

# Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics

RYAN PIERSON

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Introduction: Perception and Metamorphosis

## What We Want to Say We See

Look closely at an array of four dots, each one equidistant from and perpendicular to its two closest neighbors:



Would you say that you see a square? If so, why? A square is four equal lines that make four right angles. The array above contains no visible lines. Try pointing to a line therein, and you will point to an empty space. And since the arrangement has no visible lines, it has no visible angles either.

If we wanted to describe this array as literally as possible, we would have to do so purely in terms of distances among points, rather than as a shape. But this would not accurately describe *how* we intuit the array. Clearly it is a square—a square made up of four dots. To describe it otherwise we would have to torque the language into some functional equivalents of what we want to say we see—lines and angles—without using those exact words. Even one of the words I just used, “distances,” does not really suffice. Distances are external relations between points. The gaps in the array above convey more than that. They convey a kind of mutual dependence *among* the points. The gaps seem to hold a power that binds the points together. This is what makes the space between the points appear different from the space that lies outside the array.

If we are to be faithful to what we see, we need to redefine a “line”—not every line but this particular kind of line—as a force uniting two points. Then we can say we see a square. Would someone object that an invisible line is not a line? That we are imagining or positing one and thus not reporting what we literally see? I would reply: such an objection mistakenly equates the sensible, what we see, with the literal, what we can point to in isolation. The objection misses the role that the line plays in giving its points their own mode

of visibility as belonging to it, as being bound together in lockstep according to it, as parts of a figure.

Now imagine a sequence of four equidistant pulses. This sequence is followed by a pause, which is equal to the duration of those four tacti put together, followed by a return to the same sequence of pulses, and so on. How would you want to say you hear these pulses? Each pulse will sound connected to the others. A force will seem to propel itself from one tactus to the next. With the arrival of the pause, that force will cease. It will give rise to a slightly different force that carries itself across the pause, and within that pause we will find ourselves discerning pulses that we don't literally hear, shadow-pulses in time with which we might nod or count in a kind of internal whisper. The series of pulses will become discernible as a figure, as a Gestalt. It will hold itself together, in contradistinction to the expansive pause. (And the pause will also hold itself together, albeit in a different way.)

Now picture four different frames of a film, each shown for half a second. On the first frame is a white point on a black background, sitting at far screen left. It persists long enough to register as an independent point that remains still. This is followed by another white point, this time at near screen left, followed by a third white point at screen right, then a fourth at far screen right. The points are positioned far enough apart that there are clear gaps between them. There is no impression of a single point moving smoothly over the screen. Would we then have to say that we do not see any motion here? Of course not; there *is* motion, a motion not attributable to any one point but instantiated in composite form across the entire series. This motion would be intuitable as a force, traveling at a certain speed in a certain direction, like a wave through a fold of fabric. Each dot would remain fixed in place, flashing and receding. But the path made up thereby would coalesce into a single figure, a figure seen *through* this force of motion, a figure likewise only within which the force of motion could be seen.

What would happen if we looked at movements in animated films in this way? If we looked not simply for movement or animacy as such but for *figures*—arrangements of units that seem to hold themselves together—and *forces*—units of attraction or repulsion or direction that seem to hold the figures together (or, alternatively, that segregate distinct figures)? If we asked ourselves *What holds these units together?*, or *What presses them apart?*, or *How is it that this configuration appears one way and not some other?*, what would follow from this?

Pursuing that line of questioning is the task of this book. I suggest that in fact three things follow from such questions. First, we must look at movements more closely than moving-image scholarship has often been inclined to do; in particular, merely noting that animation moves or changes will not be enough to do sustained analytical work. Second, thinking through figures and forces enriches our picture of animation history; not only does it reveal unexpected affinities between animators across customary divisions of popular and experimental film, but it also brings an important period of midcentury animated film into relief with a new specificity. Third, this way of seeing brings with it new theoretical questions and new resources for speculation on animation. Put together, these consequences reveal a new place of animation practice within the history of moving picture culture and even within the history of modern art and thought: as a mode of testing out our relations to the world.

### Movement as Form

At its most basic level, this book takes viewing animation as a matter of resolving ambiguities among units of perception in a delimited sensory array (i.e., the screen and the source of a film's sound). Obviously this is not the only way that one can view animation, nor need this task be limited *to* animation.<sup>1</sup> In animation though, the task of resolving ambiguities tends to be particularly salient. We cannot account for what we see and hear by appealing to physical events that occurred before a camera. The consistencies that we might otherwise take for granted, such as a performer's shape or the dimensions of a room remaining the same over time, are not guaranteed by a consistency in the original recording. These consistencies must be earned, from the relations of frame to frame, the relations among the components within each frame, and the relation of image to soundtrack. Consequently, the forces that we take to undergird those consistencies are not physical but explicitly visual and sonic. In other words, they are rendered explicitly aesthetic.

This discussion so far may read like standard animation theory, which goes something like this: actions in animated worlds are not bound to the physical laws of our world in the way that events in live-action film tend to be, and animation therefore offers us an escape from that reality. The account I offer, however, diverges from this in two important ways. First, it places its



emphasis on how image and sound are organized, not on our identification with characters in the diegesis (or on the incompatibility of those characters' actions with our physical world). Second, it does not treat animation as an art of motion, at least not primarily. It would be more accurate to say that animation is considered here as an art of coordinating sensory units into perceptible figures and forces. Style in animation emerges, in part, from how units coordinate with each other. Thus, we can use style to think about animated movements as experiments in the possibilities of sensory organization.

This approach is intended to offer one way out of a longstanding difficulty in animation scholarship: not knowing how to describe what we are looking at. Suzanne Buchan calls this "the inarticulate 'mmm . . . ' that is often the response to what we see on screen."<sup>2</sup> Faced with sights that are so difficult to articulate and that pass us by so quickly, we are tempted to make the "mmm . . ." the substance of our observations, instead of trying to move past it. When describing animation, we often identify movement or change simply as whatever cannot be contained by form.<sup>3</sup> The most commonly found version of this move is the appeal to "plasmaticness," an ur-life form remarked upon by Sergei Eisenstein in a series of notes that he wrote on Disney in the 1930s and 1940s. To see a shape changing shape, Eisenstein writes, is to see a willful freedom from the constraints of form as such, a distillation of life as that which defies form.<sup>4</sup> Since movement is almost by definition everywhere in animation, we might be led to see all animation everywhere in this way.

This distinction between form and its opposite has a rich history in Western thought, notably in Romanticism. When this move is deployed to describe animation, it thus tends to be placed at the service of Romantic oppositions: life against mechanism, magic or myth against science, liberty against conformity, and so on.<sup>5</sup> (Eisenstein himself describes Disney cartoons in terms of these oppositions.) This approach has its advantages, most eloquently demonstrated by Scott Bukatman (in the most thorough study yet of plasmaticness).<sup>6</sup> But it carries a risk that puts it at odds with the goal of descriptive specificity in film scholarship. (Obviously not all film scholarship must be specific about describing films, but it would be a strange kind of scholarship that never held such specificity as a value.) We can call this risk, borrowing a phrase from poet Robert Lowell, "the monotony of the sublime."<sup>7</sup> If one takes movement or change to be that which defies form, then there is only one way to describe it: as that which defies form. This means our powers of observation are made equivocal. The logical conclusion would be to describe the figural metamorphoses in the works of, say, Émile

Cohl; Winsor McCay; and the Disney, Fleischer, and Warner Bros. studios, in more or less the same way.<sup>8</sup> If theory is a lens with which to view a world, this kind of lens allows nothing to come into focus; everything appears at once too distant and too close. This is an especially urgent issue if we want to take seriously matters of style in animation.

To describe animated movements more closely, this book makes frequent use of a body of literature largely unfamiliar to film or animation studies: Gestalt psychology. Gestalt developed in Germany in the early twentieth century as a way to account for the variability of human perception. Against what they called mechanical or sensation-driven accounts of perception, members of the Gestalt school argued that we navigate the world by grasping relationships within a whole sensory field. According to this school of thought, perception is a matter of grasping the most stable arrangement of what is present to our senses. Within psychology as a discipline, Gestalt remained something of an outlier—its attempt to turn the values of shapely elegance into an experimental method, and even an ontology of nature, placed it outside the protocols and assumptions of standard scientific research—but the movement did prove to be important for intellectual developments in later years.<sup>9</sup> Imprints of Gestalt thinking can be found in the design theory of György Kepes, the aesthetic theory of Rudolf Arnheim, the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, J. J. Gibson's theory of ecological perception, and cybernetic theory.<sup>10</sup>

This book, though, is less interested in applying the theoretical presuppositions of Gestalt (as, say, Arnheim does) than it is in utilizing its peculiar style of inquiry.<sup>11</sup> We can describe the Gestalt style of experimentation as occurring in two stages. First, perceptual (or sometimes behavioral) coordinations are played with, such that specific, often unexpected, impressions emerge from them. Second, those impressions are described as figural relations among those coordinations. For example, in his famous experiments on the impression of motion, Max Wertheimer showed his test subjects hundreds of variations on a three-step tachistoscopic presentation of a line, a blank interval, and another line, in quick succession. Subjects were invited to give open-ended descriptions of what they saw, and Wertheimer included their descriptions in his 1912 paper, "Experimental Studies on Seeing Motion." In this paper, lines are said to dance or to twitch.<sup>12</sup> Wertheimer's paper would set the agenda for Gestalt psychology, and it makes clear the need for a kind of perceptual judgment in discerning movements, a special sensitivity to the thresholds beyond which one kind of arrangement becomes



a qualitatively other arrangement. Gestalt does not explain the differences between these arrangements by appealing to specific mechanisms of, say, the visual system, but rather by the structural features of the arrangements themselves. This manner of explanation was controversial within experimental science, but Gestalt's commitment to close phenomenological description of two-dimensional arrays makes it a potent resource for describing movements in animated films.<sup>13</sup>

By taking movement as a matter of coordination, we need not rest on the opposition between movement and form, and we can press beyond the initial "mmm." A figure is not exhaustively definable as a fixed, closed shape. As the example of the square makes clear, it is the result of the forces that scaffold it. Accordingly, a force is not merely whatever undoes or works against a figure; even a force that *does* undo a figure is better described as a force working against the forces that hold the figure together. Figure and force are not opposites but mutually constitutive. (Indeed, for Gestalt a "form" is itself only a steady-state process, a relatively stable configuration of forces.) Thus, we can note that movements bear formal specificities without ossifying them into fixed shapes. Movement is not the end of analysis; it is the beginning.

### Abstract and Representational

Typically, when we speak of a "figure" we mean the human figure, or something that approximates it. It may sound, then, that by stressing the importance of figures, this approach emphasizes what is usually called "personality animation," the craft of creating individuated characters. Personality animation has primarily been a concern of commercial cartoon studios and is best exemplified by Disney's famous "Twelve Principles," forged in the mid-1930s. The study of personality animation has indeed proven to be one of the most fruitful avenues for formal analysis, as works by historians such as Michael Barrier and Donald Crafton have demonstrated with extraordinary erudition.<sup>14</sup> Since Disney's imperative to build personalities carried with it an imperative to suggest physical forces to which those personalities were subjected (inertia, gravity, and so on), it may seem that this book's notions of "figure" and "force" translate easily to "character" and "environment."

Though much of what follows touches on Disney's innovations, I want to stress that examining figures and forces in reciprocal *sensory* (rather than mimetic-physical) relation does not necessarily entail studying character.

In fact, it can have the opposite effect. When reduced to an arrangement of units, character becomes hollowed out. Individuated things become potentially continuous with non-individuated masses. The difference between interior and exterior becomes fragile, labile, contingent.

Noting figures and forces, then, allows us to see unexpected affinities between kinds of animation that are often taken to be opposed to each other: "representational" animation, best exemplified by Disney, and "experimental" or "abstract" animation, exemplified by Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye, and Robert Breer. Seeing these affinities can be difficult. It is tempting to view animation practice as a kind of spectrum, on which we can find a place for any example by gauging the resemblance of its forms and spaces to those of our world—essentially, by gauging how realistic it seems.<sup>15</sup> At the abstract end of this spectrum would lie explorations of geometric shapes, strong graphic relationships, and nonnarrative temporal patterns. At the representational end would lie Disney's imitations of physical forces, spaces, and bodies; mixtures of the two, such as Lotte Reiniger's silhouette films or the Quay brothers' puppet films, would fall somewhere in the middle. This spectrum-model has had a strong pull on animation history and theory. It has an intuitive appeal and is easy to apply. The model has its roots in the critical backlash against Disney's refinements of style in the late 1930s,<sup>16</sup> but its current form is most fully reminiscent of what David Bordwell has called the "Oppositional Version" of film history that emerged in the 1960s, championed by critics such as Noël Burch.<sup>17</sup> What the spectrum-model is really gauging here is how closely a piece of animation resembles live-action film. Thus the model carries an implicit notion of what "animation" is—namely that which cannot be captured in live-action. The more representational a piece of animation is, the less uniquely "animated" it might be said to be. The spectrum-model runs some of the same risks that the form/movement opposition does, albeit with stakes that are more specifically historical. In particular, it becomes difficult to see common features between the two kinds of practice—or, for that matter, common features between animation and photography (since the opposition between representational and abstract animation is based on that more basic opposition between animation and photography)—because the categories are set up from the beginning as antagonistic.

Recent work in animation scholarship by Thomas Lamarre, Hannah Frank, Alla Gadassik, and others has challenged the neatness of this assumed opposition between animation and live-action, on which the spectrum-model is based, yielding new ways of looking at animation.<sup>18</sup> The present



study continues in this direction. Looking for figures and forces allows us to find hidden affinities across varied instances of animation practice. Abstract films of the 1920s and *Silly Symphonies* share a concern with developing rhythmic relations among multiple figures onscreen. Len Lye and Ralph Bakshi both flatten three-dimensional live actors into solid blocks of color. Noting these kinds of affinities allows for a more expansive picture of animation's possibilities as a medium. Rather than assume that animation has an idealized essence as simply "that which is not photography," we would do well to think of animation as variable clusters of what Stanley Cavell has called "automatists": historically specific conventions, procedures, and material limitations that help make up a collective sense of what an artistic medium is at any given time.<sup>19</sup>

For that reason, this book is arranged by technique. Each chapter discusses a technique that has featured prominently in the history of two-dimensional animation. In turn, each technique is described as a problematic of coordination among units—a question of how things fit together onscreen. Chapter 1 discusses soft edges. This is in contrast to the hard outline, often found in studio cartoons, that has been crucial to much of animation theory. When a figure is made up of patches or points instead of a hard outline, that figure's integrity may become uncertain. I argue that when this soft-edged figure moves, its movements thus may not seem self-directed. Looking at soft edges means looking at clouds, smoke, and other ephemeral phenomena that are seldom examined in animation scholarship. Chapter 2 discusses walk cycles. Historically, the walk cycle has had two functions in studio animation: depicting complex, lifelike behavior in an onscreen figure and saving labor for the animators. These two functions, I argue, often work against each other. When a cycle is repeated, the figure's movements risk appearing externally imposed upon it, and the figure no longer appears to be autonomous. Chapter 3 discusses perspectival movement, or, more simply, camera movement. How must movement onscreen be shown such that an unseen camera seems to be moving through three-dimensional space? I argue that the matter here is one of figuration: parts of the screen must move in a special coordination, with the camera being figured in our view as the unseen term of a two-term system. Chapter 4 discusses rotoscoping, the technique of tracing over live-action footage. Rotoscoping often looks uncanny in a way that is difficult to place. I argue that the source of this uncanniness lies in the seemingly opposed properties of the rotoscoped contour line. On the one hand, the line holds itself together in the two-dimensional plane, as a figure

in its own right; on the other hand, the line also moves under the sway of some otherworldly force beyond that plane.

I stress that this is not an exhaustive taxonomy of animation techniques. (For example, there are no chapters on color, texture, or synchronized sound.) Nor does this book, in its choice of examples, aspire to be a survey history of animation. In particular, no examples of computer animation are discussed. Instead, I place a great deal of focus on animators working in North America and Western Europe outside the commercial studio system, roughly from the advent of synchronized sound to the 1970s. I focus on this period because it is the period in which "animation" as we currently define it—that is, animation as opposed to the more limited term "animated cartoon"—effectively came into being. Filmmakers who called themselves animators but did not make cartoons explored a wild variety of stylistic options, and it is largely thanks to these efforts that the term "cartoon" eventually came to be considered inadequate.<sup>20</sup> If the cartoon was synonymous with Disney, animation became synonymous with Norman McLaren, thanks to his sheer technical inventiveness. (Accordingly, McLaren's work has a large presence in this book.) As a result of that variety, this is the period and class of filmmakers for whom problems of coordinating units into perceptible figures and forces are made most explicit.

### Form as Concept

The explicitness with which midcentury animation addresses problems of coordination leads directly into the final upshot of looking for figures and forces. In addition to descriptive and historical value, I argue that such a task also carries interpretive value for using features of animation to think through concepts. In this regard, the book performs what we can call "philosophical film criticism" on selected examples of midcentury animation.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, I draw from these films—or more precisely, I draw from their uses of particular animation techniques—an account of how the films develop something that is like, but not identical or reducible to, a concept. Through careful descriptions of select sequences, formal problematics are likened to philosophical ones.

If the broader goal of this book is to achieve specificity for thinking about animated movements, why link them to something as abstract as philosophy? I consider this necessary in order to interrogate some of the broader



philosophical assumptions in much of animation theory, which follow from the form/movement opposition. Recall that this opposition typically serves a larger Romantic opposition between two concepts: life versus mechanism, magic versus science, freedom against conformity. Assigning terms such as “life” or “freedom” to such movements may seem intuitive, but what we mean by them is not obvious. Nor are these neutral gestures. Such oppositions carry hidden assumptions about how something such as “life” or “freedom” can be conceived. For example, the notion of freedom at play in these interpretations is often an absence of limitations on individual actions. In other words, implicit in the customary understanding of plasmatic freedom is a sense of that freedom as brute individual power. (It is not for nothing that plasmaticness is often taken to be synonymous with omnipotence.) This is hardly the kind of social harmony that Eisenstein himself ascribes to Disney’s figures elsewhere in his notes. If anything, it is suspiciously close to the liberalism that helped make America’s industrial labor conditions possible.<sup>22</sup> My point here is not to say that a concept such as plasmaticness cannot have contradictions (indeed, some of its contradictions are discussed in this book), but to ask: Why must movement or change be reducible to individual freedom? Might different kinds of movement or change, once we’ve described them more closely, not do different kinds of conceptual work as well? A dearth of descriptive resources creates problems downstream for theory and interpretation.

I consider this a symptom of a tendency that critic Annette Michelson once called a kind of criticism by idealism: the desire to first read *through* an artwork to a statement or doctrine, rather than to study its sensuous specificities.<sup>23</sup> Mixtures of film criticism and philosophical speculation may be found in other recent works on film,<sup>24</sup> but the philosophical film criticism of this book is most strongly modeled on Michelson’s writings. Partly in resistance to criticism by idealism, Michelson developed a method of philosophical criticism from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s in the pages of *Artforum* magazine.<sup>25</sup> This method was adapted from Clement Greenberg’s formalist art criticism. According to Greenberg, modernist art pursues questions about its own autonomy in the manner of a Kantian critique, examining the conditions that make it possible.<sup>26</sup> Michelson’s own criticism likewise assumes that modernist art has a philosophical function, but she describes that function in a different way. Rather than reflecting on the conditions of its medium, she takes modernism to subvert conventions in order to reflect on experience as such. Consequently, this art never achieves autonomy (or what fellow *Artforum* critic Michael Fried once called “presentness”<sup>27</sup>). Instead it

provokes a kind of critical dissociation—a shock that forces the critic to reflect on the manner of experience to which the artwork seems to refer.

Michelson’s task as a critic then becomes to register that shock. The artwork provokes a disequilibrium, and the critic must correct this disequilibrium by spanning her inquiry outward from the artwork in two directions. One direction is downward, rootlike, noting the layers of different uses of form throughout the medium’s history that appear to be embedded in the work. The other direction is outward and upward, toward conceptual speculation, seeking a cognitive function of film form by recourse to the history of thought.<sup>28</sup>

This book proceeds by following the steps laid out in Michelson’s criticism. Each chapter spends the bulk of its analytical energy on one film (or two films, in chapter 3). The film propels critical activity in two directions: toward a comparative historical account of different uses of an animation technique that the film seems to call forth and toward conceptual speculation on the conditions of the experience of it. Chapter 1 comes to focus on the use of soft edges in Alexander Alexeieff and Claire Parker’s *Night on Bald Mountain* (1933). This film not only brings into relief a selective history of soft edges in animation but also reflects on a condition of fragility in the face of large forces that I call “exposure.” Chapter 2 focuses on the use of walk cycles in Norman McLaren and Grant Munro’s *Canon* (1964). This film layers repetitive cycles to create new groupings of units. Its movements seem open and lifelike, even though each figure is locked in a single repeating action; thus the film occasions a reflection on life forms more broadly as open systems. Chapter 3 looks at uses of camera movement in McLaren’s *Blinkity Blank* (1955) and Caroline Leaf’s *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* (1977). These films create the bizarre impression of a space that is being changed by the actions of a figure (here, the camera) moving through it; this vertiginous impression invokes problems of total organizational change, or revolution. Chapter 4 focuses on the use of rotoscoping in Mary Beams’s *Going Home Sketchbook* (1975). In this film, the rotoscoped line retains its autonomy even as it stays with, and is transformed by, the moving bodies in the footage underneath it; this indicates a relation of line to footage that we can call love. By seeing the concept in the technique, without reducing each to the other—exposure in soft edges, life in a walk cycle, revolution in a camera movement, love in a rotoscoped line—we might see both anew.

It is nearly a truism to assert that animation is a “modern” or “modernist” artform in some sense, usually in reference to popular cartoons. Cartoons are



hyperbolically self-aware, responsive to new technological forms and their role in the texture of everyday life, and potentially subversive of dominant social orders.<sup>29</sup> I want to insist, though, on treating midcentury animation in particular as modernist in the previously mentioned, philosophically relevant sense, for two reasons. First, the shift in animation practice, exhibition, and discourse in this period bears the earmarks of a modernist turn. From the 1940s through the 1960s a kind of loss of faith in the aesthetic powers of the cel system and the studio cartoon emerged. Slowly but surely the cartoon disappeared from the mainstream movie theater. This correlated with the rise in opportunities for smaller-scale artisanal operations to create instructional and educational films, propaganda, and commercials. The films made from these operations gained increasing attention and prestige, in 16mm film societies and at film festivals. The turn of the 1960s saw the founding of the first large-scale international organization for the promotion of animation, the *Association internationale du film d'animation* (ASIFA, which still exists today), and the first regularly occurring film festival devoted exclusively to animation, in Annecy, France. (Three more animation festivals were added over the next two decades, in Zagreb, Ottawa, and Hiroshima.) Unlike cartoons, the films that emerged from these conditions did not need to rely on recurring characters or familiar comic situations, and they could use more directly sensuous means to get and sustain attention. In fact, in the new environment, in which different animators were competing for attention on the same screens (on the television set or at the film festival), such sensuous means became more imperative. With the change in material conditions then came a turn away from the notions of figuration that had previously been upheld by conventional uses of cels and the animation stand, toward problems of figuration itself.

My second reason for turning to philosophical film criticism is heuristic. As Michelson's criticism demonstrates, philosophical modernism is a potent means for reinvigorating our attention to film form, because it can provide accounts of why that form matters in surprising ways. This is because unlike a more straightforward kind of theoretical work that would explain and thus remain external to its explanandum, the superimposition of film form and conceptual speculation must be earned through close analysis. In this regard, my caveat that such criticism should provide "something like but not identical or reducible to" a concept in the artwork is crucial. For Michelson, this method proved valuable precisely because it *avoided* the trappings of criticism by idealism, the equivocation of art and philosophy that rendered the

art unnecessary. The critic must give an account of how the one may be seen with the other, tracing a contour common to both, without each sinking into either. (Related to this, I consider it significant that the recent turn to philosophy in film scholarship seems to have come with what Eugenie Brinkema has called a "return to form."<sup>30</sup> The former is able to help specify the latter.) This is an especially useful strategy for making sense of a mode of moving pictures that we still largely do not know how to look at—at least not with the clarity of looking at classical Hollywood cinema, or art cinema, or avant-garde film.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the following pages argue that animation techniques offer not only *pictures of change* but ways of *thinking through* change. The former is obvious enough; the latter is considerably less so, and must be argued for—or, more to the point, performed as criticism.<sup>32</sup> The specific concepts with which each chapter deals have at their core a concern with change, conceived as a problematic of the coordination of units: the change of a bodily form through exposure, the spontaneity of an open system of lifelike behavior, the deformation of social arrangements through revolution, and the transformative attachment of love. Each of these has precedents in existing animation theory. I share the conviction with much of animation scholarship that this mode of filmmaking has historically been greatly preoccupied with change, and that much of its power comes from its ability to make change concrete. What is at stake is how that change is to be seen and conceived—not merely as a freedom from sameness but as an upending, disorienting, unpredictable prospect. If we bring our attention to these kinds of change, which occur not at the level of character but at the level of perception and organization, we will see that animation has powers of metamorphosis far beyond those we have imagined.