical. This chapter also returns to both trans studies and animation's complex relations to conventionality, as explored in Chapter 1. Lumpy Space Princess presents a highly unconventional gender performance that is distinctly separate from most gender performances in the real world, and yet all the other characters in *Adventure Time* treat her as though her identity and gender are entirely normal (i.e., conventional). On the other hand, in the sequence of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* which I analyze, Shinji's consciousness is separated from his body

as his material form morphs from one shape to another. The result is a sequence that simultaneously highlights the constructed, artificial nature of his body while affirming the primacy and realness of his mind. By closely considering the implications of these two imaginative animated texts, I illustrate the powerful capabilities animation possesses to think gender and posit alternate methods of embodying gender.

As a medium with a long history of targeting younger audiences, the role of gender within animation possesses a significant potential to profoundly influence how viewers understand their own gender identity, as well as gender roles more broadly. Especially during a time when censorship efforts are rampant—particularly regarding unconventional gender embodiments for children’s programming—an exploration of animation’s potential to serve as a resource for its impressionable audiences in their gender journeys is crucial. My research dives into this possibility with great optimism as I search for ways animation studies scholars can reframe our conception of gender’s animation. Can we employ animation’s imaginative tendencies to offer viewers the very same freedom animators enjoy; that is, the freedom to construct or alter their appearances and bodies however they please? If we allow animation to truly *think gender*, what might we learn about how we think gender?

Chapter 1

In the highly gendered world in which we live, the gender construct can often appear to be a pervasive and unavoidable force, thoroughly naturalized through a constant stream of ingrained performances and practices we reenact daily. Here is where animation's imaginative potential lies. In Richard Williams's foundational and much-used animation guide, he proposes that through animation, "we can invent what doesn't take place in the real world" (145). Embracing Williams's faith in animation's inventive potential, this chapter will examine the formal qualities of animation that arise through its production, illustrating how these qualities enable fluid representations in which trans and nonbinary readings emerge that articulate and emphasize the parallels between the fluidity of animation and the fluidity of gender. Inventing what doesn't take place in the real world can—given the importance of representation for our understanding of the world—*transform* the real world. While some animated objects more strongly embody trans and nonbinary ideals than others, the core of my research is concerned with the importance of *ideation* for animation's construction as well as ideation's importance for trans and nonbinary constructions of gender. As Williams's quote emphasizes, animation possesses an innate potential for invention—creation inspired by ideation such that an animator's ideas inform the materiality of the works they produce. The traditional gender binary in its most fundamental form proposes that the materiality of an individual (i.e., their anatomy) informs their presentation and gender performance. Trans and nonbinary philosophies diverge from this (frequently taken-for-granted) understanding of gender first and foremost in their rejection of this logic of causality; instead, they propose that an individual's sense of self, their ideation, should inform the manifestation of their materiality. Thus, through this central tenet, I form the basis for the many connections I draw between animation and trans and nonbinary ideals.

In addition to Williams's articulations of animation's affordance for animators, other animation educators and scholars have identified the many ways the medium of animation endows its creators with significant freedoms regarding the ways they represent, recreate, and reimagine the world in which we live.¹ While not all animators choose to embrace the fluidity animation enables fully, the medium's mutability grants it a propensity to move toward

¹ For animation educators, see Richard Williams's *The Animator's Survival Kit* and other animation guides. For animation scholars, see Karen Redrobe's "The Worries of the World(s)" and Jake Pitre's "Queer Transformation, Contested Authorship, and Fluid Fandom."

boundary-breaking representations originating with the production phase. To back these claims, I will begin by considering discourses regarding how audiences, creators, educators, and scholars conceptualize animation to identify common foundational understandings of how animation's production practices paradoxically yield a simultaneous inclination toward a liberation from realism aesthetics *and* an inseparable connection to a sensation of reality. This paradoxical relation wherein animation is both free from the constraints of realism and bound by them illustrates how the medium of animation often parallels trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender that emphasize both gender's constructed qualities and its lived experiences (even in works that ostensibly reinforce the gender binary, intentionally or otherwise). I will then shift my focus to the malleability and mutability animation affords to the bodies it represents in order to demonstrate the ways animation's innate fluidity and blurring of otherwise rigid boundaries—enabled by the methods and practices of its production—promotes trans and nonbinary readings that embrace the fluidity of gender presentation and identity. I will conclude this chapter by exploring both the possible benefits and potential pitfalls of gender's animation, giving much needed attention to the ways animation can reinforce harmful stereotypes. Finally, the theoretical foundation from this chapter will serve as the foundation for Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2 I will apply the groundwork laid in this chapter to consider animated works that seem to support or reinforce the gender binary. Then, in my third chapter, I will apply a similar approach, but will instead focus on works that take advantage of animation's affordances to embrace fluid understandings of gender and gender embodiment that challenge the gender binary and its prescriptions.

Animation Thinks Gender

In their introduction to *Synoptique's* "Animating LGBTQ+ Representations" issue, Cooley, Ernest dit Alban, and Ristola emphasize the importance of looking beyond the narrative of animated texts to find queer potentials. They instead propose that queerness can be found even in "the very production of animated images themselves" (2). I will pursue this line of thinking in a manner that parallels Thomas Lamarre's analysis of animation in *The Anime Machine*. Lamarre looks extensively at how "anime (or animation) thinks technology" (xxx) while taking great care to avoid falling into the trap of technological determinism. Lamarre circumvents this pitfall mainly by emphasizing the "distinctively animetic" effects animetic machines² are inclined to produce

² In Lamarre's methodology defense they cite Guattari's "machine" to characterize animation not as "symptomatic of the modern or postmodern technological condition" (xxxi), but instead as "a process that

(xxxi). Importantly, Lamarre's consideration of animetism and cinematism refuses to restrict either practice to a single medium (despite the term seemingly implying a medium alignment). Lamarre defines cinematism as the use of "mobile apparatuses of perception" to grant audiences a sense of controlling the world and to embrace a "ballistic logic" (i.e., one aligned with a bullet's perspective) in a manner that collapses any distance between subject and viewer (5). Conversely, Lamarre defines animetism as a perceptual logic less concerned with a ballistic perspective, and more focused on "the effects of speed laterally" such that the image can be separated into distinct planes (6). In sum, cinematism implies movement into depth while animetism implies lateral movement and a separation of planes into layers.

Instead of applying these visual logics deterministically, Lamarre proposes that the qualities of animetism and cinematism are "potential tendencies" for both animated and photographic moving images (9-10). While animation may not naturally *be* animetic, the material process behind its production imbues the medium with an innate *tendency* to produce animetic qualities that prompt Lamarre's readings of animation's commentaries on technical value, which they explore in their book.³ Lamarre attributes this tendency to the "material limits" of the animetic machine (xxxi), but I would contend that the machine also brings with it material *opportunities*. These qualities and effects of the animetic machine prompt Lamarre to propose that anime can be understood as a medium "thinking through technical value" (xxxii).

My analysis will adopt a very similar approach to animation practices, diverging primarily in a shifted focus from the ways animation "thinks" technology to the ways animation "thinks" gender. Through a thorough consideration of animation production, we can use Lamarre's framework to think of animation and animated texts not as merely a *symptom of gender*, but rather as a medium particularly well suited to *think* gender.

Imagination and Artifice

The medium of animation simultaneously exhibits propensities for portraying imaginative possibilities *and* for presenting unique perspectives of its real-world referents. These seemingly

defies neat divisions and hierarchies" (xxxi-xxxii). They go on to describe this machine as folding out into an ensemble of mechanisms, including humans, resulting in a system that denies the animator full mastery over the machine. Instead, the machine and human, in Lamarre's words, "must learn to work with this center of indetermination" (xxxiii). As a result, while the animator will likely leave their own unique mark on their work, as proposed by auteur theory, they also will inevitably be "making visible and palpable the force of the moving image as channeled and orientated via the animetic machine" (xxxiii).

³ Lamarre uses the term "animetic machine" to refer to the entire ensemble behind anime's production (Lamarre xxxiii), but as my research considers animation more broadly, I will instead use the term "animation machine" to refer to a similar apparatus.

contradictory qualities of animation are central for my reading of the medium and the texts it produces as they closely parallel the (at times) contradictory experiences and beliefs of trans and nonbinary individuals for whom gender is both a perceived construct and an undeniably real experience. How can gender be both real and constructed? Animation's relation to materiality and production processes helps answer these questions. I will more closely consider the effects of these paradoxical aspects in later sections, but first I will consider each aspect of animation individually to better understand how the medium's various potentials influence its texts.

Through animation, worlds can literally (albeit, at times virtually) be constructed from the ground up. Traditional cel animation frequently utilized a stacking of layers to yield a compelling environment within which the action of the film could take place. Similarly, in the current age of digital animation from studios like Pixar and DreamWorks, software enables animators to develop worlds within which they simulate the filmmaking process in a manner that parallels the same processes for live-action filmmaking (as implied by the common use of industry jargon like "virtual cameras"). The constructed nature of these environments is a crucial difference from live-action cinema, which, even when relying heavily on constructed elements (e.g., sets, special effects, etc.), would arguably more accurately be described as manipulated rather than constructed. I make this distinction not to dismiss the long history of manipulated environments within cinematic practices (especially those which were the industry standard at the height of the studio system), but rather to note that even those sets had a physical quality to their indexical relationship, as opposed to animation's virtual, more intangible relationship to its real-world referent. As one might expect, animation's world-building potential has notable effects on production practices.

These world-building effects, however, also bear a powerful capability to reimagine, or *rebuild* our world. It would be misleading to suggest that animation's constructed nature has led the medium to altogether avoid replicating the world in which we live because, for much of the medium's history, animation has more frequently aimed to emulate and/or resemble the real world, as opposed to striving to produce highly detailed reproductions of reality. Crafton, in their description of what they coin the "Tooniverse," contends that while live-action films frequently aim to totally immerse their audiences in the world of their film, prior to the advent of computer animation, "animators did not attempt to make simulacra of live movies" (2). Even in animated works that do not immediately seem to be forging their own realities, there exists a greater distance between the animated worlds we see on screen and those depicted in live-action films. This distance can be understood as a way animation diverges from previous considerations of

the innate indexicality of film to its subjects. Whereas the film theory in the tradition of André Bazin emphasizes film's seemingly direct, physical relation to its subject, animation is free from this line of thinking as every representation within animation must first be filtered through the animation machine (see, for example, Bazin, *what is cinema?* ch.1). Moreover, this greater indexical distance can also be found in live-action films that employ animated effects through Computer Generated Imagery (CGI), or any other animation technique. In "Animation's Petrified Unrest," Esther Leslie notes the pervasiveness of CGI in many forms of media, including live-action works, contending that its incorporation is largely used to "conjure dreamt reality" (91). In short, the production of animation clearly has a unique reality-forging ability that grants the medium the power to imagine new possibilities and share these possibilities with audiences.

Trans studies frequently strives for similar pursuits, and from the discipline's inception—which is often attributed to Sandy Stone's 1987 essay, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," though I recognize that origins for contested fields like trans studies are inherently ambiguous—it has sought space to exist and think freely from restrictive, oppressive forces, turning to the possibility of constructing discursive spaces outside of the traditional gender binary. In Stone's foundational essay, she contends that to assume a position "within the traditional gender frame is to become complicit in the discourse that one wishes to deconstruct" (12). As an alternative to this complacency, Stone suggests that her fellow "transsexuals" reclaim and redirect the violence inscribed on their bodies to "turn it into a reconstructive force" (12). Through this proposed perspective-shift, Stone articulates a core focus of trans studies: a continual drive to employ trans perspectives as constructive forces in developing and exploring unrealized possibilities, or alternatively, new realities. The introduction of the *Trans Studies Quarterly's* first issue from 2014 further exemplifies trans studies' continued interest in the exploration of imaginative possibilities. There, Stryker and Paisley Currah note the discipline's forward-thinking potential, writing that trans studies is not only concerned with contemporary power dynamics and gendered issues, but also "is engaged with all manner of unexpected becomings, oriented toward a future that, by definition, we can anticipate only imperfectly and never fully grasp" (9). Through this interest in unrealized possibilities, trans studies, in my view, is aligned with animation's ability to forge and consider new realities—or as Leslie articulates, to "conjure dreamt reality" (91)—thereby allowing for imaginative approaches to thinking gender and upending the gender binary.

Through the medium's creative approach to realism, animation consistently insists upon its ability to reconfigure our perception of the world, frequently featuring interplay with the laws

of reality that range from the comical to the surreal. Whether those interactions take the form of anvils falling onto characters' heads, or bodies suddenly merging into abstract amalgamations of lines and shapes without warning, animation's aesthetic tendencies often serve to welcome imaginative wonder into the worlds the medium creates and presents. As Manovich notes, animation has a prominent tendency to foreground "its artificial character, openly admitting that its images are mere representations" (298). Cooley further expands on the artificiality of animation, specifically in the context of cartoons, contending that animations "flaunt their artificiality, never permitting us to forget about the illusion intrinsic to their consumption" (47). In this regard, animation's seeming self-awareness closely coincides with that of trans and nonbinary individuals. Just as the medium of animation recognizes its own artificiality, trans and nonbinary people are similarly aware of gender's constructed, performative nature. Importantly, however, both animation as well as trans and nonbinary people are simultaneously conscious of the very *real* effects of their performance as well. In later sections of this chapter, I will more closely consider the effects of this paradoxical relation to reality—that is, that animation and gender are simultaneously fabricated and real—but for now let us just acknowledge that both animation and gender possess artificial and/or constructed qualities, and yet their material grounding and real-world consequences prevent either animation or gender from being written off as entirely imagined.⁴

Audience Expectations and Experiences

The freedom animators wield during the production phase bears a cyclical relation to audience expectations for the medium. Animation's innumerable possibilities have conditioned audiences to accept unconventional texts more readily. Simultaneously, animation's freedom is augmented by audiences' greater willingness to suspend their disbelief, which directly informs and enables the medium's production. Compared to live-action texts, animation is met with far less rigid expectations regarding its grounding in the material world or adherence to aesthetics of realism, which grants the medium valuable freedoms in its representations of real-world structures and systems. In her interview with Keegan, Lana Wachowski describes live-action

⁴ Extending my consideration of animation's artificiality, I would briefly like to acknowledge the modern usage of CGI in many live-action films (as well as a few misleadingly labeled "live-action" films like the 2019 version of *The Lion King*). Bearing these instances in mind, it would be more accurate to consider the spectrum of artificiality within which most, if not all, animation exists. Most forms of animation will, to a degree, be aware of their artificiality, though some forms (e.g., CGI) will go to greater lengths to obscure it than others. For the few exceptions that exist, I return to Lamarre's emphasis on an understanding of animation that considers its "potential tendencies" rather than any deterministic qualities (9-10).

cinema's limitations regarding audience expectations, lamenting that if "an audience could be as open when they walked into a movie theater as when they walk into a museum or an art gallery, I think I would love the process of making movies much more" (Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 144). While Wachowski's complaint is certainly not indicative of *all* live-action works, the creative limitations that arise from the audience expectations she describes cannot be overlooked when considering the impacts of viewing practices on production practices. Whereas live-action cinema must constantly obey (or at least consider) the conformity of realism, audiences grant animation far greater freedoms in its representations of real-life referents. However, even this freedom has its limits, which I will address in greater detail later in this chapter.

Animation's fewer limitations regarding realism especially benefit the medium's more direct reflections on gender. While many animated works reproduce traditional understandings of gender, other less conventional texts take advantage of animation's freedoms to offer unique depictions of gender embodiment—some examples include *Adventure Time* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which I will discuss at greater length in my third chapter. These texts and others like them also show how audience expectations enable animation to think gender by offering a space for imagined possibilities to be welcomed into reality. In doing so, animation privileges ideation over materiality. Importantly, animation does not erase or forgo materiality, but rather offers ideation greater agency, granting ideas visual and aural representations for audiences. Applying this privileging of ideation to gender further illustrates how trans and nonbinary philosophies enable individuals to define their own realities based on their conceptions of themselves, thereby dethroning materiality's reign over performance and presentation, as proposed by traditional conceptions of gender. Just as trans and nonbinary ideals champion an individual's right for their ideation to inform their presentation and materiality, the ideation behind animation directly informs the materiality of its representation.

Not only can animation push representational boundaries beyond their limits and prompt viewers to imagine alternative understandings of the world but it also can put forth imaginations of worlds that have yet to exist. In "The Worries of the World(s)," Karen Redrobe describes animators as having the power to: "suck viewers into alternative realities that often foreground, then mess with, perceived boundaries between form and formlessness, life and death, human and non-human, possible and impossible, the world(s) we know and the ones we don't" (257). This expansive power not only to meld and reform the world we live in but also to construct new worlds and to imagine other realities that unsettle previous conceptions should not be

overlooked, and in the context of upending and rebuilding the entire gender construct, this power is rendered invaluable. Other scholars have noted animation's particular relevance for embracing more fluid conceptions of gender, including Pitre, who, as I mentioned in my introduction, describes animation's fluidity as "the perfect territory" to explore similarly fluid sexualities and gender identities (24). Fluid representations of gender are vital in breaking down rigid, anatomical understandings of the gender binary, but arguably even more importantly, fluidity of gender creates more space and freedom for gender identities outside of the gender binary. For viewers who wish to break free from the restrictive gender performance practices assigned to the supposed "primary" two genders, animation's imaginative possibilities provide a unique opportunity to see one's own identity not as simply an acceptance or rejection of one's anatomical sex, but instead as a fluid and open set of choices to make at one's own discretion, separate from oppressive societal forces.

Ties to Reality

Still, it is important to note that animation is not without its ties to reality, and these ties to reality greatly augment the medium's ability to make *real*, substantial strides in destabilizing commonly accepted understandings of our relation to gender. Firstly, even regarding the common practice of animators deliberately *drawing* attention to animation's artificiality, these animators still are able to convince audiences to suspend their disbelief enough to accept, on some level, their characters and environments as "real," or at least as real as the performers and environments in a live-action film (Crafton 72-73). In their book, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston discuss the animated portrayal of animals in Disney productions, emphasizing the importance of the animals appearing "real" for audiences. However, they also clarify that when they say "real," they are *not* referring to a one-to-one reproduction of animal movement, but rather "only what the audience accepts as being real" (332). Thomas and Johnston go on to note that if they had "drawn real deer in *Bambi* there would have been so little acting potential that no one would have believed the deer really existed as characters" (332). In this sense, animation's privileging of artificiality rather paradoxically is also a *source* of its realism. By pushing the limits of photo-realistic depictions of its real-world referents, animation is able to yield an experience of realism for its audiences, despite its self-acknowledged reliance on artificiality.

Moreover, animation also bears affective connections to reality. In *Ugly Feelings*, for example, Sianne Ngai explores what she describes as the affective qualities and effects of

feeling animated, which she contends is “the most basic or minimal of all affective conditions: that of being, in one way or another, ‘moved’” (91). While Ngai primarily explores this sensation of “animiatedness” in the context of racialized subjects, I would argue that Ngai highlights an important quality of animation: the ability to *literally* move its subjects (i.e., the characters on screen) while *affectively* moving its audiences. Ultimately, animation has the ability to promote and enable trans and nonbinary subjectivities in its audiences by moving and manipulating characters and worlds to bend or break the viewers’ assumptions regarding the anatomical prescriptions of the gender binary, or perhaps even the gender binary itself.

In addition to being able to imbue their creations with a sense of reality, animators also tend to produce works tied to reality simply because their animations, like most artistic works, are, by default, cultural objects. Some animated texts may set out to conjure a “dreamt reality” as Leslie describes (91), but the worlds they create are also frequently cultural touchstones that are still tied to reality in a social manner. Not only does animation use real objects—clay, paper, pencils, and even computers and their material sources of energy—it’s also grounded in representations of this world, however abstracted these representations may be. Animation is in this world and of this world, animated by the cultural and historical forces that produce it. The gender construct is one of these major forces. What’s more, not only are animated works inherently representative of these systems but Manovich argues that cultural objects also “help construct” these systems as well (15). Through this understanding of animation as a cultural object, we can clearly identify how the medium engages in ongoing (re)constructions of gender as we know it, but more importantly, we can also see animation’s ability to trouble the very foundation of current constructions of gender.

Gender Performance and Materiality

Before I turn to animation’s paradoxical relation to realism and artificiality, allow me to first go over the question of gender performance within gender and trans studies. Judith Butler’s foundational “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” proposes that gender “is real only to the extent that it is performed” (527). In this pivotal work of gender studies scholarship, Butler clearly identifies the immense role performative rituals play in the constant maintenance of the gender binary. Butler focuses on this constitutive act of performance in an effort to reconsider feminism’s adherence to the concept of womanhood; they contend that “one ought to consider the futility of a political program which seeks to radically transform the social situation of women without first determining whether the category of women is socially constructed in such a way

that to be a woman is, by definition, to be in an oppressed situation” (523). While Butler’s work appears to be focused on reflections of womanhood, since its publication in 1988 the essay has defined decades of queer studies and gender studies, frequently serving as a basis for rejecting the supposed naturalness of the gender binary and heterosexuality. Returning to my focus, as my above analysis of imagination and artifice demonstrates, animation practices privilege performativity in a similar manner to Butler’s description of gender. In my second chapter, I will explore this connection further, specifically with a focus on how Butler’s definition of gender as a “*stylized repetition of acts*” (519) closely parallels animation’s role in gender construction.

However, while Butler’s work offers valuable insights into the role of gender performance within ongoing practices of gender construction and reconstruction, some scholars, especially trans scholars, have also argued that it is inaccurate and even problematic to suggest that gender is *only* real through its performance. This criticism is typically directed towards queer studies’ treatment of gender and trans people more generally, rather than Butler’s work specifically, but some of the constructs with which trans studies takes issue are largely based on Butler’s work. In “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” Stryker contends that queer studies’ treatment of trans ideologies and people frequently serve “as the site in which to contain all gender trouble” such that homosexuality can then be deemed as normative as heterosexuality (214). Keegan expands on these criticisms, writing that queer studies often characterizes gender as purely performative such that “the felt reality of transgender identification” is written off “as a form of false consciousness” (“Transgender studies, or How to do Things with Trans*” 70). Thus, considering Butler’s crucial work and, of course, the objections expressed by leading trans studies scholars, it is important to recognize both the performed properties of gender construction *and* the very real, material aspects of gender embodiment and identification. With these two perspectives on gender in mind, an understanding of gender that recognizes both its performative and material qualities nicely compliments the closer consideration of animation’s simultaneous grounding in reality and insistence on artificiality in the following section.

Reality and Artificiality Paradox

Because of animation’s intrinsic freedom from the limitations of reality *and* its inability to ever truly create something completely separate from reality, the medium maintains a unique relation to its real-world referents. For many scholars, this unique relationship has directly shaped their belief in animation’s potential. Drawing from Miriam Hansen’s analysis of Walter

Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein, Redrobe asserts that Benjamin and Eisenstein saw animation as a “conceptual vehicle for rejecting a notion of the world as fixed and fully made” (Redrobe 262-263). As a result, animation is particularly well suited to upend a rigid view of the world precisely because of its ambivalent relationship with reality—the medium is inclined to be both anchored in reality and challenging it. The literal construction of worlds that is an inseparable part of its production opens the medium up to an unimaginably expansive set of possibilities, thereby creating a vast potential for imaginative and creative conceptions of reality both in the construction of animated worlds and in the reading of animated texts. But, crucially, these imaginations are also inseparable from our world, intrinsically bound to their real-world referents. This second effect ensures that while animation practices enable highly creative conceptions of our world and its cultural machinations, these very conceptions will still bear some relevance to the reality in which we live, no matter how distant it is from the “reality” depicted in the animated works.

Given animation’s paradoxical relation to reality, I would argue the medium is particularly well suited for an exploration of the paradoxical aspects of the transgender experience as described in my introduction. The art and practice of animation embody paradox by simultaneously insisting on its artificial, constructed nature while preserving a rootedness in reality. This self-contradiction (as well as many others that will be explored later in this chapter), enables the medium to reflect a major paradoxical tenet of trans and nonbinary philosophies: gender is a *construct* and gender is also *real*, much as animation is a construct (and constructed) and animation is also emotionally, physically, and expressively real (i.e., it is materially real in the world and has an emotional impact on its viewers). As previously touched upon, gender has a major social component that is created and maintained through practices that continually reaffirm the supposed reality of the binary gender *construct*. However, many trans individuals’ affective relation with gender suggests that there also is an element to gender that is *real*, that is viscerally felt and experienced by individuals on a personal level. Animation’s paradoxical nature renders it particularly well suited to embody this seemingly self-contradicting philosophy.

Crafton suggests that when an animated text presents us with a logical paradox in its construction (e.g., showing the animator entering their own animated work), “[w]e don’t fluctuate between these impossible views but rather entertain them together, however irrational and defiant of the laws of physics that may be” (51). Similarly, when animation presents viewers with what may appear to be a paradox, viewers are uniquely equipped to make sense of the

contradiction with relative ease. As a result, the medium of animation is especially well suited to think through gender from a trans or nonbinary perspective. Traditionally, the gender binary contends that gender is directly linked to anatomy, but animation can help viewers decouple gender from anatomy no matter how “irrational” that may (seem) to be. Many animated works include non-human subjects that viewers very readily accept as gendered, regardless of any rationality behind such a characterization. Benson (a walking gumball machine) from *The Regular Show* (see fig. 1), coded as male, Backpack from *Dora the Explorer* (see fig. 2), coded as female, and Mr. Salt and Mrs. Pepper from *Blue’s Clues* (see fig. 3) all present gender paradoxes (when assuming the perspective of cisnormativity), but none of these characters, or others like them, elicit confusion from audiences. Instead, just as Crafton describes, audiences instinctively and readily accept the reality of gender existing outside of anatomy. Thus, through paradoxes, animation is able to think gender through acts of decoupling gender identities from an individual’s anatomy.

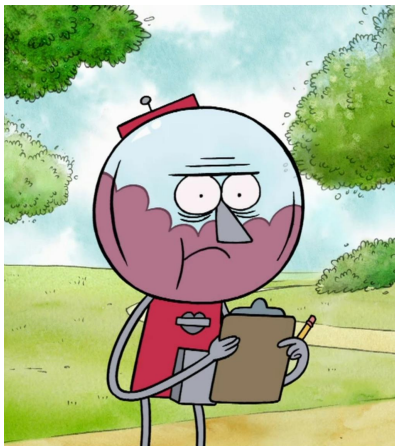


Fig. 1. Still image of Benson (a walking gumball machine) from “Just Set Up The Chairs,” *Regular Show* (0:27).



Fig. 2. Still image of Backpack from “Backpack,” *Dora the Explorer* (18:40).



Fig. 3. Still image of Mr. Salt and Mrs. Pepper from “Mr. Salt and Mrs. Pepper Day,” *Blue’s Clues* (9:02).

In addition to its frequent encounters with paradoxes, animation is also well suited for exploring “[t]ransgender gender representation,” as defined by Stryker, thanks to its ties to reality paired with its imaginative flexibility (*Transgender History* 26, 28). In *Transgender History*, Stryker describes the shifting understanding of photographic representations with the advent of digital images to highlight a similar shift in the understanding of gender presented by the transgender movement. She notes that, historically, a person’s gender has largely been

understood as inextricably linked to their anatomy, much like analog film has been described as tied to its subject (*Transgender History* 26, 28). However, she argues that for digital images the relation between image and subject is far less certain, owing to its highly malleable and constructed nature, suggesting that “it might in fact be a complete fabrication built up pixel by pixel” (*Transgender History* 26). Stryker then builds on this comparison to contend that “[t]ransgender gender representation works the same way” (*Transgender History* 26, 28). That is to say, that gender identity and performance, as defined by trans and nonbinary philosophies, are not directly linked to an individual’s anatomy. Moreover, while some transgender gender performances—despite straying from the link between gender and anatomy—may be in some way linked to or inspired by the traditional gender binary, the link between these performances and their gender identity are no longer prescriptive but are instead individually constructed. As a result, representational practices, digital imaging, and transgender gender performance may *happen* to point to a real point of reference but also disavow any attempts to draw any strict, deterministic lines of relation to these same reference points.

Shifting Stryker’s analysis from her focus on digital images to my focus on animated images and animation practices, the medium and machine of animation add new layers to the representational qualities upon which Stryker builds her argument. Like digital imaging, animation frequently possesses some tie to a real subject, though importantly, animated images have a far greater tendency to digress from strictly realistic depictions of their subjects.⁵ Consequently, not only do animated images possess a similarly analogous relationship to trans and nonbinary ideations to that of digital images, they also have a tendency to create additional space for nonbinary and gender-fluid ideations. Trans and nonbinary philosophies certainly reject notions of anatomical gender determination, but nonbinary and gender-fluid beliefs are more frequently invested in larger re-imaginings of gender that recognize and highlight gender’s constructed qualities. Animated representations are relevant for transgender gender representations too; as previously discussed, the images produced through animation are not without their ties to reality, and thus, still possess the same tenuous link to reality as digital images. However, animation’s world-building capabilities and high degree of creative freedoms expand Stryker’s conception of the digital image to better reflect nonbinary and gender-fluid

⁵ The rise of CGI practices may at first seem to counter this characterization, but I would note that firstly, CGI is frequently used to create realistic representations of *unrealistic* events or subjects (e.g., spells in *Harry Potter* or dinosaurs in *Jurassic World*). This tendency more closely aligns CGI practices with animated images than cinematic realism. Secondly, the digital image is certainly malleable, but when considering the proliferation of digital home cameras and digital phone cameras, one can see the far greater tendency for the distortion of reality through animated images rather than digital images.

conceptions of gender, thereby enabling character portrayals that utilize these creative freedoms—such as *Treasure Planet*'s Morph (see fig. 4) and Nintendo's Kirby (see fig. 5)—to think gender by testing its limits. Both Morph and Kirby are considered male, which raises the question, what does it mean to be male if these two pink blobs count? Morph, Kirby, and other animated characters like them illustrate animation's propensity to explore and question gender's construction, while also paving the way to more open-ended, imaginative conceptions of gender.



Fig. 4. Still image of Morph (right) and Jim (left) from *Treasure Planet* (22:52).



Fig. 5. Screenshot of Kirby from *Kirby and the Forgotten Land*.

One can turn here to one of the earliest examples of animation in the cel-animation genre to see that the malleability of gender within animation is not just a recent phenomenon. Émile Cohl's *Les fantaisies d'Agénor Maltracé* (1911), released only three years after their *Fantasmagorie* (1908) (a film that is often described as the first fully animated moving picture), depicts the transformation of a seemingly male character into a woman (see fig. 6). Just three years after the medium's conception, animated works were *already* exhibiting a propensity toward depicting the fluidity of gender presentation and performance. And yet, we may go back earlier still.

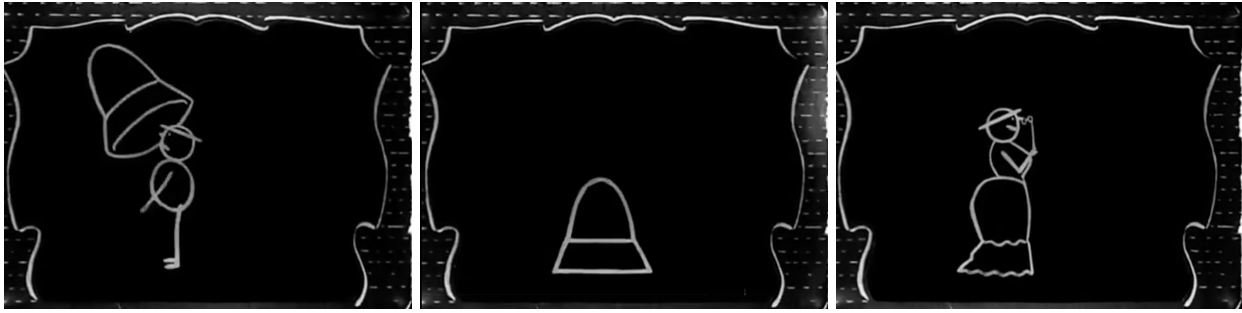


Fig. 6. Still images of gender transformation from Émile Cohl, *Les fantaisies d'Agénor Maltracé* (3:08-3:10).

Zoetropes and flipbooks embody the very same propensity, as these forms of animation (and many others) produce an aesthetic that, as Keegan proposes, demonstrates how, “what is only imagined can nonetheless be invited into perception” (*Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 28). The classic example of the bird and cage thaumatrope offers a clear illustration of this concept. In the context of the toy, no image of a caged bird exists in a tangible sense. However, upon twisting the strings, the viewer instantly can perceive what is “only imagined.” Animation at its core, in both historical and contemporary contexts, unequivocally embodies trans and nonbinary aesthetics by welcoming into reality possibilities that would otherwise be relegated only to the imagination, rendering these possibilities visible and accessible for audiences.

Animated Body Construction

Thus far we have explored animation and gender’s similarly paradoxical relations to realism and reality, respectively. Both strike an, at times, perplexing balance between an apparent artifice and a profound sense of realness. As a result, animation is capable of bringing imaginative possibilities into reality, much like trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender strive to enable more imaginative forms of gender embodiment. With that, I now turn to a more focused consideration of animated characters and animated bodies to explore further how animation’s alignment with trans and nonbinary philosophies enables the medium to think gender, but more specifically, gender embodiment. Animation techniques frequently portray bodies in a similarly imaginative fashion that, once again, closely aligns the medium’s production practices with trans and nonbinary ideologies. For example, Cooley touches on a number of inherent boundary-pushing and fluid qualities of animated bodies that lend themselves toward trans-aligned portrayals of gender. His analysis specifically focuses on the

“cartooned body,” but the observations they make can also be extrapolated to a greater tendency of animated bodies as a whole (46). Cooley proposes that:

(1) [the cartooned body] is always in flux, (2) it only masquerades as having a grounding in material reality, (3) it is an abstract and arbitrary thing with only a fuzzy resemblance (if that) to that which it seems to depict, and (4) its cartoonish re-rendering of the real mirrors the socially constructed nature of all bodies and all sexual orientations. (46)

Cooley’s second and third points tie back to animation’s tenuous relationship to its real-world referents, while his fourth point further develops Manovich’s description of digital images’ role as cultural objects. The first point, however, raises a quality that in my view holds the greatest importance when considering animated bodies. Whereas in live-action media the bodies of actors and characters have a limited degree of malleability—production practices such as prosthetics and costuming can grant live-action films greater freedom from the typical limitations of corporeal bodies, but only to a certain extent—animation practices produce bodies that are highly malleable, extensively expanding the possibilities for representing the bodies of characters with otherwise static identities.

The malleability of animated bodies implicitly endorses trans and nonbinary beliefs with regard to the fluidity of bodies, as it embraces the notion that regardless of how much a body shifts, changes, or reimagines itself, the intrinsic identity of the owner of the body can still remain. Mickey Mouse can expand, contract, bend, twist, and even be bestowed with newfound saturation and dimension, all without ceasing to *be* Mickey Mouse. Trans and nonbinary people understand that gender is, despite socialization otherwise, a malleable construct that can be redefined and remade on an individual basis *without* requiring any loss of identity. In fact, to the contrary, embracing the malleability of gender frequently *strengthens* one’s sense of self, and animation, through the high degree of malleability it grants bodies at the production stage, is especially well equipped to champion this ideal. While some animation styles and practices may reinforce static and traditional conceptions of gender, animated works still bear a powerful potential for reflections on gender, even within conventional depictions of femininity and masculinity.

Later in this chapter, I will explore this double-edged sword of stereotypical depictions of gender through Ngai’s analysis of *The PJs*, but for now, in order to better locate the malleability of animated bodies at the production level, I turn to animation education texts that explicitly encourage new animators to break bodily conventions when creating and animating characters. In his highly regarded animation guide, *The Animator’s Survival Kit*, Richard Williams accredits

animator Art Babbitt with establishing the precedent for inventive, unnatural cartoon walks (Williams 114). Williams notes that one of Babbitt's most famous walks, Goofy's, even goes as far as putting his feet on backward, and yet, "[h]e made it look perfectly acceptable and people didn't realize they were backwards!" (114). Through this example, Williams encourages his readers to truly embrace the aforementioned freedom he attributes to animation, encouraging animators to "invent" that which "the real world" does not offer (145). Williams effectively ties the malleability of animated bodies back to the imaginative possibilities enabled by animation's distance from reality. This malleability and distance from reality closely align animation's potentials with trans and nonbinary philosophies as they explicitly embrace and invite fluid conceptions of gender embodiment and presentation. Just as Williams urges animators to welcome the freedoms animation affords, gender advocates support everyone—trans, nonbinary, and cisgender individuals alike—to explore the freedoms of less restrictive understandings of gender.

Williams's writing on animation practices also characterizes the medium as one that endows bodies with high degrees of dynamic elasticity, rather than restrictive rigidity. To demonstrate this potential, Williams includes drawings that portray a basketball player with highly exaggerated movement and flexibility (see fig. 7), showing bodily proportions that are nearly (if not entirely) impossible in real life. Moreover, In describing digital animation processes, Williams proposes that while "drawn 'classical' animation is an extension of drawing... computer animation can be seen as an extension of puppetry – high tech marionettes" (20). Williams draws this comparison to suggest that digital animation faces similar problems that the art of puppeteering must overcome, such as imbuing performances with a proper sense of "movement, weight, timing and empathy" (20). Admittedly, this distinction Williams draws between animation and digital animation is a little flimsy, mainly because he devotes entire chapters and sections to movement, weight, timing, and empathy in drawn animation practices, but also because many digital animation software applications implement user interfaces (UIs) that directly call upon drawn animation practices. That being said, for all forms of animation—whether hand drawn, digitally composed, or sculpted out of clay—the need to overcome obstacles such as weight and movement actually imbues them with a greater degree of freedom for their representations. With every hindrance animation faces in producing believable movement, weight, etc., animators are also granted an *opportunity* to meld and reshape these qualities to form new "realities" for their work.

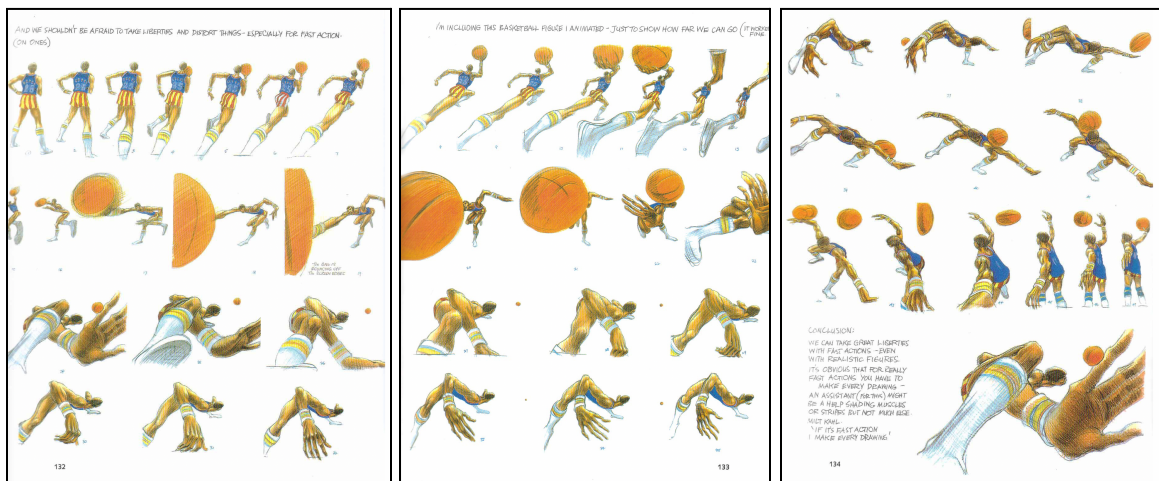


Fig. 7. Illustrating the malleability of animated bodies in Richard Williams, *The Animator's Survival Kit*, Faber and Faber, 2001, pp. 132-4.

Other animation guides present similar conceptions of animated bodies as fluid and prone to manipulation; Tony White's *Animation from Pencils to Pixels: Classical Techniques for Digital Animators* sets out to illustrate the lasting importance of traditional animation knowledge for modern digital animation practices. In his guide, he asserts that "animation is a process of caricature. What exists in the real world must be pushed beyond reality when it is animated, if it is to appear real in its own world." Here White goes as far as to suggest that animation not only *can* present bodies in exaggerated poses and forms but also maintains that animation *must* do so for its portrayals to resonate with audiences as authentic. Similarly, in *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* Thomas and Johnston define twelve core principles of animation, with the first and arguably most important being "Squash and Stretch" (47). They discuss an early design change for Disney's mascot, Mickey Mouse, that was intended to render Mickey more easily squashable and stretchable. They write that when Walt Disney was first shown this redesign in action he turned to the animator, Fred Moore, and said, "Now that's the way I want Mickey to be drawn from now on!" (Thomas and Johnston 126). Through this anecdote, Thomas and Johnston highlight the immense value and importance of flexibility and pliability for animated bodies. Lastly, Preston Blair's, *Cartoon Animation*, includes an illustration (see fig. 8) very similar to the depiction of Williams's aforementioned basketball player, once again using an athlete as an example of the malleability and fluidity of animated bodies (92-93).

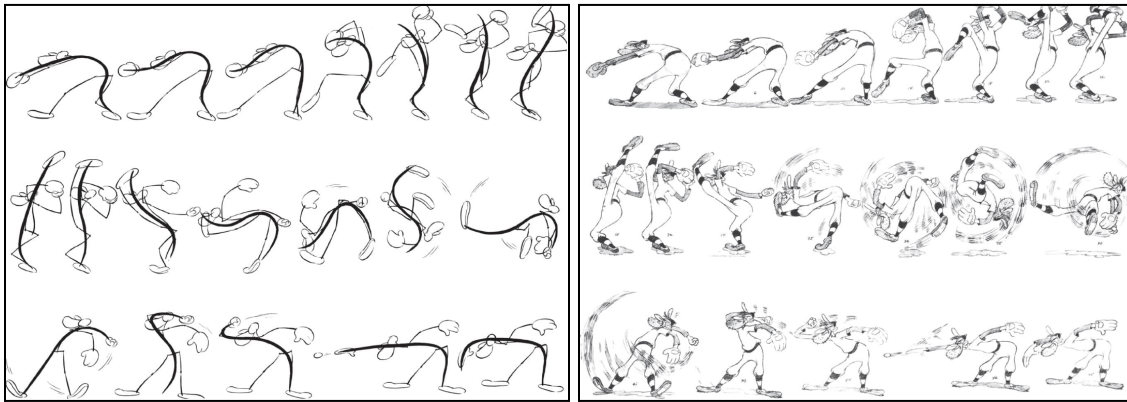


Fig. 8. Another malleable athlete in Preston Blair, *Cartoon Animation with Preston Blair, Revised Edition!* Walter Foster, 2020, pp. 92-3.

Thus, Williams, Blair, and their fellow animation guide authors *all* promote an understanding of animated bodies as malleable and fluid. As a result, each of these animators put forth a conception of bodies that, presumably unintentionally, endorses *gender's* malleability as well. This malleability is employed to create a greater sense of movement and weight in the featured basketball player and baseball player, but the effect also implicitly illustrates the ways bodies shift and reform, even during otherwise typical activities. The result is a figure that conceptualizes bodies as materially flexible and pliable, whether they (or the animator) realize it or not. Williams's consideration of the animated body thus highlights one of its core qualities, especially in the context of my research: malleability. Animation's inherently imaginative potentials afford the animated body a unique ability to embrace fluidity and transformation, consequently rendering these bodies excellent for representations of trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender that embrace similarly fluid approaches to gender presentation and embodiment. In my third chapter, I will examine *Adventure Time's* Lumpy Space Princess and *Neon Genesis Evangelion's* Shinji as examples of animation's fluidity and transformations when representing bodies. While these characters will serve as concrete examples of how animated bodies utilize the medium's propensities to present imaginative, fluid conceptions of gender and identity, for now, I simply wish to illustrate how animated bodies align with trans and nonbinary philosophies.

Gender's Voice in Animation

In addition to the visual practices of animation, the use of voiceover and voice acting components constitute a vital quality of animated media that should not be overlooked. Just as

animation's drawn and/or visually constructed elements render the medium apt for highly malleable depictions, its aural elements are crucial parts of its world-building and characterization practices. There is extensive research regarding the role of voice and sound in filmmaking practices, and while it is out of the scope of my research to delve fully into this aspect of animation's history and its practices, I will briefly touch upon the potential voice carries when it comes to animation practices thinking through gender. Tessa Dwyer and Jennifer O'Meara consider the effects of "screen voices," specifically in the context of practices like dubbing, dialogue, and the many other ways voices complement images in moving pictures. While their work is not *specifically* concerned with animation, their research does characterize the effects of screen voices in media more widely. They propose that the "screen voice" should be recognized as "a malleable tool," defined as such not only for its potential to be altered during its production but also at numerous later stages. Thus, the "screen voice," as described by Dwyer and O'Meara, offers a malleability paralleling that of visual animation practices and plays a crucial role in the production of animation.

The role of voices in animation is not only crucial to many works within the medium but also carries incredible political and social potential, as Dwyer and O'Meara suggest more broadly. In identifying this potential, it is first important to note the great fluidity voice-actors are not only granted, but often *encouraged* to employ when voicing characters of different identities, including gender identities. For many animated works featuring children, for example, it is a well-established practice, from Hollywood studios to Japanese animation studios, to cast adult female voice actors to voice male children. While this practice is definitely motivated by the biological fact that it is generally more common for adult, cisgender women to more easily replicate a prepubescent boy's voice than it is for adult, cisgender men, this practice nevertheless still embraces a more fluid conception of gender. By casting voice actors for characters that do not correspond to the actors' gender identities, there is an implied blurring of gender boundaries.

Voice tone and pitch play immense roles in gender presentation and contribute largely to trans and nonbinary culture as well, and thus the implicit fuzziness produced by casting voice actors for roles outside of their gender identity ultimately serves to push back against more rigid understandings of gender stereotypes. Dwyer and O'Meara comment on similar potentials, writing that "vocal play unearths underlying instabilities that arise from and expose screen constructs and constraints--technological, textual, and geopolitical." Just as the visual effects of the animation machine promote imaginative approaches to otherwise restrictive systems

(including the gender construct), animation's immense reliance on vocal play (and other sonic practices) also enables a fantastic potential for revealing the "underlying instabilities" of gender. In some instances this potential of animation has been employed in harmful ways, such as Him from *The Powerpuff Girls*, whose high-pitched voice is used to indicate the character's deviousness (and deviance),⁶ or Tina and Linda Belcher from *Bob's Burgers*, both of whom are voiced by cisgender men, possibly in an effort to use their low and, consequently, "unfeminine" voices as a source of humor. Nevertheless, even these cases highlight the instabilities of gender by drawing attention to the malleability and breadth of gender performance. Him's pronoun namesake paired with his drag-esque visual and aural performances present a farce of gender performativity. Tina and Linda offer counters to the aforementioned tradition of employing adult women to voice prepubescent boys, and while their voices *may* be intended as a source of humor, they are also both fully accepted as women by the show's fans and creators alike. Additionally, while these characters illustrate the potential for harmful uses of voice in animated gender construction, in my third chapter I will closely examine *Adventure Time's* Lumpy Space Princess to highlight the potential for empowering utilization of animation's aural affordances.

Animation thus holds the potential to employ voice acting practices that could significantly upend and reimagine gender systems by, once again, taking advantage of the medium's artifice and rejecting otherwise restrictive gender stereotypes regarding vocal presentation. Dwyer and O'Meara note that screen voices are almost universally "disembodied, partial, and unstable," contending that this quality of the screen voice empowers it to both "leverage and disrupt" understandings of agency and presence. This particular description of voice is especially applicable in an examination of animation's employment of voice, as the actors are *entirely* separate from the characters to which their voices "belong." When the likes of Timmy Turner, Mickey Mouse, and Bugs Bunny speak, viewers with extra-diegetic awareness of the actors voicing the characters may begin to wonder: *who* is speaking? Is it the animators, the voice actors, or even the characters themselves? While it is clear that the sound is coming from the voice actors, the more illusory "voice" of a character brings with it significant implications regarding the character's identity and cognizance. These questions regarding the source of animated voices can point viewers, scholars, and animators to an important method of gender production (and reproduction) within animation practices. The uncertainty of the animated

⁶ Gender deviance and queer-coding have a long history of being employed by animators to signal a character's villainous intentions, and while I certainly do not wish to minimize the ways said depictions have damaged perceptions of queer and trans people, I am interested in exploring possible paths towards reclaiming such characters as possible champions of gender fluidity.

voice's source accentuates the similar uncertainty and instability of gender identity and embodiment. Thus, the use of voice in animation draws attention to the ways animators endow their characters with a sense of realness for viewers through methods largely based in gender performance and construction. In addition, this uncertainty also exposes how a voice actor's gender can be read as an endorsement of traditional linkages of anatomy and gender *or* as a subversion of these assumed correlations.

Possibilities and Pitfalls of Character Animation

The malleability of animated characters demonstrated thus far offers representations uniquely suited to highlight, transform, and redefine societal constructs and boundaries, rendering them ideal for trans and nonbinary readings. I want to return to Ngai's engagement with animation to explore further this transformative potential of the medium while also, as Ngai does, acknowledging the limits of this potential, and the ways animation may retrench *and has* retrenched gender and racial stereotypes. In Ngai's chapter on "Animatedness," she analyzes a stop-motion sitcom titled *The PJs*, considering alternative interpretations of the (primarily African-American) characters' caricaturesque depictions. Her analysis contends that the exaggerated portrayals of the show's subjects ultimately make apparent the animated bodies' capacity to subvert restrictive societal constructs through the inherent fluidity of animated bodies. Ngai notes that during the production of the show, its creators needed to find a way to animate the characters' many mouth positions. To this end, each character was given a set of many individualized mouths that were swapped in and out for each frame when the characters were speaking (Ngai 116).

Ngai goes on to write that one of the show's directors told Ngai that as a consequence of this process, there was an unintended effect of "slippery mouth' syndrome," an industry term for the slight shifting of the mouth over time to the side of a character's face (116). While this effect is typically undesirable for animators, Ngai suggests that the effect actually can serve as a social critique of racial stereotypes. She proposes that the resulting inconsistency of the animated bodies can embody "the contradiction between the rigidity we typically associate with social roles and the elasticity or 'plasmaticness' hyperbolized by screen animation" (117). Here Ngai is highlighting specific ways animation's production methods enable aesthetics that reject oppressive structures, including, but not limited to, racial prejudices and, in the context of my research, gender. The gender binary often imposes strict social roles to members of each gender (as well as those that strive to exist outside the gender binary), but animation's plasmatic

nature endows the medium and its subjects with a propensity towards aesthetic practices that implicitly, if not explicitly, reject the constraints of the gender binary—squashing and stretching boundaries that are normally rigid and unforgiving. Characters like the brooms in Disney's *Fantasia*, which are endowed with lifelike movement, demonstrate not only animation's plasmatic qualities but also its ability to circumvent issues of gender altogether. These brooms do not think gender by challenging toxic masculinity or expanding definitions of femininity; they do so by implicitly challenging the assumed, default status of the gender binary by illustrating and embodying the possibility to live outside of the (assigned-at-birth) gender binary.

Building on Ngai's reading of *The PJs*, even animated characters who are not canonically trans or genderqueer can be read in a manner that challenges the limitations imposed by the gender construct. Ngai explores this possibility in the context of race, writing, "*The PJs* reminds us that there can be ways of inhabiting a social role that actually distort its boundaries," thereby creating "a site at which new possibilities for human agency might be explored" (117). Ngai's description of the possibility of upending an otherwise limiting social role by occupying the role in a manner that can "distort its boundaries" perfectly illustrates animation's unique potential to function similarly within transgender and nonbinary movements. This reading of animated texts enables a rejection of the gender construct within animated worlds that, importantly, does not explicitly rely on transgender characters, but instead can be found in any representation of gender that, in some way, serves to push the limits of gender representation, or even redefine those limits.

One possible way animation can accomplish this feat of redefining the limits of gender is through the "excess" of animation production processes, such as the "slippery-mouth effect" which, Ngai contends, is ultimately able to subvert "technology's power to constitute that body as raced" (117). Once again, a similar potential exists for animation's representation of gender, especially representations from animation's rubber hose era during the 1920s in the United States. During this period of animation's history, many hand-drawn figures were represented with highly fluid limbs and bodies, including arms that resembled the animation style's namesake, hoses. Looking back on this period of hand-drawn animation, the lack of volumetric consistency is frequently criticized—Tony White's animation guide as well as Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's both criticize this animation style's lack of realism—much like slippery mouth syndrome is typically considered undesirable for stop-motion animation. Moreover, just as slippery mouth syndrome forms the foundation for Ngai's reading of animated bodies as capable of distorting social boundaries, rubber hose animation offers the possibility to distort gender's

boundaries through fluid representations of animated bodies. For example, Betty Boop's first appearance in "Dizzy Dishes" in 1930 is riddled with volumetric inconsistencies as her body stretches, squashes, and bends in a rubbery fashion (see fig. 9). This early depiction of one of animation's most sexualized and feminized figures illustrates the ways rubber hose animation both amplifies Betty Boop's gendering *and* undermines these very same efforts. As Betty Boop bends over, her legs elongate, thereby utilizing her rubber-like body to accentuate her feminine figure. Conversely, as she sings to Chef Bimbo her face expands and elongates to the point where she becomes barely recognizable. Granted, in Betty Boop's early depictions she was originally intended to be part dog, but nevertheless, her depiction here serves as just one example of animation's ability to complicate the supposed rigidity of bodies according to the gender binary, thereby yielding the potential to undermine technology's ability (and society's ability) to "assign" anybody (and any body) a gender. Consequently, applying a similar methodology to that of Ngai's writing on animatedness, closely examining the

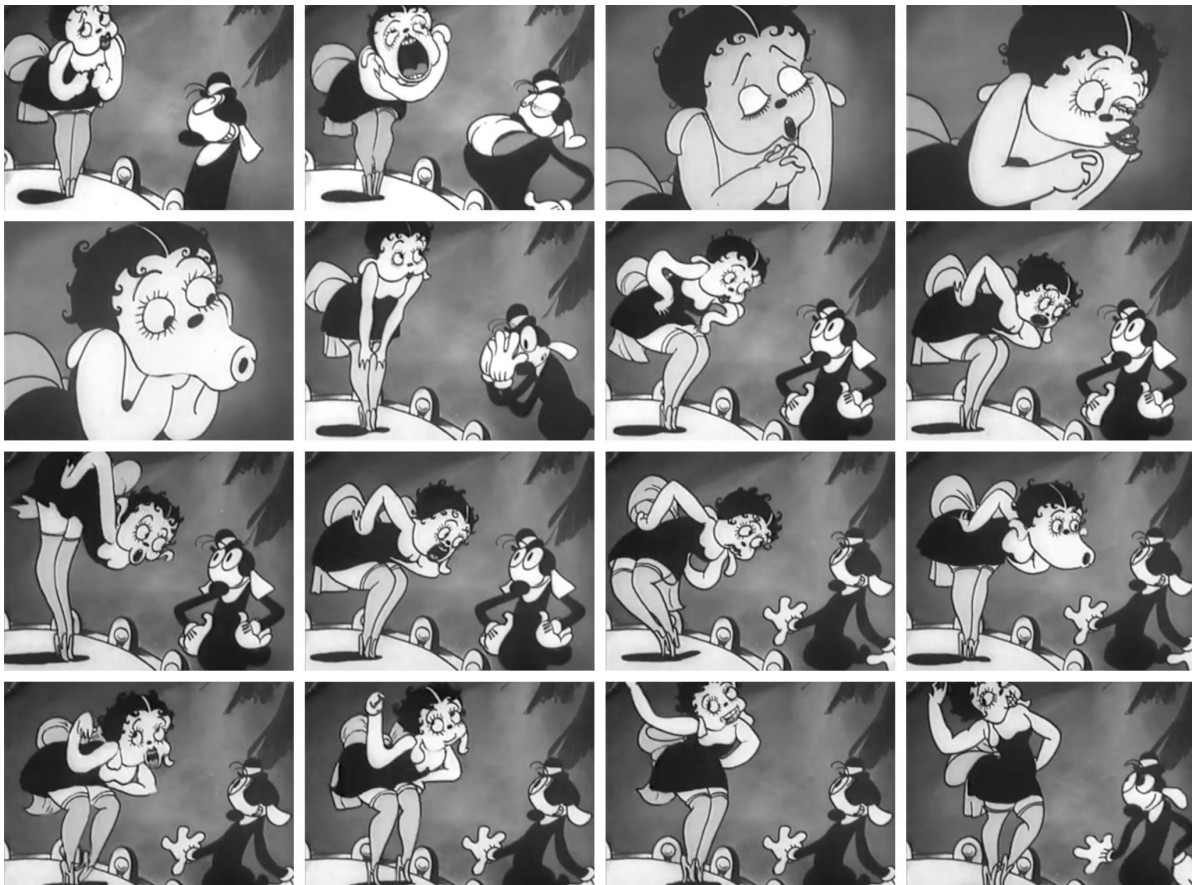


Fig. 9. Still images of Betty Boop's original appearance, showcasing the exploitation of animated bodies' flexibility to emphasize gendered characteristics, from *Dizzy Dishes* (3:08-3:37).

over-animatedness of characters illustrates the ways animation thinks gender by upsetting restrictive notions of gender embodiment, and instead championing fluid, plasmatic understandings of gender's relation to bodies.

Additionally, animation can also reflect on the limits of gender through aesthetics of minimalism or simplification. Animated texts that embrace simple, stick-figure adjacent character design, such as *Boy and the World*, think gender by exploring how characterization and gender can be reduced to but also reconfigured by simple lines and shapes. The titular boy's mom is distinguished from his father largely by their clothing, implying that women wear skirts and men wear pants. The portrayal of these characters certainly reinforces reductive assumptions of what femininity and masculinity look like, but it also shifts the focus of gender identity away from anatomy and towards performance and practice. Perhaps the boy's parents are their respective genders—or at least are perceived as such—not because of a deterministic, anatomical or material build-up, but rather because of the performances and presentations they *choose* to uphold. Moreover, the parades of musicians and dancers further complicate the reduction and simplification of gender (see fig. 10). As they march and dance across the screen, they read as neither men nor women, but instead simply as people, as a collective. Thus, through the stylistic rendering of their animated movement, this mass of people refuses viewers' desires for clear gender-legibility in favor of a more human-centered perspective, one for which gender is an after-thought, if it is even thought of at all.



Fig. 10. Still image of a parade of dancers and musicians with no discernible gendered characteristics from *Boy and the World* (26:04).

It is important to note that animation's tendencies to simplify or exaggerate bodies and movement can also serve to reignite and/or strengthen harmful stereotypes through reductive character design. Indeed, much of the popular response to the show Ngai discusses, *The PJs*, was to criticize the racial stereotypes invoked. Moreover, the extensive control animators have over their subjects can also *reanimate* objectifying power dynamics over marginalized bodies. Ngai addresses this possible effect of animation as well, citing many instances of animated works that depict grotesquely racist caricatures, which unfortunately revive stereotypes, "giving new 'life' to caricatures that might otherwise have stood a greater chance of becoming defunct or inactive" (109). The somewhat infamous *Censored Eleven*⁷ include just a few examples of extremely racist animated works from prominent animation studios (in this instance, Warner Bros.), all of which highlight the potential harm that can also arise from animation's malleable properties. Similarly, this harmful power dynamic has manifested in animated representations of gender as well, especially through the use of gender transgression as a signal for wickedness in Disney villains (e.g., *Hercules's* Hades, *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula, who was inspired by the famous drag queen, Divine, and once again, *The Power Puff Girl's* Him).

Ngai ultimately ties this ambivalent potential of the animated body to debates regarding Eisenstein's foundational reading of animation's inherent malleability. Ngai maintains that while Eisenstein found animation's qualities to be liberating, much as my research suggests, she also cites Rey Chow's counterargument that the malleability of the medium can instead be understood as "signs of the body's utter subjection to power" (Ngai 101). Thus, while I largely am championing animation as a medium especially well suited for depicting trans and nonbinary philosophies, I also wish to acknowledge and emphasize the opposite and potentially equal potential for the medium to be used instead to reinvigorate anti-trans, cis-normative conceptions of gender. In my next chapter, I will consider several examples of animated works that reinforce the gender binary, with a specific focus on the Disney Princess archetype.

Despite recognizing the historical precedent for animation to encourage rather than dissuade racist prejudices and stereotypes, Ngai still ultimately concludes that *The PJs* "actually introduced a new possibility for racial representation in the medium of television" (105). She argues that the show's rejection of realism in favor of more outlandish depictions of its characters, while risking reproducing older racial caricatures, ultimately served to lay the

⁷ The *Censored Eleven* are a group of eleven animated cartoons produced by Warner Bros. that, since 1968, have been removed from all forms of broadcast and official circulation—though some rogue copies can be found in physical and digital formats—owing to their extremely offensive depiction of people of color.

groundwork for a reclamation of the “grotesque and/or ugly” (105). Through Ngai’s analysis of animation’s handling of racial issues, we can clearly see not only the potential pitfalls animation faces regarding giving new life to harmful perceptions of marginalized groups but also the great promise it shows for imagining new approaches to and conceptions of the very same issues these pitfalls represent. Much like Ngai, while I recognize these potentially harmful consequences of gender’s animation, I also believe that even stereotypical depictions of gender possess the potential to distort and break the constraints of the gender binary. Thus, my next chapter will *also* consider the possibility that animated characters with seemingly conventional genders, including Disney Princesses, still exhibit an inclination to (re)think gender.

In this chapter, I’ve worked through key animation theories in order to propose that animation possesses a strong propensity for portraying and exploring trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender. Animation’s paradoxical relation to realism parallels trans studies’ contention that gender is both real and not real, and similarly, the medium’s production practices, especially those relating to the design and gendering of animated characters, neatly coincide with social productions (and reproductions) of gender. These approaches to characterization within animation admittedly bear the potential to reinvigorate stereotypes and reductive conceptions of gender, but nevertheless are also capable of challenging and upending traditional understandings of the gender binary. In the following chapter, I will take the theoretical practices regarding animetic tendencies that I have considered in this chapter and demonstrate their applicability through an analysis of several animated texts. These analyses will first break down animation’s processes of gendering Disney Princesses and other well-known animated characters, after which I will consider how these and other animated characters distort gender’s restrictive boundaries in favor of more liberating conceptions of gender.

Chapter 2

What gender is WALL-E? To many if not most viewers, *WALL-E*'s titular character is almost obviously a “boy,” especially when foiled by his love interest, EVE, a robot whom viewers similarly are likely to perceive as a “girl.” One could read this tendency as indicative of commonly-held gender stereotypes—boys are boxy, dirty, and rough around the edges; girls are curved, smooth, and elegant—but I am interested in re-evaluating our understanding of these robots' genders. Supposing that audience perceptions are correct reveals what I believe is a more interesting and fruitful read of gender's role in animation: if *WALL-E* is a boy, then what *is* a boy? This reframing embraces WALL-E's constructed nature, both diegetically and extra-diegetically, and consequently upends traditional assumptions regarding anatomical understandings of gender and, significantly, highlights the methods of gender production embedded into the production of animated images. In this chapter, I will take this reframing as inspiration to reconsider traditional representations of gender within animation in an effort to determine if even conventional approaches to gender can be read to *think gender* in a manner aligned with trans and nonbinary ideals such that the animated (re)productions of gender illustrate and examine the processes behind gender's construction and maintenance.

Keegan's article, “On the Necessity of Bad Trans Objects,” provides some valuable scholarly backing for this approach, as he contends that a reevaluation of so-called bad trans objects “can contribute to the development of new techniques for reading, valuing, and expanding upon the qualities of trans badness they contain” (29). With this reframing in mind, Keegan provides textual analyses of several films that typically are considered to have “bad” representations of trans identities. Instead, Keegan proposes that these representations of transness offer valuable contributions to trans media archives, concluding that “embracing badness” means “pursuing a world in which the distinction between cis and trans ceases to exist altogether, because the systems enforcing binary sex and gender are dismantled” (“On the Necessity” 36). In this chapter, I will offer several similarly redemptive textual analyses of animated works that are ostensibly “bad”—in that their representations of gender appear to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than deconstruct them—in an effort to identify animation's propensity for thinking gender and obscuring the distinctions between cisness and transness, even when its representations may at first appear to only further entrench common assumptions of the gender binary.

Where my work differs from Keegan's is in the category of "bad" objects I am interested in exploring. Whereas Keegan is concerned with poor representations of trans-coded characters, either explicitly or implicitly, my analysis will be centered around animated representations of presumably cisgender characters whose portrayal can be considered "bad" owing to their reductive representations of gender and their (seemingly) implicit endorsement of an anatomically grounded conception of gender. However, much like Keegan ultimately suggests that his bad trans objects bear redeemable qualities, I propose that a closer consideration of animated reifications of cisnormativity will reveal ways these animated works complicate the gender binary's assumptions and in turn *actually* endorse a more complex understanding of gender's relation to the body. Each example I consider will highlight unique ways animation's handling of (again, presumably) cisgender characters complicates the assumptions of the gender binary, but a central quality of each example will be the way animation and its processes of production render the labor of gender construction apparent, thereby problematizing the supposed naturalness of the traditional gender construct. For this portion of my analysis, I will call upon Butler's writing on gender—specifically their characterization of gender's construction as a "*stylized repetition of acts*" ("Performative Acts" 519)—in order to draw parallels between gender's stylized, repetitive acts of construction and the similarly stylized and repetitive qualities of animation's production.

Finally, this chapter will cite many animated works, but each of the works I consider in significant detail will be texts produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar (a collaborator with Disney since the early 1990s and a subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios since 2006). The Walt Disney Company has grown to be one of the largest corporations in the United States with a significant international presence, and a core tenet of Disney's brand and image globally is its traditional, family-friendly focus, so much so that even indirect inclusion of queerness frequently elicits large public outcries.¹ Much of Disney's animated work embraces conventional, cisnormative conceptions of gender, frequently avoiding any notably progressive or non-normative representations of sexuality and gender. Consequently, I have devoted a large portion of this chapter to addressing Disney's animated handling of gender, as I believe its filmography offers a valuable opportunity to demonstrate that even animated works which strive

¹ Disney's 2017 live action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* was met with notable backlash after revealing that LeFou would be openly gay—though since the film's release even LeFou's actor, Josh Gad, has stated that the controversy had been blown out of proportion as the film did very little to acknowledge LeFou's sexuality at all (Walsh).

for a relatively strict adherence to conventional conceptions of gender still bear an inclination towards thinking gender and highlighting the instabilities of the gender binary.

Drawing Gendered Bodies

“I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself” (Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein” 241). In this evocative line from her discipline-defining piece of trans studies scholarship, Stryker commands her readers to reconsider the supposed naturalness of their gender. Following Stryker’s advice, with this section, I aim to “discover the seams and sutures” within animation production practices that serve to gender the medium’s subjects. As previously shown through animation education texts and analyses of animation practices, animation has a long history of calling upon stereotypes and over-generalizations to produce characters that more easily fit into common social categories. However, it is important to explore further some of the many examples where animators have employed these reductive understandings of gender to clearly illustrate animation’s role both in reconstructing (and reinforcing) the gender binary, as well as its unique ability to render the process of gender construction highly visible for gender scholars and audiences alike. In Butler’s foundational work, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” they note that a core trait of the gender construct is that it “regularly conceals its genesis” (522). As a result, in real-life instances, it can be hard to truly pinpoint and/or differentiate the moments in which gender is constructed, reaffirmed, and enforced. However, the production of animation does not conceal but instead highlights the processes of gender construction. By making gender’s construction apparent, rather than hidden, animation simultaneously enables a closer examination of gender’s machinations *and* accentuates its artificial components.

One of the best-known examples of animation’s role in gender construction is the archetype of the Disney Princess. In the following paragraphs, I will consider how Disney Princess character design and movement production firstly illustrate the ways animation supports and renders visible the construction of the gender binary, but then I will show how this highly gendered archetype also results in what I contend could be understood as a *new* gender thanks to its highly specific and seemingly codified practices and traditions.

Disney is a prominent perpetrator of bolstering restrictive conceptions of gender as it frequently calls upon antiquated gender roles in its character designs—Amanda Putnam notes the almost ubiquitous depiction of Disney princesses in form-fitting dresses and clothing (149).

However, we can take this analysis a step further and note that not only are the clothes form-fitting, but the very forms of the characters themselves have been contorted and molded to (re)produce gender in a hyperbolic, even caricaturesque fashion (even for characters who are canonically 16 or 15 years old, or in the case of Snow White, only 14). Even Mulan, who notably spends a large portion of the film disguised as a man, is represented in a manner that supports reductive linkages between gender and sex. While Gwendolyn Limbach notes the ways that *Mulan* emphasizes gender's construction, especially in scenes such as Mulan's preparation to meet the matchmaker during which "[e]very characteristic, even a tiny waist, is fabricated rather than natural, and none are essentially linked to the biological 'fact' of Mulan's sex" (117), the film's ultimate reveal of Mulan's true gender is clearly directly tied to her biological sex, thereby undoing any of the film's other efforts to uncouple a person's gender performance and identity from their assigned gender at birth. Thus, many Disney films, especially those featuring the Disney Princess archetype, make a habit of reinforcing traditional gender roles through their heavy reliance on an anatomical conception of gender.

Beyond restrictive, anatomical conceptions of gender, animation also has a history of, at times, endorsing the social conventions of the gender binary, reproducing archaic gender roles and perpetuating gender stereotypes that bolster harmful, sexist beliefs. Nevertheless, these instances of stereotypical gender portrayals within animation still open the door to closer inspections of how gender is constructed, thereby enabling trans and nonbinary readings even for animated texts that may appear to otherwise contradict trans and nonbinary ideals. Crafton highlights the ways societal structures impact animators' works, writing that some animated narratives "re-perform social structures and attitudes, such as patriarchy, family relationships, and sexual identities" (36). They go on to argue that classical animation contributed to the objectification of women, as the medium "generally treated women as, well, figures" (36). Given the numerous princess toys Disney aggressively markets and sells, this portrayal of women as "figures" has clearly permeated several layers of Disney's treatment of its princesses. Through these princess "figures"—which we could also conceive of as "figures" in that they are *manipulable constructions*—Disney and its animators' implicit endorsement of malleable bodies unwittingly demonstrates gender's constructed qualities.

Disney Princesses also serve as a clear illustration of how gender stereotypes are transcribed and maintained within animation. In Disney's animation of Snow White, its animators employed rotoscoping techniques in an effort to give its titular princess more realistic movements and character design (Yang 33-34). While their intention may have been to offer a

more nuanced, realistic depiction of femininity, the animators inadvertently reproduced restrictive gender roles by creating what Crafton calls “the quintessential stereotype of femininity: ‘Disney princesses’” (Crafton 36), thereby putting forth limited and often disempowering portrayals of girlhood and womanhood for impressionable audiences. But what if the production of the Disney Princess could be understood as not simply an endorsement and reiteration of archaic gender roles, but also as a construction of a *new* gender? With now thirteen iterations,² each Disney Princess has seemingly followed a core set of principles and guidelines for their gender performances. Though each may present their own unique take on the Disney Princess archetype, their common qualities unite their performances into a recognizable social practice quite similar to the social practices of manhood and womanhood. Thus, while the Disney Princess archetype is undoubtedly heavily influenced by the gender norms that predate it, I contend that the archetype is also a gender itself, at least in the world of animation. Through this reframing, seeing the Disney Princess archetype as not just a perpetuation of traditional femininity but also as an instance of gender *construction*, the many animated works revolving around Disney’s famous princesses offer a unique opportunity to more closely examine the processes of gender construction at play in our world.

Because animations, like the Disney princesses, are cultural objects created by animators who are part of a gendered world, these works are often inspired, at least in part, by the gendered world the animators inhabit. As a result, the animators are prone to reproducing societal structures and systems like the gender binary. However, they are also motivated to gender their creations through traditional stereotypes in order to avoid the social consequences of publicly presenting ungendered or atypically gendered figures, and in this vein, employing stereotypes often provides a path of least resistance toward gender legibility while prioritizing a minimization of labor (a common motivation for many animation practices).

Butler comments on the potential consequences of recognizable (or unrecognizable) gender performances, contending that gender performance can actually be understood as a survival strategy (“Performative Acts” 522). They write, “Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (“Performative Acts” 522). Thus, in order to construct characters who are accepted—and in some instances, even idolized—by audiences (instead of

² This number may vary slightly depending on who you ask, but Disney’s official number is thirteen. Interestingly, Disney excludes both Elsa and Anna from *Frozen* for reasons that are unclear.

“punished”), animators often make efforts to align their characters with traditional gender conventions.

Conversely, while Butler’s notion of punishment is largely based in social spheres, it is interesting to note that most of Disney’s villains are frequently portrayed through tropes that quite literally villainize gender deviance, and consequently, ultimately *are* punished, albeit narratively rather than socially. The punishments these villains all meet may not be in direct response to their deviant gender presentation, but just as most of these villains are given dark, cold color palettes, it seems that their non-normative forms of gender embodiment similarly serve to signal and justify their punishments for audiences. As a result, the production of animated characters that primarily reproduce traditional linkages between anatomy and gender directly parallels societal pressures on individuals to strictly comply with their assigned gender at birth, while characters that reject these linkages *literally* illustrate the dangers of failing to “do their gender right” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 522). Together, labor-saving motivations for animators and societal pressures like those described by Butler work in tandem to push animated characters towards traditional, and often stereotypical depictions of gender. However, as demonstrated through the Disney Princess archetype, the utilization and adherence to these stereotypes can also result in *new* gender constructions. Regardless, both stereotypical animations of gender and the animation of new genders can serve to expose processes and motivations behind gender’s construction and maintenance, thereby revealing “the seams and sutures” of gender’s construction.

Stylized Repetition in Gender’s Animation

In addition to aligning the anatomy of their characters with traditionally gendered social roles, animators also have a tendency to animate gender by incorporating and calling upon the stylistic performances that the gender binary prescribes. The process by which animators gender their characters through repeated acts of performance distinctly embodies the analogous process through which people reproduce gender roles through their daily performances. Trans theory and queer theory have each articulated that one way gender is produced and reproduced is through repeated performances and forms of expression. In their iconic 1998 pamphlet, “Transgender Liberation,” Leslie Feinberg even goes so far as to define gender as entirely rooted in performance, writing: “Gender: self-expression, not anatomy” (5). Butler presents a similar view of performance’s role in gender construction, arguing that “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an

identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (“Performative Acts” 519). Almost as if taking direct note from Butler, animators frequently gender their subjects through a similar process, moving their characters in manners that are repetitive and undoubtedly stylized.

The medium of animation presents an opportunity to illustrate, literally, the processes through which repeated *and* stylized acts serve to establish and reaffirm gender conventions. Dating back to cel animation practices, as a way to conserve time and resources it has been a fairly common practice of animators to reuse, or at least repurpose, animated sequences. For example, in some Disney animations, highly observant viewers may recognize repeated compositions and choreography in various films, including *The Many Adventures of Winnie The Pooh* and *The Jungle Book* (see fig. 11). Notably, in this example and others like it, the subjects of the original and secondary sequences are gendered similarly. In the case of *Robin Hood* and *Snow White*, the animation of Maid Marian (of the former) appears to be inspired by the animation of the titular Snow White several times throughout *Robin Hood*, thereby creating a chain of gender mimicry from the aforementioned use of rotoscoping in Snow White’s animation to the repurposing of animated sequences for Maid Marian (see fig. 12). Thomas and Johnston identify a similar practice with regard to Sluefoot Sue’s “sassy walk with the swinging hips” in *Melody Time*, claiming that it has “been copied widely throughout the animation industry” (363). This practice of repeated samplings of previous gendered sources serves to help the animators essentially transfer a specific gender performance from one subject to the next. Moreover, even when a character’s animation is not based on that of another, animators will also frequently repurpose their previous animations of the same character to minimize unnecessary work. This process of repurposing can include recycling actions in different scenes, or even just looping a sequence of frames to elongate cyclical acts such as walking. Through its repurposing and repetition of gendered movement, animation reifies the gender binary and the restrictions it imposes (assuming the basis of its gender mimicry also reifies the gender binary), but it also reveals the labor necessary to maintain the binary’s validity. Thus, even at the level of production, animation boasts a unique propensity to highlight the importance of repetition in acts of gender construction and gender maintenance.



Fig. 11. Repeated compositions in Disney's *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* (top) and *The Jungle Book* (bottom) from "Disney Reused Animations From Jungle Book In Winnie The Pooh Over 50 Years Ago," *Indiatimes*, 8 Feb. 2021. Accessed 4 Oct. 2023.

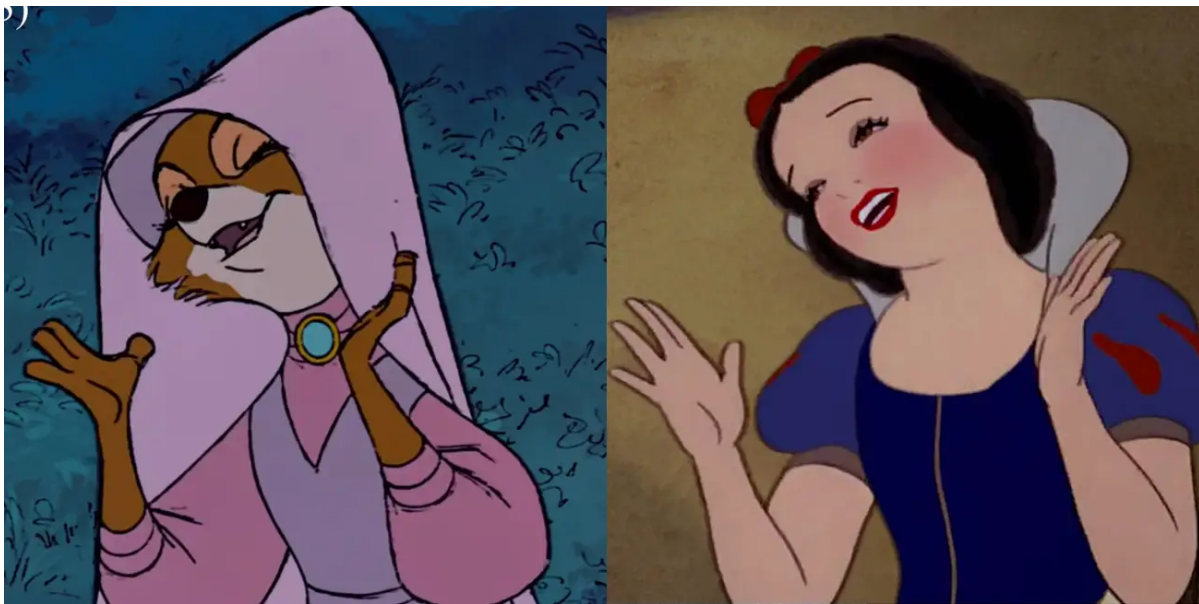


Fig. 12. Repeated compositions and choreography with Maid Marian (left) from Disney's *Robin Hood* and Snow White (right) from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in Kirsten Acuna, "Disney has been recycling the same footage in its beloved animated movies for years," *Business Insider*, 15 May 2015. Accessed 4 Oct. 2023.

While animation practices certainly exhibit a tendency to recycle “performances,” the medium also embodies the stylization of gender performance, arguably even more so. Butler describes the importance of stylization in gender’s construction and maintenance, writing that “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender” (“Performative Acts” 519). Similarly, the medium of animation bears a comparably significant relationship with stylization, especially when one considers the incredibly vast array of aesthetics and styles that fall under the broad category that is “animation.” Some scholars have even proposed that *all* moving images should fall under the umbrella of animation (Redrobe 254, Manovich 302). Even more conservative definitions of the medium would still include works with a diverse set of visual styles such as *Finding Nemo*, the *Wallace & Gromit* franchise, and *Loving Vincent*. Thus, the medium of animation can, if nothing else, be understood as one with significant potential for an incredibly wide variety of stylizations.

As a result, the medium similarly possesses a notable potential for greatly exhibiting the stylization of gender in both normative and non-normative manners. For example, in the film *Up!*, all the primary characters clearly feature shape motifs in their character design (see figs. 13 and 14). As shown, the design of the protagonist, Carl, is almost entirely composed of squares and rectangles. Pixar’s website suggests that this is intended to draw associations with bricks, thereby characterizing Carl as “weighed down and resistant to change” (“Simple Shapes”). However, this stylistic choice was also likely intended to help characterize Carl as a man. Carl’s rigid angles parallel the angular bone structure and rigid, stubborn demeanor traits frequently

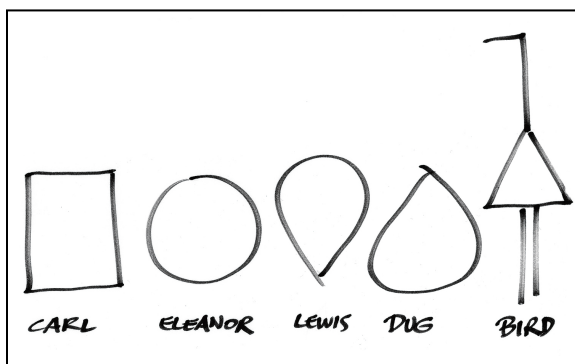


Fig. 13. Animator’s illustration of the primary shapes for each character’s design in Disney’s *Up!* from “Simple Shapes,” *Up!*, Pixar, 2009. Accessed 4 Oct. 2023.

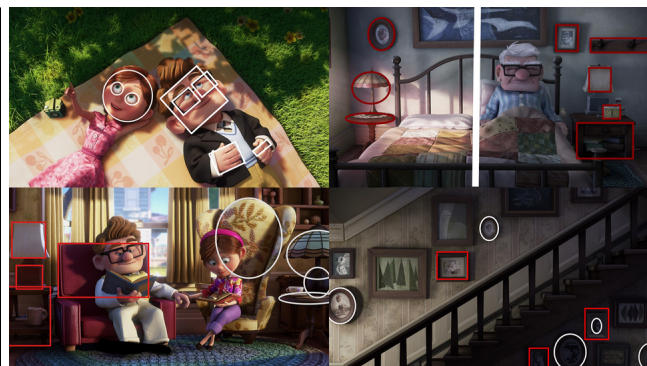


Fig. 14. Illustration of how shapes ultimately inspired the character designs in Disney’s *Up!* from u/AmiroZ, “Movie Details,” *Reddit*, 25 Jun. 2019. Accessed 4 Oct. 2023.

associated with masculinity. Similarly, Carl's wife, Eleanor, is made of round circles and ovals which accentuate her curves, gentle features, and bubbly and bouncy personality, all of which are qualities commonly attributed to female characters.

As a result of these stylistic choices for *Up!*'s character designs, the characters serve as excellent examples of the stylistic elements of gender construction. Carl and Eleanor take Butler's notion of a "stylization of the body" ("Performative Acts" 519) to a whole new level, as the stylization of these characters not only influences the ways they move and act but even permeates through their identity so deeply as to affect their bodily appearances. In *Cartoon Animation with Preston Blair*, Blair devotes an entire chapter to various types of characters and the most common anatomical traits for these respective types. As shown below, they dissect character design practices for archetypes like "THE CUTE CHARACTER" (see fig. 15), noting the many ways a character's personality directly informs the stylization of their appearance, even to the point of altering their anatomical build-up (Blair ch. 3). Just as Blair highlights the

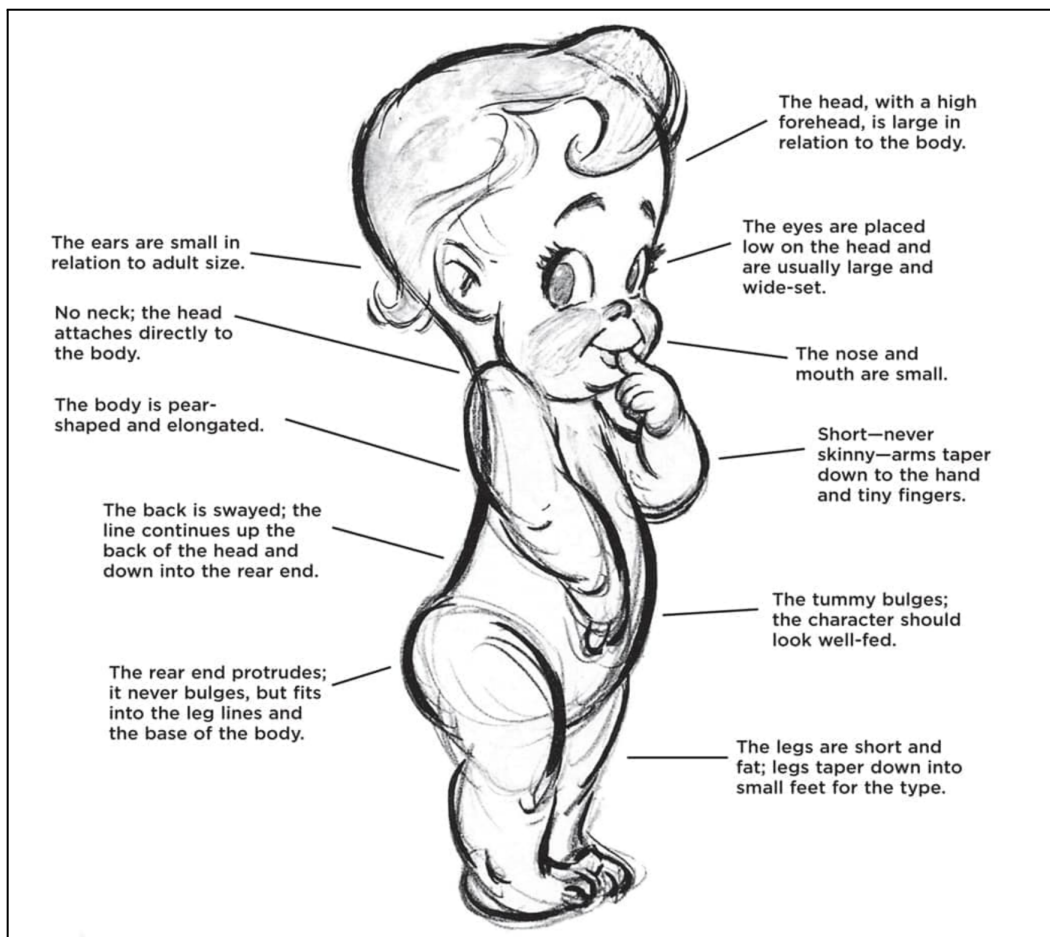


Fig. 15. "THE CUTE CHARACTER" from Preston Blair, *Cartoon Animation with Preston Blair, Revised Edition!*, Walter Foster, 2020, p. 32.

ways stylization reflects a character's cuteness, screwball inclinations, or pugnacity, many character portrayals, such as those of Carl and Eleanor in *Up!*, utilize animation's stylistic capabilities in a manner that implicitly endorses Butler's emphasis on stylization's role in gender (re)production.

This blending of stylization and anatomy interestingly parallels Ngai's analysis of the slippery mouth effect in *The PJs*. While there are certainly ways these stylistic methods of gendering characters reinforce traditional gender conventions, they also subvert and "distort" (Ngai 117) common gender expectations and conventions through exaggeration or other forms of stylization. Traditional gender conceptions largely link anatomy (and more frequently, genitalia) to the binary gender groups of male and female, which results in a societal expectation that an individual's anatomy will inform their personality and behaviors. However, characters like Carl and Eleanor reconfigure this association, for while their gender performances may still adopt some stereotypical qualities, their character design implies a reversal of the direction of causality between anatomy and behavior. In the case of *Up!*'s Carl, his box-like face and body do not make him stubborn, but rather his rigid personality inspired his rectangular features. The result is an approach to gender that actually is far more aligned with trans and nonbinary philosophies than traditional gender conventions—by allowing and encouraging a character's ideation and performance to directly inform the make-up of their body, animation's approach to character design parallels and supports the trans and nonbinary value of accepting and defending an individual's right to body modifications that more closely align them with their ideal relation to gender. *Up!*'s characters may not defy the gender binary, but they *do* distort and reimagine some of the restrictive associations gender enforces based on a person's anatomy.

Williams's animation guide illustrates a similar emphasis on performance stylization as he explains the ways a character's walk can have a wide range of implications on the subject's characterization. While Williams's guide presents a quite rigid, anatomically-based approach to the gender binary (somewhat surprisingly, given his endorsement elsewhere in the guide of the highly malleable potential of the animated body), his writing on gendering animated characters provides valuable insights into the processes behind gender's animation. That is, Williams's animation guide allows us to go a step beyond inferring how the production of animation reproduces gender, and actually see firsthand the ways students of animation—for this text is still frequently used by animation production instructors—are taught to construct gender in reductive and, at times, archaic fashions. Williams notes the importance of giving characters

distinguished walks to better tell their story, telegraph their mood, and deepen their characterization (103-104). To demonstrate this point, Williams turns to a personal anecdote about a time he “identified” a stranger’s queer sexuality based only on their walk—he notes that the story is “a little politically incorrect” (104), but concludes that the story is still worth sharing anyway. Williams uses this story to demonstrate that even a detail as small as the way a head moves up and down while walking (or does not) can signal any one of a number of traits of a character or person. In other words, even minor qualities of a person’s performance can have a large impact on how others perceive or categorize their identity. He then goes on to provide further examples, this time focusing on gendered characteristics of people’s walks. He writes that women “walk with their legs close together, protecting the crotch, resulting in not much up and down action on the head and body. Skirts also restrict their movement” (106). Williams goes on to describe the walks of men in an equally reductive fashion, writing that “Mr. Macho, however, because of *his* equipment, has his legs well apart so there’s lots of up and down head and body action on each stride” (106) If Williams’s persistent focus on crotch-based generalizations is not enough to establish his reductive conception of gender, he accompanies this description of walks with a similarly stereotypical example of a woman and a man (106) (see fig. 16). *Beauty and the Beast’s* (1991) protagonist and antagonist, Belle and Gaston, perfectly exemplify the gendered walks Williams outlines, with Belle’s feet remaining close together as she walks, and Gaston’s legs standing wide apart (see fig. 17 and fig. 18).



Fig. 16. Illustrating stereotypically gendered walks in Richard Williams, *The Animator’s Survival Kit*, Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 106.



Fig. 17. Still image of Belle's gendered walk, similar to the one Williams depicts, from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) (7:12).



Fig. 18. Still image of Gaston's (left) gendered posture, with Lefou (right), similar to the one Williams depicts, from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) (9:22).

This excerpt from Williams's animation guide may seem to simply reaffirm an anatomical understanding of gender that indulges in reductive gender roles, but it actually offers strong support for a trans or nonbinary reading of animation production practices by rendering the process of gender construction highly visible. Whether Williams is basing his conception of gender on the "equipment" of his characters or on gendered social conventions and stereotypes, *both* possibilities draw attention to the artificial components of gender because, ultimately, the equipment he is concerned with is not *really* there—that is, despite animation's materiality, a character's genitalia does not truly impose restrictions on their movement unless an animator *chooses* to account for this "equipment" when constructing their character's movement. Once again, by highlighting the processes through which gender is reconstructed in animation, the medium also highlights the gender binary's inherent artificiality. Even attempts at aligning a character's design with their "anatomy"³ still ultimately demonstrate the massive influence of performance on a person or character's perceived gender. The performative qualities of gender are thus made clear by Williams's significant emphasis on the differences of the walks of subjects of various genders.

³ In very few instances is the anatomy of a character ever made explicit, with animated pornography being a notable exception. Typically, the anatomy of an animated character is at most only ever implied if addressed at all. Consequently, as I argue above, animators who rationalize their characters' gendered movements with arguments that cite a character's anatomy are still illustrating gender's performative qualities.

Gendering the Non-Human

It is important to note that the gendering of animated characters is rarely limited to human subjects or even subjects with any form of biological sex at all. The renowned *Looney Tunes* cast of characters is composed almost entirely of non-humans (i.e., mostly animals with the occasional martian or monster) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) features a mansion's worth of gendered furniture and cutlery. Beyond these examples are countless other instances of non-human animated subjects, ranging from robots to volcanoes, being very clearly gendered. Whereas other examples of gender's effects on animation practices illustrate the ways gender is produced and maintained, the almost ubiquitous gendering of even non-human subjects highlights two important motivations at play for animators: the consequences of straying from gender's restrictive paths and the supposedly improved relatability of characters with recognizable genders, especially for non-human subjects. As mentioned before, Butler describes the social importance of maintaining the gender binary, defining the construct as "a performance with clearly punitive consequences" ("Performative Acts" 522). What's more, in the context of animating non-human subjects, Butler's writing is surprisingly relevant, as they note that "genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals" ("Performative Acts" 522; my emphasis). As a result, animators are often driven to find ways to imbue their subjects with gender, even in instances where their subjects typically lack a gender identity. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) a wardrobe and clock exhibit unique personalities, while a teapot and cup, and a candle and feather duster evoke familial and romantic relationships all via their gendering. Consequently, gendering creates identifications and emotional attachments by mirroring gendered social dynamics with which viewers are familiar (e.g., mother and son, [heterosexual] lovers, etc.). This gendering within animation is a process that is complex and shows the entrenchment of the gender binary in the very conception of being human.

This process of striving to produce a gender presentation accepted by audiences closely resembles that of trans-binary individuals wishing to "pass" socially. Keegan describes this struggle clearly in "Against Queer Theory," writing that "trans people are highly familiar with the loaded game of recognition, how passing as a discrete gender is both expected by others and yet shamed as a failed exercise, required by others to be seen as human and yet simultaneously treated as a naïve performance" (352). Animation production practices specifically dedicated to gendering non-human subjects (and human subjects) face a similar need to yield a recognizable gender performance in order to be treated (empathetically) as

human, lest they meet the fate of characters like the Green and Brown M&Ms⁴ and be publicly shamed for their “naïve performance” (albeit primarily from only a relatively small subset of audiences). However, animation’s fluid properties and paradoxical relation to reality have also enabled the medium, in some instances, to bend and break the limitations gender imposes. By embracing the medium’s imaginative qualities and thereby distancing their portrayals of gender from the gender binary (while still preserving a sense of realism), some animated texts have presented non-traditional embodiments of gender that more closely align with trans and nonbinary philosophies while simultaneously avoiding retribution for depicting non-traditional gender presentations. Characters like Marcel from *Marcel the Shell with Shoes On*, Tweety Bird from *Looney Tunes*, and Lumpy Space Princess from *Adventure Time* all offer unexpected sites of refuge for trans and nonbinary audiences by offering characters who present alternative conceptions of gender without facing the same dismissive social pressures trans and nonbinary people face on a regular basis, or at the very least, fewer pressures to assume a gender performance aligned with one’s anatomy.

In most instances, however, the gender construct is so deeply ingrained in social structures that it not only manifests in our compulsion to gender non-human characters in very human ways (e.g., WALL-E seemingly being portrayed as a boy, or at least boy-ish) but also exercises its influence in the *other* direction, as non-human animated subjects frequently serve merely to reinforce our understanding of the gender binary’s influence on human practices. In “Beyond Captain Nemo: Disney’s Science Fiction,” Brian Attebery links animation’s power to construct icons as universal as Mickey Mouse to a similar power to construct “larger-than-life images of masculinity and femininity which then become part of our apparatus for interpreting the world and ourselves” (149). Pixar’s *Cars*, for example, features a cast of characters that offer an extremely limited variety of gender performances. Firstly, of the eleven characters featured on Pixar’s web page for the film, only two are female, a lack of gender diversity that not only reflects a common occurrence in blockbuster films but also perhaps a stereotypical presumption regarding the demographics of a car-centered film’s target audience. What’s more, one of the two female characters, Flo, has very little screen time and is given one of the briefest

⁴ In 2022 M&Ms updated two of the candy spokesperson designs by changing the Green M&M’s heeled boots to sneakers and the Brown M&M’s stilettos to a shorter pair of heels. Notably, the controversial Fox News pundit, Tucker Carlson, responded with outrage. He protested: “M&M’s will not be satisfied until every last cartoon character is deeply unappealing and totally androgynous” (Victor). This response to the gender performance of *non-human* animated characters clearly demonstrates the “loaded game of recognition” that Keegan describes, even for something as trivial as an animated piece of candy’s “choice” of footwear.

descriptions on the webpage, which includes the highly gendered description: “a sassy, no-nonsense lady” (“Cars as Characters”). The other female character, Sally, is slightly more developed, though she still ultimately seems to only be included in the film to serve as the love interest for the protagonist, Lightning McQueen. As a result, the film presents a highly reductive depiction of femininity, which is a somewhat remarkable but also disappointing feat given its lack of any biological characters. The male characters also follow a similar pattern, with Lightning McQueen embodying the stereotypical young-male-hotshot trope and Doc Hudson epitomizing the old-wise-mentor role that is almost always filled by a man.

The character design in *Cars* further exacerbates the film’s problematic depiction of gender, as highlighted by its lack of gender diversity. Despite the cast being entirely comprised of actual cars, Pixar’s depiction of these cars still manages to employ human-based stereotypes in the gendering of their characters. Many of the male characters in the film are given grills, logos, or some other typical car feature to mimic facial hair, while the female characters are all given smaller mouths and nearly perfectly smooth faces. Additionally, the male characters consistently have boxier designs as opposed to the greater emphasis on curves in most of the female character designs. Even Lightning McQueen and Doc Hudson, who have fewer sharp edges or corners than the rest of their male companions, overall more closely resemble a box with rounded corners, while the designs of female characters like Sally and Flo rely heavily on curves as a central aesthetic quality. In later iterations of the franchise, the animators seem to blur this gendered distinction, especially with characters like Cruz Ramirez, whose overall shape is quite similar to McQueen’s with only some very minor differences, such as slightly rounder framing around her windshield/eyes. That being said, Cruz does share one common trait that nearly every female character in the *Cars* universe possesses—eyeliner along her upper eyelid (see fig. 19).

Through these design choices, the film’s animators reinforce anatomical gender stereotypes by implying that men are inherently rougher, bulkier, and more rigid while women are intrinsically petite, curvy, and softer (both in physicality and demeanor). However, in their translation of these stereotypes from human bodies to car bodies, the animators’ work renders itself visible to viewers in a manner more common acts of gender maintenance are not. The performances of Hollywood stars like Audrey Hepburn and Bruce Willis might similarly serve to reinforce gender stereotypes in a manner resembling the “bad” objects in Keegan’s analysis of



Fig. 19. Still image highlighting the similar shapes and designs of Lightning McQueen and Cruz Ramirez from *Cars 3* (39:55).

trans film representations, but the deliberate application of stereotypically gendered attributes to non-human subjects in “bad” animated texts like *Cars* draws attention to the labor necessary to (re)produce the gender binary, and consequently undermines claims supporting the binary’s supposed “naturalness”. As just one example, the *Cars* universe demonstrates the various ways that animators categorize bodies by their shape and presentation while also highlighting how pervasive the underlying logics of gender are in our relation to animated media and the narratives it presents. As Attebery notes, media, and moving pictures especially, play a large role in the way audiences learn to see themselves and the world (149), and animated films like *Cars* can greatly inform viewers’ perception of gender (especially considering the film’s predominantly young, impressionable audience), regardless of the anatomy or species of the featured subjects. At the same time, however, the apparent gendering of cars’ bodies and appearance illustrates the fragility of the gender binary, rendering evident the constant work necessary to maintain the binary’s validity.

Here I return to my consideration of WALL-E’s gender presentation and identity. WALL-E, as well as EVE, bring together the concepts I have considered for Disney Princesses, *Up!*’s romantic leads, and the cast of *Cars* and present a clear and cohesive representation of the core ideas presented in this chapter. Much like Snow White’s inspiration from real-life actors began a long line of gender mimicry and reconstruction, WALL-E’s understanding of romance—and consequently gender roles—comes from potentially centuries of rewatching and studying clips from a *Hello Dolly* VCR tape. Several times throughout the film, WALL-E watches

a dance number from the musical and then immediately proceeds to mimic the dance moves and choreography (in a very WALL-E-esque fashion), thereby reflecting the process of mimicking and transferring real-life performances into animated movements. Additionally, the film suggests that through *Hello Dolly* WALL-E gains an understanding of and desire for (heteronormative) romance such that hand-holding is internalized as the ultimate form of connection. Thus, WALL-E, much like how Disney animators approached the creation of Snow White and Maid Marion, embodies practices of reproducing and maintaining gender through repetition and mimicry.

Moreover, WALL-E and EVE each share strong character design similarities to Carl and Eleanor respectively, with WALL-E being comprised primarily of boxes and hard angles, and EVE sharing a core design quality of sleek, curved shapes (see fig. 20). Through these stylistic choices for WALL-E and EVE's character designs, these two romantic leads once again illustrate animation's capability to *think gender*. Is WALL-E boxy because he's a boy? Is he a boy because he's boxy? These questions presented by WALL-E's gender and presentation highlight the indeterminacy of gender while also problematizing strictly anatomically informed conceptions of gender identity. Instead, WALL-E implicitly endorses a perspective of gender that recognizes the inherent ambiguity of anatomical-gender determinism. For those with more conservative, traditional conceptions of gender, common rallying cries such as "gender is what's in your pants" or "gender is the parts you were born with," WALL-E undermines the supposed simplicity of their claims. Firstly, WALL-E does not have pants, and the "parts" he does have do not clearly align with one gender over another. And yet, few would contend that WALL-E's intersex, nonbinary, or any other identity outside of the gender binary. To the contrary, as stated earlier, WALL-E is usually recognized as a boy. This common understanding of WALL-E's gender comes not from a biological or so-called "scientific" basis, but instead from his *presentation*, his *performance*, one that interestingly, seems to be an example of gender mimicry with *Hello Dolly*'s Cornelius as the source. Consequently, WALL-E's gender (and EVE's) implicitly champions and defends an approach to gender that deprioritizes anatomy and instead enables greater freedom in one's gender performance and embodiment.



Fig. 20. Still image illustrating the differences in the character designs of WALL-E and EVE from *WALL-E* (59:24).

Lastly, *WALL-E*'s similarities to the cast of the *Cars* franchise further demonstrates the ways even “bad” animated objects—that is, animated works that seemingly reinforce the gender binary and its prescriptions—can present trans and nonbinary-aligned depictions of gender. Both films primarily feature a cast of non-human, inorganic characters who are brought to life through their animation. In order to produce characters that feel fully real to audiences, each film employs gender in order to yield more legible, relatable characters for viewers, but in doing so unwittingly reveals the work necessary to uphold the gender binary's supposed “naturalness.” My analysis of *Cars* identifies the many ways character design highlights this labor behind the gender binary's construction and maintenance, but with the voice talents of notable figures like Owen Wilson and Bonnie Hunt, this process of gender construction is *partially* outsourced to the recognizability of real-life actors (and their gender identities). However, while WALL-E and EVE are both voiced by real-life actors, their voices are not nearly as significant in the film and are modulated to the point where they are barely recognizable. Interestingly, in an interview, *WALL-E*'s Story Supervisor, Jim Reardon, compares WALL-E and EVE to Buster Keaton and Sigourney Weaver respectively, contending that if these actors made a movie together “it would probably be *WALL-E*,” and while this *does* align WALL-E and EVE with real-life actors, the association is conveyed purely through the animation of their respective performances (“WALL-E and EVE”). As a result, these two animated robots' embodiment of gender reveals the labor behind gender's (re)production even more evidently than the cast of *Cars*, as their gender identities are signaled to audiences almost *entirely* through their movements and “animated” personalities.

The portrayals of WALL-E and EVE, the Disney Princesses, Carl and Eleanor from *Up!*, and the cast of *Cars* all serve firstly to illustrate animation's problematic tendency to reproduce stereotypical approaches to gender. However, these same examples also are closely aligned with Keegan's notion of "bad objects," as their relation to gender *also* renders the gender binary's production and instability apparent. With every active effort animators take to reaffirm the gender binary, they simultaneously expose the extensive work required to uphold it. Disney princesses demonstrate not only the practice of carefully adhering to established performances of femininity but also the potential for even acts of gender reaffirmation to lead to the production of quasi-new genders as well. Carl and Eleanor put forth an understanding of bodies that reflects trans and nonbinary ideals by implicitly suggesting that one's anatomy can reflect their personality and performance, rather than the other way around. The gendering practices employed for the designs of the cast of *Cars* exemplify the ways even traditionally inanimate, inorganic subjects are routinely subjugated to the classifications of the gender binary. Consequently, the meticulous attention to the gendered characteristics exhibited by the character designs in *Cars* also undermines the supposed innate nature of the gender binary by drawing attention to the extensive labor required to maintain the system's validity. Finally, WALL-E and EVE excellently bring my consideration of animation's portrayal of traditional gender embodiments to a close, as these adored characters highlight the role of gender mimicry within animation, illustrate a reversal of the gender binary's prescriptive anatomical determinism, and problematize the presumed innateness of the gender binary. While my reading of these examples proposes that they are simultaneously in support of and in opposition to the gender binary, in my next chapter I will turn to animated texts that more thoroughly counter traditional conceptions of gender. Through these examples, I hope to dive deeper into animation's potential to propose *new* understandings of gender, rather than simply problematize existing ones.

Chapter 3

In my previous chapter, I opened with the question, “What gender is WALL-E?” Now, I instead would like to open with just the beginning of this same question, “What gender is” Typing this opening to a question into Google’s homepage search bar (using a browser with no active cookies influencing the results) yields the Google-generated suggestions shown below. Notably, of the ten suggestions Google provided all but *one* are animated characters (the only exception being G-d) (see fig. 21). This chapter will explore in greater detail the fluidity of bodies and characterizations enabled by animation’s affordances. I contend that in addition to highlighting the instability of gendering processes, as explored in my previous chapter, animation’s properties also endow the medium with an innate propensity towards unconventional representations of gender and identity that offer valuable insights into the possibility of a world outside of the conventional gender binary. As this chapter will demonstrate, this possibility embraces gender’s paradoxical qualities and consequently recognizes the importance of ideation informing materiality, rather than the other way around.



Fig. 21. Screenshot of Google search page with red boxes to show animated characters. For religious reasons, I altered the entry reading “g-d.”¹

¹ Note: This search was repeated on various computers using Safari’s “incognito” mode on June 13th, 2023, all of which yielded the same results.

In my second chapter, I demonstrated that the medium of animation offers representations of gender that highlight the labor and logics of its construction, thereby producing portrayals of the gender binary that undermine its supposed naturalness. Arguably, however, the medium's greatest asset is its ability to imagine entirely *new* understandings of gender; that is, understandings of gender that embrace fluidity of form and reject anatomical determinism. This ability is particularly valuable for trans and nonbinary audiences who may turn to various media objects in hopes of finding what Keegan has described as "images that seemed to offer new ways of imagining or becoming a gender in the world" ("Revisitation" 27). Whereas *Up!* distorts the boundaries of gender, some animation practices have actually enabled depictions of gender almost unrecognizable in comparison to the prevailing gender binary, thereby pushing the limits and restrictions imposed by the gender binary.

Animation can accomplish this feat by employing its imaginative capabilities in acts of gender experimentation. Keegan locates within digital technologies new possibilities for transgender people to "engage in gender experimentation without following the medically mandated path of diagnosis and surgical sex reassignment" (*Lana and Lilly Wachowski* 26). The medium of animation expands on this digital potential by facilitating the exploration of non-normative gender subjectivities through its paradoxical relationship with realism aesthetics (both in its digital and analog forms). By toeing the line between presenting fantastical alternate realities and grounding its representations in the conventions and customs of our world, animation is capable of gendering subjects in ways that open the door for genderqueer subjectivities. A primary tool for making space for non-traditional gender performances is the animated body itself. Halberstam describes the transgender body as one that "performs self as gesture not as will, as possibility not as probability, as a relation—a wink, a handshake and as an effect of deliberate misrecognition" (159). The *animated* body possesses a similar potential to champion a performance of "deliberate misrecognition" through the mutability of its performance, aesthetic, and aural qualities. As a result, animation is uniquely able to present to its audiences conceptions of gender that reject the constraints of the gender binary and the stereotypes it enforces, instead presenting depictions of gender embodiment that are both inventive and freeing, *and* grounded and relatable.

Redrawing Gender and Representing Ideation

Here I will turn to the first of two examples that will ground this chapter in order to work through the possibilities of a different kind of animation, one that does not simply highlight or

destabilize the gender binary's construction as we saw in Chapter 2, but rather presents alternative embodiments of gender. Pendleton Ward's *Adventure Time*—an animated cartoon quite often cited alongside *Steven Universe* in queer considerations of media, both academically and popularly²—frequently presents characters that embody Halberstam's "deliberate misrecognition" (159). While some *Adventure Time* characters' performances closely resemble traditional gender roles, albeit with a progressive bent (such as Princess Bubblegum's passion for science), others have gender performances that more fiercely reject the conventions of the gender binary. For example, Lumpy Space Princess (LSP) displays an undoubtedly unique gender performance with an amorphous body, a deep voice, and a blunt and jaded personality. As previously shown, animation's approach to gender can reinforce the gender construct or distort it by either adhering to the construct's conventions or breaking down the boundaries of these conventions. However, LSP serves as a powerful example of a third approach animation enables: a complete indifference and deliberate rejection of gender's conventions entirely.

LSP's body is composed of what can only be described as lumps, evoking a resemblance to a purple cloud. Beyond these lumps, her only other features are long thin arms (a fairly common characteristic in the show), a yellow star on her forehead, small and completely black eyes and eyebrows, and an oval mouth with, of course, a lumpy cheek (see fig. 22). This character design's *only* resemblance to that of *Up!*'s Eleanor is its emphasis on round shapes, but even then, it may be more accurate to characterize LSP's shapes as *lumpy*, an adjective rarely if ever linked to idealistic understandings of femininity. Apart from this singular and tenuous connection to curvy character design, LSP's body illustrates a stark aberration from traditional female bodies in animation, let alone live-action representations of women. Through her "deliberate misrecognition," LSP greatly subverts what it means to be female, a woman, or in this case, a princess, opening the door for a wide array of alternate embodiments of more gender-fluid identities.

In addition to her irregular body shape, LSP also upends gender conventions through her voice. As previously mentioned, it is a fairly common practice within animation practices to employ adult women to voice prepubescent boys. However, it is far less common for adult men to voice female characters of any age, but LSP is one of the few exceptions. *Adventure Time*'s creator, Pendleton Ward, voices LSP, and while he does not use his natural voice for the character, he also makes seemingly no effort to feminize the character's voice either. She

² See for example Emma A. Jane's "'Gunter's a Woman?!'"—Doing and Undoing Gender in Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time*;" Jake Pitre's "Queer Transformation, Contested Authorship, and Fluid Fandom;" and Kevin Cooley's "Drawing Queerness Forward: Fusion, Futurity, and *Steven Universe*."



Fig. 22. Still image of Lumpy Space Princess (left) and Princess Bubblegum (right) in the first seconds of Lumpy Space Princess's debut appearance from "Trouble in Lumpy Space," *Adventure Time* (0:37).

speaks with the cadence and tonality of a jaded teenager, all while sounding like a middle-aged man speaking from the back of their throat. The result is quite difficult to describe, and that very indescribability is exactly why LSP's voice furthers her complete rejection of gender conventions. Furthermore, LSP's personality similarly avoids relying on stereotypical gender conventions to construct her gender performance. LSP's movements, behaviors, and overall characterization avoid succumbing to gendered tropes, instead opting to portray the character as unapologetically unique. Nor does she "walk with [her] legs close together" as Williams suggests women do (106); she simply floats. Her melodramatic behavior also completely forgoes the quintessential polite charm and endearing optimism nearly universally exemplified by the Disney princesses—in the climax of the episode in which she first appears, she brushes off Finn's complaints by saying "I was just trying to help but whatever." Put simply, LSP may be a woman; she may not be, but she *is* LSP. This is not to say that LSP's gender is rendered unimportant, but rather that her gender is not prescriptive of her performance. First and foremost LSP is who she believes herself to be, and her gender is simply one of many pieces of her multi-faceted personality. Regardless of LSP's gender, *Adventure Time* presents its viewers

with a depiction of gender that not only enables but encourages a highly imaginative approach to gender identity and presentation.

LSP is just one of many characters in the series that adamantly renounces traditional gender norms, and in doing so these characters, as well as the show as a whole, provide a haven for trans and nonbinary viewers to find “new ways of imagining or becoming a gender in the world” (Keegan, “Revisitation” 27).³ LSP illustrates that regardless of your body, voice, presentation, or personality, you can be a woman, Disney Princess, or any other gender you desire. This is not to say that LSP is trans (or cis for that matter); on the contrary, LSP’s gender is unequivocally separate from any anatomical determinism. Her gender simply *is*, with no basis in her materiality or presentation. Additionally, the show truly drives home the validity of varying gender performances through its portrayal of how other characters, such as Finn and Jake, speak to and about characters that may appear to have ambiguous gender presentations from the perspective of audiences. Jake and Finn do not misgender LSP, nor do they question or undermine her gender identity. By portraying LSP’s pronouns and gender identity as accepted and natural, *Adventure Time* is able to circumvent many harmful tropes, namely those that depict the gender identities of gender-ambiguous and transgender characters being scrutinized and delegitimized. As a result, LSP’s inclusion in *Adventure Time* helps create a safe space in the show for transgender, nonbinary, and even cisgender audiences to explore and imagine inventive relations to gender.

LSP clearly illustrates the vast freedoms animation grants its artists as they design and construct characters’ bodies and performances. However, even once an animated character is given its form, the process of animation greatly enables an *ongoing* malleability of animated bodies. In instances where this ongoing malleability is embraced, animated bodies can be understood as not only imaginative but also *fluid*, thereby opening them up to numerous possibilities for representing and exploring the fluidity of gender. Cooley touches on this potential of animation, writing that animation’s malleable bodies offer “a powerful tool to materialize a world where bodies, genders, and sexualities are free to resist the policing of language and authority” (46). Animation’s inherently malleable properties thus endow its

³ Many scholars, journalists, and fans have noted the entire series of *Adventure Time*’s appeal to the LGBTQ+ community. See, for example: “Queer Dimensions and The Gender-Fluid Fantasy of *Adventure Time*,” by Zoe Daniels; “*Adventure Time* and gender stereotypes,” by Carolyn Leslie; “Gender Roles in *Adventure Time*,” by an anonymous poster on the AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre website at the University of British Columbia; “Gender Bending in *Adventure Time*,” by adventuretimeanalyzed on Tumblr; “What time is it? Gender Time!” by Richard Rosenbaum; and an archived Reddit post titled “Genderqueer/gender-bending elements in *Adventure Time*” posted on the r/genderqueer thread by a since-deleted user.

representations with a unique ability to reject the restrictions of “language and authority,” as Cooley suggests, but also the very laws and constraints of reality and matter itself. In live-action filmmaking, prosthetics and costuming can result in distortions of bodies, similar to the squareness and roundness of *Up!*'s Carl and Eleanor respectively, but CGI and other forms of animation allow bodies to stretch, twist, and change form entirely—Mystique's shapeshifting in the *X-Men* series serves as an example of not only the dramatic form changes enabled by animation but also the gender-bending potential of animated characters.

In many animated works, animated bodies will utilize their fluidity for dramatic or comedic effects. However, in some cases the malleability of animated bodies is explicitly employed to illustrate the complicated relationship between identity, corporeal embodiment, and outsiders' perceptions.

Here I turn to another series, this time from outside the American animation tradition. In the animated television series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the show's protagonist, Shinji, undergoes an identity crisis in the series' final episode which the animators portray through a sequence of animations and stills that completely break down Shinji's body, turning him into ribbons, fish, amorphous shapes, an egg,⁴ and much more (see figure 23). The show's deconstruction of Shinji's body exemplifies the divide between identity and body—what Lamarre calls “an exploded view of the psyche” (182).⁵ However, for the purposes of my research, this divide between identity and body also presents a sort of “exploded view” of gender, illustrating the persistence of identity regardless of form by opening and expanding what shapes, forms, and (re)presentations can still be considered to *be* Shinji. Additionally, the sequence not only illustrates the divide between mind and body but also adopts an aesthetic quality that emphasizes the medium's hand-drawn nature far more than the rest of the series. Through this aesthetic choice, the animators add an additional nod to the constructed nature of our bodies, and, though admittedly less directly, the constructed nature of gender as well. Finally, the sequence culminates in Shinji's realization that he has the power to self-determine the nature of his identity, a power that is essential to the lives of trans and nonbinary people.

⁴ Egg's are quite frequently employed as a symbol for birth, rebirth, or life more broadly, but it is interesting to note that in the trans community the term “egg” refers to a trans individual who has not yet realized their trans identity.

⁵ Lamarre's initial analysis of the “exploded view,” commonly found in assembly diagrams, highlights the spatial potential of the animated image (120-121). Ultimately, the “exploded view” serves to further Lamarre's exploration of how the machine of animation influences the ways it interacts with and thinks through technological practices by producing de-hierarchizing effects that yield a more “open” view of technology (122).



Fig. 23. Still images of Shinji's bodily transformation from "The Beast That Shouted 'I' at the Heart of the World," *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (12:45-12:47).

Shinji's body vanishes in an instant before viewers' eyes, and yet, despite these radical changes, he continues to *be* Shinji, both narratively and perceptually. Through animation's imaginative powers, Shinji can—without warning—turn into a series of unidentifiable shapes, and still, audiences will perceive these shapes as Shinji. This illustration of the persistence of identity regardless of form perfectly embodies trans and nonbinary understandings of gender which give great weight to an individual's subjective, personal relation to gender and little to no weight to notions of anatomical determinism. Whereas more restrictive conceptions of gender consider anatomy to be an indicator of and/or a limitation on proper behaviors and social roles, trans and nonbinary approaches to gender emphasize personal ideation and support a relation to one's body and appearance with greater freedoms and few, if any, limitations. Thus, the animation of Shinji in the final episode of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* clearly embodies a philosophy that prioritizes ideation over corporeality by illustrating the persistence of identity through form changes of any degree.

Embracing Paradox

At the core of each of these examples, both that of LSP and of Shinji, the driving force behind animation's special ability to portray and explore trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender is the medium's unique inclination towards embracing paradoxicality. Keegan identifies paradox as a central method of trans studies, reasoning that the "critical use of paradox is drawn directly from transgender experience: the impossible possibility of living one life in two genders or the illogical project of seeking to be recognized as a gender one already is" ("Transgender studies, or How to do Things with Trans*" 70). As discussed in Chapter 1, animation similarly possesses a paradoxical nature at the core of its representations: animation

not only enables artificiality but flaunts it, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of realness. And as analyzed in Chapter 2, the history of commercial animation, especially with regard to the works produced under the vast umbrella of Walt Disney Studios, consistently reinforces restrictive gender stereotypes in a manner that, once again, paradoxically undermines the naturalness and stability of the gender binary. Finally, this chapter has shown that the parallels between animation's paradoxical inclinations and the paradox methodology of trans studies are especially apparent in works like *Adventure Time* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and that these parallels enable these animated works to produce powerful reflections on our relation to gender and identity.

In the case of *Adventure Time*, LSP's gender is rendered highly ambiguous by her character design, voice, and performance, and yet, *paradoxically*, the show's creators—as well as the other characters—treat her gender identity as not only natural, but obvious. Consequently, LSP and other animated characters like her are free from the “unstable but indissoluble relationship between language and materiality” described by Stryker (“My Words to Victor Frankenstein” 248). Here, Stryker refers to the same struggle Keegan describes above, but she focuses less on recognition from others and more on the ways language imposes restrictions and expectations on the body. Stryker asserts that this paradox produces a rage within trans individuals, but LSP is not encumbered by this rage. Thanks to the world-building potential and artificiality of animation, LSP is privileged enough to live in another world (specifically, the Land of Ooo), and in *this* world, she need not worry about “seeking to be recognized,” as her identity is accepted by her friends and audiences alike. Moreover, the acceptance of her identity from others, especially audiences, is where the paradox emerges. For while the artificiality of LSP and the Land of Ooo enables her liberation from the restraints of language (i.e., the restraints of linguistic gender conventions), the acceptance of her gender identity is enabled by the audience's perception of her as *real*. LSP does not have a true *materiality* in the literal sense of existing corporeally in *this* world, and yet the medium of animation produces the highly believable illusion that she does. Through characters like LSP, it becomes clear that animation has the invaluable power to reimagine gender's role in our world. Importantly, the Land of Ooo is not a world *without* gender, but rather a world in which gender is reimaged. LSP illustrates that there are alternatives to the gender construct as we know it that are liberating for trans and nonbinary individuals, while also demonstrating animation's unique power to grant these alternatives a sense of materiality.

LSP's presentation offers a portrayal of a unique, self-defined gender being welcomed as real and indisputable, mirroring trans studies' defense of gender's real and material qualities. But Shinji's (literally) transformative experience explores the flipside of trans conceptions of gender, highlighting the nebulous difficulties that come when navigating the intricate relationship between one's ideation of oneself and the perceptions of others. As a result, Shinji's connection to trans and nonbinary philosophies is centered less on the imagining of alternatives to our gender construct, and more on the importance of recognizing identity's persistence, regardless of one's material composition, thereby freeing oneself from the restraints of gender and all the societal expectations it brings with it. The animation of Shinji's identity crisis repeatedly draws attention to the constructed qualities of his body and deconstructs his seemingly material form. The result, both narratively and visually, is the isolation of his mind and consciousness from his physical body. Through this sequence, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* embraces the paradoxical nature of animation to present Shinji's body as artificial and constructed, and his mind and thoughts as real. Thus, Shinji's animation, like LSP's, comes face to face with Stryker's lament of the relationship between language and materiality, but whereas LSP's animation imagines a world without the constraint of gender's language (as we know it), Shinji's animation presents a world without materiality. The result is a powerful realization of animation's ability to illustrate and examine the inherent obstacles in conceptualizing the many facets of one's identity, including their gender identity. By literally illustrating the artificiality of Shinji's material existence, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* captures the primacy of an individual's ideation over their physical body, and consequently, the anatomical makeup of said body. The show's depiction of the power Shinji's mind has over his (self-)perception clearly demonstrates animation's powerful potential to closely examine the complex relation between our self-ideation, body, and gender identity.

Through animation's inherently creative production processes and simultaneous links to reality, the medium offers imaginative alternatives to the gender binary that more closely align with trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender while illustrating the importance of ideation in navigating our relation to ourselves and our bodies. The representations of *Adventure Time's* Lumpy Space Princess and *Neon Genesis Evangelion's* Shinji mobilize animation's potentials to embrace the medium's paradoxical propensities in manners that complement gender's similarly paradoxical qualities. Just as animation possesses both an aesthetic of artifice and realism, trans and nonbinary conceptions of gender also hold in tandem gender's performative elements

and its material elements, and the representations of Lumpy Space Princess and Shinji both embody and welcome both of these paradoxical relations. Together, these two examples illustrate a mere sampling of animation's ability to *think gender* by embracing the medium's inclination towards expressive abstraction such that the boundaries of the gender binary are obscured to the point of near imperceptibility, resulting in an understanding of gender for which difference and diversity are welcomed rather than othered.

Conclusion

By putting animation studies and trans studies in conversation with one another, this thesis has presented a preliminary exploration of the many ways animation can think gender. While my work is in no way exhaustive of the many insights these two disciplines have to offer one another, I hope that this research demonstrates the immense value of interdisciplinary scholarship that considers the numerous connections between animation studies and trans studies. With their common appreciation of fluidity, complex relation to realism and reality (respectively), and emphasis on ideation and self-determination, animation studies and trans studies possess harmonious values that, as I have extensively shown, enable these two fields of study to greatly benefit each other.

Though the medium of animation is by no means confined to any specific aesthetic or thematic focus, the medium's formal qualities and production practices yield a significant propensity toward thinking gender. Moreover, this inclination does *not* restrict animation to specific forms or subject matter but rather is a direct consequence of the medium's vast possibilities and myriad forms. Animation studies has long resisted limiting definitions of the medium, and importantly, trans studies has similarly resisted restrictive conceptions of gender. Just as these disciplines share this resistance to reductive generalities, my research illustrates several other ways discourses regarding the medium of animation are closely aligned with discussions regarding trans and nonbinary practices of gender embodiment. Through their mutually paradoxical relation to reality, their persistent defense of fluidity, and their shared privileging of ideation over material determinism, animation studies and trans studies clearly share many core values and practices.

Even within education practices for students of animation, guidebooks and instructors highlight the medium's fluid representations of bodies in a manner that is strikingly similar to the approaches to embodiment put forth by trans studies scholars and trans and nonbinary individuals. Both animation and trans and nonbinary philosophies champion a malleable conception of bodies that prioritizes the role of ideation in matters of bodily presentation and embodiment, a conception that encourages freedom of expression and experimentation. As Richard Williams wrote in his iconic animation guide, even when drawing bodies, animators "can invent what doesn't take place in the real world" (146). Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that this claim includes gender.

The Disney Princess archetype is just one of many examples of animated works that essentially (re)invent gender. While many cite the Disney princesses as figures that reinforce traditional gender roles, in Chapter 2 I shifted this framing instead to consider these princesses as archetypes for their *own* gender. Through the recycling of previously animated sequences, I traced a simplified path of gender's construction—a path consisting of repetition and stylization, just as Butler describes. Admittedly, the Disney princesses do not offer a path toward highly imaginative gender embodiment, at least not a clear path, but they do demonstrate the medium of animation's unique inclination to think gender by simplifying and highlighting the mechanisms of gender's construction and maintenance.

However, other animated works *do* offer a clearer path toward liberated forms of gender embodiment. Chapter 3 explored two of these more imaginative texts: *Adventure Time* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. The former's Lumpy Space Princess upends prescriptive links between anatomy and gender embodiment, presenting a path distinct from her Disney counterparts in that it appears to be highly unique and personal to LSP rather than simply an iteration of previously established norms. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s Shinji, on the other hand, offers an example of animation's ability to portray the complex and often paradoxical relationship between corporeality and ideation. Additionally, Shinji's shapeshifting sequence not only highlights the difficulties of feeling comfortable in one's body and presentation—a common struggle for trans and nonbinary people—but also ultimately concludes that ideation should precede materiality (while not overwriting it entirely). That is, Shinji learns a lesson central to trans and nonbinary philosophies: We have the power to choose who we wish to be.

Future Research

The intersection of animation studies and trans studies has vast potential for future research. I hope that with my work I have demonstrated the validity and importance of exploring this interdisciplinary subject, but I have by no means exhausted the many ways these two fields can benefit one another.

Firstly, in Chapter 1 my consideration of animation's production only scratches the surface of the many modes and practices behind animation's production. Future research could more closely examine any one (or combination) of numerous modes of animation, including but not limited to cel animation, digital animation, or stop-motion. A closer analysis of these forms of animation could consider the ways their varied relations to materiality affect the way they *think* gender's materiality. Does the use of layers in cel animation yield unique contributions to

conceptions of gender when compared to the volumetric animations used in so-called “live-action” CGI films? Even within a category such as stop-motion, there are numerous modes of production to consider—perhaps claymation’s *literally* malleable construction of gender in films like *Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio* offers commentary on the materiality of boyhood in a manner that differs on a formal level from the portrayal of masculinity through the toy figures playing *A Town Called Panic’s* lead characters: Cowboy, Indian, and Horse.

There are also many elements of animation’s production that I was not able to consider in depth. While my work touched upon the role of voiceovers within animation, there is undoubtedly potential for more research regarding the gendering of animated voices. My research considered instances in which the gender of voice actors differed from the gender of the characters they played, but it may also be worth considering the methods voice actors employ to “construct” gender through their aural performances. How might voice acting techniques reveal the way gender is performed vocally in a manner isolated from physical embodiment? Moreover, how do these techniques parallel and/or inform the lived experiences of trans and nonbinary people pursuing gender-affirming vocal therapy? Thus, further research exploring the role of voice in animation’s production of gender, as well as many other animation production techniques, could prove highly valuable for both animation studies and trans studies.

As I mentioned in my Introduction, owing to the scope of this project, I focused my attention primarily on Western works of animation. For future research, I strongly support the application of methodologies similar to my own to the animation practices of non-Western cultural and geographical contexts. Animation’s production, aesthetics, and viewing cultures vary widely across the world; a consideration of another region’s approach to animating gender *or* a comparison between multiple cultural animations of gender would likely add great nuance to the arguments I have made. Additionally, future research could—and should—also consider more varied conceptions of gender. Once again, my research was limited to a culturally-isolated understanding of gender, but surely an analysis of animation’s approach to gender that embraces alternative gender constructs would prove fruitful. Of particular note, I believe that a consideration of gender’s role in animated films from Indigenous peoples of the Americas would be highly valuable. Kristin L. Dowell’s article, “DIGITAL SUTURES: Experimental Stop-Motion Animation as Future Horizon of Indigenous Cinema,” sets out to expand Indigenous studies scholarship to include experimental stop-motion animation. Their research considers stop-motion animation “as a cinematic practice that literally handcrafts new, imaginative futuristic worlds” (Dowell 189). I wonder how Dowell’s research could further expand to consider the representation of gender (and its construction) within these animated “futuristic worlds.”

Finally, future research should certainly consider the animation of gender outside of film and television. Animation is truly *everywhere*—to quote the very first sentence of Suzanne Buchan’s introduction to *Pervasive Animation*, “Animation is pervasive in contemporary moving culture” (1)—and a consideration of the medium’s handling of gender truly could not be complete without a consideration of the medium’s numerous contexts. Video games are a mode of animation that places great emphasis on characterization while also adding complex relations to subjectivity. I believe that an exploration of video games offers great promise, specifically for considerations of animation’s ability to offer trans and nonbinary people opportunities to reimagine gender. For example, character creation screens, an element of gameplay notorious for capturing hours of players’ attention, highlight the importance people place on their presentation. But what happens when we go deeper and consider the parallels between character-creation processes and gender-affirming surgery? It bears noting that colloquially, many trans people cite themselves choosing the “opposite” gendered character growing up as an early sign of their trans identity. Other contexts for animation, such as public advertisements, application user interfaces (UIs), and more only compound animation’s innumerable contacts with gender representation. Research regarding these more practical forms of animation can further our understanding of the many ways animation shapes our understanding of gender, perhaps even more than animated films and shows.

Animation studies and trans studies still have much more to offer one another, and their dialogue may also include (and benefit) many other disciplines including, but not limited to, video game studies, Indigenous studies, and media studies more widely. And yet, those who may benefit from further research the most may not be scholars, but rather trans and nonbinary individuals. An understanding of animation that includes its inclination towards thinking gender endows the medium with a unique ability to offer trans and nonbinary people a wider archive of resources illustrating paths towards “new ways of imagining or becoming a gender in the world” (Keegan, “Revisitation” 27). If for nothing else but this purpose, I hope that this project is only the beginning of a long and productive partnership between animation and trans studies.

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