

Compulsive Animation

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This paper brings together the unlikely topics of rotoscoping (the film animation technique) and cognitive disabilities that entail compulsive movement. The paper is in the spirit of making, in the words of Amanda Baggs, “a strong statement on the existence and value of many different kinds of thought and interaction” (*In My Own Language* 2007). But my question is, what is it that viewers care to know or understand through watching the expressive movement of another person’s body? What might viewers hope to learn or feel (about thought, interaction, difference) in watching, for instance, Baggs, a cognitive disabilities activist, as she looks, listens, and feels on her Youtube posted video? Baggs tells her viewers, “It is not enough to taste and look and listen and smell and feel. I have to do those things to the right things and fail to do them to the wrong things.” My talk is about normativity and expectations about “getting it right,” the compulsion not only to get things right when one looks, listens, and feels one’s world, but also to get things right when one watches others do this--when one makes and interprets bodily movement on film, or when one tries to make meaning out of, or simply watches and fails to understand, the routine performances of others encountered in passing in everyday life. In film studies, animation is a genre or subset of 20th-century cinematic techniques and practices that among other things maximizes and demonstrates the interesting and

necessary disconnections in our ability to make the repetitive act of “getting it right” automatic and failsafe. I flip the terms provisionally, making the cinematic a subset of an expanded concept of animation in order to use film theories and concepts of animation to think through different epistemic and phenomenological experiences of bringing life to subjects through automated drawing and through repetitive watching of bodily movement. I discuss some instances of films in which the issue of “getting it right” is the central problem that is undone. The films through which I guide these ideas include animated films and film segments that were produced using the technique of rotoscoping, in which tracings of live-action footage form the basis for representations of bodily movement and expression (the 1920s animated series *Out of the Inkwell* by Max Fleischer; James Cameron’s 1997 *Titanic*; and Bob Sabiston and Tommy Pallotta’s 2000 short *Snack and Drink*) and live-action video (*In My Own Language*, a 2007 documentary short by Amanda Baggs; and interviews from the *Global Tourette* 2006 Argentina project by Brian Goldfarb). I draw on theories of affect and representation developed by André Green, the concept of projective identification developed by Melanie Klein, and formulations of intersubjectivity and communication introduced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and discussed by Emmanuel Levinas to make a case for an interpretive theory of empathetic intersubjectivity that moves outside the range of normative assumptions about bodily movement without simply valorizing notions of cognitive plurality and difference.