Call for papers

International colloquium

101 THEORY NOT FOUND

Video Games x Animation

December 14 & 15 2023 - INHA, Paris
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Video Games x Animation

This international colloquium is organized by the University of Paris Nanterre (HAR) and the NEF Animation, in partnership with the University of Rennes 2 and with the support of the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, the Institut Universitaire de France and the GIS «Jeux et Sociétés». This event is part of the annual colloquiums organized by the scientific committee of the NEF Animation.

Argument

When scholars in game studies turn their attention to the moving images of video games, they do so, with a few exceptions\(^1\), from the perspective of cinema. However, thinking the moving images on the basis of film theories often leads to perpetuating their blind spots, a fairly common oversight being the ad hoc category known as “animation cinema”.

In fact, the first known occurrence of this expression dates back to 1953 and is attributed to André Martin, who used it to group and legitimize various marginalized cinematographies (such as animated films, puppet films, animated engravings, scratching on film, etc.) under a common technical principle: “frame-by-frame production”. Martin sought to establish a community of crafts beyond “cartoons”, without reducing it to experimental cinema, giving rise to what he called “animation cinema”\(^2\). This field articulates at the same time a technique and a specific idea of cinema: it is based on an inverted model where “the living is no longer the convention\(^3\)”, presenting catabolic bodies and entropic images\(^4\) that defy classical theories predominantly constructed on live-action cinematography.

However, it is striking to note that despite the widely recognized inversion of power relations between animation and cinema\(^5\), “animation cinema” remains a minor and marginalized field within academic research, often overlooked by film scholars. This omission seems to persist in game studies as well while – although the photographic codes traditionally holds primary importance when considering cinematographic images – animation techniques are at the heart of video game image production. On the other end of the spectrum, a similar problem arises: the history of digital animation often neglects the development of animation within the field of video games. Beyond the question of animation techniques common to both mediums, the aesthetic reflections and issues of animation cinema can yet significantly enhance the understanding of video games as an art form.

Therefore, we aim to outline an approach of video games based on the thoughts and methods of animation cinema, laying the foundations for studying animation within video games. Indeed, considering the links between animation cinema and video games proves fruitful, both technically and aesthetically, for understanding images, the industry, video games, and animation. In fact, designations such as “computer games” and “electronic games”, which coexisted at the time of the medium’s birth, have now disappeared, leaving an overwhelming dominance of the term “video games” (at least in France), underscoring the importance of moving images within the medium. Animation thus appears as one of the current cores of video game, constituting one of its enabling conditions, even in cases where video game techniques take more ambiguous paths, such as motion capture or performance capture, which have sparked debates among scholars regarding their classification as animation cinema territory or not. We consequently find it essential to examine the connections between animation cinema and video games: their legacies, alterations, themes, and common actors.

Furthermore, besides their coincidental emergence in the 1960’s (the modern era of cinema, during which the concept and community of animation


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 34.


\(^5\) On this particular topic, see Joubert-Laurencin Hervé, “Le cinéma d’animation n’existe plus”, Acném, n°1, octobre 2008.

\(^6\) “Rear projection and blue screen photography, matte paintings and glass shots, mirrors and miniatures, push development, optical effects and other techniques which allowed filmmakers to construct and alter the moving images, and thus could reveal that cinema was not really different from animation, were pushed to cinema’s periphery by its practitioners, historians and critics. In the 1990s, with the shift to computer media, these marginalized techniques moved to the center.” Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2001.
Thematic Axes

In this context, proposals can fit into one or several of the following thematic axes, without necessarily being limited to them:

• Logic of creation
  This first axis aims to study the role of animation in video game development, as well as the points of convergence between the two industries. It covers topics such as transmedia/media-mix, collaborative animations and games, hand-made/material cinema and video games, creation as a playful practice and playing as a creative activity, machinimas, the role of animators in the video game industry, etc.

• Economic and cultural history of techniques
  A history of animation in video games is still to be written, and would encompass – for instance – software and hardware developments, evolution of animation techniques in video games, trajectories of industry actors, relationships between science, art, and industry; the elaboration of artificial intelligences, aesthetics based on simulated materials, data and code libraries, interfaces of creation; as well as the place of animation in the imagination of developers.

• Mutant architectures
  Unlike live-action cinema, animation often presents space as a representation that embraces its identity as an image, where the material is submerged in the immaterial and vice versa. It seems therefore relevant to consider video game spaces through this lens: animations and materiality of virtual spaces, transformation of reality through games, political interactivities within virtual spaces and spatial politics of interaction/control; virtual reality, augmented reality, sandbox games, data visualization and spatialization, procedural animation, interpolation-based animation, non-Euclidean or liminal spaces, relationships of depth and flatness within images; software corruptions, glitch aesthetics, noises and signals, etc.

• Moving letters
  The movement and animation of texts within video game images also bear multiple interrogations. This axis covers topics such as animated texts and animations generated from texts, ASCII7 arts and games, command line games, data interpretation models, relationships between computer languages and code(s) of reality, recurrences of comics in animated films and video games (speech bubbles, embossing, shading of cells, etc.), procedural rhetoric, user interfaces (UI) and heads-up displays (HUD)8, inventories, etc.

• Thanatomorphic bodies
  Lastly, we propose to study body animations in video games and the questions they raise, including motion capture, avatar and NPC9, animations, embodiment and simulation issues, logics and designs of birth (spawn, respawn), death and survival (die & retry, survival, beat’em all, etc.); performances and role-plays (of animators, of players), choreographies, dances, and transformations of images and games; scripted actions, automatons, players and machines agency, character design, creation and customization in games (influence of “choices” on the fate of these bodies, skins economies, etc.).

7. “American Standard Code for Information Interchange” originally refers to a computer standard for encoding typographic characters, and later to practices and aesthetics that treat these characters as elementary components of an image (see, for example, the compiled archives at https://www.asciiart.eu/).
8. “User Interface” and “Heads Up Display” are often used interchangeably, but the HUD is actually a specific form of UI that mimics the physical HUDs found in aircraft, submarines, etc., from which it borrows its name.
9. “Non-Playable Characters”
Submission

Professionals and scholars are invited to submit their papers proposals (approximately 300 words) in French or English, along with a brief biographical statement.

- before September 10th, 2023
- to: 101tnjvxa@liste.parisnanterre.fr

Selections will be announced by email.

Practical information

The conference will be held both in-person at the INHA (Paris) and digitally on December 14th and 15th, 2023.

Organizing Committee

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Image (cover): Conway’s Game of Life on a LED Matrix par Simon Waldherr
Indicative bibliography

ALBERA François & TORTAJADA Maria (dir.), *Cinema Beyond Film: Media Epistemology in Modern Area*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2010.


