Cartoon "Realities":
The Animated Body and Narrative Conventions in
Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc.
Films of the 1930s

by
Gordan Calma, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Film Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

August 27, 2003

© 2003, Gordan Calma

Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 0-494-00714-1

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-494-00714-1

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis will deal with different ways in which animated films construct their self-contained diegetic “realities,” with a particular emphasis on the 1930s cartoon shorts from two American animation studios, Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc. The animated cartoon does not exist in some sort of “imaginary” realm, but rather creates its fictitious universe by relating its signifiers to their subjects’ referents/signifieds in the “real world” and by employing different types of narrational strategies. In that sense, this work will thoroughly examine the physical and symbolic nature of the animated body in the two studios’ shorts. It will also explore how particular narrative conventions served to reinforce different types of ideological values in Disney and Fleischer animated realms of the period. The thesis will conclude with a suggestion of how its theoretical framework may be used in future discussions of different animation and live-action practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their unselfish help, the author wishes to thank Tea Rokolj, James Dean, Eden Munro, Melissa Charlesworth, and Chad Pinkess. I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Mark Langer, for his unprecedented approachability, encouragement, and assistance with the research material. For their love and support I am deeply indebted to my dear parents, Božo and Mirjana Calma, and my brother, Nenad Calma. Without them, I would not have been able to finish this project. Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Ljerka Calma, whose love for life is exceeded only by her love for her family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Preface.....	vi
2. The Real vs. the Imaginary: Live-Action Cinema and Animated Cartoon as an Unstable Dichotomy.....	1
3. Disney vs. Fleischer: Appealing Caricatures, Grotesque Hybrids, and Different Cultural Symbols.....	30
4. Disney, Fleischer, Text and Context: Different Narrational Practices in Different Animated Worlds.....	66
5. Conclusion.....	112
6. Bibliography.....	117

PREFACE

I have always been fascinated with animation. As a child growing up in a country once known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I would impatiently wait for the clock to strike 7:15 every night. It was the time when one of the two state-controlled TV channels used to show an animated cartoon. Children all around the country would stop whatever they were doing, abandon the games they were playing in an eager anticipation of the “7:15 cartoon short.” My generation grew up watching Hollywood cartoons from the “golden age” of animation. Sure, we watched some Russian, Hungarian, Italian, Belgian and, of course, Zagreb animated films, but American cartoons were everyone’s favourites. I loved them. I never paid attention to how old those shorts were, but I knew that they displayed wonderful images, amazing characters, entertaining actions, and the quality of animation that was unprecedented. As my friends grew older, many of them outgrew their love for cartoons. Of course, once I became a teenager, certain pastime activities like soccer or socializing with friends became significantly more important than before. Still, I never forgot to turn on my (or someone else’s) TV at 7:15 p.m. if I had an opportunity to do so.

Even as a child I was aware of all sorts of differences among Warner Bros, MGM and Disney shorts. (Disney films were always my favourite.) I must admit, other children have never been particularly amazed by my ability to distinguish between four different cartoon incarnations of Tom and Jerry. In a way, here lies the tragedy of animation: you are supposed to love cartoons as a child (when you cannot truly appreciate or discuss them), and stop caring about them as you get older. It was different with me. Instead of

forgetting about cartoons, I started appreciating them even more. I wanted to know more about different animation studios. I was curious to find out how different animation practices created different animated worlds, or how different cartoons communicated their meanings to us. I never wanted to accept the notion that animation is a medium that you love as a child and that you forget as an adult. I developed a new respect for Walt Disney's cartoons and the studio's artistry. Disney always remained the number one for me. Unfortunately, critical literature on Disney, let alone other animation studios or practices, was almost non-existent in my part of the world.

Due to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), my family and I moved to Canada. In Ottawa I pursued my post-secondary education and enrolled in the undergraduate Film Studies program at Carleton University. In my third year, I took Mark Langer's course on the history and different practices of animation. It was my first encounter with the subject of animation from the academic perspective. The films that left a particularly strong impression on me in that class were the late 1920s and early 1930s cartoons by Max and Dave Fleischer. It was the classical Hollywood animation that I had not seen before.¹ I found Fleischer films to be truly unique. They were different not only from Disney shorts, but also from many other animated cartoons that I knew. I came to realize that animation is truly a very complex medium that, like the live-action cinema itself, has the ability to convey different ideas through different stylistic practices, narrative conventions and ideological values. Still, the bitter truth that I had to face during my undergraduate years was the fact that until the last two decades of the twentieth century, animation was one of the most neglected forms of film, and was greatly ignored

by the discipline of Film Studies. With rare exceptions, such as the Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein, who praised the work of Walt Disney in his writings of the 1930s and 1940s, film critics and scholars traditionally tended to disregard animation or, as Edward S. Small and Eugene Levinson say, “view it with doctrinaire deprecation.”² In the introduction to one of the first academic books that dealt with animation from a theoretical perspective, its editor, Alan Cholodenko, said:

It had long been obvious to us that the traditional apparatuses of Film Studies had ignored animation. There had been little if any incorporation of animation history and/or theory in Film Studies courses and programs; addressal of animation by film scholars through research, publication or papers at conferences...Moreover, there had been little acknowledgment of the existence, history, achievements and cultural contributions of the practice of animation.³

To many traditional film theorists the cartoon was, to use Edward Snead’s words, “*ipso facto* innocuous” and was perceived to address “relatively unsocialized ‘code-naïve’ minds.”⁴ Kristin Thompson points out that critics and theorists have largely avoided the subject of animation, thus “implicitly accepting the view of the cartoon as trivial.”⁵ André Bazin’s, Siegfried Kracauer’s and other realist film critics’ rejection of animation was, in great part, consistent with their philosophical premises and their utter regard for “physical reality.” Bazin praised the live-action cinema for its ability to recreate the world in its own image: an image, as he pointed out, “unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist.”⁶ This aspect, however, is exactly what many formalist film theorists have found to be an impediment to the live-action photo-realism. In his quasi-prophetic insight, formalist scholar, Rudolf Arnheim said:

I would venture to predict that the film will be able to reach the heights of the other arts only when it frees itself from the bonds of photographic reproduction and becomes a pure work of man, namely, as animated cartoon or painting.⁷

Surprisingly enough, Arnheim barely mentioned the animated cartoon beyond this comment. Even though it seems logical that animation would have been an appealing area of study for the formalist scholars due to the medium's freedom of artistic expression, which Arnheim acknowledged, many theorists from this school, with rare exceptions such as Eisenstein, have tended to ignore the art of animation just like the realist critics. In addition, within the neglected medium of animation, the Hollywood cartoon had a particularly unfavourable place. Leonard Maltin explains:

[As an adolescent], all [animation books] I could find at the library were several books on Walt Disney. General histories of film barely mentioned animation, reserving what little space there was for Disney and the pioneers of experimental animation (Len Lye, Lotte Reiniger, Norman McLaren, and others). In these surveys, Bugs Bunny did not warrant so much as a passing nod, and neither did his creators.⁸

Although in the final two decades of the last century the study of animation (both Hollywood and experimental) increasingly was incorporated into the discipline of Film Studies, many scholars continued to reinforce the idea of the medium's inherent "difference," thus positioning the animated cartoon as a sort of binary opposite in relation to the live-action cinema. Such perception can have very harmful consequences for the artistic and academic status of animation, since it tends to homogenize what is really an extremely rich and heterogeneous category. My refusal to ever position my favourite cartoons in an inferior, trivial realm served as the basis for this project. It perfectly coincided with my academic interests in semiotics and questions of different narrational practices in the cinema. In that sense, this thesis will argue that animation does not belong

to some essentially imaginary domain, but instead engages in complex signification practices by relating its fictitious signifiers to their subjects' referents/signifieds in the "real world." In addition, animation, like the live-action cinema, follows different types of narrative conventions that define ideologically different diegetic "realities." Due to my interest in American animation in its "golden age," particular emphasis will be placed on the 1930s Disney cartoons and, for me, equally important Fleischer shorts from the same period. The thesis will be divided in three chapters:

In Chapter One I will build on Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) semiology, Catherine Belsey's notion of classic realism, and Sergei Eisenstein's idea of "cartoony" plasmaticness in order to challenge the essentialist dichotomy that perceives the animated cartoon as the opposite of the live-action cinema. I will argue that the animated medium does not simply revel in some sort of imaginary realm, but, like the live-action cinema itself, it operates on different registers of both the real and the imaginary.

In Chapter Two I will proceed to discuss animated films from the Disney and Fleischer studios of the 1930s in light of the concepts introduced in Chapter One. The focus will be on the physical nature of the animated body and its symbolic function. I will argue that while Disney accentuated the caricatural appeal of the organically homogeneous animated body, which symbolized an optimistic, innocent, and morally acceptable world, the Fleischers often depicted ugly and/or grotesque cartoon characters, which stood for a pessimistic, sinful, morally subversive world of the period.

In Chapter Three I will deal with different types of textual logic in Disney and Fleischer animated films from the 1930s. I will argue that while Disney's optimistic

universe operated as an animated text that followed multiple realist tendencies, the Fleischers' world often embodied different narrative conventions, which expressed the medium's "liberating" tendencies, but also its anarchic and hallucinatory disorderliness.

Notes

¹ I had seen a few later, "Disneyfied" Fleischer shorts in Yugoslavia, but at the time I was not aware that they were Fleischer films.

² Edward S. Small and Eugene Levison, "Toward a Theory of Animation," in The Velvet Light Trap, No. 24 (Fall 1989), 67.

³ Alan Cholodenko, "Introduction," in Alan Cholodenko (ed.), The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation (Sydney: Power Publications in association with the Australian Film Commission, 1991), 10.

⁴ James Snead, "Trimming Uncle Remus's Tales: Narrative Revisions in Walt Disney's *Song of the South*," in James Snead, Colin MacCabe (ed.) and Cornel West (ed.), White Screens Black Images (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85.

⁵ Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," in Teresa de Lauretis and Steven Heath (eds.), The Cinematic Apparatus, (London: Macmillan, 1980), 112.

⁶ André Bazin, What is Cinema? Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 21.

⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, Film as Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 213.

⁸ Leonard Maltin, Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons, Revised Edition (New York: A Plume Book, 1987), vi.

CHAPTER ONE

The Real vs. the Imaginary: Live-Action Cinema and Animated Cartoon as an Unstable Dichotomy

As I indicated in my introduction, both realist and formalist film critics and theorists who ignored animation tended to do so due to their perception of animation's inherent "difference" from the live-action cinema. This essentialist view of animation, where cartoon is seen as existing as a sort of binary opposition in relation to the live-action cinema did not end once film scholars started incorporating animation into the discursive apparatus of the discipline. Quite the contrary, the idea of animation's "difference" continued to be reinforced even more strongly. This school of thought, led by such film critics and scholars as Gene Deitch, Steven Millhauser, William Moritz, and Kristin Thompson, among others, has tended to position the animated cartoon within the domain of the imaginary.¹ Oppositely, the live-action cinema has been seen by these critics as a medium that largely interacts with the realm of the real. In that sense, the animated cartoon has generally been perceived as a medium that is intrinsically antithetical to the live-action cinema. Contrary to this traditional belief, I will argue in this chapter that both live-action cinema and animated cartoons always have been engaged in a process of negotiation with both the real and the imaginary. In order to problematize the essentialist notion of animation (and, by extension, the live-action film), I will rely on C. S. Peirce's semiology, Catherine Belsey's structuralist approach to the ideology of realism, and Sergei Eisenstein's notion of plasmaticness, relating them to our understanding of the medium's epistemological qualities. By using conceptual

categories from Peircean semiology, I will explain how live-action cinema and animation, rather than being strictly divided along the unambiguous lines of the real and the imaginary, in fact, both engage in complex relationships between cinematic signifiers and their signifieds in the “real world.” In addition, by relying on Belsey’s concept of classic realism and Eisenstein’s notion of plasmaticness, I will discuss particular narrative conventions, which, regardless of whether a film is animated or live-action, serve to ideologically situate on-screen signifiers and portray the cinematic world as diversely (un)intelligible and/or (un)natural.

Kristin Thompson in her “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique” said that “Hollywood defined the cartoon by its difference from live-action films.”² She added:

During the late teens, twenties, and up into the fifties, filmmakers and audiences maintained this ideological view of animation’s difference; animation could do things live-action could not, and hence it came to be assumed that it *should* do only these things.³

Similarly, in his article “Animation - What the Heck Is It?” from September 2001, Gene Deitch quoted Steven Millhauser’s Little Kingdoms to support this traditional understanding of the animated film:

The animated cartoon was a far more honest expression of the cinematic illusion than the so-called realistic (live-action) film, because the cartoon reveled in its own illusory nature, exulted in the impossible – indeed it claimed the impossible as its own, exalted it as its own highest end, found in impossibility, in the negation of the actual, its profoundest reason for being.⁴

Later in his work, Millhauser associated the animated cartoon with “the poetry of the impossible,” and connected it to the “willful violation of the actual” and “an intoxicating release from the constriction of things,” pretty much everything that is perceived as being in opposition to the live-action cinema.⁵ Perhaps, the most radical statement that supports this school of thought could be seen in William Moritz’s extremely peculiar remark: “No

animation film that is *not* non-objective and/or non-linear can really qualify as true animation, since the conventional linear representational story film has long since been far better done in live-action.”⁶ Moritz’s very idea that there exists some sort of “true” animation, which, by its definition, is “different” from live-action, not only in terms of its representational philosophy (“non-objectivity”), but also in terms of its narrational strategies (“non-linearity”) only reinforces what I see as a historically and theoretically inaccurate and rather biased conception of animation. Talking about the animated cartoon and live-action cinema as such a fixed dichotomy presupposes ignoring the complexity of ways in which both animation and live-action cinema construct their “realities” and the way in which they both communicate their meanings to us. Thus, perceiving animation and the live-action cinema as a clear-cut binary assumes disregarding all sorts of representational and (con)textual affinities that may exist between the two. Allow me now to discuss cinematic representation by relying on C. S. Peirce’s science of signs in order to challenge this traditional viewpoint.

In his semiology, Peirce differentiated between three types of signs, namely the index, the icon, and the symbol. Terence Hawkes explains that “triadic relations of performance” in Peircean semiology involve actual entities in the real world, and continues:

These are the *icon*, something which functions as a sign by means of features of itself which resemble its object; the *index*, something which functions as a sign by virtue of some sort of factual or causal connection with its object; and the *symbol*, something which functions as a sign because of some ‘rule’ of conventional or habitual association between itself and its object.⁷

According to Peircean semiology, in the live-action cinema the relationship between the signifier and its referent is clearly indexical, meaning that there exists a direct causal

connection, or a material/physical/corporeal link between what is represented on-screen and its subject/object in nature. For example, even though Sam Spade from *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) does not exist in the “real world,” the projected film still displays moving images that portray an actual, concrete, causal, in one word - indexical - imprint of the “real” Humphrey Bogart who plays Sam Spade. This photographic directness and its sensuous materiality have not only been appealing to semiologists like Peirce, but also to, as I already suggested, realist film critics such as André Bazin and structuralists such as Roland Barthes. Bazin praised the live-action cinema for its ability to transfer “reality” from the original object/body to its photo-indexical copy, while Barthes also accentuated the very materiality of the photographic image by writing the following:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me...A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium.⁸

As can be inferred from both Bazin’s and Barthes’ writings, this physical/corporeal dimension of the photographic image, and, by extension, of the live-action cinema itself, automatically connotes a certain degree of “reality” that such media as paintings or animated cartoons do not possess. Therefore, it is obvious that the very indexicality of the live-action medium and its strong, material connotation of “reality” is one of the main reasons for the traditional way of dichotomizing the live-action cinema and the animated cartoon along the lines of the real vs. the imaginary.

According to this essentialist dichotomy, the animated cartoon, by its very nature, lacks the photo-indexical relationship to its subject matter. The non-indexical nature of the animated film and its ability to portray the magical and extraordinary by being capable

of crossing, like painting, the boundaries of logical representation often inspired animation artists from around the world to escape the dominant representational philosophy of the cinematic language. For example, influenced by the twentieth-century modernism, Oskar Fischinger's films of the 1920s and 1930s conveyed the idea of synthesis of motion, colour, and music through animation of abstract visual elements. Similar abstract animation was also embraced by the animator Len Lye in such films as *Tusalava* (1929) or *Rainbow Dance* (1937), by Walt Disney in some sequences of his animated masterpiece *Fantasia* (1940), and also by Norman McLaren who made some innovative abstract animation for the NFB in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹ It is fair to say that if all animation were like Fischinger's or McLaren's works, then perhaps the essentialist dichotomy could be considered appropriate. It seems to me that the very nature of the animated cartoon is much more ambiguous than what this arbitrary binary suggests, and that, rather than being unquestionably positioned within the realm of the imaginary, simply "marveling in its illusory nature," animation, like the live-action cinema itself, has always been involved in an active process of negotiation with, as Joanna Bouldin puts it, both "the real and the really made up."¹⁰

If we think in Peircean terms, from the very early days of animation, many cartoons have relied on a sort of iconic relationship to their subject matter, insofar as they provided us with a similarity or "fitness" of resemblance proposed by the sign. Just like a diagram, or a painting, the animated cartoon largely became, to use Hawkes' words, "the signifier to its subject's signified in the iconic mode."¹¹ In that sense, many animated films throughout film history, from *Little Nemo* (1911) to the "King of the Hill" series,

have provided us with representations of all sorts of “real life” phenomena. However, even though, in terms of the signifier’s relationship to its corporeal subject in the “real world,” an indexical cinematic character is hierarchically more “real” than an iconic filmic character (physical imprint vs. drawn imitation), it comes to us as no surprise that spectators today may empathize with animated characters just as much as they may emotionally identify with live-action characters. In other words, we may accept the animated world to be as concrete, plausible and coherent as the live-action world. How is this possible?

Both live-action (indexical) characters and animated (iconic) characters behave according to certain rules and laws of narrative logic. It is exactly this self-contained diegetic realm that conveys the on-screen world as intelligible and/or plausible to various degrees. Kristin Thompson points out that as early as 1907, the cinema as a commercial institution developed strategies for drawing the audience to specific films.¹² Some of the most important strategies were the reliance on the star system, the dominance of the story, and an ideology of the realism of depicted events.¹³ This ideology of the realism of depicted events, as Thompson labels it, or classic realism, the term Catherine Belsey uses, is what makes any fictional world believable. In her writings on classic realism in art, Belsey states:

[The classic realist text’s] patterns of cause and effect, of social relationships and moral values, largely confirm the patterns of the world we seem to know....Realism is a culturally relative concept, of course, and many avant-garde movements have successfully introduced formal changes in the name of increased verisimilitude. But the term is useful in distinguishing between those forms which tend to efface their own textuality, their existence as discourse, and those which explicitly draw attention to it. Realism offers itself as transparent.¹⁴

Since the cinema is a rather complex medium, its diegetic plausibility comes not only from some abstract notion of “logical storytelling,” but from a highly conventionalized depiction of visual continuity which helps maintain coherent narrativity. In other words, the cinematic classic realism assumes the effacement of the film’s textual constructed-ness through a sort of visual (and also aural) transparency. In Hollywood and many other national cinemas throughout the world, the ideology of classic realism is inscribed in the filmic text by means of following numerous cinematic conventions such as continuity editing, which helps create logical (usually linear) storytelling. These rules create both visual and narrative coherence, forcing the viewer to overlook the mechanics of filmic production and the artificiality of cinematic conventions in favour of narrative’s naturalness and verisimilitude of its characters’ personalities and behaviour. Bart Testa explains the cinematic classic realism this way:

[In the classical style, storytelling] is regulated by a narrational system that operates both within and across scenes, usually by motivating all space-time shifts to strictly narrative exigencies, such as characters’ gestures and dialogue, looks and, more widely, movements from one scene of action to another. Classical films maintain the immanent diegetic ground for all such shifts, however complicated, by this kind of narrational motivation. Even special cases, such as chases or parallel narration, which do give rise to spatial disjunctions, prove negotiable by syntagmatic figures of temporal simultaneity and are habitually mastered by closure of all such shot series.¹⁵

Sam Spade could have spontaneously combusted in the middle of *The Maltese Falcon* and in the following shot we could have had a twenty five minute long take of Humphrey Bogart addressing the audience directly, had Michael Curtiz and Warner Bros wanted to do so. Instead, in this film, like in so many other mainstream movies, we have a coherent story that follows the classical three-act-structure through logically established and smoothly paced, fictitiously self-contained space-time continuum. The goal of the

ideology of classic realism is to portray the film's narrative diegesis as transparent and logical within the dominant system of signification.

Belsey notes that the ideology of classic realism does not refer to the plausibility of the text's signifiers in relation to their signifieds in some sort of "objective reality" (i.e. how realistic is it that green Martians exist?). It rather suggests that the events of the world that is represented, regardless of the text's generic category, are constructed in such a way as to seem as if they are objectively happening. Belsey explains:

'Classic realism' makes it possible to unite categories which have been divided by the empiricist assumption that the text reflects the world. By implying Saussurean quotation marks round 'realism', the phrase permits the inclusion of all those fictional forms which create the illusion while we read [and by extension, while we watch] that what is narrated is really and intelligibly happening: *The Hobbit* and *The Rainbow*, *The War of the Worlds* and *Middlemarch*. Speaking animals, elves, or Martians are no impediment to intelligibility and credibility if they conform to patterns of speech and behaviour consistent with a 'recognizable' system. Even in fantasy events, however improbable in themselves, are *related* to each other in familiar ways. The plausibility of the individual signifieds is far less important to the reading [or viewing] process than the familiarity of the connections between the signifiers. It is the set of relationships between characters or events, or between characters *and* events, which makes fantasy plausible.¹⁶

It is clear that, by this standard of diegetic verisimilitude and plausibility, it is not important whether we are talking about a "realistic" genre such as the War Drama, or a fantastic type of film such as Science-Fiction, or any other contextual generic category for that matter. What is important is that any cinematic work may follow the same rules and logic of presenting its narrative world as intelligible, transparent, and coherent. In other words, classic realism does not refer to *what*, but to *how* the narrative world is represented.

The most important aspect of classic realism in relation to my work is the fact that the very concept of Belseyian realist ideology, if applied to the cinema, does not refer to the actual mode of filmmaking, but rather to the film's textual organization. Therefore, it

is clear that classic realism in the cinema is not synonymous with the photographic realism that Bazin, Kracauer and other realist film critics praised. In other words, classic realism is not exclusively related to the indexical nature of the live-action/photographic image. To take an extreme example, a photo-indexical film such as *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) may be considered less “realistic” by this standard than an animated motion picture such as, for instance, Disney’s *Peter Pan* (1953), because, instead of the ideology of classic realism, *Un Chien Andalou* follows the dream-like logic of surrealism. Even more importantly, Belsey’s classic realism does not refer to the signifiers’ relationships to their referents/signifieds in the “real world” (that is the domain of Peircean signs). For example, if we are talking about “The Simpsons” series in terms of classic realism, we are not discussing the fact that the animated Homer Simpson does not have a “real” (photo-indexical) referent in nature, as Sam Spade does (or did). That would be the domain of Peircean icon and index. We are, instead, talking about the animated text’s internal logic that involves particular relationships between signifiers. For example, the question could be: Does Homer plausibly relate to Marge, his children, and other characters within the realm of “The Simpsons” by following diegetic logic similar to the one of Sam Spade within the hermetic realm of *The Maltese Falcon*? The cinematic classic realism refers to the more or less realistic ways the on-screen characters (signifiers) relate to each other within their self-contained diegetic worlds, regardless of whether they are related to the real in the iconic or indexical mode. Accordingly, classic realism, I would argue, refers to the verisimilitude of narration and characterization, rather than the visual plausibility of the on-screen phenomena (which is best achieved

through the live-action photo-indexicality). In that sense, both “The Simpsons” (particularly the early episodes before the series became dominated by such postmodernist qualities as self-reflexivity or parodic inter-textuality), and *The Maltese Falcon* follow the ideology of classic realism.

It is important to understand here that neither live-action cinema, nor animation reflect some sort of “actual world” that exists out there, in the “objective reality.” Instead, both live-action cinema and animation, through numerous cinematic practices, construct their worlds by creating different types of meanings and relating them to other meanings. A live-action film may pretend to respect all the rules, laws and logic of our physical world, but so can an animated motion picture. Isao Takahata’s animated *The Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) is a visually stylized, but astonishingly realistic picture that tells a tragic story of a young boy and his little sister during their struggle for survival in Japan near the end of the Second World War. Classic realism, nonetheless, as Belsey maintains, will even go beyond the pretension of imitating the “real world,” since it is the intelligibility, not the mimesis that makes the narrative world realistic. For instance, many animated movies take place in a fictitious realm, in which even animal characters have patterns of human motivation. These films, however, still narrate their stories in a coherent/logical/plausible fashion typical of classic realism. Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) would be an obvious example of this, for even though it challenges the rules of the “real world” by means of providing animal characters with human traits and psychological motivation, it still presents its diegetic realm as familiar and intelligible. This, of course, does not mean that this convention is exclusively “cartoony” either. Films

like *Francis the Talking Mule* (1950), or TV series such as “My Mother the Car” are live-action/photo-indexical works, which allow animal characters and even inanimate objects to use patterns of psychological motivation and even recognizable utterances. These traits, in the “real world,” are exclusively human. In terms of narrative ideology, *Francis*, just like the animated *Lady and the Tramp*, is realistic, since it portrays its fictional universe as naturalized and coherent.¹⁷ Both films’ signifiers, to paraphrase Belsey again, use patterns of speech and behaviour that are intelligible and familiar to us.¹⁸

Since even representational animation is by its nature non-indexical, it can more easily challenge the real world’s laws of biology and physics and, by extension, the transparency and naturalness of classic realism. Sergei Eisenstein praised the cartoon’s “freedom” of expression, which he called “plasmaticness.” He associated this quality with the cartoon’s “rejection of once-and-forever allotted form, freedom from ossification, the ability to dynamically assume any form.”¹⁹ Examples of such fantastic plasmaticness in animation are well-known not only to animation scholars, but also to casual viewers of Hollywood cartoons from the classical era. Many of us take for granted that MGM’s Tom and Jerry in their shorts of the 1940s could slam into a door, or a wall, and turn into various shapes such as metal coins, or an accordion, totally challenging the rules of biology and anatomy in the “real world.” Wyle E. Coyote in the Warner Bros shorts of the 1950s could also freely assume various shapes as a consequence of the gravitational forces, such as plunging from extreme heights or being squashed by a giant rock. Animated characters could be cut in half by a sharp axe and be fully recovered in the very

next scene. They could assume shapes of objects, such as bottles or billiard balls, which they just swallowed, or they could arbitrarily elongate bodily parts at will. These are only a few examples of the liberating plasmaticness that Eisenstein praised in the animated medium. This freedom to miraculously challenge numerous constrictions of not only our physical world and the live-action photo-indexicality, but also the naturalized logic of classic realism, are even today seen as being representative of animation. As I indicated in my introduction, this “difference” from the live-action medium is what critics like Deitch, Millhauser, Moritz, or Thompson perceive to be the main reason for the clear-cut dichotomizing of the animated cartoon and the live-action cinema. But, again, we come to the question of how unambiguous this dichotomy really is.

Even though it is more than clear that the traditional photo-indexical cinema could not display the fantastically plasmatic quality the way the animated cartoon could, this does not necessarily mean that many live-action films could not and did not follow what critics like Deitch, Millhauser, Moritz, Thompson, or even Eisenstein, saw as the exclusively “cartoony” logic. Just as I argued many animated films, such as Disney’s features, may follow the laws and logic of classic realism, which depicts a sort of coherent, transparent and familiar diegetic world, many live-action films may, on the contrary, employ certain rules of what is perceived to be the exclusively “cartoony” logic. For example, Brian Henderson noted that many of Frank Tashlin’s and Jerry Lewis’ films from the 1950s and 1960s employed the essentially cartoony language by means of challenging numerous physical laws, such as thermodynamics, biology/anatomy, and mechanics. Henderson wrote:

Thermodynamics are involved when ice melts and milk bottles burst open as Jayne Mansfield walks by in *The Girl Can't Help It* [1956] and when a watercooler boils as Shirley MacLaine kisses Jerry Lewis in *Artists and Models* [1955]. More often, however, it is laws of biology and anatomy that are contravened, as in the masseuse's impossible bending and stretching of Lewis's body in *Artists and Models*, variations of which occur in the Lewis-directed films *The Nutty Professor* (1963) and *The Big Mouth* (1967). The laws of mechanics are frequently set aside as well, as in the impossible course of the runaway golf ball and other object behavior in *Who's Minding the Store?* [1963] and other films.²⁰

It is important to note that much before such "cartoony" logic became characteristic of Tashlin and/or Lewis films, many silent comedians, such as Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, or Charlie Chaplin, had used many aspects of plasmatic lawlessness. In a movie titled *Liberty* (1928), for instance, Stan and Ollie play convicts who escape from the prison. They try changing clothes in the getaway car, but wind up wearing each other's trousers. The film involves their trying to exchange pants in various places such as alleys and taxis. Finally, they unintentionally end up high above the street on the girders of a construction site. As the film approaches its closure, Stan and Ollie finally find an elevator, which saves them from this rather acrophobic predicament. An unsuspecting police constable strolls beneath the descending elevator, which squashes him. As our "heroes" run away, the policeman emerges from beneath the elevator. Not only is he uninjured, but he comes out as a dwarfed version of himself, dressed in a miniature police outfit. Just like Tom and Jerry, or Wyle E. Coyote, the police officer in *Liberty* ends up in an alternate realm of fantastic plasmaticness, a universe totally removed from the physical laws of our world and, consequently, from the transparent ideology of classic realism.²¹ In an even earlier film titled *Easy Street* (1917), Charlie Chaplin who plays a police constable, at one point engages in a fight with a much larger adversary, played by the ominous-looking Eric Campbell. As the two of them fight on a deserted street, Chaplin

manages to grab a nearby streetlight, which he bends as if it were made out of rubber. Charlie shoves the bully's head inside the bent streetlight's lantern and anesthetizes him with gas.

Similar plasmatic illogicality resurfaced again in much later photo-indexical films, not only the ones directed by Frank Tashlin and Jerry Lewis as Henderson points out, but also in movies by directors such as Mel Brooks (*Blazing Saddles* [1974]), Hal Needham (*The Villain* [1979]), David Zucker (*The Naked Gun* [1988]), or Robert Zemeckis (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* [1988]), to name only a few. An obvious scene that follows such “cartoony” logic can be seen near the end of *The Naked Gun*. The movie's villain is run over by a steamroller, but instead of being harmed/mutilated as a “real” person in the “real world” would be, he is flattened like a pancake, the way Tom, Jerry, or any other plasmatic cartoon character would be. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is much smarter, but also a bit more conservative about its use of such cartoony plasticity. The film superbly mixes drawn (iconic) characters and “real” (photo-indexical) people. *Roger* tells a story of Eddy Valiant, a cynical private eye who has been on the skids since the death of his brother at the hands of a cartoon character (in the film, cartoon characters are referred to as the “Toons”). When Roger Rabbit gets framed for murder of human Marvin Acme, he has no one but the Toon-hating Eddy to ask for help. The villain responsible for framing Roger is revealed to be the menacing Judge Doom, supposedly a human character whose desire is to further a corrupt business plan, the realization of which involves the obliteration of the cartoon characters' ghetto, Toontown. Near the end of the film, in a scene reminiscent of the one from *The Naked Gun*, the monstrous villain is run over by a

steamroller. Instead of being killed, the evil judge is flattened as if he were a shirt hot-pressed with an iron. Judge Doom's plasmatic nature suddenly reveals that he is not a human character, but a Toon in disguise. This scene, unlike the scene from *The Naked Gun*, deliberately plays around with the interstitial zone between the two modes of expression: while physical laws of the "real world" apply to human characters (Eddie's brother is said to have been killed when a cartoon character dropped a piano on his head), the Toon characters follow a completely different logic - the one of fantastic plasmaticness. Even though he has passed for a live-action character, Judge Doom cannot escape from his cartoony plasticity.

We can come to a conclusion that just as an animated cartoon may be intelligible/plausible in a sense that a photo-indexical movie may be, by following not only the laws of our, physical world, but also the rules of classic realism, a live-action film may be as "unrealistic" as an animated cartoon by following the lawless nature of plasmatic illogicality. Interestingly, as I already explained, this very Eisensteinian plasmaticness had characterized the American silent comedy much before it became typical of the American animation. To say that Laurel and Hardy's, let alone Chaplin's, silent films use the "cartoony" logic of "Tom and Jerry" or "Road Runner" shorts is to label these films retrospectively, applying our knowledge of the 1940s and 1950s animation to the live-action cinema of the Teens and Twenties. Quite the contrary, one might argue that it was the photo-indexical medium that had first brought the kind of plasmatic lawlessness that was later associated and radically exaggerated in the animated medium.²² Thompson's assertion that "Hollywood defined the cartoon by its difference

from live-action films,” like the whole basis of the essentialist dichotomy itself, is most certainly misleading, or, even historically and theoretically erroneous. Quite contrarily, in terms of narrative logic of any filmic text, neither cinematic practice, animation nor live-action, essentially belongs to either domain - the real or the imaginary. I am going to pause here and return briefly to the question of the animated character’s relationship to the “real body.”

I suggested that cartoons generally lack the material, physical, or indexical relationship between on-screen signifiers and their signifieds in the “real world.” I proposed that an animated character’s relationship to its signified in nature is largely iconic, meaning that there exists a sort of non-arbitrary similarity proposed by the cinematic sign, which must be acknowledged by the receiver/viewer. The cartoon realm and its inhabitants, however, did not always simply function as signs by means of features of themselves which faithfully resembled creatures in the “real world.” In other words, their bodies’ relationship to “real bodies” in nature has often been much more complex than what the rather simplistic concept of the Peircean icon connotes. When talking about animated bodies it is important to distinguish between two concepts, which I would define as the mimetic icon and the caricatural icon.

Quite a few animated films throughout history have attempted to imitate the “real world,” or photo-indexical cinema, in terms of their visual philosophy. This is known as the mimetic representation. Mimesis in art predates the animated film by many centuries. Lev Manovich, for example, traced the icons of mimesis to the history of Western painting:

Historically, the idea of mimesis has been connected with the success in illusionistic representation of certain subjects. The original episode in the history of Western painting is the story of the competition of Zeuxis and Parrhasius. The grapes painted by Zeuxis symbolize his skill to create living nature out of inanimate matter of paint. Further examples in the history of art include the celebration of the mimetic skill of those painters who were able to simulate another symbol of living nature - the human flesh.²³

In the 1940s, in his striving to achieve greater realism in the animated medium, Disney was preoccupied with giving a convincing mimetic dimension to his animated characters that inhabited the realm of his feature films. In *Bambi* (1942), for example, Disney wanted his iconic deer and rabbits to have the visual aura, as well as the patterns of movement and behaviour, that were reminiscent of “real animals.” Paul Wells explains:

As Disney’s studio grew and embarked on ever more ambitious projects, most notably the creation of a full-length animated feature, Disney’s animators undertook programmes of training in the skills and techniques of fine art in the constant drive towards ever greater notions of realism. Animals had to move like real animals but it was important that the complexity of this movement must be unnoticeable, a condition achieved through the dexterity of the artist’s skill in drawing the creatures.²⁴

But, even before Disney, in the very early days of animation, artists like Winsor McCay expressed this tendency for achieving the icons of mimesis. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston maintain that “working essentially alone, he [McCay] turned out several astounding films between 1911 and 1921, with some cartoon figures so convincing that he was accused of tracing them from photographs.”²⁵

Even though some animated films, including the works of McCay and much later, Disney himself, have provided us with mimetic portrayals of their fictitious animated realms, a significantly greater number of cartoons have depicted their animated characters as caricatural icons. Since one of the most important precursors of the animated film was graphic narrative, not photography, it is not surprising that the vast majority of “classical” cartoons have continued the tradition of comic books in which the main characters were

depicted as caricatural versions of beings that inhabit the “real world.”²⁶ “Caricature,” Philip Thomson explains, “may be briefly defined as the ludicrous exaggeration of characteristics or peculiar features.”²⁷ Popeye’s big forearms (signifiers of working-class strength), Elmer Fudd’s huge forehead (signifier of infantilism), or the Pink Panther’s anthropomorphized posture are only a few examples that classify these animated characters as iconic bodies exaggerated in the caricatural mode. The animated medium from its earliest days clearly expressed both these tendencies - sometimes it presented its protagonists as caricatures, and sometimes it portrayed animated characters as mimetic bodies. In terms of textual logic too, the early animation employed different conventions. Sometimes it challenged the biological/physical laws of the “real world” (and, by extension, the coherence and logic of classical storytelling) by relying on numerous “liberating” tendencies of plasmatic language, but, at other times, it provided diegetic intelligibility to its fictitious realm by creating animated characters with plausible motivation and realistic behavioural patterns.²⁸ Let me elaborate this point by discussing two milestone animated pictures by two of the most important animation pioneers, Emil Cohl and Winsor McCay.

In the late nineteenth century (1883-1891), Emil Cohl, together with Jules Lévy, led a group of artists, journalists, and bon vivants who called themselves the Incoherents. They manifested in their art a sort of playful anarchy through a spontaneous creative expression. As Donald Crafton points out, the Incoherents “were nihilists who adamantly refused to adhere to rules and conventions or to temper their creations in order to conform to standards of respectability.”²⁹ Refusing to impose any rational order or coherent

structure, while accentuating the ludicrous, in their avant-garde art, the Incoherents were the true predecessors of the Dadaists and Surrealists.³⁰ After the group disbanded, Cohl preserved its erratically absurdist and irreverently contemptuous attitude, but now in the new medium of animated film. A great example is one of Cohl's earliest achievements in animation titled *Fantasmagorie* (1908). In the tradition of a music hall lightning sketch, the film begins with the artist drawing a character who comes to life on a blackboard. Even though the film uses representational animation, its characters are portrayed as artificial beings made out of white lines. They are simplistic caricatural icons of "real life" phenomena, who do not possess any mimetically realistic qualities. The short's language, in the typical fashion of the Incoherents' art, is outrageously bizarre and almost unintelligibly phantasmagoric. Outlandishly surreal moments in this film show metamorphoses and transformations of all kinds. A gentleman's clothes reshape themselves into a cinema interior. A man sets a lady alight with his cigar. A clown is abused by a flower. The clown's head is, then, ripped off his shoulders, and he is later swallowed by a bottle, metamorphosed into a lotus flower, then into an elephant, and finally into a house. The clown ends up cracking open his regained head, and, later, swells up like a balloon and floats away. Cohl found animation to be a perfect medium for displaying the Incoherents' poetry of the irrational by using the fantastic language, which Eisenstein later defined as plasmaticness. By relying on the extreme anarchism of such lawless language, by refusing to employ physical laws of the "real world" or the coherence, plausibility, and intelligibility of classic realism, *Fantasmagorie* displayed, to quote Esther Leslie, "an illogical narrative of cruelty and torture executed at people and

things at war with each other.”³¹ Since the film’s characters were not mimetic, but openly flat and artificial, the metamorphic language that tortured them was almost hallucinatory. In that sense, Leslie points out that the violence in *Fantasmagorie* is “painless, dreamlike, as if it were more of a utopian transfiguration of actuality’s discord.”³²

The appeal of Winsor McCay’s early animated cartoon *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) was significantly different from Cohl’s reliance on the animated medium’s “imaginary nature.” *Gertie* is part photo-indexical, part animated film, which features McCay bringing a drawn dinosaur to life through the miracle of animation. McCay, cartoonist and director of this one-reel film, gets out of a car with cartoonist George McManus and humorist Roy McCardell in front of the American Museum of Natural History, where a dinosaur skeleton is on display. McCay bets a dinner he can make a dinosaur live again by a “series of hand-drawn images.” Six months pass, during which time tens of thousands cartoon drawings have been completed and photographed. At the long-awaited dinner gathering, McCay reveals a hand-drawn landscape on a large screen. Gertie, a brontosaurus, emerges from a cave, eats a rock and a tree, and bows to the audience. McCay requests Gertie to perform various tasks such as raising her right and left foot. The dinosaur sometimes listens and sometimes her attention wanders off like that of a little child. A small elephant meanders by. Gertie flings him into the lake and gets sprayed when the elephant returns with a trunk full of water. A four-winged lizard passes overhead. Gertie drinks the lake. McCay enters the animated realm in cartoon form (he becomes an icon of himself) and rides the dinosaur off stage. The “real” McCay wins his bet.

The beginning of *Gertie* clearly positions the dinosaur's world within the imaginary realm, since it presents animation as a technological novelty. The animated universe is seen as an artistic/manufacturing process, standing in a clear contrast to the naturalized world of live-action. However, even though within the diegetic realm of *Gertie* the animated dinosaur stands as a novelty/spectacle, it (she), at the same time, becomes a realistically alive creature. Gertie is not a caricature, her appearance and the world in which she lives convey the icons of mimesis. Furthermore, Gertie's movements do not challenge the biological/anatomic, or any other laws of our physical world. Instead of behaving "plasmatically" in the way Cohl's caricatures do, Gertie keeps her basic bodily properties. Her patterns of behaviour are transparent, familiar, and, above all, intelligible. Even though Gertie, at times, behaves more like a human child than a "real" dinosaur, she demonstrates a plausible and coherent personality (an element of classic realism). Thus, Gertie has an ambiguous role. On the one hand, her very existence is foregrounded as spectacular since she is positioned within the technological/artificial realm of animation. On the other hand, Gertie's mimetic corporeality and her realistic patterns of movement and behaviour depict her as a plausible/live creature, not a plasmatic/fantastic cartoon.

It is clear that *Gertie* is a fascinating example by which we may question Deitch/Millhauser/Thompson deep-held belief that from the very early days "cartoon reveled in its own illusory nature." A big appeal of *Gertie* is the fact that its animated dinosaur becomes as alive and behaves as plausibly as the indexical people themselves. In *Fantasmagorie* we are fascinated by artificial drawings positioned in the outrageously

bizarre and outlandishly plasmatic animated world, which, because of its liberating tendencies rooted in the medium's non-indexical nature escapes not only the physicality of the "real world," but also the entrapment of coherent narrativity based in the ideology of classic realism. *Gertie* presents a realm, which rather than simply emphasizing the magical, extraordinary, spectacular and imaginary nature of the animated medium, succeeds in convincing us of the "reality" and alive-ness of the mimetically drawn dinosaur, as well as the plausibility and coherence of her personality. If Cohl in his *Fantasmagorie* gave life to cinematic illusion, McCay with his *Gertie* provided us with the illusion of life. Both these films show that the cartoon medium, rather than strictly occupying the domain of the imaginary, found itself, from the very early days of animation, actively negotiating with both the real and the imaginary, just like the photo-indexical medium itself. Both media, rather than being directly opposed to each other as the essentialist dichotomy suggests, have always operated on different registers of the real and the imaginary, not only in terms of on-screen characters' relationship to the "real body" (index, caricatural/mimetic icon), but also in terms of the actual textual logic of the signifiers' diegetic realm.

One final thing that needs to be addressed in this chapter is the very unfixed nature of Peircean semiotic categories in relation to the cinematic medium. As Hawkes explains:

It is important to note that the 'triad' [index, icon, symbol] involves, not mutually exclusive *kinds* of sign, but three modes of a relationship between sign and object or signifier and signified which co-exist in the form of a hierarchy in which one of them will inevitably have dominance over the other two...We can have symbolic icons, iconic symbols, etc., and the nature of a sign's ultimately dominant mode will depend finally on its context.³³

In regard to the animated body's physicality, we can see how two American animation studios, Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions occasionally provided their animated characters with the indexical dimension by using a device known as the rotoscope. The rotoscope was one of the most innovative technological processes, which Max and Dave Fleischer used first in their "Out of the Inkwell" series made in the late Teens and early Twenties. The process gave a sort of physical/material dimension to animated characters. Joanna Bouldin explains:

The rotoscope is an animation technology invented by Max and Dave Fleischer in 1915 and patented in 1917. Designed to facilitate the production of fluid, lifelike animation, the rotoscope allowed the movements of real actors' bodies to be reproduced in animated form. The rotoscope projects original live-action footage frame-by-frame onto a transparent drawing board, thereby allowing animators to trace each frame of the motion, securing the realism of their animated segments. Rotoscoping, however, often creates a curious aesthetic effect. Commentators rarely fail to identify an uncanny, jarring quality to rotoscoped animation. The rotoscoped body stands, the "realism" of its form and motion undermining itself, making the rotoscoped body seem unreal and unbelievable within the plastic physics of an animated universe.³⁴

In the early "Inkwells," Ko-Ko, a mischievous little clown, the Fleischers' first cartoon star, would often find itself in a peculiar position of, in Peircean terms, an "indexical icon." The clown's iconic body, thanks to the rotoscope, would establish an interesting material, physical, corporal, in one word - indexical - connection with a "real body."³⁵

Ko-Ko's indexical-iconic body existed in a world of extreme metamorphism of the plasmatic language. Many early shorts in the series began by showing the animator's hand in the process of bringing Ko-Ko out of the inkwell. As Michael Frierson points out, the early "Inkwells" would show an artist (usually Max Fleischer himself) draw Ko-Ko in an innovative way by having, for instance, a group of ink drops miraculously metamorphose into the clown.³⁶ Similarly, Max (in the series often referred to as the

“boss”) would often draw a line which would, then, magically morph to form the clown. In terms of the series’ textual logic, the magical, transformational, or plasmatic quality of the animated world would be emphasized at the very beginnings of these films. Within the animated universe of the “Inkwells,” thus, Ko-Ko would exist as a sort of fantastically metamorphic spectacle while, at the same time, his animated/iconic body, through the process of rotoscoping, would borrow a rather peculiar dimension of photo-indexical materiality. In that way, Ko-Ko the Clown very clearly negotiated between his animated plasmaticness and his rotoscoped indexicality in his struggle for corporeal presence within the realm of the “Inkwell” series. This bizarre in-between-ness of Ko-Ko’s animated body was also noted by Norman Klein:

Of all the Fleischer characters, Koko was rotoscoped the most often. By 1933, it gave him a phantom presence, too often invaded. Graphically, rotoscoping leaves scars—something a bit too human, a bit too lithe, subtle, but plain to see. Koko practically inhabited two bodies at once, from a cartoon clown who shuffled (buttery head, sacklike body), to a leaner man who ran gracefully (more angles to his chin; a stiffer spinal column).³⁷

Ko-Ko clearly occupied the interstitial zone between, to use Bouldin’s words again, “the real and the really made up.” This aspect represents the major difference between the Fleischers’ use of the rotoscope and Disney’s use of the same device in the 1930s. In Disney’s first feature animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the character of Snow White was rotoscoped in some scenes from live-action footage of dancer Marge Champion. However, while the Fleischers used the rotoscope to accentuate the aspect of negotiation between the indexical “reality” of Ko-Ko’s body and the irreverent illogicality of plasmatic language, Disney used the process for strictly mimetic and narrative purposes in order to make the diegetic realm ever more “realistic.”³⁸ Ko-Ko

and Snow White as “indexical icons” followed two very different types of textual logic, which emphasized the basic ideological difference between the two studio’s animated realms. I will return to this problem in Chapter Three.

While the concept of the “indexical icon” deals more with the animated body’s connection to a physical referent in the “real world,” one should not disregard the complex relationship between animated characters and their signifieds. Many famous animated characters rather than simply having a (mimetically/caricaturally) iconic relationship to a “real body,” often stood as “symbols” for certain values and ideologies. Perhaps the best example of this may be found in the writings of William DeMille who, as early as 1935, in his article “Mickey vs. Popeye” saw these two most popular cartoon characters of the decade as broader cultural metaphors of their era. While DeMille saw Mickey Mouse’s persona as being representative of the middle-class romantic charm and spirituality, he identified Popeye as a symbol of the self-righteous, spiritless, more menacing aspect of the human condition.³⁹ In his discussion of DeMille’s article, Michael Wassenaar, for example asserts that

taken at its widest sociological significance, DeMille found that Mickey spoke to the spirit of a democratic republic, while the instrumental power of Popeye might appeal to the same masses who thrilled to dictatorship.⁴⁰

One could argue that both Mickey and Popeye might have been seen as, in Peircean terms, “symbolic icons” of the mid-1930s.⁴¹ Michael Eisner, Walt Disney Co.’s present chairman, interpreted Disney characters’ symbolic nature in more universal terms. From Disney’s 1993 Annual Report:

Mickey, like the rest of the classic Disney characters, does not live in the temporal world of mortals. Instead, he and his Disney counterparts live in the hearts, memories and minds of people

everywhere. He is renewed with each generation, which means that Mickey at 65...or 165...will remain eternally young, eternally optimistic, eternally plucky.⁴²

I argued in this chapter that rather than simply positioning animation and live-action cinema along the unambiguous lines of the real vs. the imaginary, we should, instead, be grappling with different ways cinematic signifiers relate to their referents/signifieds in the “real world” (index, icon, symbol), and the ways in which they follow different types of narrative logic that provide ideologically different diegetic “realities” (i.e. classic realism, fantastic plasmaticness, etc.). Animation is not essentially an abstract medium, but a medium that, just like the live-action cinema itself, has been negotiating with both - the real and the imaginary - from its earliest days.

In the two chapters that follow, I will apply some of these theoretical concepts to the 1930s animated films, produced by the two most inventive, but also stylistically and ideologically different American animation studios, which I already tackled in this chapter - the West Coast-based Walt Disney Productions and New York-based Fleischer Studios, Inc. By relying on the theoretical framework that I laid out in this chapter, in Chapter Two I will examine the multiplicity of ways in which animated characters in the two studios related to their referents/signifieds. I will discuss these characters’ physical constructed-ness and their symbolic nature. Furthermore, in Chapter Three I will examine how different narrational strategies served to ideologically situate Disney/Fleischer animated realms by discussing implementations and significance of such cinematic practices as classic realism and “cartoony” plasmaticness in the two studios’ films of the period.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Mark Langer, "The End of Animation History," <http://asifa.net/SAS/articles/langer1.htm> (In an unpublished paper given at the "Animated Worlds" conference in Farhnam, England on 11 July 2003, Thompson has moved away from this position. I will, however, confine my remarks to her published work).

² Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," 108.

³ Ibid., 110.

⁴ Quoted in Gene Deitch, "Animation - What the Heck is It?," in Animation World Magazine, http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=search&sval=animation+what+the+heck+is+it?&article_no=630

⁵ Steven Millhauser, Little Kingdoms (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1993), 107.

⁶ William Moritz, "Some Observations on Non-Objective and Non-Linear Animation," in John Canemaker (ed.), Storytelling in Animation: The Art of the Animated Image, Vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1988), 21.

⁷ Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977), 127. See also Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles Hartshorne (ed.) and Paul Weiss (ed.), Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 196.

⁸ Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 80-81.

⁹ Lye's experimental shorts tended to be more representational than either Fischinger's or McLaren's abstract animation.

¹⁰ Joanna Bouldin, "The Body, Animation and the Real: Race, Reality and the Rotoscope in Betty Boop," <http://www.utu.fi/hum/mediatutkimus/affactive/bouldin.pdf>

¹¹ Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, 129. It should be noted that the terms *signified* and *referent* are not synonymous, but they are not mutually exclusive either. While, for instance, Hawkes uses the term *signified* to describe the indexical relationship between the photographic signifier and its subject matter in "reality," Barthes uses the term *referent*. Signified is generally more complex than referent. While the referent of a signifier "star," for example, refers to the actual physical phenomenon in the "real world," its signified can have more complex connotations depending on the context (i.e. star, communism, unique talent, etc.). When Hawkes, for example, says that "in the *index*, the relationship [between signifier and signified] is concrete, actual and usually of a...causal kind" (Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, 129.), he reduces the signified's status to that of the referent. The term signified, thus, encompasses but is generally broader than referent. To go back to my earlier example, while *The Maltese Falcon*'s Sam Spade relates to Humphrey Bogart's body (referent) in the indexical mode, his signified may be much more complex, having also iconic and symbolic qualities. The very concept of the "star persona," for example, refers to the iconic (and often symbolic) status of the actor's image - For example, even though there is a "real" person behind the star image, his/her body is merely the site into which a number of (diegetic and extra-diegetic) meanings are attached and inscribed.

¹² Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," 108.

¹³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁴ Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London: Routledge, 1980), 51.

¹⁵ Bart Testa, "Arcand's Double-Twist Allegory: *Jesus of Montreal*," in André Loiselle and Brian McIlroy (eds.), Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 93.

¹⁶ Belsey, Critical Practice, 51-52.

¹⁷ Films like *Look Who's Talking Now* (1993) and *Babe* (1995) are also live-action works that depict "humanized" animal characters, but in order to convey their anthropomorphism these films make use of computer-generated animation effects. Animation, therefore, is used in these films to depict fantastic elements that are difficult to express in the photo-indexical medium.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Bazin was very critical of anthropomorphism in the live-action cinema. Writing about Jean Tourane's films, Bazin argued that the only way for this director to create actions and give meanings to his "humanized" animals was by means of numerous manipulations through the use of montage. For more information on anthropomorphism and montage, see Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," in What is Cinema, Vol. 1, pp. 41-52.

¹⁹ Sergei Eisenstein in J. Leyda (ed.), Eisenstein on Disney (London: Methuen, 1988), 21.

²⁰ Brian Henderson, "Cartoon and Narrative in the Films of Frank Tashlin and Preston Sturges," in Andrew S. Horton (ed.), Comedy/Cinema/Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 154.

²¹ The scene has nothing to do with the rest of the film's story. It merely exists as a humorously self-reflexive spectacle that challenges the naturalized world of classical storytelling.

²² One could even argue that this type of "unrealistic" manipulation is as old as the cinema itself. For example, significant evidence of similar "cartoony" illogicality can be found in the early trickfilms of Edwin S. Porter and Georges Méliès.

²³ Lev Manovich, "'Reality' Effects in Computer Animation," in Jayne Pilling (ed.), A Reader in Animation Studies (Sydney: John Libbey & Company Pty Ltd., 1997), 12.

²⁴ Paul Wells, Understanding Animation (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 23.

²⁵ Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation (New York: Disney Editions, 1981), 22.

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of the conventions of "graphic narrative," consult Norman M. Klein, Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon (London & New York: Verso, 1993).

²⁷ Philip Thomson, The Grotesque (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972), 38.

²⁸ A cartoon caricature does not necessarily have to behave "plasmatically," nor does a mimetic character necessarily have to live in an intelligible and coherent world. Even though it is more common for a caricatural icon to defy the rules of biology and physics by relying on the playful nature of cartoony plasticity, such connections are simply a matter of a conventionalized practice.

²⁹ Donald Crafton, Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 258.

³⁰ The Incoherents, for example, organized an exhibition of drawings by people who did not know how to draw, or they showed work by professional artists who used a variety of everyday found material, such as, for example, sculptures made of bread and cheese. For more information on *Arts Incohérents*, check out Crafton's *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film*, or Esther Leslie's *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2002).

³¹ Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, 129.

³⁴ Bouldin, "The Body, Animation and the Real: Race, Reality and the Rotoscope in Betty Boop."

³⁵ The "real" person whose body was traced to give Ko-Ko the indexical dimension was usually Max's brother, Dave Fleischer. Dave was generally credited as the director of Fleischer Studios' shorts.

³⁶ Michael Frierson, *Clay Animation: American Highlights 1908 to the Present* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 86.

³⁷ Norman M. Klein, "Animation and Animorphs", in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 27.

³⁸ For more information on differences between Disney's and Fleischers' use of the rotoscope see Mark Langer, "Rotoscoping the Real: Thoughts on Animation Technology," unpublished paper given at University of Western Ontario, 18 February, 2003.

³⁹ William DeMille, "Mickey vs. Popeye," in Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (eds.), *The American Animated Cartoon* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 241-244.

⁴⁰ Michael Wassenaar, "Strong to the Finish: Machines, Metaphor, and Popeye the Sailor," in *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 24 (Fall 1989), 29.

⁴¹ In that sense, cartoon characters are not much different from live-action stars. From Rudolph Valentino and Humphrey Bogart, to James Dean and Elvis Presley, many photo-indexical movie stars have been seen as symbols of certain cultural anxieties (i.e. Valentino: xenophobia, effeminate masculinity) or values (i.e. Dean as the symbol of the "new" generation's rebellion) of the period.

⁴² Quoted in Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 125.

CHAPTER TWO

Disney vs. Fleischer: Appealing Caricatures, Grotesque Hybrids, and Different Cultural Symbols

As pointed out in Chapter One, a framework for theorizing any representational text's relationship to our experience of the "real world" can be derived from Peircean triad of signs. This triad of index, icon, and symbol does not involve mutually exclusive kinds of sign. Using Peircean semiology I demonstrated that animation and live-action cinema, rather than simply belonging to the opposite side of the imagined dichotomy (real vs. imaginary), negotiate with both domains. This chapter will focus on a discussion of the animated body's relationship to its subject's referent/signified, illustrated by 1930s cartoons from two American animation studios, Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc. This will begin with a discussion concerning the physical nature of the animated body in the two studios' shorts from the period. I will argue that Disney homogenized his animated realm by emphasizing the unity/coherence of cartoon characters' corporeal structure and by relying on such animation techniques as "appeal." Oppositely, the Fleischers often accentuated not only "ugliness" of their animated heroes' physical design, but also a sort of unsettling hybridity of the human-animal body by foregrounding its grotesque constructed-ness. Next, I will discuss how animated bodies in both studios stood, in Eisenstein's words, as plastic metaphors, or, in Peircean terms, symbolic icons, which expressed different values and anxieties of the period.

The Beautiful World of Walt Disney: Appealing Caricatures in a Homogeneous Animated Realm

A drawing in Leyda's Eisenstein on Disney caught my attention as soon as I opened the book. It is a reprint of a frame from a Mickey Mouse comic strip Walt Disney dedicated to his friend, Sergei Eisenstein, in 1930. The image shows seven African animals, including a hippopotamus, an elephant, a lion, and four monkeys, obviously frightened, frantically running away from something. In front of them we see Mickey Mouse, even more terrified, running faster than the rest of the animal species. What caught my attention was not the content of the image, but rather a very peculiar affective response that I had when I concentrated on the picture. Suddenly I was reminded of how truly extraordinary Mickey's relationship to the real is. Even though all the animals in the frame are obviously caricatures (there is no attempt at the mimetic representation here), Mickey is very different from the rest of the animal species. Unlike other animals, he does not have an adequate referential body in the "real world." In other words, Mickey's corporeal structure emphasizes a gap between the animated signifier and its subject's referent in the "real world."¹ While the more-or-less proportionally built animals in the drawing are signifiers to their subject's referents in the iconic mode, Mickey's design and bodily scale point to his "difference." The world's most famous mouse is totally detached from the "suchness" of his animalistic origins. Despite his misleading last name, the four-foot tall Mickey is not a mouse, but rather a mouseman.

In the animated shorts of the 1930s, Mickey Mouse, like other popular Disney characters, existed as a creature whose body occupied an interstitial space between a

human and an animal. This human-animal corporeality suggested the somewhat deformed nature of Disney's characters' bodies. In other words, if Mickey, Goofy and Donald had a physical (photo-indexical) equivalent in nature, they would be seen as "freaks."² In her writings on the psychical, physical, and conceptual limits of human subjectivity, Elizabeth Grosz defined "freaks" as beings who

...occupy the impossible middle ground between the oppositions dividing the human from the animal,...one being from another,...nature from culture,...one sex from the other,...adults and children,...humans and gods,...the living and the dead.³

This uneasy middle ground between the opposition that divides the human from the animal, however, has traditionally been naturalized in such media as comic books and animation. Brian Henderson maintains that "comparing animals to humans by a kind of graphic assimilation has been fundamental to caricature since its first appearance in the late sixteenth century."⁴ Rather than foregrounding the anthropomorphic body's "freakish" hybridity, caricature emphasizes the coherence and homogeneity of its structure.

Beside accentuating the animated body's physical congruity (in the caricatural mode), the Disney studio presented its characters as rather appealing creatures. The studio animators, Thomas and Johnston, explain:

To us, it [appeal] meant anything that a person likes to see, a quality of charm, pleasing design, simplicity, communication, and magnetism. Your eye is drawn to the figure that has appeal, and, once there, it is held while you appreciate what you are seeing. A striking, heroic figure can have appeal. A villainess, even though chilling and dramatic, should have appeal; otherwise, you will not want to watch what she is doing...A weak drawing lacks appeal. A drawing that is complicated or hard to read lacks appeal...Spectators enjoy watching something that is appealing to them, whether an expression, a character, a movement, or a whole story situation. While the live-actor has charisma, the animated drawing has appeal.⁵

Even though they started out as pretty unattractive (anthropomorphized, but very animalistic) barnyard rodents in the late 1920s shorts such as *Plane Crazy* (1928), *Galloping Gaucho* (1928) and *Steamboat Willie* (1928), already by 1930, Mickey and Minnie were considerably cuter and visually appealing characters. The ratty Mickey, who appeared barefoot in *Plane Crazy*, gained shoes. His eyes, which had been outlined by ovals with black pupils inside, became simply defined by the black oval pupils. According to Disney studio handbook of the 1930s, the blacks and whites on Mickey's head were now supposed to be balanced in such a way as to emphasize the character's appeal (even if it required animators to cheat while animating the character). Mickey's cuteness was also accentuated by means of giving the character smaller shoulders, "with a suggestion of stomach and fanny."⁶ Almost all of these rules were applied to Minnie's new design as well. By the time Goofy or Donald Duck were created, this animation technique, which came to be referred to as "appeal," was commonly used at the studio. Since Disney's characters appealed to spectators, their human-animal bodily constructedness was even more naturalized, and, consequently, made attractive rather than uneasy or repulsive. But, how exactly are Disney's heroes different from many other popular anthropomorphic cartoon characters? Let's compare Disney's characters with two cartoon stars of the 1940s, Tom and Jerry.

The cat and mouse team of Tom and Jerry from the MGM "Tom and Jerry" shorts were related to the real as anthropomorphic caricatural icons, but unlike Disney's characters, they preserved the basic nature of their animal species. Tom and Jerry had many qualities of facial expression and bodily posture, as well as traits of movement and

behaviour, that were consistent with human patterns of psychological motivation and comportment. They generally walked on two legs. Tom used (human) deductive logic when he planned to capture Jerry. Still, within their self-contained realm the two characters preserved the very essence of their animalistic origins. In other words, Tom and Jerry maintained the basic notions that we associate with the idea of “cat-ness” or “mouse-ness.” Both characters’ bodily scale/proportions “caricaturally” corresponded to the bodies of the “real cat” and the “real mouse.” Tom was depicted as a house pet who was owned by his human masters, while Jerry was an intruder, a mouse who lived inside a hole in the house that belonged to the humans. Narratively, Tom the cat constantly chased Jerry the mouse. In that sense, Tom and Jerry preserved the “suchness” of their animal species, even though a lot of the pair’s physical gags and actions, as well as psychological qualities and motivations were distinctly human. Disney’s characters, as I indicated, were anthropomorphic animals, but they were very different from the likes of Tom, Jerry and similar cartoon characters. Mickey, Goofy, and Donald were not animal characters with patterns of human motivation and bodily gestures, they were “evolved” animal species that replaced humans altogether in a sort of alternate universe. In Disney shorts from the 1930s, these three characters never, not even once, “played” the roles that had anything to do with their animalistic origins.⁷ Also, since they stood for humans themselves, Disney’s anthropomorphic heroes very rarely interacted with (iconic) human characters. Mickey’s caricaturally appealing body, for instance, stood for a human being, who, among other things, had his own house, car, and, even, his own domestic animal, a

dog named Pluto. In that sense, Mark Langer maintains that “the Disney studio was particularly rigorous in its definition of separate worlds for animals and humans.”⁸

Since Disney’s characters were physically “evolved” species rather than animal characters with patterns of human motivation and bodily gestures, the studio tried to homogenize their animated realm by isolating these characters from not only humans, but also the same “species” whose relationship to their subjects in “reality” was in the iconic mode. Disney could not allow such interactions, because they would have blurred the troublesome line separating the anthropomorphic body’s caricatural appeal from its corporeal freakishness. Even though Mickey Mouse, for instance, may have interacted with iconic animals such as Pluto (in the traditional master-pet relationship), he was very unlikely to encounter an iconic mouse. Similarly, both Mickey and, much later, Goofy were seen hunting ducks in *The Duck Hunt* (1932) and *Foul Hunting* (1947), respectively, but Disney made sure that Donald was never to be put in such an (awkward) position. The moments of shock and ambiguity did, however, come in Disney cartoons from time to time. In a short titled *The Worm Turns* (1937), for example, mad scientist Mickey Mouse brews up a potion that contains supernatural powers. In order to test it out, he squirts it on a fly that has been trapped by a spider. The empowered fly, then, retaliates by beating up the spider. The shock comes in the next scene in which Mickey squirts the potion on a “regular,” iconic mouse who is being harassed by a cat. A strange rupture in the film’s self-contained diegesis affects the narrativity of the cartoon realm at this moment. The comfort of watching the lovable, appealing Mickey Mouse persona is suddenly disturbed by the viewer’s realization of Mickey’s peculiar relationship to the

“real body” when contrasted to the body of the iconic mouse. The often naturalized “freakishness” of Mickey’s anthropomorphic corporeality within the self-contained hegemony of Disney’s animated universe becomes abruptly and literally foregrounded, for it unexpectedly highlights the uneasy aspect of Mickey’s human-animal bodily constructed-ness. Such instances, though, as I already explained, were very rare in Disney films of the 1930s.⁹

It can be said that Disney naturalized his animated realm through reliance on the coherence and appeal of the animated character’s corporeality, through the separation of human and animal worlds, and through resisting any interaction of anthropomorphic creatures with the same species in the iconic mode. In that sense, Disney films of the 1930s depicted an attractive and homogenized world.

The Heterogeneous Animated World of Fleischer Studios: The Comic, the Grotesque, the Ugly

Fleischer Studios’ distinctive, gag-oriented shorts of the early to mid-1930s emphasized both ludicrous playfulness and a sort of bizarre eccentricity of the animated realm. Leonard Maltin described the visual aura of Fleischer cartoons from the period this way:

The ambiance [in Fleischer shorts] was strictly New York-inspired, as opposed to the sunny barnyard settings and characters that abounded in cartoons produced on the West Coast, mainly by men who had grown up in the rural Midwest. The Fleischer crew not only grew up in New York, but lived and worked there; its gray canyons, seamy characters, and unique sensibilities permeated their work. There was no mistaking the gritty appearance of a Fleischer film.¹⁰

Unlike Disney, Max and Dave Fleischer rarely emphasized the caricatural appeal of their animated characters’ corporal structure. Maltin, for instance, maintains:

[Fleischer shorts were] populated by the strange-looking characters...If they weren't cross-eyed, they might be wall-eyed or at the very least goggle-eyed. Their bodies were arranged in odd proportions, and deformities of every kind were common.¹¹

The most famous Fleischer character from the early 1930s was Betty Boop. Betty is remembered today as a sexy flapper, whose body Norman Klein describes as a sort of iconic amalgam:

Betty's body was a traced composite -a traced memory- of women they [Fleischer animators] saw along the way. Her garter was like those favored by Hoochie Koochie dancers so popular at burlesque and dance parlors. She slouched her back like a flapper at a speakeasy. Her banjo eyes and her bounce were copied from the moves of vaudeville singer Helen Kane. Her head bobbed like a Coney Island kewpie doll shaking on a spring.¹²

But, the relationship of Betty Boop's body to the "real body" in the very early "Betty Boop" cartoons was much more complex than what the concept of Klein's iconic amalgam suggests. Before she evolved into a fully human flapper, Betty existed as a character whose body emphasized the fusion of human and animal elements. When she appeared for the first time in a cartoon titled *Dizzy Dishes* (1929), beside her feminine human body, Betty had long doggy ears, which in 1932 transformed into Betty's trademark earrings. The nature of Betty's human-animal physical connection was different from Disney's characters. While Disney naturalized the freakish nature of the human-animal corporeal structure by relying on the caricatural homogeneity and appealing cuteness of the animated body, the Fleischers accentuated the grotesque coexistence of human and animal elements in the character of Betty Boop.

Many scholars have seen the fusion of diverse and heterogeneous physical elements in a single body to correspond to the concept of the grotesque. Alton Kim Robertson explains:

Wolfgang Kayser...specifies the nature of the physical abnormality, suggesting that it involves the mixing of the human and the animal...Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that in the logic of the grotesque "the limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects." And finally, even Geoffrey Galt Harpham, who is careful to note that the advances of technology have begun to confuse such discrete categories as "the human," "the animal," and "the mechanical," argues that the grotesque often involves the surrender of the "structural integrity and formal coherence" of the body."¹³

But, how does the grotesque differ from caricature? Philip Thomson explains that the major difference between caricature and the grotesque is that in caricature, unlike in the grotesque, "there need be no suggestion of the *confusion* of heterogeneous and incompatible elements, no sense of the intrusion of alien elements."¹⁴ Clearly, according to Thomson's definition, Betty's body could be seen as grotesque since it accentuated the incompatibility of heterogeneous human and animal elements (human hair, torso, legs vs. doggy ears).¹⁵ The contradictory accounts of Betty's original design reinforce the fact that Betty was not conceived as an anthropomorphic animal character, but rather as a human with intrusive animal elements. Leslie Cabarga explains Betty's origins this way:

Grim Natwick, who designed Betty and animated *Dizzy Dishes* told me, "I had a song sheet of Helen Kane and the spit curls came from her. So I just designed a little dog and put cute, feminine legs on her and the earrings which developed later started out as long ears. I suppose I used a French poodle for the basic idea of the character."¹⁶

This account, however, is more than likely to be incorrect. A few years later, in an interview with Mark Langer, Natwick categorically denied ever designing Betty Boop as an anthropomorphic dog.¹⁷ The more likely version of Betty's origin may be the one accounted by Norman Klein:

Paramount, Fleischer's distributor, specialized in films that used vaudeville and burlesque stars, and may have pressured the Fleischers to take on Betty Boop....Harvey Deneroff believes that Fleischer executives may have provided the Helen Kane portrait, on sheet music, which Natwick used for his first sketch of Betty Boop (the doggy ears and model sheet were added afterward by Ted Sears).¹⁸

In any case, regardless of whether her doggy ears were added afterwards, or whether they were a part of the original design, it is more than evident that Betty's original screen appearance foregrounded the incompatibility of her human, feminine and sexualized figure. In her conception, Betty was a grotesque human-animal hybrid which highlighted an unsettling combination of human traits belonging to the easily recognizable (indexical/iconic) vaudeville entertainer, Helen Kane, and doggy ears characteristic of a French poodle.¹⁹ As such, Betty was very different from Disney's Mickey and Minnie Mouse, or even later, Donald and Daisy Duck. Unlike Disney's characters who were "evolved" animal species with caricaturally appealing and homogeneously structured corporal elements, Betty Boop was a human-animal hybrid with alien body parts, which called attention to themselves.²⁰

As early as 1932, Betty Boop evolved into a fully human character, but her boyfriend, Bimbo, did not. In the animated universe of Max and Dave Fleischer, the two characters, who now occupied two clearly different registers of the real - Betty's relationship to the real was in the iconic mode (human), while Bimbo remained an anthropomorphic dog - were allowed to freely interact at the romantic level, thus openly engaging in a sort of "forbidden" behaviour - bestial relationship. Geoffrey Harpham explains that "ugliness has a long and respectable tradition dating from, in Western culture, at least the late medieval period, when sin, linked with bestiality was commonly portrayed in grotesque images."²¹ Thus, even when the Fleischer characters became much more caricaturally homogeneous, within the playful universe of their animated shorts, they still continued to invoke some uneasy thematic concerns that were characteristic of

the grotesque. This bestial relationship between Betty and Bimbo was not explicitly sexual (nobody expects such a thing in a cartoon), but it did exist as a sort of unsettling-comic subtext. This subtext was present in a number of Fleischer shorts. In *Betty Boop Presents Popeye the Sailor* (1933), which featured the first cartoon appearance of Elzie Segar's one-eyed hero, there was a bestial subtext as well. As Olive Oyl, Popeye's (human) girlfriend, awaits Popeye's arrival, she becomes subject to crude male advances from Bluto, as well as from an anthropomorphic dog and a peg-leg pig. By allowing such cultural taboos as bestial relationship to form a diegetic subtext, the heterogeneous animated realm of Max and Dave Fleischer expressed a sort of disquietingly humorous "ugliness" that was connected to certain thematic concerns typical of the grotesque.²²

The aspect of "ugliness" in the Fleischer cartoon universe was also emphasized by featuring human characters that were generally unsightly. In such cartoons as *Mask-A-Raid* (1931) and *Chess-Nuts* (1932), Bimbo's rival for Betty's affection was depicted as an ugly elderly character. The characters of Popeye the Sailor and Olive Oyl were not archetypes of animated beauty either. The famous story of Max Fleischer's decision to make a cartoon of Segar's "Thimble Theater" hero goes like this: When Max Fleischer met with Mr. Gortatowsky at King Features Syndicate in the early 1930s he told him: "I want to make a cartoon of your Popeye!", to which Gortatowsky replied in an apparent bewilderment: "Out of that ugly looking thing?" Max said: "The funnier he looks, the better the cartoon will be."²³ The early Popeye, especially when animated by Roland Crandall and Seymour Kneitel, was an unattractive fellow, particularly in contrast to Disney's appealing heroes. Popeye was old, bald, short, one-eyed and a heavy-smoker

with grotesquely huge forearms. The sailor's first film began with newspaper headlines that read "Popeye A Movie Star: The Sailor with the Sock accepts Movie Contract." Popeye was very lucky indeed, since it is hard to believe that he would have passed Disney's requirement for "appeal," were he searching for a job position at the West Coast.

Unlike Disney who portrayed a hermetic animated realm whose inhabitants were characterized by the caricatural homogeneity/appealing cuteness of their corporeal structure, the Fleischers accentuated the "ugliness" of their cartoon universe by portraying characters who were visually unappealing (Popeye), by emphasizing the grotesque hybridity of the human-animal body (the early Betty Boop) and also by allowing human and anthropomorphic animal characters to engage in relationships that invoked such cultural taboos as bestiality (the later Betty and Bimbo). But, the Fleischers' animated world was about to change in the mid-1930s.

Only the first few cartoons in the "Popeye" series allowed human characters to freely interact with anthropomorphic animals. As early as late 1933, anthropomorphic animals completely disappeared from the self-contained realm of the famous pipe-smoking sailor. All the characters in the newly homogenized "Popeye" universe were either iconic humans or iconic animals. Unfortunately, the very same thing happened to the "Betty Boop" shorts. Very soon after the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association's implementation of the Code of Motion Picture Production in 1934, which spelled out in detail what was and was not permissible in the America's movies, "Betty Boop" shorts started becoming increasingly homogenized. Betty's anthropomorphic

boyfriend Bimbo disappeared without a trace, while Betty found a new boyfriend, Fearless Fred, whose body was totally human. Instead of Bimbo, Betty's new best friend became a cute, little puppy called Pudgy. Since Pudgy's relationship to the "real dog" in nature was in the iconic mode, Betty's relationship with the dog within the narrative context of the animated realm became that of a master and pet, something like that of Mickey and Pluto. Thus, the grotesque aspect of "forbidden love" that had been foregrounded in the bizarre relationship between anthropomorphic dog Bimbo and totally human Betty, was now neutralized by transforming Bimbo into two separate characters - Fred and Pudgy.

Many post-1934 Fleischer cartoons started to become increasingly characterized by the "appeal" of their characters' bodies. Popeye, for example, became cuter, more rounded and softer, and by 1938, especially when drawn by the animators Willard Bowsky or Shamus Culhane, he looked like a distant cousin to his former self, especially the 1933 Crandall/Kneitel runt. The world of Betty Boop was also "Disneyfied." The comic "ugliness" of the human-animal realm was replaced by the appealing, and almost sickening cuteness of the new characters such as David Tendlar's Grampy and, especially, Myron Waldman's Pudgy. Betty's design was also changed. Her sexual appeal was toned down considerably. By 1935, as Leslie Cabarga points out, Betty's "single garter was gone and several yards of fabric added to her dress."²⁴ These more appealing bodies in the newly homogenized Fleischer realm started expressing different cultural values and beliefs. I will return to this problem in the following section.

Animated Bodies as Symbolic Icons

As I indicated in Chapter One, animated signifiers often had a sort of symbolic relationship to their signifieds. In his writings on Disney films, Eisenstein connected the idea of plasmatic mutability to the very condition of the animated film, which, in Paul Wells' words, "recalled primal states, and relocated contemporary culture within the context of its own evolutionary development."²⁵ In that sense, Eisenstein related Disney's anthropomorphic animals to the idea of "totemism" (descent from animals), particularly its third (metaphoric) stage:

The first stage:

the unity of man and animal (the evolutionary stage). 'Factual' metempsychosis and the belief in the migration of souls.

The second stage:

the unity of man and animal in totemistic belief.

The third stage:

the comparison of man with animal-the metaphoric series.

In this sense, Disney is on the 'Homeric' stage: his beasts are metaphoric to people, i.e. reversed to the comparison of man with animal. They are plastic metaphors *in essence*.²⁶

Eisenstein saw the anthropomorphizing of animal characters as not only "metaphysical liberation," but, also, as a sort of societal and ideological liberation that has been expressed throughout the world for centuries. He wrote:

It's interesting that the same kind of 'flight' into an animal skin and the humanization of animals is apparently characteristic for many ages, and is especially sharply expressed as a lack of humaneness in systems of social government or philosophy, whether it's the age of American mechanization in the realm of life, welfare and morals, or the age of...mathematical abstraction and metaphysics in philosophy.²⁷

Similarly, regarding Disney's humanlike animals, the Soviet director wrote: "In Disney's works on the whole, animals substitute for people. The tendency is...: a displacement, an upheaval, a unique protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given."²⁸ In this sense, Eisenstein seems to have agreed with Walt Disney himself, who

saw Mickey Mouse as a metaphor for something that is ultimately human. “When people laugh at Mickey Mouse,” said Disney in 1953, “it’s because he’s so human, and that is the secret to his popularity.”²⁹ But, it would be naïve to assume that the “humanization” of Disney’s anthropomorphic animals was somehow value-neutral. This term must be properly contextualized.

Animation, like the live-action cinema, as an economic/political apparatus always had power to construct, interpret, and provide a means of consuming the world in specific ways. Rather than only investing animated bodies (regardless of whether they are iconic human characters or anthropomorphic animals) with some abstract idea of “humanness,” the animated cartoon employs already mediated representations of reality in what Robert Stam refers to as “an already textualized and discursivized socio-ideological world.”³⁰ In the case of Disney’s symbolic icons, Mickey, Goofy, Donald and other visually appealing anthropomorphic animal heroes often reinforced numerous cultural values consistent with the American middle-class ideology. According to Mark Langer:

Although Mickey Mouse began as a rural labourer in such films as *Plane Crazy* (Celebrity, 1928) and *Steamboat Willie* (Powers, 1928), the character emerged in the early 1930s as an exemplar of an upwardly mobile middle class.³¹

He, then, quotes Louella Parsons who noted as early as 1931:

Today, Mickey is the perfect illustration of every Cinderella tale ever written....He has his own visiting cards. A tiny automobile painted yellow, with a painting of Mickey, stands in a miniature garage. Minnie, his sweetheart, too has her garage, but as yet no car fills the empty stall. But soon, Mr. Disney promises, Minnie will have her own motor.³²

Interestingly, Mickey Mouse has rarely been associated with the city life. He started his career in the barnyard environment and by the early 1930s he already had a nice suburban house, and, a bit later, his own dog, Pluto. By 1935, Mickey became a sort of managerial

ensor who, in Norman Klein's words, kept "his little band of motley men working together."³³ This is especially evident in such films as *Mickey's Grand Opera* (1936) *Moving Day* (1936) *Clock Cleaners* (1937) *Boat Builders* (1938), *The Whalers* (1938), etc.

The vast majority of Disney's films from the 1930s portrayed characters who were characterized by qualities of optimism and individualism. Joel Taxel, for example, saw Disney's value system of the 1930s as being consistent with "the basic American package":

Individualism, advancement through self-help, strict adherence to the work ethic, and the supreme optimism in the possibility of the ultimate improvement of society through the progressive improvement in humankind.³⁴

Such optimism and work ethic were more than clearly expressed by animal characters in such films as *Three Little Pigs* (1933), *The Wise Little Hen* (1934), or *The Grasshopper and the Ants* (1934). All three films emphasized numerous benefits of one's dedication to hard work, and unpleasant consequences of one's laziness and slackness. In addition, a film like *Brave Little Tailor* (1938), for example, depicted the character of Mickey Mouse as an embodiment of numerous mainstream values. The short features the heroic Mickey with a task to single-handedly defeat a giant in order to save a mythical kingdom's cityfolk, and, thus, win the hand of princess Minnie. It is interesting to note that the menacing giant here is portrayed as a "freakish" outsider that occupies Grosz's "impossible middle ground" between the opposition that divides humans and (rather evil) gods, all the while Mickey's (anthropomorphic animal) body stands as a symbolic carrier of all the normative cultural/social/societal norms, values, and beliefs within the self-

contained diegetic realm. The breakdown of the dichotomy human-god (human giants) in this film is, thus, explicitly foregrounded as “unearthly,” although not physically grotesque, while the breakdown of the human-animal dichotomy as seen in the anthropomorphic animal character of Mickey is traditionally downplayed, not only by Mickey’s appealing/cute design, but also by the investment of culturally acceptable values such as individual initiative, optimism, heterosexual love, bravery, etc.

Henry Giroux saw the Disney studio as “an icon of American culture and middle-class family values,” which, unlike any other studio, traditionally has been perceived as “a paragon of virtue and childlike innocence.”³⁵ As such, it constructed “sanitized notions of identity, difference, and history in the seemingly apolitical cultural universe of the magic kingdom.”³⁶ Taking Giroux’s insights into account, it is not surprising to see that many of Disney’s characters throughout the 1930s stood as metaphors for certain ideas of childlike innocence. Many scholars such as Robert W. Brockway and Stephen Jay Gould argued that Disney’s heroes, Mickey Mouse in particular, were often characterized by such qualities as youthfulness and neotenization. Brockway maintained that Mickey’s character symbolized a state of constant youth and incomplete development.³⁷ This is a sound argument, since even according to Disney studio handbook of the 1930s such qualities were quintessential to the Mickey Mouse persona:

Mickey seems to be the average young boy of no particular age; living in a small town, clean living, fun loving, bashful around girls, polite and as clever as he must be for a particular story. In some pictures he has a touch of Fred Astaire; in others of Charlie Chaplin, and some of Douglas Fairbanks, but in all of these there should be some of the young boy.³⁸

Mickey's behaviour in the early cartoons might have been more raucous than later, but it still displayed the character's childish nature. For example, Klein states that in the early cartoons...

...Mickey discharges his infantile anger often, clobbering ants with a hammer, knocking a parrot with a potato...At various moments, Mickey will attack defenseless creatures, destroy automobile parts (particularly tires), then laugh heartily, displaying sharp rodentile teeth.³⁹

But, as I indicated, this mischievously undidactic behaviour in the character of Mickey Mouse was, by 1931, already replaced by a more respectable, gentle, kind, bland, and responsible persona, which despite its adult, middle-class disposition (i.e. suburban house, or later managerial jobs) preserved its childlike innocence (i.e. shyness, naiveté, childish inquisitiveness). Mickey was even identified as a youthful character in the titles of such early shorts as *The Karnival Kid* (1930), or *The Klondike Kid* (1932). Similarly, in the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment of the much later *Fantasia*, Mickey played a mystical wizard's youthful assistant, whose childish curiosity got him into a rather frightening predicament. Other Disney characters, such as Donald and Goofy, were also very childlike, naive and innocent throughout the 1930s.⁴⁰ In that sense, it was not particularly unnatural to see Donald play a role of a child character (young schoolboy) attempting to resist numerous luring temptations in *Donald's Better Self* (1938), even though it was the very same year in which he (asexually) became an uncle in the short titled *Donald's Nephews* (1938).

Disney's characters' childishness also translated into their asexual, innocent, and rather platonic romantic relationships. Even though in *Plane Crazy*, in an undeniably inappropriate gesture, Mickey tried to force himself upon the unwilling Minnie, Disney

would have none of such amorality, bawdiness, or random sex in his cartoons of the 1930s.⁴¹ It is also important to mention that Disney made sure that if his symbolic icons were to be involved in a romantic relationship, their partners had to be members of the same anthropomorphic species. In the Disney realm, thus, inter-species relationships were uncommon. Mickey Mouse was to be paired with a member of the same species - Minnie Mouse. Donald Duck's sweetheart was another anthropomorphic "duck" - Daisy.⁴² In the shorts from the 1930s, only Goofy did not have a girlfriend, which was not surprising at all, since there was not a female anthropomorphic "dog" character in the magical world of Disney. One of the rare exceptions to this rule were occasional connotations of attraction between Horace Horsecollar and Clarabelle Cow, but the two characters have never been seen as a defined romantic couple. If considered metonymically, the very pairing of the anthropomorphic animals from the same original species in Disney cartoons might be said to reflect the "natural order" of the "real world." If viewed metaphorically, it could be said to reflect Disney's own ideological "straightforwardness" and middle-class morality, emphasizing such values as "clean," platonically heterosexual world, devoid of even a figurative concept miscegenation.

If Disney's visually appealing anthropomorphic characters were embodiments of many middle-class values, convictions, and beliefs, rather than being metaphors for some abstract idea of "humanness," then, the Fleischers' often unsightly characters of the early to mid-1930s were the opposite. In a clear contrast to Disney's barnyard or suburban heroes, the Fleischers' working-class characters such as Bimbo or Popeye the Sailor occupied the gritty urban streets of a much gloomier animated universe. Unlike Disney's

heroes who were rarely shown in the city environment, the Fleischers' Bimbo and Betty, or, later, Popeye and Olive Oyl, were often portrayed residing in gritty building apartments.⁴³

Unlike Disney's innocent world, the Fleischer realm showed characters who were often engaged in violent or criminal activities. In *I Eats My Spinach* (1933), as he sings his "theme song," Popeye strolls down what seems to be the typically Fleischeresque urban neighbourhood of the early 1930s. The characters he passes by include two huge, suspicious-looking bullies who are knocking each other out and a bank robber who holds a local police constable at a gunpoint. Popeye passes them by without even noticing them. The violence in the "Popeye" series stood in sharp contrast to the middle-class morality of Disney's animated world. Comparing Disney's innocent/childish characters with Popeye, William Kozlenko, for instance, wrote:

Here is a man who, after swallowing the contents of a can of spinach...goes completely berserk and with a series of powerful punches destroys buildings, knocks down trees, and annihilates men normally stronger than himself. His philosophy of action is the doctrine that with physical strength man can overcome every obstacle; and his justification for this display of unbridled power usually takes the form of saving his girl from the unsavory clutches of the gargantuan villain. We are speedily convinced by all this that if a man cannot get satisfaction by persuasion, he can certainly get it by a knockout blow.⁴⁴

It is interesting that Popeye's doctrine of strength might, in great part, be responsible for his unappealing physicality (i.e. his missing eye and lack of teeth), which can be contrasted to the appeal/cuteness of Disney's anthropomorphic animals.

The Fleischer realm provided viewers with many ethnic characters, such as Betty's immigrant parents in *Minnie the Moocher* (1932), or Olive's mother, Nana Oyl, in *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934), among many others. These characters stood

in a clear contrast to the WASP-ized anthropomorphic bodies of Mickey, Donald, or Goofy. Also, many Fleischer cartoons from this period provided numerous references to the consumption of alcohol as a clear commentary on the 1930s alcohol Prohibition. Some of these cartoons were *Betty Boop, M.D.* (1932), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1931), *The Old Man of the Mountain* (1933), and *Snow-White* (1933).

The Fleischers' urbanized characters were far more likely to express certain forbidden behaviours than Disney's appealing middle-class characters. In his comparison of the West Coast style with New York style of animation, Mark Langer, for instance, wrote:

New York animated films were far less likely to demonstrate moral homilies than those of West Coast studios...Many New York films expressed other forms of forbidden behavior, such as cheating in Van Beuren's *Opening Night* (RKO, 1933) and Fleischers' *Betty Boop M.D.* (Paramount, 1932), or homosexuality in *Dizzy Red Riding Hood* (Paramount, 1931) and *Betty Boop's Penthouse* (Paramount, 1932). Compared to the West Coast animation heroes, New York studios were less likely to use the fable convention of animal or child characters. Instead, New York animation tended to present adult characters with adult concerns, including employment, sex, and death.⁴⁵

The urban environment of Fleischer shorts often portrayed characters who were poor and who often engaged in immoral/unethical activities in order to achieve their goals. Neither Bimbo in *Silly Scandals* (1931), nor Popeye in *I Eats My Spinach* have enough money to attend a performance at a local theatre or a rodeo show, respectively, so both of them have to cheat their way in. In *Betty Boop, M.D.*, no one from the bunch of side characters is willing to spend their hard-earned money on a "snake-oil" tonic called "Jippo" until Betty lures them with her sexuality. In *We Aim to Please* (1934), Wimpy and Bluto do not have money to pay for dinner they just had at Popeye's recently opened diner, so they engage in all sorts of deceptive behaviour in order to avoid paying. The

Fleischers' often unappealing animated bodies of the 1930s, thus, were symbolic icons that expressed many culturally subversive values and attitudes. Such subversive behaviour, as I explained, would be punishable in Disney's moralistic universe, but not in the Fleischers'.

Betty Boop, as a highly sexualized flapper, worked at dance parlours, bars, and even circuses. Her qualities were those that have always been repressed in Disney's Minnie Mouse or Daisy Duck. Betty's body was often fetishized and objectified, as in the close-up scene of her sexualized feminine legs in *Mask-A-Raid*. Betty's top kept falling off, revealing her frilly bra in such films as *Silly Scandals* and *Any Rags* (1932), to name a few. Her nightgown and dress were known to fly off, sometimes out of their own volition, as in *Dizzy Red Riding Hood* or *Mysterious Mose* (1930). In addition, Betty lived in a world in which impolite and abusive characters resided. She was sexually harassed in *Boop-Oop-A-Doop* (1932) and *Betty Boop's Big Boss* (1933). In *Boop-Oop-A-Doop*, a huge ringmaster with thick, dark mustache follows circus bareback rider Betty into her tent and starts molesting her. At one point, he aggressively fondles her mature bosom, even though Betty tries to resist. In *Betty Boop's Big Boss*, Betty, who plays a stenographer, is harassed by her much older, obese, balding boss who, at one point, in Leslie Cabarga's words, starts petting "her breasts with wonderfully rubbery strokes."⁴⁶ Here we can see yet another bizarre aspect of the Fleischers' world, which I wish to address.

Betty, just like Disney's characters, displayed both childlike and adult qualities. Many Fleischer animators, including Max Fleischer himself, often considered Betty Boop

to be an innocent, childish character.⁴⁷ Like Mickey or Donald, Betty herself sometimes assumed the role of a child character in such films as *Minnie the Moocher* or *Dizzy Red Riding Hood*. However, it is obvious that the process of neotenization of Disney's characters was naturalized, not only due to the appealing cuteness of the characters' anthropomorphic bodies, but also through the investment of such qualities as asexuality and innocence. In the case of the Fleischers' Betty Boop, the very contradictory aspects of the character's childish innocence and her foregrounded adult sexuality co-existed in the same body. Even in terms of her physical design, Betty's outrageously huge head and big eyes (signifiers of infantilism) stood in opposition to her sexualized adult body. If we think in Grosz' terms regarding the question of coherent human subjectivity, this aspect represented yet another example of Betty's explicit hybridity. In both *Boop-Oop-A-Doop* and *Betty Boop's Big Boss*, a partly childlike Betty was abused by much older men. This accentuated the "forbidden sexuality" of the Fleischer realm, namely pedophilia. In another cartoon titled *The Old Man Of the Mountain*, the title character is an old, bizarrely huge wild man, who also tries to abuse Betty, but she luckily escapes. Clearly, not only was Betty involved in a bestial relationship with her anthropomorphic dog boyfriend Bimbo, but also, as I said, she experienced quite a few abusive/pedophilic sexual encounters with much older men.

It should also be noted that, unlike Disney's characters, Betty herself often exposed many aspects of questionable morality. In *Betty Boop's Big Boss*, for instance, the police and the army rush to save Betty from the clutches of her big, bad boss. In their attempt to rescue poor Betty, the army starts firing munitions into the building in which

the sexual harassment takes place. The force of the bullets is so strong that it progressively powders the building which collapses to the ground up until it reaches Betty's office floor. As the army and police attempt to save Betty from her predicament, she winks at them, then pulls the office window shade down. The short ends with an iris-in as the shadows of Betty and her boss continue to passionately embrace and kiss. In such films as *Mask-A-Raid* and *Chess-Nuts*, Betty, with her explicit sexuality, intentionally provokes Bimbo and an older man to fight for her. This convention would later continue to be fundamental to the "Popeye" series, in which Olive Oyl would make Popeye and Bluto (or some other masculine man) fight for her love.⁴⁸ In *Beware of Barnacle Bill* (1935), Olive cheats on Popeye by getting engaged with another sailor, Barnacle Bill, played by Popeye's traditional enemy, Bluto. Popeye, after eating his spinach, defeats Bluto, this time by punching him so hard that he flies from Olive's apartment all the way to his boat. Popeye decides that that is all he can take. He leaves Olive, for she is a tease who seduces many men, but "marries none." Olive gets depressed for a few seconds saying that "there goes the Navy," but, then, suddenly brightens up concluding "but, still,...there's the Army."⁴⁹

Unlike Disney's 1930s films, which reaffirmed life, many Fleischer shorts, such as *Bimbo's Initiation* (1931), *Betty Boop, M.D.*, *Minnie the Moocher*, *Snow-White, Is My Palm Red* (1933), and *I Heard* (1933) depicted images of death and decay. In both *Minnie the Moocher* and *Snow-White*, the jazz legend Cab Calloway is rotoscoped into a ghostly creature who sings about drug abuse and death in a cave. Both shorts show grotesque (though gag-ridden) background imagery, which includes corporeal mutilation,

decomposition, decapitation, human and anthropomorphic animal skeletons, and spiritual lifelessness.⁵⁰ These images of bodily decay symbolized the paranoia of city life and the collapse of social order. According to Norman Klein, this grotesque scene in *Snow-White* was “intentionally traced like the wall of a Coney Island Mystery Cave Ride...it was [the Fleischer animators’] boozy Manhattan caricatured in some detail, as an inside joke.”⁵¹ In *Minnie the Moocher*, but also in other films such as *Is My Palm Red* and *I Heard*, Betty and Bimbo are chased by menacing, unsightly underworld phantoms, symbols of death itself. Interestingly, one of the rare Disney cartoons from the 1930s that portrayed images of ghosts was mainly done by former Fleischer animators who moved to Disney, particularly Ted Sears and Dick Huemer.⁵² The short was titled *Lonesome Ghosts* (1937), and it featured Mickey, Donald, and Goofy as ghost hunters with a task to exterminate “plasmatic” spooks from a secluded haunted mansion. Influenced by the studio’s ideology that reinforced such values as innocence and childishness, Disney’s ghosts in this short were different from the Fleischers’ symbols of death. Even though they resided in a dark, secluded, and threateningly eerie castle, Disney’s ghosts in this cartoon were visually appealing, perpetually smiling, rather playful spirits. Unlike the Fleischers’ angry, colourless, and often grotesquely deformed ghosts, Disney’s spooks were characterized by rounded bodies with arms, legs, and colourful red noses. Unlike Fleischers’ phantoms, Disney’s ghosts did not threaten the main heroes’ lives, but rather wanted to play a prank on them. Also, unlike Fleischers’ demons, Disney’s apparitions in this film did not symbolize death, they themselves were scared of death. In the last scene of *Lonesome Ghosts*, the spooks get frightened when they run into Mickey, Goofy, and Donald who

had unintentionally gotten covered in dough. Terrified, the ghosts run away from the castle, mistaking our heroes themselves for ghosts.⁵³

It is easy to conclude that while Disney shorts of the 1930s generally presented an enchanting world inhabited by appealing characters, whose bodies symbolized optimism of childish innocence and middle-class morality, celebrating culturally acceptable values and the beauty of life, the Fleischers' cartoons of the early to mid-1930s depicted a decaying urban world often inhabited by grotesque/ugly bodies that stood as plastic metaphors for culturally subversive values, bizarre sexuality, poverty, and death. The question that arises from my discussion so far is - How can we interpret Disney's insistence on the bodily appeal and the Fleischers' emphasis on the grotesque/ugly dimension of their animated realm? Jacques Lacan, for example, argued that a coherently structured body represents one of the most fundamental principles of order that allows for identification.⁵⁴ Contrarily, the ugly/grotesque distortion of the bodily image challenges the very process of identification and differentiation. Alton Kim Robertson explains:

The importance of the body as an ordering principle has been pointed out by Jacques Lacan, who suggests that it is the identification (and idealization) of the reflected image of the subject which begins the process of differentiating (and ordering) the objects of the world. Indeed, it is the adoption of the body as a point of self-reference that allows such distinctions as identity and difference and establishes the very possibility of signification. Thus, if one accepts Lacan's theory that the process of making sense of the world is predicated on the recognition of the body as an organic whole with clearly defined features and functions, it is fairly obvious that the disintegration of the order it represents would raise serious questions about the meaning of the world and how (and even if) it can be understood.⁵⁵

Many psychoanalytic film theorists such as Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey used Lacan's theory of a child's recognition of its own image in the mirror (which stands for the crucial moment of one's constitution of the ego), and related it to the cinema by

arguing that, just like the child who sees its idealized image in the mirror, the cinema viewer identifies with the hero's idealized body and looks at the world from his point of view.⁵⁶ Mulvey's psychoanalytic feminist theory is much more complex since it proposes that the narcissistic identification with the masculine protagonist in Hollywood cinema, which allows for both voyeuristic and scopophilic visual pleasure, has traditionally been structured by the dominant patriarchal order. My intention is not to get involved in theorizing how the process of bodily identification works in classical cartoons and even whether such a process could be said to exist at all. But, I would argue that by depicting homogeneously structured and caricaturally appealing animated bodies, Disney, above all, created lovable characters who served as role models for all ages all over the globe. Janet Wasko, for instance, maintains that Mickey Mouse has always represented "fantasy, pleasure, and escape for audiences around the world."⁵⁷ Similarly, in his "'Building a Better Mouse': Fifty Years of Disney Animation," published in the summer of 1979 edition of Funnyworld, Mike Barrier wrote the following about Mickey Mouse of the Thirties:

However difficult he [Mickey] might be to describe, he was undeniably an active, positive character, and this was very important at a time when the world was sliding into the worst days of the Great Depression. Audiences could read into him an optimistic affirmation of their own values.⁵⁸

On the contrary, the unappealing (and often one-dimensional) bodies from the Fleischer Studios generally challenged the comfort of easy and passive identification (or empathizing) with animated characters. As Rosemary Jackson points out, "corporal disintegration is the reverse of the constitution of the body during the mirror phase, and it occurs only at those times when the unified and transcendent ego is threatened with

dissolution.”⁵⁹ By emphasizing the grotesque nature of Betty Boop’s animated body, the Fleischers accentuated both human-animal and human-child hybridity of a character who, if we take Elizabeth Grosz’s definition, existed “outside and in defiance of the structure of binary oppositions that govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition.”⁶⁰ This alienating effect was also translated into the bizarre relationship of the “evolved” (human) Betty Boop and her anthropomorphic boyfriend, Bimbo. Disney’s organically congruous characters lived in an optimistic, innocent, culturally acceptable, rural, middle-class world to which the audiences were invited to escape, while the Fleischers’ ugly/grotesque bodies inhabited a pessimistic, sinful, culturally subversive, urban, working-class world that was humorously liberating, but also alienating, disorienting, and often hallucinatory. This universe did not depict an optimistic affirmation of the viewer’s “own values,” but rather expressed numerous anxieties of the period in a whimsically bizarre way (I will return to this point in Chapter Three). But, as I already indicated, the Fleischers’ culturally subversive realm also changed around 1934. It was the year characterized by sex reforms in Hollywood and the Hays Office new movie-code.

As the Fleischer characters’ bodies became more visually appealing and cute, they also started being invested with different moral values. As I already explained, by homogenizing the characters’ relationship to their signifieds in “reality” to the exclusively iconic mode, such taboo themes that had been representative of the freedom of the animated medium as “forbidden sexuality” were completely abandoned in the Fleischer cartoon realm. Also, the nightmarish, adult world of dance parlors, drugs, poverty and unemployment started being replaced by domestic worries of raising kids, or being kind

toward weaker characters and animals.⁶¹ The change in Betty Boop's character, Leslie

Cabarga explains this way:

By 1934 certain changes had taken place in the Betty Boop series. Most noticeable was the disappearance of the talking animals who had been Betty's playmates. From then on her only animal pals were mute pets. By 1935 Betty had lost much of her charm. Some of this was attributable to the toning down of her sexuality...She went from a vivacious, wised-up dumb brunette to a Jewish maiden-aunt type, as though transferring the love she'd never known with a man to her cute, moonfaced doggie. Betty's costume also changed. Gone was the frilly, 1920's style mini-skirt with revealing cutaway back and neckline. Her dress became knee-length and sedate, buttoned to the collar. Often a lace apron was added. She lost all but ten of the curls on her head...As her personality changed, the once voluptuous plumpness of her limbs now made her look aging and a bit overweight...Woeful was the plight of sweet Betty. Whereas she might have become a great actress, atomic scientist or president, she spent her last years as a nurse, teacher, baby sitter and second fiddle to other characters brought into the series to add interest.⁶²

Similarly, around 1937 the character of Popeye started losing much of his toughness and roughness that made him so popular in the beginning of his movie career, and instead, became a very moral and kind person. In *I Eats My Spinach* Popeye, with a single punch transformed an enraged bull into pieces of fresh and nicely cut meat. Similarly, in *Wild Elephinks* (1933), again with a single punch, the one-dimensional swab morphed an angry gorilla into a fur coat for Olive. By 1938, Popeye was so self-sacrificial, that he passively endured quite a number of attacks by an enraged bull in *Bulldozing the Bull* (1938), in order to prove that "it ain't no right to hit no animal." In the end of the cartoon, Popeye and the bull became friends.

The most interesting aspect of the later Fleischer shorts is that the unlikely center of vice and sin, which had made Fleischer cartoons so popular in the early to mid-1930s, now became Popeye's hundred years old father known as Pappy. This was probably due to the fact that by the mid-1930s such (subversive) topics were considered comically old-fashioned. Instead of the voluptuous Betty, or the mischievous Ko-Ko, it was now

Popeye's aging Pappy who, in such films as *My Pop, My Pop* (1940), *With Poopdeck Pappy* (1940), *Problem Pappy* (1941), and *Quiet! Pleeze* (1941) expressed strong libidinal desires and alcohol cravings. Pappy can be seen as a great metaphor for whatever happened to the Fleischers' culturally subversive realm.

The reasons for the changes in the Fleischer animated universe are complicated and heterogeneous. The Production Code certainly played an important role, but it was not the sole factor that contributed to the alterations in this frantically bizarre cartoon world. Norman Klein suggests that beside the Hays Office movie-code standards, which put pressure on the Fleischers' distributor, Paramount, other reasons for such changes could be found in the reality of business, not morality of the period. Klein explains:

First of all, the Fleischers were not as financially independent as Disney. Adolph Zukor at Paramount kept the Fleischer Studio on a long leash. Also, unlike Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop was inconceivable as a child-safe icon (or logo)...Paramount pressured the Fleischers to tame down Betty. Why? Apparently the company was afraid of a repeat of the adverse publicity it had suffered in the twenties with the sex scandals associated with the lurid murder of director William Desmond Taylor, as well as the embarrassing trials of Fatty Arbuckle. In 1933, when Paramount went into receivership (along with most other film companies, the notable exception being MGM), the top brass reckoned the company could not afford a moral blockage of its products or stars (which included, in addition to Betty Boop, Marlene Dietrich and Mae West).⁶³

Beside the Hays Code, business motivations and studio politics, another factor that contributed to the changes in the Fleischers' animation was Disney's critical success, especially after *Three Little Pigs*. Disney's critically acclaimed achievements might have led the Fleischers to emulate the West Coast's studio's work. For example, Michael Barrier wrote:

By the time the first Popeye cartoon appeared, Disney had raised the stakes again: *Three Little Pigs* had become wildly popular...In the Silly Symphonies [Disney] was beginning to make cartoons whose characters engaged an audience's interest in much the way that real actors did. The Fleischers were pulled along with the tide. Their cartoons began to reflect a Disney influence, both in how they were made and in what appeared on the screen.⁶⁴

Also, in the second part of the decade, some former Fleischer animators who previously had been at Disney, notably Shamus Culhane and Al Eugster, returned to the studio, while some West Coast veteran animators were also hired after Fleischer Studios moved to Miami, Florida, in 1938.⁶⁵ Clearly, all these factors such as the Hays Code, studio politics, Disney's critical success, and the hiring of new animators were important contributors not only to the changes in visual conventions (physical nature of the animated body) and ideological values (different types of symbolic icons), but also to certain changes in the Fleischer cartoons' narrative conventions. In the following chapter, I will discuss how different types of textual laws, such as fantastic plasmaticness and Belseyian classic realism helped create different diegetic contexts in which Disney/Fleischer animated bodies operated.

Notes

¹ The gap between the signifier and the referent does not necessarily constitute a gap between the signifier and the signified. Mickey's body does not have an appropriate counterpart in the "real world" (referent), although it does have an adequate signified, since it stands as a "plastic metaphor" for a human. I will return to this problem in the second part of this chapter.

² The connection between the animated body and "freakery" originates in Mark Langer's work. See, for example, "Regionalism in Disney Animation: Pink Elephants and Dumbo," in *Film History*, Vol. 4 (1990), pp. 305-321; "Geanimeerde Freaks, Cyborgs en Rotoscopie: Die animate in de schemerzone tussen biologie en technologie," in *Plateau*, Vol. 20 No. 4 (1999), pp. 14-18; "The Freak Show Cultural Tradition in American Animation," unpublished paper, Film Studies Association of Canada, Ottawa, 30 May 1998.

³ Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 57.

⁴ Henderson, "Cartoon and Narrative in the Films of Frank Tashlin and Preston Sturges," 155.

⁵ Thomas and Johnston, *The Illusion of Life*, 68.

⁶ For more information on differences in Mickey's appearance in the early cartoons see Leslie Iwerks and John Kenworthy, *The Hand Behind the Mouse* (New York: Disney Editions, 2001), pp. 53-72. For more details on Mickey's and Minnie's new (appealing) designs according to Disney studio handbook of the 1930s, see Thomas and Johnston, *The Illusion of Life*, pp. 551-553.

⁷ This mainly applies to Disney's heroes from the "Mickey Mouse" and/or "Donald Duck" cartoon series from the 1930s. A number of characters from "Silly Symphony" cartoons were connected to their animalistic origins (i.e. *The Grasshopper and the Ants* [1934]).

⁸ Mark Langer, "Regionalism in Disney Animation," 306.

⁹ A self-reflexive parody of this type of sensation came much later, in the "Father Noah's Ark" section set to "Pomp and Circumstance" in *Fantasia 2000*. Donald Duck plays Father Noah's right hand, helping him get a pair of various animal species onto the ark. After numerous animal species have climbed onto the ark, in one moment two "regular" (almost mimetically iconic) ducks pass by, leaving the confused Donald looking off-screen, totally baffled. The story's narrativity again becomes ruptured by Donald's realization of his own bodily "freakishness." Only the film's self-reflexivity creates a comic effect here, and not a shocking affect as when Mickey helped a "regular" mouse 63 years before. It should also be noted that this kind of sensation was less apparent when Goofy, an anthropomorphic dog character, interacted with an iconic dog such as Pluto. It was perhaps due to Goofy's physical structure, which hardly resembled a dog. Unlike Mickey or Donald, Goofy looked more like a generic anthropomorphic character from Disney comic books and cartoons. Also, unlike Mickey or Donald, Goofy did not even have a last name that would give some indication about his animalistic roots.

¹⁰ Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic*, 99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹² Norman Klein, "Animation and Animorphs," 27-28.

¹³ Alton Kim Robertson, The Grotesque Interface: Deformity, Debasement, Dissolution (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1996), 120.

¹⁴ Thomson, The Grotesque, 38.

¹⁵ When it comes to the question of corporeal structure, the terms “freak” and the “grotesque” are very similar in a sense that they both point to the fusion of diverse (usually incompatible) elements in a single body. While Grosz’s term “freak” refers to a being who occupies “the impossible middle ground” between a number of physical/societal/cultural distinctions, the “grotesque” refers more to certain types of visual representations and thematic concerns in such media as paintings and literature. If related to the “real mouse” and the “real dog,” both Mickey and Betty (respectively) would be seen as “freaks.” However, as I indicated, Disney naturalized Mickey’s “freakishness” through the character’s caricatural unity and appealing design. The Fleischers, on the contrary, emphasized the grotesque nature of Betty’s human-animal body by means of foregrounding the incompatibility of heterogeneous elements. I will use the term “grotesque” to describe the visual representation of Betty Boop’s “freakish” body, but also to point out a particular thematic subtext evident in the Fleischer realm that is typical of the grotesque art.

¹⁶ Leslie Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, Revised Edition (New York: DaCapo Press, 1988), 54.

¹⁷ Grim (Myron) Natwick, Interview by Mark Langer, 28 January, 1990.

¹⁸ Klein, Seven Minutes, 62. Model sheets are charts (usually made by animators or directors) that show approved designs of animated characters. These sheets are used for the purpose of maintaining the continuity of the animated character’s appearance from one scene to another, to highlight various plastic shapes, “animatable” forms, and broad attitudes and emotions of the animated character.

¹⁹ Betty’s connection to Helen Kane, who was also a Paramount contract player known as the “Boop Oop a Doop Girl,” was not simply visual. Her voice was the strongest cue that there was a reference to Helen Kane. In addition, the women who did Betty’s voice were finalists in a Helen Kane look-alike contest held at the Brooklyn Paramount. For more information on the early days of the Boop character see Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, pp. 53-71.

²⁰ Some Disney characters were more humanlike than the others. For instance, Goofy was more anthropomorphic than either Mickey or Donald. Still, throughout the 1930s, it was obvious that Goofy, just like Mickey or Donald and unlike Betty Boop, was an appealing anthropomorphic animal with coherently structured body parts rather than a “grotesque hybrid.” Just like Mickey or Donald, the Goof had an animal head, without any intrusive elements. Also, like Mickey’s black-furred or Donald’s white-feathered design, but unlike Betty’s humanized skin, Goofy’s blackness suggested a caricaturally homogeneous body. Goofy, however, did change significantly much later, in his films of the 1950s. He became an almost grotesque hybrid, reminiscent of the early Betty Boop. His animal fur disappeared as he got white, human skin. In some Jack Kinney-directed shorts such as *Cold War* (1951) and *Tomorrow We Diet* (1951), for instance, the Goof even lost his doggy ears as he gained human hair. Goofy’s body lost a lot of its “caricatural exaggeration” and became almost mimetically iconic. The suddenly foregrounded incompatibility of the heterogeneous elements - animal snout on an otherwise human body (white skin, man’s hair, “realistic” torso and feet) made the “new” Goofy absolutely unattractive. The Goof’s post-WW2 design became rather problematic to many fans of the original character. To read one such negative opinion that emphasizes the grotesque hybridity of Goofy’s bodily constructed-ness in his 1950s shorts, go to www.amazon.com and read Craig Carrington’s review of a Disney Treasures DVD set, “The Complete Goofy.” Most importantly, as I indicated, one should realize that throughout the 1930s, Goofy, just like Mickey or Donald, was a homogeneously structured anthropomorphic character, typical of the Walt Disney studio at the time. It should also be pointed out here that certainly not all of the Fleischer “stars” emphasized the grotesque

aspect of the human-animal corporeal structure. Betty's boyfriend, anthropomorphic dog named Bimbo, for example, was a homogeneously structured caricatural icon. In the late 1920s Bimbo started off as a rather unattractive character, but soon, influenced by Mickey Mouse's popularity, he evolved into a cute anthropomorphized hero.

²¹ Geoffrey Harpham, "The Grotesque: First Principles," in Journal of Aesthetics, 34 (1975-6), 465.

²² It should be noted here that this type of moral/ethical transgression was not atypical for the New York style of animation, but was almost unheard of at the West Coast-based Walt Disney studio. Disney allowed a strange bestial subtext much later in such films as *The Three Caballeros* (1945) in which the libidinous Donald Duck engaged in a bizarrely lustful chase of live-action human females (whose relationship to the real was in the indexical mode). But, those occurrences in a hegemonic Disney universe, as I already explained, were very rare in the 1930s.

²³ Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, 82. It is possible that this story is only a myth. There is an indication that the Fleischers might have been pressured by Paramount to take on Popeye. Consult Klein, Seven Minutes, 62.

²⁴ Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, 81.

²⁵ Wells, Understanding Animation, 22.

²⁶ Eisenstein, Eisenstein on Disney, 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ "Disney Quotes," http://www.justdisney.com/walt_disney/quotes/quotes01.html

³⁰ Robert Stam, "Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation," in Lester D. Friedman (ed.), Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and American Cinema (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 252.

³¹ Quoted in Langer, "Regionalism in Disney Animation," 306.

³² *Ibid.*, 306.

³³ Klein, Seven Minutes, 45.

³⁴ Quoted in Wasko, Understanding Disney, 117.

³⁵ Henry A. Giroux, The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁷ Robert W. Brockway, "The Masks of Mickey Mouse: Symbol of a Generation," Journal of Popular Culture, 22 (Spring 1989), pp. 25-34. See also Stephen Jay Gould, "Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz," Natural History, May 1979, pp. 30-35.

³⁸ Quoted in Thomas and Johnston, The Illusion of Life, 551.

³⁹ Klein, Seven Minutes, 43.

⁴⁰ Even though Donald was yet another in the line of Disney's characters that displayed such qualities as youthfulness and innocence, he did inherit some of Mickey's earlier prankishness. Donald, however, has never been as subversively raucous as the early Mickey.

⁴¹ Perhaps the only exception to Disney's asexual universe was Jenny Wren, the sumptuous female protagonist of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (1935). Jenny was a parodic, anthropomorphic-bird version of the pre-Code sex-symbol, Mae West. Otis Ferguson described Jenny Wren as a character, who, even though feathered, "by virtue of certain astonishing developments in the upper regions, forward, and by a routine of sundry bumflips, you impress-me's, etc., turns out a dead ringer for Miss Mae West, complete with voice and picture hat." For more information on this unique, but rather unusual Disney cartoon see John Grant, Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules (New York: Hyperion, 1998), pp. 75-76.

⁴² Daisy Duck appeared for the first time in a short titled *Don Donald* (1937) under the name Donna Duck.

⁴³ See, for example, such "Betty Boop" cartoons as *Barnacle Bill* (1930), *Minding the Baby* (1931), *Any Rags* (1932), *The Robot* (1932), or such "Popeye" shorts as *I Eat My Spinach* (1933), *A Dream Walking* (1934), *Beware of Barnacle Bill* (1935), *For Better or Worser* (1935), or *Let's Get Movin'* (1936).

⁴⁴ William Kozlenko, "The Animated Film and Walt Disney," New Theatre, III (8) (August 1936), pp. 17-18.

⁴⁵ Langer, "Regionalism in Disney Animation," pp. 308-309.

⁴⁶ Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, 81.

⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁸ See, for example, such films as *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*, *Beware of Barnacle Bill*, *For Better or Worser*, *A Clean Shaven Man* (1936), etc.

⁴⁹ Only one Disney short from the period, *Mickey's Rival* (1936), featured Mickey fighting for Minnie's affection by taking on the sleazy Mortimer Mouse. There was, however, none of Olive's promiscuity in Minnie's character, only innocent teasing/flirting/giggling. It took only about seven minutes (one cartoon) for Mickey to defeat Mortimer by exposing his cowardice. Mortimer never showed up again.

⁵⁰ Prior to the 1930s, a few Disney films conveyed grotesque/ugly imagery rather than an appealing/cute animated universe. Disney shorts directed by Ub Iwerks, such as *The Skeleton Dance* (1929), *Hell's Bells* (1929), or *The Haunted House* (1929) depicted such unsettling visual motifs as an explicit depiction of Hell and the "danse macabre." By the 1930s, however, such uneasy imagery and thematics were gone from the Disney studio.

⁵¹ Klein, "Animation and Animorphs," 27.

⁵² Disney hired Ted Sears (the animator who had provided doggy ears to Betty Boop's original design) early in 1931, while Dick Huemer started animating for Disney in May of 1933. For more details, consult Michael Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵³ A Disney short titled *Pluto's Judgment Day* (1935) featured somewhat more sinister ghosts. I will deal with this short as one of the exceptional Disney cartoons from the 1930s when I discuss the questions of plasmatic lawlessness and classic realism in Fleischer/Disney films of the period in Chapter Three.

⁵⁴ See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), especially pp.799-819.

⁵⁵ Robertson, *The Grotesque Interface*, 119.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 303-315.

⁵⁷ Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, 123.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Grant, *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney Animated Characters*, 28.

⁵⁹ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 90.

⁶⁰ Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity," 56.

⁶¹ See "Betty Boop" shorts such as *On with the New* (1938) as an example of the former. Also, see Betty and Pudgy films of the late 1930s, but, also, "Popeye" shorts such as *Proteck the Weakerist* (1937), *Leave Well Enough Alone* (1939), and *Olive's Boithday Presink* (1941) for examples of the latter.

⁶² Cabarga, *The Fleischer Story*, 108.

⁶³ Klein, *Seven Minutes*, 85. It should be noted here that some information that Norman Klein presents as facts lack satisfactory empirical evidence. While the quote that I provided might be Klein's pure speculation presented as fact (i.e. it is uncertain whether Adolph Zukor really "kept Fleischer Studios on a long leash"), the important thing is that the "reality of business" was truly a significant factor regarding the changes in Fleischer cartoons of the mid-1930s. For example, in 1934 the Fleischers introduced the "Color Classics" series done in the two-colour "Cinecolor" process in order to compete with the popularity of Disney's "Silly Symphonies," which were done in the superior Three-Color-Technicolor process (introduced in 1932). But, this competition and product differentiation was not only a one-way street. In 1936, Disney introduced a three-dimensional animation technology called the Multiplane camera to compete with (and to differentiate his product from) Max Fleischer's Stereoptical Process introduced in 1933. To find out more about the economic and historical reasons behind the two studios' developments and uses of the two three-dimensional animation technologies, see Mark Langer, "The Disney-Fleischer Dilemma: Product Differentiation and Technological Innovation," in Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey (eds.), *Screen Histories: A Screen Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp.148-163.

⁶⁴ Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 184.

⁶⁵ Michael Barrier points out that Culhane, after returning from Disney, became a director of Disney-flavoured short cartoons at Fleischer Studios. The animator Al Eugster left Disney in March of 1939 and joined the Fleischer staff in April of the same year. The two of them worked on such films as *Popeye Meets William Tell* (1940) and *A Kick in Time* (1940). Also, around one hundred employees from California were recruited to join the two hundred or so animators who made the move from New York to Miami, where the Fleischers' "Disneyesque" feature film, *Gulliver's Travels* (1939), was made. For more details, see *Ibid.*, pp.287-402.

CHAPTER THREE

Disney, Fleischer, Text and Context: Different Narrational Practices in Different Animated Worlds

In Chapter One I argued that animated characters, just like live-action characters, do not exist in some sort of imaginary realm, but rather operate on different registers of both the real and the imaginary (index, icon, symbol). I also proposed that, just like photo-indexical signifiers, animated characters follow different types of textual logic that defines their diegetic plausibility in different ways. In that sense, I showed how the irreverent nature of Eisensteinian plasmaticness, characteristic of the early silent comedies and, later, numerous cartoons from different Hollywood studios, achieved its most extreme form in the medium of animation by means of depicting outlandishly surreal metamorphoses and transformations, as seen in such early films as Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*. I also argued that a number of American cartoons, beginning with *Gertie the Dinosaur*, accepted, like the live-action cinema, numerous physical rules of our own "reality," some of which were anatomic consistency/bodily integrity, or the laws of mechanics and gravity. In light of the concepts introduced in Chapter One, in Chapter Two I discussed complex relationships of the animated body to its subject in the "real world" by examining the 1930s cartoons from Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios. I argued that while Disney characters' organically homogeneous, caricaturally appealing bodies symbolized an optimistic, innocent, culturally acceptable world, the Fleischers' ugly bodies and grotesque hybrids often stood for a pessimistic, sinful, culturally subversive world of the period. In this chapter, I will turn to discussing how

different types of textual logic were used to ideologically position and narratively contextualize Disney/Fleischer diegetic realms in which their animated characters existed. I will argue that while Disney's appealing bodies' optimistic affirmation of the American mainstream values was achieved through numerous realist conventions, the Fleischers' unappealing, culturally subversive realm depicted many anxieties of the period through the hallucinatory and disorienting plasmatic language in its most extreme form.

Both Disney and Fleischer cartoons from the late 1920s and early 1930s challenged many rules and laws of physics/mechanics and biology/anatomy of the "real world." These early films were characterized by what is known as the "rubber-hose" animation. "Rubber-hose" animation was a style in which both live characters and inanimate objects moved with elastic flexibility, totally disregarding anatomic complexity of the animated body and fixed materiality of the inorganic matter, as if the whole world were made of rubber. This style was rather peculiar. On the one hand, it was certainly unsophisticated and primitive by "realist" standards. On the other hand, it was extraordinary and liberating since it refused to portray the animated realm as transparent, logical, and natural. It was precisely this rebellion against the fixed indexicality of the photographic image and the absolute freedom from the physicality of the "real world" that both animation critics and enthusiasts, as well as many animators themselves, often praised in their discussions of the early cartoons' "rubber-hose" stylistics. Disney's animator Wilfred Jackson, in an interview with animation historian Michael Barrier, connected this type of animation to the medium's fantastic freedom and explained why he liked such "unrealistic" cartoons:

The kind of gags I used to like in pictures were the things that they could do because they were drawings - the impossible things. You feel like you could do it: I feel like if I stretched hard enough I could reach out there and get my hand on those things [he was reaching toward some sandwiches six feet away]; well, a [cartoon character] could shoot his hand out, and pick one of those up, and eat it.¹

Sergei Eisenstein himself, as I pointed out in Chapter One, defined this type of freedom as plasmaticness. Even though, as I demonstrated earlier, a number of live-action films throughout history displayed many aspects of plastic illogicality, it was, according to Eisenstein, fundamentally the medium of animation that was able to express fantastic mutability due to its ability to “behave as a non-material volitional play of free lines and surfaces.”² Similarly, the British film critic Huntly Carter noted as early as 1930:

The cartoon...is in some respects the best medium of cinema expression. The human atom and its belongings undergo whimsical changes that cause a continuous stream of images to form in the mind, and that throw an abundance of rich crumbs to the imagination...an elastic line in evolution. Shapes grow out of it with which we are familiar even though they are distorted and battered by a sort of recurrent earthquake...[Cartoons are] a line with the elasticity of gas. It shrinks and expands, collapses and recovers, behaves like a spring winding and unwinding, and at the same time assumes the shapes and characteristics of human beings, animals, insects, of animated things, and inanimated things made animate...[Cartoons] outdo even an india-rubber ball in diversity of shapes, that speed through space with a velocity that has no parallel outside the Cinema.³

Both Disney and Fleischer cartoons from the late 1920s and early 1930s were “liberating” in this sense. However, as Disney’s animated characters started becoming symbols of middle-class morality, childlike innocence and optimistic wholesomeness, the textual logic that defined these fictitious signifiers also changed by means of accepting numerous “realistic” conventions. On the other hand, the Fleischers’ pre-Code shorts constantly employed the extreme lawlessness of plasmatic language in order to portray their culturally subversive realm characterized by hallucinatory and anarchic disorderliness.

Disney “Evolution”: From Liberating Plasmaticness to Multiple Realisms

Beside characters’ bodies being unrealistically elastic, some of the most obvious examples of plasmatic lawlessness was the way in which inanimate objects used to assume lives of their own and stretch flexibly as if freed from all constraints of inanimate fixity of the material world. In his writings on Disney, Eisenstein was very enthusiastic about the ability of the late 1920s black and white “Mickey Mouse” shorts, such as *Steamboat Willie* and *The Karnival Kid*, to literally animate inanimate objects in the fantastically playful fashion:

Let’s examine the characteristics of the pre-colour Mickey Mouses. What do you remember from them? A lot. There’s the steamboat that folds logs like pastries; there are the hotdogs whose skins are pulled down and are spanked; there are the piano keys which bite the pianist like teeth, and much, much more.⁴

Indeed, many Disney cartoons from this period made use of what was truly plasmatic freedom, completely detached from the physicality of the “real world.” In that sense, Esther Leslie, like Eisenstein (only much later), gave a very positive account of the rubbery nature of two very early “Mickey Mouse” shorts. Rather than pointing to the “primitiveness” of the technique, Leslie accentuated its ingenuousness and spontaneity:

[In *Plane Crazy*] the whole world is alive. A church spire crumples itself up to avoid the passing plane. Bodies elongate and detach parts at will. Substance mutates. Reality, objects, are always working to solve problems, efficiently. So, Mickey is able to yank a fan-tail from a turkey to place on his new airplane.....[In *Steamboat Willie*] when the cow is fed hay it immediately assumes the size and shape of the bale it is fed. A ratty Mickey Mouse was made of a rubber-hose-type torso, which did not snap back into place when stretched, but dangled for as long as was necessary for the gag.⁵

Other shorts from the period expressed the same sort of detachment from the rules and logic of the “real world.” In *Opry House* (1929), for example, Mickey plays the piano, but the piano and the stool, obviously annoyed with the violence and complexity of the

composition, kick him off stage. The instrument starts playing its keyboard, with its own front legs, while the stool dances. In *Mickey's Follies* (1929), it is the stool that starts playing the piano, while Mickey climbs the instrument and starts singing. By the 1930s, such fantastic activities were becoming much rarer in the Disney realm, although they did not disappear completely. In *The Birthday Party* (1931), for example, inanimate things become as alive during the celebration of Mickey's birthday as the "live characters" themselves. Similarly, in *The Whoopee Party* (1932) as Mickey dances with Patricia Pig, various inanimate objects dance along with them. Minnie, Mickey, Patricia Pig and numerous other characters and enlivened objects enjoy themselves, while all exclaim "Whoopee!" from time to time. In *Traffic Troubles* (1931) Mickey's taxi bites a car in order to secure a parking place, licks its own flat tire, and goes crazy after drinking.

These early cartoons did not only challenge the rules of physicality through their plasmatic "unfixity." They also challenged the codes and ideology of classic realism by refusing to conform to the laws of cause-effect narrativity, linear storytelling, and, consequently, moralistic contextualization of the on-screen diegesis. Robert Sklar, for instance, accentuated the way these early Disney films defied the ideology and coherence of classic realism:

The early Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony cartoons are magical. Freed from the burdens of time and responsibility, events are open-ended, reversible, episodic, without obvious point. Outlandish events occur without fear of consequence. There is no fixed order of things: the world is plastic to imagination and will. Yet its pliant nature also renders it immune to fundamental change.⁶

It is important to see that the plasmatic lawlessness of these early shorts occupied a sort of interstitial zone between the medium's comic playfulness and its anarchic

disorderliness. Sklar points out that almost presciently, this comic fantasy world of Disney's pre-1932 shorts "portrays the cultural mood, the exhilarating, initially liberating, then finally frightening disorder of the early Depression years."⁷ Although the fantastic universe of many of these early shorts was simply humorously liberating, such early "Silly Symphonies" as *The Skeleton Dance* (1929) and *Hell's Bells* (1929) portrayed, as I indicated in Chapter Two, such occultish images as the living dead and images from hell. *The Skeleton Dance* depicted an uncanny nighttime outing of skeletons at a cemetery, while *Hell's Bells*, as Sklar points out, "was even more grotesque: it takes place in hell, whose inhabitants include a three-headed dog and a dragon cow that gives the devil fiery milk."⁸ A later "Silly Symphony" short titled *Egyptian Melodies* (1931) showed a spider descending into a sphinx. As the spider reaches the central chamber, four mummies in nearby coffins come to life and begin to dance, as do the soldiers and royalty drawn on the sphinx's wall. The drawings eventually engage in fierce fighting with one another. All the activity ultimately scares the spider, and it runs out. Some "Mickey Mouse" shorts reflected a similarly uncanny world. *Haunted House* (1929), for example, features Mickey stuck in a haunted mansion, in which live skeletons and the Grim Reaper himself force him to play the piano, while they engage in an eerie, yet silly, dance. In the end of the cartoon, the terrified Mickey, just like the spider in *Egyptian Melodies*, escapes from the menacing otherworldly phantoms, without defeating them. Obviously, the plasmatic language of Disney's late 1920s and very early 1930s shorts, emphasized the medium's humorously liberating playfulness, but also, due to its lawlessly illogical nature that stood in sharp contrast to the comforting coherence of classic realism, it

accentuated a sort of anarchic disorderliness in which all sorts of otherworldly mutations and even death existed in a bizarrely outlandish universe. The shorts' fantastic realm did not have any closure that would bring an equilibrium or a moralistic message that could reinforce dominant values in the fashion of classic realism. Monsters came to life, but nobody engaged in righteous fights against them. The little spider and Mickey could only escape from the frightening spooks. However, just as the Disney studio homogenized its animated characters' bodies' relationship to their signifieds by means of making them organically congruous, visually appealing symbols of certain moralistic values (which I discussed in the previous chapter), it also started, after 1931, compensating the freedom of the plasmatic disorder of its cartoon universe by employing certain "realistic" tendencies.

By introducing the so-called twelve principles of animation - defined as squash and stretch, anticipation, staging, straight ahead action and pose to pose, follow through and overlapping action, slow in and slow out, arcs, secondary action, timing, exaggeration, solid drawing, and appeal - Disney animators introduced the plausibility and verisimilitude to bodily actions and personalities of their animated characters.⁹ The principles helped create greater realism in Disney's animated shorts, since they allowed the animator to preserve characters' bodily integrity and, through unique animated movements, give birth to distinguishing personality traits. The animated body could not arbitrarily stretch nor elongate anymore, for according to the new rules, as Thomas and Johnston explain, even "when the animator distorts the figure, he must always come back

to the original shape.”¹⁰ Writing about Disney cartoons from this period, Norman Klein concluded:

Donald and Goofy can be made to bulge and implode but must never lose their “personality”, never turn into other *things*...In cartoons of the thirties and forties, for example, there are no Disney gags where characters who slam into a wall turn into metal coins and twirl noisily as they land...According to the Disney rule, once a character’s body was shown - rubbery, watery, humanlike - its substance was irreducible. Walt was convinced that revealing the drawing behind the flesh could wreck the atmospheric effects that he prized so highly.¹¹

As we can see, Klein connected the purposeful lack of plasmatic logic in Disney films from the 1930s to the depiction of a more realistic atmosphere, achieved by means of respecting the basic integrity of the animated body. It is important to note that Disney shorts from this period were not realistic in a sense that they mimicked the “real world” in the way photo-indexical cinema or some later Disney animated features like *Bambi* did. Due to numerous caricatural exaggerations of not only characters’ corporeal designs, but also their bodily movements, these cartoons were still plastically detached from the “real world.” Thomas and Johnston explain:

Some of the artists had felt that “exaggeration” meant a more distorted drawing, or an action so violent it was disturbing. They found they had missed the point...When Walt asked for realism, he wanted a caricature of realism. One artist analyzed it correctly when he said, “I don’t think he meant ‘realism.’ I think he meant something that was more convincing, that made a bigger contact with people, and he just said ‘realism’ because ‘real’ things do.”¹²

I would argue that Disney shorts did not “get rid” of their plasmaticness, but they rather constricted its lawlessness by means of employing the strict rules which became the basis of what I would define as *plastic realism*. Thus, Disney animators created a realm that for the most part followed the basic logic of physicality of the “real world,” but in a rather exaggerated manner. Luca Raffaelli found such animated universe to be an example of “Disney’s plausible-impossible philosophy.” Raffaelli explains:

Following the [twelve] rules, the cartoonist learns how to transform a rubber-hose creature into an expressive and credible character and to create a world which is extravagant but not entirely removed from the real one. ...It should perhaps be emphasized that Disney had never been interested in realism *per se*. He did not intend to interpret reality so much as to invent a parallel reality. For this reason, Disneyan exaggeration refers only to the personalities of his characters and only in a limited manner to the contraposition of his laws of animation to those of the natural laws of physics. In the real world, a car driving away does not bend back on itself for extra push. With Disney this can happen because communication, even more than spectacularisation, requires it. A fat man walking along, in Disney's cartoons, bounces his belly on the ground: this serves to re-invent reality in a caricatural key, but not to go beyond it (as it happens in Warner and MGM cartoons).¹³

Taking into account Raffaelli's insights, we can conclude that Disney's symbolic icons operated in a world that was, after 1932, both plasmatic and realistic. This means that animated phenomena in Disney shorts could move, squash and stretch in a way photo-indexical people and objects could not, but the plastic exaggeration of their animated universe could never challenge their material essence. As Raffaelli explains, even the exaggerated stretching and squashing of Disney's characters served to reinforce the reality of their bodily composition by re-inventing it in a caricatural/comedic mode, rather than pointing to the artificial nature of the animated corporeality and instability of its constructed-ness. Furthermore, it should be noted that both Thomas and Johnston, and Raffaelli point out that by creating more plausible characters whose bodies followed the new "plastic realist" principles, Disney emphasized the aspect of contact/communication, rather than spectacular affectivity that was characteristic of the lawless plasmaticness and rubber-hose stylistics of the earlier cartoons. It is not surprising, then, that this "evolution" from plasmatic illogicality to plastic realism in Disney shorts of the 1930s also signaled the studio's acceptance of many conventions of classic realism, since the believable characters opened up a great possibility for identification (or, at least, for empathizing with characters) through narrative linearity, and, consequently, for the

inscription of various “moralistic” values and messages within the self-contained diegetic realm. In that sense, Michael Barrier connected Disney’s movement away from the rubbery arbitrariness toward the greater plausibility of the animated body’s physicality and personality with the greater narrative integrity of Disney’s animated world of the period. He writes:

[In the rubber-hose style of animation] a cartoon character reaches for something and stretches his arm several times its normal length while his body remains stationary; nothing could be more arbitrary than that. By the early thirties, too, many animators were relying on curving forms so heavily that they were sacrificing any sense of a body’s structure for the sake of smooth, flowing movement. Like arbitrary distortions of other kinds, such “rubber hose” animation could not be reconciled with Disney’s emerging emphasis on telling coherent stories that would engage an audience.¹⁴

Once detached from the playful lawlessness and sometimes anarchic disorderliness of plasmatic illogicality, the new “realistic” cartoons in the “Silly Symphony” series started telling their stories in a coherent and straightforward fashion, often emphasizing a sort of moralistic cheerfulness by which we recognize Disney’s ideology. The medium’s language through which these new values were now being expressed was very different from the animation language of the 1920s and very early 1930s. Background objects did not come to life arbitrarily anymore. The appealing bodies in this new and logical universe started accentuating new values, like the work ethic as seen in *Three Little Pigs*, *The Grasshopper and the Ants* and *The Wise Little Hen*. All three films tell similar straightforward and moralistic stories about consequences of one’s laziness and avoidance of work. In *The Wise Little Hen*, the title character is looking for someone to help her plant her corn. Peter Pig and Donald Duck both fake belly aches to avoid the work. Their indecency is further emphasized by the fact that they both spend

their time in leisure activities - playing musical instruments and dancing (in that sense, they are very similar to the two “slacker” pigs from *Three Little Pigs*). With help from her chicks, the hen plants the corn herself. Harvest time comes. When asked to help, Peter and Donald again complain of belly aches. Time comes when the hard work brings the joy. The hen cooks up a variety of delicious corn dishes. She heads over to Peter and Donald, but before she even opens her mouth (or her beak?), the two loafers already have their belly aches. When the hen asks them to help her eat her corn, Peter and Donald suddenly feel great. All she gives them, however, is castor oil for their stomach problems. The two characters’ slackness did not pay off, so they decide to punish one another by kicking each other’s derriere. Other “realistic” shorts such as *The Flying Mouse* (1934) and *The Robber Kitten* (1935) told moralistic stories that emphasized such conservative values as conformism and submission to the natural/societal order of the world. In a (chrono)logical fashion, *The Flying Mouse* tells a story of a young mouse with a strong desire to fly. He fashions wings from a pair of leaves, but his attempts to use them fail. When the butterfly he rescues from a spider is revealed to be a fairy, the mouse wishes for a pair of wings. His bat-like appearance, however, does not fit in with either the birds or the other mice. The title character becomes detached from the world. Even the bats make fun of the poor alienated guy. In the end, our hero regains his happiness when the fairy removes his wings. Nobody can be happier than him, for he can conform to the rules of “society” once again. Other “Silly Symphonies” started appropriating famous fables and fairy tales such as Hansel and Gretel in a short titled *Babes in the Woods* (1932), or *The Tortoise and the Hare* (1934), and later *Ugly Duckling* (1939). All these films

conformed the plasmatic nature of their animated universe to the twelve rules of plastic realism, allowing Disney animators to present these stories (in simplified versions) as straightforward, logical, and moralistic narrative tales. The majority of Disney's "Silly Symphonies" from the period, in Catherine Belsey's terms, accepted the classic realist aspects of narrative coherence and intelligibility, patterns of cause and effect, of social relationships and moral values, which the audiences could see as natural and familiar.

Many post-1932 "Mickey Mouse" shorts also tended to be narrative. Such cartoons as *The Klondike Kid*, *Ye Olden Days* (1933), *The Mail Pilot* (1933), *The Dognapper* (1934), *Two-Gun Mickey* (1934), or later *Brave Little Tailor* presented straightforward goal-oriented stories, featuring the traditional fight of good against evil. In these cartoons Mickey was depicted as a resourceful hero who engaged in righteous fights against sinister (usually dull or physically bigger) adversaries. Other "Mickey Mouse" shorts were a bit different. Even though they were not as explicitly didactic as the "Silly Symphony" cartoons from the period, these films were "realistic" in a sense that they depicted a diegetically plausible world that showed Mickey as a suburban homeowner, often entertaining children or later occupying various sorts of managerial positions. Mickey was shown entertaining orphan children in such cartoons as *Giantland* (1933), *Gulliver Mickey* (1934), *Orphan's Benefit* (1934) and *Orphan's Picnic* (1936). Other shorts like *Moving Day*, *Clock Cleaners*, *Boat Builders* or *Lonesome Ghosts* had narratives surrounding Mickey, Goofy and Donald completing some sort of task (i.e. being evicted, cleaning a clock tower, building a boat, exterminating ghosts, etc.). These cartoons would often establish the three characters within the same diegetic space and,

then, split into three separate (parallel) sequences, following each character, only to have them coalesce at the end. Rather than displaying bizarrely plasmatic gags, these cartoons served as vehicles for emphasizing the verisimilitude of the three characters' physical structure and for developing coherent and lovable personality traits that made them famous (i.e. Mickey's cheerful, bland, responsible persona, Goofy's clumsiness, Donald's bad temper, etc.).¹⁵

What Happened to Plasmatic Illogicality in Disney Shorts?

The tenacity with which the Disney animated realm reinforced numerous normative (middle-class) cultural values, such as work ethic, the victory of good against evil, but also characters' asexuality and innocence, clearly coincided with the textual logic's change from disorderly plasmaticness to the strict rules of plastic realism. By providing animated bodies with plausible movements and believable personalities, the twelve rules of plastic realism also opened up numerous possibilities for Disney animators to inscribe the ideology of classic realism by presenting the animated diegesis as naturalized, transparent, and narratively logical/straightforward. But, did the irreverent illogicality of fantastic plasmaticness completely disappear from the animated realm of Disney shorts?

Anthropomorphizing of inanimate objects in Disney cartoons from the period did continue to happen occasionally, but these occurrences started to be contextualized in a very different way. A great example is a "Silly Symphony" cartoon titled *Flowers and Trees* (1932). The short's main characters are anthropomorphized trees. The fantastic

aspect of bringing inanimate trees to life in this short, however, was not incidental, otherworldly, or pointless, but rather purposeful, logical, and narratively justified. In that sense, this cartoon was ideologically very different from the early “Silly Symphonies” in which anthropomorphizing of inanimate characters emphasized the lawless nature of the animated, plasmatic realm. *Flowers and Trees* tells a linear story of an evil tree trying to stop a good-boy tree and a good-girl tree from engaging in a romantic relationship. The evil tree ultimately fails, for the male and female tree fall in love and end up married to each other. *Flowers and Trees*, according to Janet Wasko, “presented a moralistic story with a distinct beginning and a distinct ending, anthropomorphized characters, and good triumphing over evil.”¹⁶ The trees in this short existed in a hermetic and homogenized realm in which their plasmatic aliveness was naturalized by the fact that they were, in Peircean terms, symbolic icons standing for humans themselves. The anthropomorphized trees in this short, far from being fantastic instances of rubbery playfulness or plasmatic anarchism, were plastic metaphors for such human values as love, matrimony, and the struggle between good and evil.

In the “Mickey Mouse” series, the fantastic moments that had been associated with liberating and/or anarchic fantasies in Disney’s pre-1932 shorts started being narratively distanced from the “diegetically real” world through such classic realist conventions as carefully signaled dream device. *The Mad Doctor* (1933), for example, takes place in a dark and stormy night. Pluto is spirited away to the ghostly mansion of an evil genius for a mad transplant scheme to put the dog’s head on the body of a chicken. Mickey tries to save his dog, but finds himself threatened by the doctor’s creepy castle

and its denizens, who, among other things, include live skeletons. The whole cartoon is uncannily dark, and one scene even includes the mad scientist cutting Pluto's shadow's head off with his scissors. The ending, in a typical fashion of classic realism, however, shows Mickey waking up in his bed with Pluto smothering him. The movie's conservative closure serves to re-establish a sort of equilibrium in which none of the disorderly plasmatic things are really real - their threatening lawlessness is narratively justified by the fact that they happen only in a dream. As such, ideologically, *The Mad Doctor* is miles away from *The Haunted House*, made only one year before. There are numerous other examples like this. *Thru the Mirror* (1936), for instance, portrays some of the most astonishing examples of animated plasmaticness and fantastically liberating imagination. It features Mickey who has been reading Alice in Wonderland, falling asleep as his dreaming self separates from the character's "real" body. The dreaming Mickey finds himself on the other side of the mirror, where all sorts of unreal things happen. Inanimate objects, such as the armchair, an ottoman, a radio, and a telephone become alive. Their aliveness is depicted as playful, but also quite unsettling since Mickey does not know how to communicate with such a "strange" world. When he steps on the little ottoman, the anthropomorphized piece of furniture gets hurt, starts squealing like a puppy, and finally jumps into its "mother's"(armchair's) lap. In one particular sequence Mickey eats a walnut, which, in a fantastically "cartoony" fashion, makes him briefly larger, then small. At the end of the film, our hero finds himself chased by several decks of cards, which throw their spots at him. He turns on a fan, blows the cards away, and escapes by going back through the mirror. Luckily, Mickey is saved from this mysterious,

otherworldly universe. As his dreaming body submerges into the “real” Mickey, the alarm clock starts ringing. Mickey’s waking up again establishes a coherently logical closure, separating the fantastic/plasmatic/imaginary/dreamy elements from the relative normalcy of the “real,” material world in which such threats do not exist. *Thru the Mirror*, thus, ends in a typical fashion of classic realism. Robert Sklar gave an excellent example of similar dichotomizing of illogically plasmatic realm versus coherently realistic universe in yet another Disney short from the period:

In *Pluto’s Judgment Day* (1935) [Mickey Mouse] is so anthropomorphic that he’s an owner of domesticated animals. He rebukes Pluto for chasing the cat, and the dog settles into a troubled sleep near the fire, dreaming of punishment in hell of his misdeeds. The underworld scenes have interesting affinities with *Hell’s Bells* that illuminate the transformation of Disney’s style. In the earlier film they are a fantasy, in the later, a dream, carefully bounded by waking reality: they are not magic, not out of time, they are part of Pluto’s imagination, not accessible to the viewer’s.¹⁷

These three films showed that despite Disney animators’ ability to animate characters and their universe “realistically,” and despite the conservative structure that they imposed on these shorts, the irreverent nature of plasmatic language still allowed these artists to express their imagination by emphasizing the medium’s humorous playfulness and its outlandish anarchism. It is not to say that other Disney shorts from the period were inferior. Quite the contrary, they stood (and still stand) as some of the most sophisticated animated shorts ever made. But their increasingly relentless insistence on the codes that reinforced both the predictable straightforwardness and exaggerated literalness of plastic realism, as well as tiresome linearity, coherence, and morality of classic realism, made them, to put it bluntly, rather dry and monotonous in comparison to the films discussed above.

Disney studio's tendency toward a "progressively realistic" depiction of the animated universe in its short films was also reflected in Disney's only feature film from the 1930s, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (henceforth *Snow White*). It is, however, important to realize that *Snow White*, just like many other Disney feature films, successfully combined different types of "realism" in order to depict a unique realm that reinforced Disney's ideological values. Firstly, as I indicated in Chapter One, Disney tried to "perfect" its animated world by accepting the codes of mimetic representation in his feature films. In *Snow White*, we can see how the characters of Snow White, the Prince and the Queen represented Disney animators' attempts (no matter how [un]successful) to create mimetic characters in terms of their bodily relationship to the real.¹⁸ In addition, these characters tended to imitate the laws of "external reality" not only in relation to their physical design, but also in regard to their bodily movements. The seven dwarfs, on the other hand, were different. First of all, the dwarfs' "freakish" nature (human-child) that would have pointed to their "physical deformity" in the photo-indexical medium was neutralized by caricaturally appealing bodily designs typical of the studio. The dwarfs' movements were often plastically realistic, not mimetic, following, to a great degree, the "cartoony" fashion of Disney's earlier shorts. The plastic dwarfs re-invented reality in a comic/caricatural key in the way Mickey, Goofy, or Donald had done before them, rather than trying to imitate the "objectivity of external reality." Different designs and movements provided unique and lovable personality traits for each of the seven dwarfs. Their caricaturally homogeneous/plastic reality, thus, helped reinforce Disney's values of appeal, childishness, asexuality and innocence of the animated universe. Narratively,

Snow White followed almost all of the conventions of classic realism, including linear narration, cause-effect structure, and moralistic messages. Just like *Three Little Pigs* or *The Grasshopper and the Ants*, Disney's first animated feature through its "Whistle While You Work" philosophy and coherent narrativity promoted and naturalized the idea of exemplary work ethic. The film also emphasized such ideas as victory of good over evil, heterosexual marriage of mimetic (more realistic/less "cartoony") characters and happy closure. *Snow White* was, thus, much more than a simplistic animated universe. Through a sort of hybridity of multiple realist styles, it served as an artistic achievement that naturalized Disney's many ideological values of the period.¹⁹

The Fleischers, Ani-morphism, Plasmatic Disorderliness

Disney's striving toward greater realism and plausible characters led him toward narrativizing his animated realm by submitting it to the twelve principles of what I defined as plastic realism and, consequently, many rules and conventions of classic realism as early as 1932. The Fleischers, on the other hand, explored the rubbery illogicality of their cartoon realm for a few more years. The liberating plasmaticness was not simply one of the elements in the Fleischer animated universe, until the implementation of the Code of Motion Picture Production, it was its driving force. In the Fleischer realm, the plasmatic language took its most extreme and fantastic form, which Norman Klein defined as - "ani-morphing" (animated metamorphism). While Disney's realm in the late 1920s and early 1930s was plasmatic and, occasionally, its inanimate

things seemed to have their own willpower, Disney's world was never truly ani-morphic in the Fleischeresque sense.

Metamorphosis, a fantastic evolution of one object or being into another, was prominent, as I mentioned in Chapter One, in the early "Inkwell" shorts. But, the liberating aspect of Fleischer ani-morphism did not disappear from the Fleischer films well into the 1930s, the time when Disney was making his cartoons ever more "realistic." Ani-morphism continued to be an important aspect in both "Betty Boop" and "Popeye" animated series. Norman Klein compared Disney's insistence on the "illusion of life," character plausibility and bodily integrity achieved through the principles of plastic realism to the fantastically ani-morphing tendencies of the Fleischer realm of the 1930s:

Disney nature made war with the character's body. In *The Band Concert* (1935), Mickey stays intact (no metamorphosis of any kind)-and on the beat-while conducting an orchestra thrown asunder by a tornado. His failure to morph was the central gag to the cartoon. Pluto was perhaps the only Disney character allowed to show his scribbles-to have ani-morphs. For example, in a cycle drawn for the cartoon *Alpine Climbers* (1936), Pluto's body literally takes a wing. Lines snarl up until he looks like a bird in a blender, becomes briefly an ani-morph. His body appears to dissolve; that is, we see it lost for two drawings out of sixteen. However, the commentary on this drawn cycle by Thomas and Johnston advises us to turn away from ani-morphic lapses: "Never lose the personality of the character in either a long shot or a wild action."²⁰

This failure to morph was not only typical of the later Disney cartoons that followed the tradition of plastic realism, it was very evident even in the early black and white shorts done in the tradition of "rubber-hose" animation. Consider, for example, the way Mickey Mouse sings this particular verse of "Minnie's Yoo-Hoo" in a 1929 cartoon titled *Mickey's Follies*:

Oh the ol' tomcat with his "meow-meow-meow",
 Old hounddog with his "bow-wow-wow",
 The crow "caw-caw" and the mule "he-haw"
 Gosh what a racket like an old buzz saw
 I have listened to the kookoo koo his "koo-koo"

And I've heard the rooster's "cock-a-doodle-doo"
 With the cows and the chickens they all sound like the dickens
 When I hear my little Minnie "yoo-hoo!"

As Mickey imitates the utterances of various barnyard animals he mentions in his song, his body tries to assume the characteristics of each of those animal species, but it fails. For example, during the cats's "meow-meow-meow," Mickey's facial expression is angrier, his teeth seem to be a little bit more pointy. As he imitates the rooster's "cock-a-doodle-doo," Mickey's body tries to elongate and stretch plasmatically. The character, however, never metamorphoses into a cat, nor a rooster. It seems as if Mickey desires to morph, but is not able to do so. Even at the time when Disney shorts were characterized by rubbery plasmaticness, the bodies' of Disney's animated characters had to preserve the essence of their inherent "species." Mickey always had to remain a "mouse," because there was not to be a confusion of heterogeneous/incompatible elements (an occurrence possible through the process of ani-morphing). In other words, there were certain limits to Disney's characters' plasticity even before 1932. Consider now another example of Disney's realm's plasmaticness that failed to be quite ani-morphic. While praising Disney's short *Hawaiian Holiday* (1937), Eisenstein wrote:

How easily and gracefully four fingers on both of Mickey's hands, playing a Hawaiian guitar, suddenly dissolve into...two pairs of extremities. The two middle fingers become little legs, the two outer fingers - little hands. The second hand becomes its partner. And suddenly there are no longer two hands, but two funny, little white people, elegantly dancing together along the strings of the Hawaiian guitar.²¹

While applauding Disney's plasmatic freedom in the example above, Eisenstein most definitely overlooked certain limits of Disney's plastic realism that were at work there. Mickey's fingers may look like "two funny, little white, people," but that is as plastic as

the twelve principles of animation will let them be. Mickey's fingers are not ani-morphic. They do not become little humans. All they do is - resemble little humans. Besides, such limited plasticity was also possible in the live-action medium. For example, this scene was inspired by Chaplin's famous "Oceana Roll" from *The Gold Rush* (1925).

The Fleischer realm was different. In Fleischer animation every being and every thing was potentially somebody or something else. In *Silly Scandals* an anthropomorphic lion points a gun at a dog and the terrified animal transforms into a series of wieners. The Queen's face in *Snow-White* morphs into a frying pan with sunny-side up eggs that replace her eyes. In *Ha! Ha! Ha!* (1934) tombstones grow eyes and mouths and start laughing hysterically. In *Betty Boop for President* (1932), Betty runs a political campaign against Mr. Nobody while her face morphs into various caricatural/parodic versions of actual candidates from the time, such as Al Smith. In a film like *Betty Boop's Ups and Downs* (1932) even the Moon and planets such as Venus and Saturn anthropomorphize by growing specifically human features. Such a bizarre occurrence has for its consequence the Moon auctioning off the planet Earth to the highest bidder, Saturn, who, then, takes away the planet's gravity. Popeye was able to literally adjust his anatomy by treating his facial features as if they were made out of malleable matter in shorts such as *Goonland* (1938) or *Puttin' On The Act* (1940). In the former he transformed into a member of the (fictitious) Goon species, while in the latter he was able to morph into Stan Laurel and Jimmy Durante. While Mickey failed to become a cat or a rooster in *Mickey's Follies*, Popeye did not have too much trouble transforming himself into a Goon or the two famous entertainers.

As one can see, Disney's "plausible-impossible" philosophy "evolved" the lawlessly plasmatic logic of the studio's shorts into what I referred to as plastic realism, which, at the same time, accepted numerous narrative and ideological conventions of classic realism. The Fleischer realm's ani-morphism, however, stood in sharp contrast, not only to the plausibility and "fixity" (no matter how plastic or exaggerated) of the animated bodies, but also to many normative and ideological principles of logical narrativity. Several scholars have noticed this peculiar tendency of metamorphism to challenge the coherence and conventions of classic realism. Norman Klein, for example, wrote in regard to the Fleischer shorts of the period:

The Fleischer Studios in the early thirties (1931-1933) specialized in ani-morphing, with a simultaneity of effects that is still extraordinary to catalog; certainly by Disney standards, those effects seemed to wipe out the coherence of "story."²²

Similarly, Paul Wells wrote the following about metamorphosis:

Metamorphosis legitimizes the process of connecting apparently unrelated images, forging original relationships between lines, objects, etc., and disrupting established notions of classical story-telling. Metamorphosis can resist logical developments and determine unpredictable linearities (both temporal and spatial) that constitute different kinds of narrative construction.²³

The irreverent illogicality of ani-morphic language, by its very nature, challenges numerous binary oppositions. Writing about the unstable nature of metamorphism Wells concluded:

[Metamorphosis can] achieve transformations in figures and objects which essentially *narrate* those figures and objects, detailing, by implication, their intrinsic capacities. In enabling the collapse of the illusion of physical space, metamorphosis destabilises the image, conflating horror and humour, dream and reality, certainty and speculation.²⁴

Fleischer ani-morphism, just like Disney's plasmatic universe of the late 1920s, existed somewhere in-between the medium's liberating playfulness and its anarchic disorderliness. Being able to convey such ambiguous feelings by breaking the boundary

between horror and humour, dream and reality, certainty and speculation, a morphing effect is capable of producing an uncanny feeling of simultaneous joy and unease. Vivian Sobchack, however, differentiated between the animated morph and the computer-generated morph in the photo-indexical cinema, connecting the former to a sort of benign playfulness and the latter to the feeling of *unheimlich* (uncanny). She wrote:

Morphing and the morph deflate in humanly meaningful temporal value proportionate to their inflated spatial display of material transformation as both seamlessly reversible and effortless. This, of course, is a phenomenological effect we experience regularly when we engage the playful cartoon physics of animated films. However, when such an impossible physics irrevocably alters verisimilar forms of photographic representation and human action to digitally warp and punctuate (if not completely puncture) the temporal gravity and spatial grounds of cinematic realism, the effects of temporal evacuation and spatial shiftiness seem less playful than *unheimlich*.²⁵

Even though it may be true that the digital morph can be more disturbing than an ani-morph, since the former challenges the “fixity” of the live-action indexicality, and the latter is sometimes naturalized within the artificial world of the animated plasmaticness, an important element that Sobchack ignores is the narrative tone within which any particular morph occurs, regardless of the cinematic world’s relationship to the real (photo-indexical or drawn/iconic). Although in her essay she acknowledges that metamorphic effects in live-action films such as *Babe* (1995) are more playful than in, for instance, *Dark City* (1998), since the former deals with the morphing in a comedic mode, and the latter is more unsettling and dark, Sobchack, in the true “essentialist” fashion, dismisses the animated morph as simply “playful” due to the medium’s inherent “difference” and its “imaginary” domain.²⁶ In other words, Sobchack’s differentiation between the ani-morph and digital live-action morph again reinforces the traditional way of dichotomizing animation and live-action cinema. While Fleischer cartoons’ ani-

morphs were, in some instances, imaginatively comic and playful, at other instances, they clearly expressed the darkness of the cultural mood by uncannily mixing dreamlike imagery and “reality,” humour and horror. In that sense, these films’ ani-morphic effects did not only express the exhilaratingly liberating tendencies of the animated medium, but they often emphasized the frightening disorderliness and alienating anarchism of the period.

Even in the early “Out of the Inkwell” shorts, the anarchic lawlessness of the Fleischeresque ani-morphism was, at times, used to accentuate certain cultural taboos typical of the studio. In *Ko-Ko the Kop* (1927), for example, constable Ko-Ko is shown chasing Fitz the dog, who suddenly jumps onto a wall and morphs into an attractive housewife leaning from a window. The woman flirts with Ko-Ko, and as he kisses her, she and the window morph back into Fitz. Ko-Ko, without noticing anything, continues to kiss the dog. This fantastic ani-morphic tendency of the early Fleischer cartoons, as is obvious from this example, did not only point to the plasmatic freedom that Eisenstein praised so highly in the animated medium, but it also, in and of itself, accentuated certain anxieties of corporeal “fixity,” bodily integrity, and overall stability of the animated world by creating such culturally subversive subtexts as, in this case, bestiality and homosexuality. As I said, later in the 1930s, as the Disney studio was conforming its animated universe to the strict rules of plastic realism and narrative coherence of classic realism, the Fleischers used the language of plasmatic ani-morphism to depict both animated playfulness and hallucinatory anarchism of their culturally subversive realm. Let me take a look at a few examples.

In a short entitled *Bimbo's Initiation*, the Fleischers used the ani-morphic language to depict the ideas of fear, entrapment, and surreal nightmare. The cartoon begins as Bimbo walks down a street somewhere in an urban neighbourhood typical of the studio's cartoons from the period. Bimbo, then, falls through an open manhole, down a chute. In the underworld he is greeted by a mystic order, whose hooded members with candles on their heads try to persuade him to join the clan. Norman Klein argues that these menacing ghouls in *Bimbo's Initiation* do not possess bodies at all. He adds that in the short "incorporeal laughter and lighting metamorphoses become characters: they are villains from an unnamed bundist organization trying to frighten Bimbo into joining."²⁷ When Bimbo says no to their threatening offer, he finds himself in a number of agonizing, claustrophobic predicaments from which he cannot escape. The floor beneath him lifts Bimbo up to a room in which the exit door rolls up and disappears. The floor begins moving backwards. A knife emerges from it, then grows a mouth (with sharp teeth) that tries to bite Bimbo. The character is, then, almost killed by a fire and a huge spiked board. The hooded specters are shown voyeuristically enjoying our hero's struggles. Bimbo ends up in more mysterious rooms, meeting a live skeleton and riding a bike that is anchored to the ground. Bimbo's furious pedaling sets himself on fire. He tries to extinguish the fire by jumping into a nearby swimming pool, which causes the water to crack as if it were glass. Betty Boop shows up by opening a door, and invites Bimbo to come to her. Bimbo tries to follow Betty, but the door closes in front of him, as the door knob starts cruising around the door frame. The door grows a mouth which swallows our hero. Bimbo is shown running through a dark tunnel as numerous axes

almost cut him in half. As he runs, he spits out his heart, and then swallows it again. Bimbo's enlarged shadow gets decapitated, which frightens him. The last scene shows a menacing cultist offering Bimbo the membership in their organization once again. This time, the ghostly figure removes the hood and is shown to be Betty Boop herself. Bimbo accepts the offer. The character finds himself in a rather uncanny situation since the room suddenly gets filled with four rows of Betty's duplicates. Bimbo is intoxicated by Betty's sexuality, but he never escapes from the ghastly underworld. *Bimbo's Initiation*, far from depicting a coherent, realistic, let alone moralistic story, portrays a nightmarish world, in which the ani-morphic language creates anarchic disorder and fatalistic horror. The ani-morph is not natural, its almost surrealist illogicality torments the cartoon "hero." Leslie Cabarga, for example, wrote the following about *Bimbo's Initiation*:

Bimbo's Initiation...is as hauntingly surrealistic, in its own way, as Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*. ..[It] is like a bad dream. The paranoia of minding one's own business but falling into an insidious trap; the unmotivated abduction; the futility of the flame that would not be extinguished and the bicycle that would not move; the sheer unexplained terror of the situation are all common dream symbols captured in a marvelously effective Talkartoons cartoon.²⁸

Another Fleischer short from the period, *Betty Boop, M.D.*, shows a wagon coming to an urban neighbourhood, where it is greeted by an enthusiastic crowd. It contains a group of traveling hucksters (Betty, Bimbo, Ko-Ko), selling a product called "Jippo," which claims to be a miracle cure for everything. The crowd, at first reluctant to buy the product, gives in to their consumerist desires after Betty lures them with her sexuality. Bimbo himself takes a swig of Jippo. He starts sputtering maniacally and, then, after calming down a bit, he settles down to sing jazzy "You're Nobody's Sweetheart Now." We quickly learn that not only did Betty engage in a culturally forbidden

behaviour by luring the paying customers with her feminine appeal, the potion that she sells is itself revealed to be a product of cheating - tap water. Thus, the world of *Betty Boop, M.D.* is obviously set in a world where morality does not play an important role. The main heroes are characterized by such anti-social characteristics as prostitution and deception. In such an ethically transgressing world, Jippo starts producing undesirable effects upon those who consume it. The true ani-morphic horror starts at this point. A tiny man takes a swig of Jippo in hope of gaining some weight. Instead of gaining healthy weight, he morphs into an extremely obese, ill-looking creature. An old man, teetering on the brink of death, and accompanied by a little baby, takes a swig of Jippo in hope of getting younger. He does become younger indeed, although not the way he intended. Instead of becoming a healthy young man, the old man fantastically morphs into a baby that preserves his bodily scale, thus becoming a grotesque creature. The little baby that the old man carried with himself also drinks the potion. But, instead of becoming an adolescent man, the baby withers into a miniature old man, thus creating yet another freak of nature. Another old man drinks Jippo and dies, covering himself with rubbery asphalt, which transforms into a grave. The grave, complete with a flower on it, then grows black, dotty eyes and a mouth. The alive grave starts mumbling in a trumpet-like rhythm of Bimbo's diegetic song. Another (anthropomorphic) man takes a sip of Jippo, and as a consequence, his own skeleton leaves his body and starts patting him on his bum in the rhythm of the jazzy score. Ko-Ko and numerous other characters are, then, shown marching toward the camera, their bodies fantastically stretching and squashing, elongating and squishing in a ghostly fashion. Finally, an innocent toddler gulps a whole

bottle of Jippo down its throat. The baby starts choking, again in the rhythm of the jazzy tune, and, then, slowly morphs into an ugly monster that looks like Fredric March's Mr. Hyde. In a close-up the grotesque monster-baby starts producing a high-pitched, eerie sound as the cartoon irises-in to display the end credits. As we can see, the whole realm of *Betty Boop, M.D.* was driven by the powerful ani-morphic force. The violent ani-morph was not gentle, it was harsh, uncontrollable and scary. Yet, at the same time, this unsettling metamorphism was accompanied by Bimbo (and other characters) singing the popular song ("You're Nobody's Sweetheart Now") with an infectious, happy rhythm that impelled the action (i.e. the characters happily bounce up and down in the "rubber-hose" rhythm of the music as all sorts of bizarre things happen). The whole world that this lawless language depicted was both comic and scary, material and hallucinatory, existing somewhere in-between reality and dream. Rather than conforming to the language and ideology of classic realism, the Fleischers created a realm in which plasmatic lawlessness and fantastic ani-morphism created joyously liberating, but also disorderly anarchic and uncannily grotesque vision, which conveyed the ideas of futility of characters' actions and pessimism in an already deceitful and immoral context. Such a universe expresses both playfulness of the cartoon medium and the disruptive power of the sublime.

It could be said that if Disney's "realist" language told coherent stories that were unfolding forward in time, the Fleischers' ani-morphic plasmaticness spread all over the cartoon space. Roger Warren Beebe, for example, connected the very concept of metamorphism in the cinema to the idea of Barthesian punctum.²⁹ Writing about the art of photography, Roland Barthes defined the punctum as an accident of photographic detail

which pricks the viewer (but also bruises, is poignant to the viewer).³⁰ For Barthes, the punctum signified the photographic detail that had the power to catch the eye, jog the memory, arouse tenderness. Even though the Fleischer “Betty Boop” realm was animated/drawn, it still displayed some of the characteristics of Barthesian photographic punctum. In that sense, Fleischer cartoons have traditionally provided us with a complexly rich imagery that emphasized numerous animated details rather than the cause-effect narrativity typical of classic realism. The richness of visual details in Fleischer cartoons was well explained by Leonard Maltin in his discussion of Fleischer *Snow-White*:

Snow White [sic] is so full of bizarre images and crazy ideas that it’s difficult to absorb it all in one or two viewings. ...Every scene is replete with tiny throwaway gags - Dave Fleischer’s touch...When Betty arrives at the palace, Ko-Ko throws down a red carpet for her, and Bimbo follows with a suit of red-flannel underwear. As Betty walks away, a tiny mouse pops out of a flap in the underwear, tips one of his ears and calls, “Hiya!”. Later, when the Dwarfs are skiing with Betty’s coffin, a flowerpot resting on top falls off and suddenly grows hands to help itself back onto position. The action never stops and the ingenuity seems limitless.³¹

Since the cinema is a medium that is capable of showing visually complex (animated) space, as well as going forward in time, its punctum functions in more than one way - spatially as a fascinating detail within a frame, but, also, temporarily, as a moment of non-narrative rupture in the progressive chain of cinematic narrativity. This is why, perhaps, it is very useful to distinguish between what Beebe calls Barthesian punctum and the cinematic punctum:

Although Barthes limits his exploration of the punctum to the specificities of the still photograph, a cinematic analogy is apt, but it requires some translation. Whereas Barthes reads the punctum’s rhetorico-affective challenge as a spatial disruption (primarily to the unity of composition, although also to the unity of interpretation), the cinematic punctum functions additionally (and perhaps primarily) as a temporal disruption, an interruption of the flow of narrative and a suspension of linear time. In its volatile, affective disruptions, the cinematic punctum offers a type of radically non- or antinarrative pleasure, which provides the ground for an analysis of the morph.³²

The Fleischers' ani-morphic punctum functioned as both - Barthesian punctum in terms of the richness of disruptively bizarre animated details, but, also, as the cinematic punctum - a way of rupturing an already loose narrativity of the animated world. According to Barthes' definition, the visual punctum creates "an internal agitation, an excitement...the pressure of the unspeakable which wants to be spoken."³³ In that sense, the Fleischers' often used their ani-morphic detail as a sort of hallucinatory anti-social punctum. This can best be seen in one of the most ingenious "Betty Boop" shorts titled *Snow-White*.

The Fleischer masterpiece *Snow-White* begins by showing the fairy tale's Queen consulting her mirror in order to find out who is the fairest in the land. The mirror that looks like a minstrel show blackface answers that the Queen is the prettiest in the kingdom. The sexualized Snow White (played by Betty Boop) enters the castle singing "I wanna see my stepmama." When the mirror sees Betty Boop, it revises its original view and suggests that it is, in fact, Betty who is the fairest in the land. This familiar story is constantly ruptured by numerous Fleischeresque ani-morphic gags in the playful mode. For instance, as Betty enters the palace, two icicles on the castle's door grow human facial features, start singing to help announce Betty's arrival at the palace, and, then, coil upwards to let her in. As the Queen hears the mirror's new decision, her scowling face metamorphoses into a frying pan with two sizzling eggs instead of eyes. "Off with her head!" orders the Queen as Ko-Ko and Bimbo, two guards substituting for the huntsman of the original tale, take Betty away. The heartbroken guards tie Betty to a tree and try to prepare for her execution by sharpening an axe on a grinding wheel (so hard that it grinds

up into sawdust) and by cleaning a tree stump. Emotionally affected by Betty's rendition of "Always in the Way," the two guards show compassion by destroying their tools and tossing the grinding wheel and the tree stump down a nearby hole (actually, the grave intended for Betty). Unluckily, the two of them fall in the chasm too. They plummet to the bottom of the abyss, knocking themselves unconscious. The tree releases Betty by lifting her out of the binding rope. Betty walks away, then trips and rolls herself into a huge snowball. The rolling snowball passes through a wooden gate that reshapes the ball into a flat box, which, then, plunges into a frozen lake only to emerge as a sort of ice coffin. The coffin slithers through the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs, a rubbery, undifferentiated bunch, who, after elongating their necks to see Betty, become pallbearers who carry the coffin on their shoulders straight to the Mystery Cave. At the same time, the Queen visits Betty's supposed grave site and, after realizing the deception, she passes her magic mirror over her body, thus transforming herself into a rather unsightly witch. Using the mirror as a broomstick, the witch sails down the hole and, then, wakes up Bimbo and Ko-Ko by stepping on their armoured heads. At this time, Ko-Ko starts singing Cab Calloway's rendition of "St. James Infirmary Blues," a song about a girl who died from cocaine overdose. The lyrics of the song introduce a story within the story. But, Ko-Ko's/Calloway's "story" becomes totally detached from any sense of coherent narrativity. Instead, it emphasizes the spectacularly affective ani-morphic force and the grotesque background detail. In other words, a sort of darkly illogical visual punctum takes over by literally rupturing the already loose narrative flow. As Ko-Ko and Bimbo join Betty in the Mystery Cave, numerous metamorphoses and bizarre visual details

foreground an anti-social subject matter. The background imagery displays a sort of “danse macabre” with numerous puncturing details that include such grotesqueries as a nightmare globe, a dead policeman directing traffic, human and animal skeletons in a bar, a hippo playing a whorehouse piano to an audience of dead bodies, etc. The dark cavern is also decorated by such fatalistic symbols as guns, dice and cards. We see Betty Boop in her glass coffin that is carried by the dwarfs. Ko-Ko and Bimbo follow the coffin, in which Betty Boop is shown blinking and moving around, while the witch on her broomstick swims through the air in pursuit of Ko-Ko. The procession looks as if it is taking place on a cracked conveyer belt that moves the characters through the cave. The Witch transforms Ko-Ko into a ghostly creature. Even though extremely plasmatic, the ghost’s body acquires an indexical dimension through the process of rotoscoping. Ko-Ko’s phantasmal corporeality becomes physically associated with Cab Calloway’s body, following the exact same dance-walk movements that made this jazz legend famous. The ghost, therefore, finds itself in an interstitial space between the explicit “realism” of corporeal indexicality and the extreme metamorphism of the animated realm. The sequence becomes very uncanny - narratively and textually it becomes rather “unrealistic” since its extreme ani-morphic lawlessness disassociates it from both the (loose) narrative flow and almost all physical/biological rules of the “real world,” but it, at the same time, also becomes bizarrely more “real,” since Ko-Ko’s ghostly body suddenly acquires a familiar indexical dimension.³⁴ The whole time, plasmatically indexical ghost keeps singing. As Ko-Ko sings the culturally subversive lyrics of Calloway’s song, his plasmatic body morphs into visual symbols of the song, such as a bottle of “boo-oo-ze”

and “twenty dollar gold piece on my watchchain.” At the same time, numerous phantasmal creatures such as a fish skeleton, a snake and a human skull fly around him. The whole ani-morphic punctum, if compared to the logical storytelling of classic realism, is anti-narratively spectacular. Beside undermining physical orthodoxies of characters’ bodies, the Fleischers’ anarchic language ruptures the familiar story by means of creating a sort of hallucinatory, culturally subversive, grotesquely dark, anti-social spatio-temporal punctum. While Walt Disney’s 1937 feature film stressed character development and plausibility, coherent storytelling, visual realism, and a moralistic message, the Fleischers’ version made four years earlier, had used the Grimm Brothers’ story only as a backdrop, as a sort of a loose structure that connected numerous incidental, both humorously playful and subversively anarchic gags. In this sense, it is worth quoting Paul Wells’ comparison between the Fleischer *Snow-White* and the Disney version of the same story:

In many ways, Fleischer’s deployment of metamorphosis is a resistance of the ‘moral function’, and enhances the modernity of animation itself beyond the constraints of mere story-telling. Whilst Disney’s version of *Snow White* changes and distorts the premises of the original fairytale, it does this in order to bring clarity to an extended narrative and to create an optimistic resolution. Even its most memorable metamorphosis - the transition of the wicked queen into the old witch - has a narrative function, that of disguise. Fleischer’s *Snow White* has little interest in such plausibilities, using the fundamental structure of the fairytale as an exercise in the construction of dark humour and sensual fantasy. ...[The Fleischers’ metamorphic] images are a long way from the safe ideological dislocations of the later Disney version and foreground the dark agendas which define the Fleischer output as a genuine contemporisation of the fairytale form. The Fleischer brothers use their metamorphoses to reveal and emphasize the ease with which social destabilisation and collapse may occur. Their fantasy worlds only heighten the fragile premises of law and order, routine and process, expectation and fulfilment.³⁵

Another cartoon from the period that achieved the same goal was *Minnie the Moocher*. The short starts off with the live-action footage of Cab Calloway performing the title song with his orchestra. It, then, shows Betty Boop as a rather sexualized child

who refuses to eat her mother's hasenpfeffer. Playful ani-morphs again constantly disrupt the short's narrative. A flower positioned in a vase on the kitchen table comes to life and asks the tearful Betty: "What's wrong, Betty? Can't you eat? No?!". After Betty refuses to eat again, the flower itself grabs the spoon and takes a bite, then starts crying in pain, its leaves fall off, and it dies in agony. Betty's father's head morphs into a gramophone complete with a skipping cylinder that replaces his heavy-accented mumbling. The narrative continues as Betty leaves home with her anthropomorphic boyfriend Bimbo. The threatening ani-morphic punctum takes over as Bimbo and Betty hide in yet another cave. The rotoscoped, plasmatically indexical Cab Calloway in the form of a ghostly walrus appears and starts singing the title song, which serves as a kind of warning about loose behaviour and drug abuse ("he showed her how to kick the gong around"). As in *Snow-White*, the animated ghost is physically associated with the jazz performer's body. In this film, the rotoscoped ghost is also textually associated with Cab Calloway's live-action prologue. The cave's background imagery is full of grotesque detail, the cave's stalagmites and stalactites dissolve into a human skull and back again. The jazzy scene shows numerous other otherworldly phantoms, ghostly blind cats, electrocution procedures and the like. The threatening disorder of social life again literally ruptures the short's main narrative thread as a sort of ani-morphic punctum. The ending shows Betty and Bimbo, terrified by the experience, escaping from the cave as numerous menacing ghosts chase after them. Interestingly enough, Bimbo literally winds up in the doghouse, which again foregrounds the bizarre relationship between human Betty and her animalistic boyfriend.

Another film titled *Ha! Ha! Ha!* also used the ani-morphic language as a sort of bizarre non-narrative spectacle. Betty and Ko-Ko the Clown are shown inside a drawing. Betty wants to cure Ko-Ko's toothache, but she unintentionally releases laughing gas, which instead of anaesthetizing Ko-Ko makes both animate and inanimate objects laugh hysterically. The gas leaves the animated realm and spreads into the photo-indexical world. Live-action people start laughing. The non-narrative ani-morph takes over by literally animating inanimate objects. Photo-indexical cars and a bridge start laughing hysterically. The laughter, however, is not spontaneous or natural. The ani-morph forces it and dictates it. Even the tombstones start laughing, simultaneously exclaiming: "Don't make me laugh!" Betty and Ko-Ko leave the cartoon realm and jump into the nearby inkwell, which here serves as a sort of self-reflexive reference to the earlier "Out of the Inkwell" shorts. The inkwell itself comes to life and starts laughing insanely. Its painful laughter, however, causes the inkwell to collapse, its supposedly solid materiality becoming disfigured. The more menacing music starts playing in the background and the short irises-in to display the end credits.

As I indicated in my discussion about Fleischer characters' relationships to their referents/signifieds in Chapter Two, the Fleischer animated realm became increasingly homogenized after the implementation of the Production Code. Interestingly, just as the studio's animated bodies became more appealing and started expressing different cultural values, their whole universe became less ani-morphic. Thus, after 1934, metamorphoses and anthropomorphizing of inanimate objects became much rarer in the "Betty Boop" series. These films started increasingly conforming to the cause-effect patterns of

coherent narration and classic realism. I am not arguing that these films stopped displaying fantastic elements altogether. In such cartoons as *Betty Boop and Grampy* (1935), *Grampy's Indoor Outing* (1936), or *House Cleaning Blues* (1937) the Fleischers showed engagingly amusing gags that came as a result of Grampy's ingenious mechanical inventions (which were inspired by Rube Goldberg's newspaper cartoons and which, perhaps, later inspired another animated "genius" - Chuck Jones' Wyle E. Coyote of the "Road Runner" series). But, while these films did display extraordinarily "unrealistic" events, they were narrated in the coherent fashion and straightforward logic. The fantastic events such as those when Grampy rigs a player piano to iron sheets and towels, creating party music by having a teakettle's steam blow through a flute, were not a result of plasmatic freedom, let alone ani-morphic anarchism, but were rather narratively contextualized ("real") events that resulted from diegetically plausible inventions of the beloved Grampy. Around this time, beginning with *Poor Cinderella* (1934), the Fleischers started making another animated series, which they called the "Color Classics." Many "Color Classics" tried to emulate Disney's "Silly Symphonies" by telling sentimental, moralistic stories done in the coherent and straightforward fashion of classic realism. This new homogenized world seems to have been in contradiction to Max Fleischer's own ideological view of what the animated cartoon should be. In 1945 Fleischer said:

During the span from 1914 to 1936, I made efforts to retain the 'cartoony' effect....Let us assume we desire to create the last word in a true to life portrait. We examine the subject very carefully and religiously follow every shape, form and expression. We faithfully reproduce every light, shade and highlight. Upon completion of this grand effort, we compare our result with a photograph....What have we now? Nothing at all. We have simply gone the long way around to create something which the camera can produce in seconds. In my opinion, the industry must pull back. Pull away from

tendencies toward realism. It must stay in its own back yard of 'The Cartoonist's Cartoon'. The cartoon must be a portrayal of the expression of the true cartoonist, in simple, unhampered cartoon style. The true cartoon is a great art in its own right. It does not require the assistance or support of 'Artiness'. In fact, it is actually hampered by it.³⁶

The reasons for the changes in Fleischer cartoons' narrative ideology, as with the changes in the studio's characters' physical appeal and cultural values they expressed, were complex and heterogeneous. Leonard Maltin, for instance, connected these changes to Disney's critical success and the Fleischers' subsequent attempts to emulate Disney's work. According to Maltin, this did not work particularly well for the two New Yorkers:

The problem with the "Color Classics" was a simple one: The Fleischer animators were trying to be something they weren't. Their attempts at sentiment were contrived, not sincere, and the results were some of the most treacly done cartoons ever made. Although the staff worked hard to make these shorts attractive, they could never match the sumptuousness of Disney's contemporary product and failed on that count as well. Fleischer cartoons had their own charm, and when they tried to imitate Disney they succeeded neither as Fleischer creations nor as bogus Disneys.³⁷

Perhaps Maltin is a bit too harsh on the "Color Classics." For example, some ingenious cartoons from the series such as *Dancing on the Moon* (1935), *The Cobweb Hotel* (1936), *Play Safe* (1936), and *Small Fry* (1939) displayed the typically Fleischeresque anti-narrative, bizarre and even ani-morphic qualities (even though in *Play Safe* and *Small Fry* these moments were narratively isolated as dreams/fantasies in pretty much the same way similar moments were bounded in Disney shorts such as *The Mad Doctor*, *Thru the Mirror*, or *Pluto's Judgment Day*). But, the general tendency in the "Color Classics" series, as Maltin points out, was a sort of Disneyfication of the animated realm. This is, perhaps, best seen in the atmospheric mood pieces (sentimental tear-jerkers) such as *Song of the Birds* (1935) and *Somewhere in Dreamland* (1936) or the Fleischer version of The Ugly Duckling, titled *The Little Stranger* (1936) which, like Disney's 1939 version, told the familiar story (with some variations) in a perfectly straightforward

and coherent manner. The Fleischers' animated realm, however, was not completely homogenized in the Disneyesque sense. Unlike the "Color Classics," Fleischer "Popeye" cartoons consistently preserved some aspects of the earlier rubbery irreverence and plasmatic metamorphism.

"Popeye" cartoons were, to a degree, "narrative" cartoons. Many shorts in the series used the same story structure repeatedly - that of Popeye, Bluto, and Olive Oyl engaged in a love triangle in which the self-righteous, but chivalrous Popeye would be contrasted to Bluto, a rude, obnoxious, ill-mannered villain. A typical cartoon in the series would end with Popeye's ingestion of spinach and a consequent physical punishment of Bluto for his ungentlemanly behaviour toward Olive Oyl. But, even though the "Popeye" realm was narrative (often emphasizing innovative ways in which the familiar story was told, rather than presenting new/original stories), it never lost its plasmatic illogicality. Thus, while Disney cartoons evolved toward plastic realism, the Fleischer "Popeye" series proudly remained fantastic in the "rubber-hose" tradition. They continued to defy physical laws of gravity/mechanics and biological laws of human anatomy. At the carnival scene in *Betty Boop Presents Popeye the Sailor*, for example, at one instance we see people flexibly jumping from one ride to another, and, then, the merry-go-round takes off in the air. In the same cartoon we see a single train track that splits into four separate tracks and, then, reconnects again into a single one. The trains' four speeding cars each follow one track and, then, reconnect again. In reality, the train with all its cars would have to take one single track. Michael Wassenaar explains it this way:

The joke plays with the economic expectations of geometry and mechanics: inertia should force the train down a single track; in other words, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But, the funnier movement between those points is the incongruous, wasteful meander.³⁸

In terms of bodily plasmaticness, the character of Olive Oyl, for example, was one of the most plastic characters in the history of animation. She did not have elbows and could wrap her arms all the way around her body as if she were indeed made out of rubber. While critics like Wassenaar openly praised such fantastic defiance of the laws of physics and biology, other more conservative critics found such things to be an impediment to the coherency of the “Popeye” shorts. The Disney-biased and a bit unfairly anti-Fleischerian critic, Michael Barrier, said the following about “Popeye” shorts:

In *A Clean Shaven Man*, released in February 1936, Popeye pulls a barber chair out of the floor and spins the chair’s seat off its base, so that it whirls through the air and forces Bluto against a wall. Then the seat, with Bluto in it, bounces back onto the base of the chair, which Popeye is holding. There is no sense that this might somehow be physically possible; the set simply floats. The slow and even Fleischer timing, sometimes so effective in earlier films at contributing to a dreamlike atmosphere, was much more problematic in cartoons organized around coherent narratives and dependent on audience interest in their protagonists.³⁹

While Fleischers’ timing might have been relatively slow at the time (much more frantic than Disney’s sense of timing in any case), the aspect that Barrier ignores is that the Fleischers did not even attempt to create, in their “Popeye” cartoons, a world of plastic realism that would follow the Disneyesque “plausible-impossible philosophy.” On the contrary, many shorts in the series, beside being vaguely “narrative,” were also graphically self-reflexive. In *Fowl Play* (1937), for example, Popeye gives Olive a parrot that he has trained to sing and speak. Bluto sets the bird free and then, tries to kill it. Popeye who “can’t take it no more, ‘cause that’s all he can take” eats his spinach and, then, teaches Bluto a lesson. He starts punching Bluto so hard, so that the villain’s inside colours/shades separate from his body, hit the house wall, and, then, bounce back inside

Bluto's bodily contours, which stayed in their place as curvy black outlines the whole time. Instead of creating a universe that would strictly follow the rules of the "real world" in a caricatural key, the Fleischers purposefully continued to go beyond it. In *I Wanna Be a Lifeguard* (1936), after being beaten up, Popeye whistles not only with his lips, but also with his eye-socket. His spinach listens, willingly jumping off the shelf and rolling over to him. In *Bridge Ahoy!* (1936), the spinach-induced Popeye single-handedly builds a bridge over a big river by jumping over it. As he is putting together an extremely complicated structure by jumping over the river in a great loop, numerous cars start crossing the bridge before it is even finished. Popeye's jump, however, is faster than the speeding cars, and he finishes the bridge before the cars are able to cross it. As we can see, "Popeye" shorts have continued with the tradition of unrealistic playfulness, fantastic flexibility and defiance of physical and biological laws. Even though they did not reflect the anarchic disorder of the earlier years, their plastic playfulness still defied the realism and relative "normalcy" of Disney's "plausible-impossible philosophy."

"Popeye" cartoons also defied the classic realist sense of a sentimentally naturalistic world, and through the forceful ani-morphic language they fantastically conveyed the idea of machine-like human strength in the world of unstable physics and extreme bodily rubber-ness. The ani-morphic language of "Popeye" shorts, however, was not as dreamlike as it was in the earlier "Betty Boop" shorts. If the earlier use of metamorphoses was intended to convey the idea of hallucinatory disorderliness as a sort of culturally subversive punctum in the surrealist fashion,⁴⁰ the "Popeye" shorts used the ani-morphic language as a sort of "cartoony" intellectual montage. In that sense, the ani-

morphic punctum in the “Popeye” series was controlled by what could be seen as plasmatic metaphorism. Consider, for instance, Popeye’s introduction in his first cartoon *Betty Boop Presents Popeye the Sailor*. As the gruff, pipe-smoking sailor struts along the deck of the ship, singing “I’m Popeye the Sailor Man,” he comes upon a big anchor, which he hits hard. The anchor, subsequently, morphs into many tiny anchors. Then, he sees a large clock. With a single punch, Popeye transforms it into a number of smaller alarm clocks. He proceeds to transform a mast, again by punching it, into many clothespins. Finally, he punches a huge fish mounted on a plaque with such a force that it splits into a number of tiny sardine cans. The ani-morphic punctum in the “Popeye” shorts, as we can see, was used as a sort of metaphoric explanation of Popeye’s machine-like strength. The most unsettling example of this sort of ani-morphism came in the short titled *I Yam What I Yam* (1933). The cartoon features Popeye, Olive, and Wimpy as they come to a seemingly deserted island. While Wimpy and Olive stay in an abandoned wooden house, Popeye goes off to find dinner. Once Popeye returns, he finds Olive and Wimpy attacked by sinister “Indians.” The sailor engages in a fight to save his friends. Near the end of the cartoon, a stereotypical, but unusually huge and menacing Indian chief tries to approach Popeye from behind in order to kill him. The spinach-empowered Popeye suddenly turns around and punches the Indian chief. The impact of the punch is so strong that the Indian chief metamorphoses into a huge and wrinkly caricature of Mahatma Gandhi. The morph here serves as a cinematic punctum, a plasmatic intellectual montage, which ruptures the cause-effect narrativity of the cartoon in order to explain Popeye’s strength in metaphorical terms. The ani-morph symbolizes Popeye’s ability to

physically transform an “evil” Indian chief into an embodiment of peacefulness (Gandhi).⁴¹ Popeye’s strength was expressed by means of similar ani-morphic metaphors in almost every single Fleischer “Popeye” cartoon. In that sense, according to Michael Wassenaar, Fleischer “Popeye” shorts of the 1930s celebrated American technology during the Depression by means of metaphoric association of the man with the engine. He explains:

[In Fleischer “Popeye” shorts] Popeye metaphorically becomes the mechanism - the engine - through which energy is transformed into work...Viewed in terms of a mechanistic metaphor, Popeye’s moment of change within the cartoons-the moment when he rallies against some opposing force-is a moment of increased efficiency of the organism...This change in metabolic states is often depicted graphically in the cartoons as physical transformation of part or all of Popeye’s body...The Fleischer cartoons play with this notion by frequently showing Popeye flexing his biceps after a spinach-induced transformation. When this happens, however, the bicep more often than not is inscribed with some metaphor of his prowess, or the muscle itself transforms into the object that stands as metaphor for Popeye.⁴²

As Wassenaar points out, it was often Popeye’s body itself that became the ani-morphic metaphor for the human (machine-like) strength. Thus, if “Betty Boop” shorts conveyed a curious connection between the human body and the animal body, the “Popeye” series explored the fascinating connection between the human organism and the machine through the power of ani-morph. For example, in *Can You Take It?* (1934), Popeye’s hand morphs into a vise appendage that squishes Bluto’s hand, as the two ruffians exchange handshakes. Popeye himself, after ingesting his favourite green vegetable, turns into a mortar shell in *My Artistical Temperature* (1937), or a whirling electrified nut and bolt in *Organ Grinder’s Swing* (1937). In *Fowl Play*, for instance, Popeye’s biceps transform into what looks like a number of miniature, armed soldiers. Examples of such ani-morphic metaphorism in the Fleischer “Popeye” shorts are countless.

This chapter dealt with different types of textual logic that ideologically positioned Disney and Fleischer animated shorts of the 1930s. While Disney's plasmatic language accepted numerous "realist" conventions in order to depict an appealing, naturalized, coherent, and, above all, moralistic universe, the Fleischers used the extreme lawlessness of ani-morphic language as a sort of anti-narrative punctum in order to emphasize the medium's "liberating" qualities, but also to (almost surrealistically) convey the collapse of social order and a sort of threatening anarchism of the period. Even though the Fleischer realm changed after 1934, their "Popeye" series still used plasmatic playfulness in order to challenge many physical/biological rules of the "real world." They also made use of ani-morphism in order to pay homage to the American technology during the Depression era by metaphorically/intellectually associating a man with a machine as a sort of commentary on the increasingly industrialized world of the 1930s.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons, 74. As I explained in Chapter One, such “unrealistic” things were also possible in the live-action cinema, but in order to achieve them, a director had to rely on either manipulation through editing or some other sort of techn(olog)ical trickery. Today such fantastic events are best achieved through computer-generated effects (animation).

² Eisenstein, Eisenstein on Disney, 99.

³ Huntly Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema (London: Harold Shaylor, 1930), pp. 29-30.

⁴ Eisenstein, Eisenstein on Disney, 10.

⁵ Leslie, Hollywood Flatlands, 26.

⁶ Robert Sklar, “The Making of Cultural Myths - Walt Disney,” in Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (eds.), The American Animated Cartoon (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹ See Thomas and Johnston, The Illusion of Life, 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹ Klein, “Animation and Animorphs,” 25. While Klein’s insights are very appropriate for Disney cartoons of the 1930s, they are not totally applicable to Disney animated films of the 1940s. A number of the studio’s shorts from the 1940s moved away from these realistic tendencies, thus challenging the animated characters’ bodily integrity that was important in the 1930s (see, for instance, *Hockey Homicide* [1945] and *Californyer Bust* [1945]).

¹² Thomas and Johnston, The Illusion of Life, pp.65-66.

¹³ Luca Raffaelli, “Disney, Warner Bros. And Japanese Animation: Three World Views,” in Jayne Pilling (ed.), A Reader in Animation Studies (London: John Libbey, 1997), 115.

¹⁴ Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons, 74.

¹⁵ Interestingly, unlike Mickey’s “heroic” cartoons, the shorts featuring Mickey, Goofy and Donald did not always feature a satisfactory outcome for the three characters. In other words, Mickey, Goofy and Donald would often fail to complete a given task successfully (i.e. the boat that they build in *Boat Builders* collapses at the end of the film, or the three characters fail miserably in their attempts to hunt moose in *Moose Hunters* [1937]). This, however, never stopped Mickey, Goofy and Donald from engaging in a new adventure or a new task. In a sense, the three characters in these films were more like eager, but incompetent children than responsible adults. This particularly applies to Goofy and Donald, one of whom would always mishandle his duties and, consequently, cause the given task to fail.

¹⁶ Wasko, Understanding Disney, 111.

¹⁷ Sklar, “The Making of Cultural Myths - Walt Disney,” 65.

¹⁸ The character of Snow White, as I pointed out in Chapter One, was in some scenes rotoscoped from live-action footage of dancer Marge Champion in order to gain a more mimetically realistic dimension.

¹⁹ While multiple “realist” tendencies may be seen in many feature films from the studio, it is important to note that Disney’s animated universe became more heterogeneous in the 1940s. Disney feature animation increasingly started emphasizing numerous co-existing tendencies in regard to the textual logic and narrative stylistics. For example, in 1940 Disney released two stylistically opposing films - *Pinocchio* done in the tradition of classic realism and *Fantasia*, which foregrounded multiple and heterogeneous styles such as abstract animation, rubbery animation, mimetic realism, and whose sequences were not connected in any coherent or unifying fashion. The same year when it released mimetically realistic *Bambi*, the Disney studio also released a rather “cartoony” *Dumbo* (1942). *Dumbo*, however, was much more than simply “cartoony.” It was in itself a very rich, stylistically heterogeneous film. Some of its characters, such as adult elephants were mimetic. Some, like the bouncy clowns, or the “cartoony” train, which stretched and squashed, were quite rubbery. Other films like *The Three Caballeros* and *Saludos Amigos* (1943) not only challenged the linearity and coherence, but also, as I indicated in Chapter Two, they defied the naturalness and moralistic context of Disneyan classic realism by allowing characters who operated on different registers of the real to freely interact and engage in “forbidden activities” (i.e. Donald Duck chasing live-action females in *The Three Caballeros*). In addition, contrary to Klein’s earlier argument, many Disney films from the 1940s revealed the artificial constructed-ness of the animated medium by foregrounding the drawing behind the cartoon characters’ flesh, thus challenging the atmospheric effects of plastic realism so extremely important in Disney’s animated universe of the 1930s. A variety of factors may be attributable to the changes in the textual logic and narrative ideology that started occurring in Disney films of the 1940s. One of them was the influence of animators from the East Coast. To find out more about *Dumbo*’s stylistic diversity in the context of two disparate animation traditions (West Coast and East Coast) operating simultaneously within the Disney studio, refer to Langer, “Regionalism in Disney Animation.” Other factors were important too. In June of 1941, many Disney employees (mainly assistant animators and inbetweeners) supported by the Screen Cartoonists Guild organized a huge strike, demanding higher wages. The studio ended up giving layoffs to many of its employees and, consequently, found itself in a very difficult financial situation. The war in Europe, according to Michael Barrier, intensified the Disney studio’s difficulties tremendously. Disney started making films for the federal government, but for the fiscal year 1942 (which ended on 2 October 1942), the Disney company reported a loss of more than sixty thousand dollars on those films. The cheap-produced films such as *The Three Caballeros* and *Saludos Amigos* had originally been planned as a number of short films, but were later packaged together with live-action footage taken during Disney’s South American tour (which was a part of the “Good Neighbor Policy”). Because of the war in Europe, the films were targeted at the domestic audience and some Latin America’s nations. All these complex artistic/economic/political factors might have contributed to the changes (or heterogeneous tendencies) in Disney films narrative ideology. For more information about the studio’s problems in the 1940s, see Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, pp. 306-379.

²⁰ Klein, *Animation and Animorphs*,” 25.

²¹ Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, pp.36-39.

²² Klein, *Animation and Animorphs*,” 26.

²³ Wells, *Understanding Animation*, 69.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁵ Vivian Sobchack, "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis," in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), Meta Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 137.

²⁶ Ibid., 137.

²⁷ Klein, Seven Minutes, 72.

²⁸ Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, 63.

²⁹ See Roger Warren Beebe, "After Arnold: Narratives of the Posthuman Cinema," in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), Meta Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 161.

³⁰ See Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida.

³¹ Maltin, Of Mice and Magic, 105.

³² Beebe, "After Arnold," 164.

³³ Barthes, Camera Lucida, 19.

³⁴ Again, in this example we can see the major difference between the use of the rotoscope in the Fleischer *Snow-White* and Disney's 1937 version of the same story. The Fleischers' insistence on negotiation between the indexical "reality" of Ko-Ko's/Cab Calloway's body and the extreme lawlessness of the ani-morphic language can be contrasted to Disney's insistence on mimesis, narrative plausibility and the film's diegetic realism.

³⁵ Wells, Understanding Animation, pp. 73-75.

³⁶ Max Fleischer, Letter to James (Shamus) Culhane, quoted in Mark Langer, "The Disney-Fleischer Dilemma," pp.161-162.

³⁷ Maltin, Of Mice and Magic, 114.

³⁸ Wassenaar, "Strong to the Finish," 28.

³⁹ Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons, 186.

⁴⁰ Both Leslie Cabarga and Leonard Maltin compare *Bimbo's Initiation* and Fleischer *Snow-White*, respectively, with Buñuel-Dalí surrealist masterpiece - *Un Chien Andalou*. See Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, 62, and Maltin, Of Mice and Magic, 102.

⁴¹ This metaphoric ani-morph could also be read as a politically incorrect association between Native people (formerly referred to as the "Indians") and India's populace.

⁴² Wassenaar, "Strong to the Finish," pp.23-24.

CONCLUSION

By discussing the physical and symbolic nature of the animated body in Disney and Fleischer films from the 1930s, I demonstrated that cartoon characters are not frivolous creations that exist in some sort of “code-free” environment. The visual depiction of the animated body and its relationship to its subject’s signified served as the basis for my discussion of how the two animation studios constructed two different fictitious realms that expressed different cultural values of the era. In addition, by exploring a number of narrational strategies in Disney and Fleischer cartoons from the period, I demonstrated how different cinematic languages textually reinforced ideologically different diegetic “realities.” In that sense, I argued that Disney’s animated realm in the 1930s was a fictional text that emphasized a coherent, straightforward, cheerfully optimistic and conservatively moralistic world through multiple “realist” tendencies (such as plastic realism and classic realism). The Fleischers’ ani-morphic cartoon realm, on the contrary, accentuated the medium’s liberating playfulness and its hallucinatory anarchism through the anti-narratively affective and, at times, disorderly alienating spatio-temporal punctum (and, later, through a sort of “cartoony” intellectual montage). Even though I focused on the 1930s animated films from Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc., the same theoretical framework can be used for cartoons from other Hollywood studios or for different animation practices in general. Let me briefly show how this methodology can be useful in a discussion of another cartoon series. Since my interest is mainly directed toward American animation in its “golden age,” I will again draw my example from that particular era.

William Hanna and Joseph Barbera's MGM "Tom and Jerry" series may serve as a great example through which we can analyze different narrational strategies that complement (or stand in opposition to) one another, namely classic realism and "cartoony" plasmaticness. As I explained in Chapter Two, "Tom and Jerry" cartoons made throughout the 1940s and 1950s, depicted their main characters as caricatural icons that preserved the basic essence of their animal species. The two characters had plausible personalities and they lived in a "realistic" cartoon environment. In great part, Tom and Jerry followed the straightforward linearity and aesthetic coherence of classic realism. In this "realistic" animated world, the cat and mouse team of Tom and Jerry engaged in acts of extreme violence and physical brutality. Michael Barrier points out that...

...the drawing style and the animation [in the "Tom and Jerry" series]- literal at its core...encouraged accepting the cartoon's world as a sort of reality. Translated into such a visual language, Barbera's broad and careless gags often suggested that the characters were suffering severe and extremely painful injuries.¹

Barrier's statement is true, but it needs elaboration. Even though Tom and Jerry lived in a relatively "realistic" cartoon environment, the moments of their (especially Tom's) excruciating pain, were almost exclusively positioned within the realm of exaggerated, zany plasmatic lawlessness. The "reality" of Tom's pain was undermined by the character's bloodlessness and "cartoony" illogicality. In *The Flying Cat* (1952), for example, Jerry befriends a canary and Tom finds it necessary to construct a makeshift pair of wings in order to capture the two critters. As Tom flies around, the canary unlaces his wings. The cat falls down hitting a tree with his crotch. The impact is so strong that Tom continues slicing the tree in half with his own body, obviously suffering a lot of pain (this

is supported by the power-sawing noise on the soundtrack). But, as Tom's horrifying ordeal ends, his bodily structure is shown totally distorted from its original shape. He is not in pain anymore. Instead of being wounded, Tom's legs are elongated as if they were made out of rubber. In *Two Little Indians* (1953), Nibbles (another mouse, Jerry's companion) scalps Tom and chops off the end of his tail, which causes an agonizing scream on Tom's part. But, Tom is not hurt for too long. He immediately recuperates and the chase continues. In *Touché, Pussy Cat!* (1954), for instance, Nibbles cuts Tom in half with a huge, sharp axe. But, Tom does not bleed, nor does he die. Instead, he recovers in the following scene. One could argue that these cartoons negotiated between certain conventions of classic realism (believable characters living in a diegetically plausible environment) and the characters' plasmatic corporeality during the moments of (realistically) excessive pain. Because of the characters' foregrounded cartoony plasticity, which made war with the animated body's integrity and coherent personality (so important in the Disney studio during the 1930s), these moments of extreme physical brutality in "Tom and Jerry" shorts from the period were humorously irruptive rather than disturbing or repulsive. In that sense, I propose that the interactions between classic realist conventions and cartoony plasmaticness in the "Tom and Jerry" series can be approached from the point of view of phenomenology and non-narrative affectivity. Like many other animated universes, the "Tom and Jerry" cartoon realm did not exist in some essentially imaginary domain, but rather employed different textual devices in order to depict its world as diversely intelligible.

My discussion of fictional characters' relationship to the real in light of different narrational laws, as I indicated in Chapter One, is also important to our understanding of the live-action cinema's construction of different diegetic "realities." In that sense, it is particularly interesting to see how modern computer-generated films use animation and live-action in order to negotiate between different cinematic conventions. Films such as *Jurassic Park* (1993) or *Titanic* (1997), for example, use computer animation for strictly mimetic purposes (by, for instance, making animated characters look as "real" as photo-indexical people themselves). Yet other films such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), or *The Hulk* (2003), use computer-generated characters in order to negotiate between a number of conflicts within the self-contained cinematic text. In the case of *Terminator 2*, the live-action/computer-generated Terminator T-1000, negotiates between his photo-indexical, mimetic "reality" and his Fleischeresque "cartoony" plasmaticness. Narratively, the film negotiates between the linear, cause-effect storytelling (classic realism) and a sort of spectacularly rupturing, phenomenologically affective punctum of the T-1000's computer-generated morph. In the case of *The Hulk*, the whole filmic world negotiates between its photo-indexicality and the Hulk's animated "reality" (that exists somewhere in-between caricature and mimesis), between the "natural" physicality of the "real world" and the Hulk's plasmatic defiance of the laws of physics and mechanics, between the conventions of (transparent) classical storytelling and the comic book fantasy achieved through the computer-generated transition effects.²

This thesis demonstrated that animation does not exist in some sort of imaginary realm, as the essentialist critics and theorists maintain. Instead, animation constructs its

worlds by creating different meanings through complex relationships between its signifiers and their subjects' referents/signifieds in the "real world" and, also, through different narrational practices that ideologically position different fictitious realms. In that sense, this thesis may provide the basic ground for future investigations on how different registers of the real such as the index, the icons of mimesis, or caricature, and different narrational practices such as classic realism, "cartoony" plasmaticness, metamorphism, or plastic realism negotiate, complement and collide with each other, sometimes within the same cinematic text. This approach, rather than homogenizing the practice of animation by accentuating its inherent "difference" from the live-action cinema, allows us to start grappling with a variety of ways in which animated cartoons construct their "realities." Future researchers will, hopefully, continue to deal with different layers of "reality" and imagination (fantasy) that both animation and the live-action cinema invoke. After all, the beauty of the cinema is that the live-action film is much more than a photograph and that the animated cartoon is much more than a drawing.

Notes

¹ Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons, 407.

² Another aspect that is important to the modern computer-generated cinema is the question of three-dimensionality of the cinematic space. That is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Rudolf Arnheim, Film as Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
- Michael Barrier, Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
- André Bazin, What is Cinema? Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
- Roger Warren Beebe, "After Arnold: Narratives of the Posthuman Cinema," in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), Meta Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp.159-179.
- Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London: Routledge, 1980).
- David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- Joanna Bouldin, "The Body, Animation and the Real: Race, Reality and the Rotoscope in Betty Boop," <http://www.utu.fi/hum/mediatutkimus/affective/bouldin.pdf>
- Robert W. Brockway, "The Masks of Mickey Mouse: Symbol of a Generation," Journal of Popular Culture, 22 (Spring 1989), pp. 25-34.
- Leslie Cabarga, The Fleischer Story, Revised Edition (New York: DaCapo Press, 1988).
- Huntly Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema (London: Harold Shaylor, 1930).
- Alan Cholodenko, "Introduction," in Alan Cholodenko (ed.), The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation (Sydney: Power Publications in association with the Australian Film Commission, 1991), pp.9-36.
- Donald Crafton, Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928 (London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1982).
- _____, Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Gene Deitch, "Animation - What the Heck is It?," in Animation World Magazine, http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=animation+what+the+heck+is+it?&article_no=630

William DeMille, "Mickey vs. Popeye," in Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (eds.), The American Animated Cartoon (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), pp. 241-244.

"Disney Quotes," http://www.justdisney.com/walt_disney/quotes/quotes01.html

Sergei Eisenstein in J. Leyda (ed.), Eisenstein on Disney (London: Methuen, 1988).

Michael Frierson, Clay Animation: American Highlights 1908 to the Present (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

Henry A. Giroux, The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999).

Stephen Jay Gould, "Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz," Natural History (May 1979), pp. 30-35.

John Grant, Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules (New York: Hyperion, 1998).

Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.), Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 55-66.

Geoffrey Harpham, "The Grotesque: First Principles," in Journal of Aesthetics, 34 (1975-6), pp. 461-468.

Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977).

Brian Henderson, "Cartoon and Narrative in the Films of Frank Tashlin and Preston Sturges," in Andrew S. Horton (ed.), Comedy/Cinema/Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 153-173.

Leslie Iwerks and John Kenworthy, The Hand Behind the Mouse (New York: Disney Editions, 2001).

Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

Norman M. Klein, "Animation and Animorphs", in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 21-39.

_____, Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon (London & New York: Verso, 1993).

William Kozlenko, "The Animated Film and Walt Disney," New Theatre, III (8) (August 1936), pp. 16-19.

Siegfried Kracauer, Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

Jacques Lacan, Ecrits (Paris: Seuil., 1966).

Mark Langer, "The Disney-Fleischer Dilemma: Product Differentiation and Technological Innovation," in Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey (eds.), Screen Histories: A Screen Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp.148-163.

_____, "The End of Animation History," <http://asifa.net/SAS/articles/langer1.htm>

_____, "The Freak Show Cultural Tradition in American Animation," unpublished paper, Film Studies Association of Canada, Ottawa, 30 May 1998.

_____, "Geanimeerde Freaks, Cyborgs en Rotoscopie: Die animate in de schemerzone tussen biologie en technologie," Plateau, Vol. 20 no. 4 (1999), pp. 14-18.

_____, "Regionalism in Disney Animation: Pink Elephants and Dumbo," in Film History, Vol. 4 (1990), pp. 305-321.

_____, "Rotoscoping the Real: Thoughts on Animation Technology," unpublished paper given at University of Western Ontario, 18 February, 2003.

_____, "Working at the Fleischer Studio: An Annotated Interview with Myron Waldman," in The Velvet Light Trap, No. 24 (Fall 1989), pp. 3-19.

Esther Leslie, Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde (London: Verso, 2002).

Leonard Maltin, Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons, Revised Edition (New York: A Plume Book, 1987).

Lev Manovich, "'Reality' Effects in Computer Animation," in Jayne Pilling (ed.), A Reader in Animation Studies (Sydney: John Libbey & Company Pty Ltd., 1997), pp. 5-15.

Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," in Braudy & Cohen (eds.), Film Theory and Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 800-817.

Steven Millhauser, Little Kingdoms (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1993).

William Moritz, "Some Observations on Non-Objective and Non-Linear Animation," in John Canemaker (ed.), Storytelling in Animation: The Art of the Animated Image, Vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1988), pp. 21-31.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Bill Nichols (ed.), Movies and Methods, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 303-315.

Grim (Myron) Natwick, Interview by Mark Langer, 28 January, 1990.

Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles Hartshorne (ed.) and Paul Weiss (ed.), Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

Luca Raffaelli, "Disney, Warner Bros. And Japanese Animation: Three World Views," in Jayne Pilling (ed.), A Reader in Animation Studies (London: John Libbey, 1997), pp. 112-136.

Alton Kim Robertson, The Grotesque Interface: Deformity, Debasement, Dissolution (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1996).

Robert Sklar, "The Making of Cultural Myths - Walt Disney," in Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (eds.), The American Animated Cartoon (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), pp. 58-65.

Edward S. Small and Eugene Levison, "Toward a Theory of Animation," in The Velvet Light Trap, No. 24 (Fall 1989), pp. 67-74.

James Snead, "Trimming Uncle Remus's Tales: Narrative Revisions in Walt Disney's *Song of the South*," in James Snead, Colin MacCabe (ed.) and Cornel West (ed.), White Screens Black Images (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 81-100.

Vivian Sobchack, "At the Still Point of the Turning World: Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis," in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), Meta Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 131-158.

Robert Stam, "Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation," in Lester D. Friedman (ed.), Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and American Cinema (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 251-276.

Bart Testa, "Arcand's Double-Twist Allegory: *Jesus of Montreal*," in André Loiselle and Brian McIlroy (eds.), Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand (Westport: Praeger, 1995), pp. 90-112.

Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation (New York: Disney Editions, 1981).

Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," in Teresa de Lauretis and Steven Heath (eds.), The Cinematic Apparatus, (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 106-120.

Philip Thomson, The Grotesque (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972).

Janet Wasko, Understanding Disney (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

Michael Wassenaar, "Strong to the Finish: Machines, Metaphor, and Popeye the Sailor," in The Velvet Light Trap, No. 24 (Fall 1989), pp. 20-32.

Paul Wells, Understanding Animation (London/New York: Routledge, 1998).