
Animation and the Medium of Life: Media Ethology, An-Ontology, Ethics

Deborah Levitt

Eugene Lang College, The New School for Liberal Arts

prelude: cinema and spectral life

I will argue in this essay that while cinema was the dominant medium of the 20th century, the dominant medium of the 21st century, or of what we know of it so far, is animation—here broadly conceived as encompassing a wide array of cultural productions from cartoons *per se* to modes of simulation used across aesthetic and scientific practices. The kind of life that is at stake in this form whose name declares its vocation as making-live will become the central target of analysis in what follows and I will contend that we’re seeing a notable shift in this domain as animation moves us toward what I’m calling an-ontological life. Instead of launching right into animation and its emergent forms, however, I want to begin with a look back at the cinematic regime to develop a context, a comparative framework, for discussing this transformation.

There’s a very striking moment in Fellini’s 1987 *Intervista* that will serve as a useful starting point. In one scene, two aging movie stars, Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Eckberg, watch themselves in another Fellini film, *La Dolce Vita*, a film

made 27 years earlier. In *La Dolce Vita*, now a film within a film, these two play almost impossibly beautiful people—she, a statuesque and voluptuous blonde, he, tall, dark and handsome in an impeccably tailored mod suit—who are also paragons of the exploding global media spectacle circa 1960—an American screen goddess and a celebrity gossip writer. (Marcello’s colleague and sometime side-kick in the film, Paparazzo, will lend his name to the emerging “profession”). In the sequence they watch, a now hyper-iconic scene shot in the Trevi fountain in Rome, they dance, talk, and kiss as dawn breaks. Watching these spectral images of their youthful selves, Marcello wistfully tilts his head; Anita wipes a tear from the corner of her eye—carefully, so as not to smudge her elaborate make-up.

This scene is, of course, Fellini’s own nostalgic, auto-elegiac, look back at his own career, but it is also a profound reflection on the cultural significance of the cinematic apparatus itself, and particularly of its very special relation to time, life, and death. As Fellini’s scene presents it, as a luminous, indexical inscription of a pro-filmic real, cinema’s projected images and sounds revivify the world as it returns what has passed, and what has passed, along with the dead, always haunt the time-space of cinema’s projected present. [1] If, as Vivian Sobchack so aptly suggests, cinema is a form of cosmetic surgery—“its fantasies, its makeup, and its digital effects able to ‘fix’ (in the doubled sense of repair and stasis) and to fetishize and to reproduce faces and time as both ‘unreel’ in front of us”—it is, like its surgical counterpart, also always shadowed by its own undoing, haunted by the specter of temporality and decay (Sobchack 2012: 50).

The scene plays out across a series of layered *topoi* involving embodiment, temporality, reality—and a particular conception of *life*. To begin with, it is packed with bodies: If, as Sobchack details in a different context, a star actor always has at least four bodies, even in a single role—a no-body-in-particular, a personal body, a character body, and a star body—in this scenario the bodies proliferate as we try to sort out the confrontations between them. [2] To take

Anita as our exemplar, four current bodies confront not just one but four former selves, and each confrontation is slightly different. She is nobody in particular looking across time at this revivification of a youthful body. At the same time she is the private person, Anita Eckberg, looking at a younger version of her personally identified self. She is also a character in one film looking at a character in another, an aging actress watching a young one in a now-iconic film, and an aging actress looking at herself not only as a young actress, but as a young star actress playing the ur-type of the screen goddess. In this relay of bodies, the older one cries from nostalgia for youth or dismay at age (or both), and the “real” body—despite its visual and visceral presence—is so overdetermined as to almost collapse under the combined weight(lessness) of the spectacle’s spectral bodies. It’s a story of time’s passing. Its pathos comes from the pathos of aging itself with its implication of the inevitability of death, from the particularity of this “tragedy” for the female body, the movie star, and the female star even more particularly, but also from the relationship between the “real” and the cinematic body—the former’s subjection to the vagaries of time, decay, and death only amplified by the latter’s silvery, luminous vitality.

This pathos of temporal unfolding, of the interplay, between “real” life and death and a spectral life which lives on, which survives, also implies Fellini’s—or the film’s—understanding of the film’s own body as an index, as a material inscription of a real-life situation which, at some time and place, took place in front of a camera’s lens. The *sense* of cinema as an index of the real is essential to this scene’s argument, but it’s also important to note that the reality-effect of the photographic index is not at all figured as part of a discourse on realism *per se*. *Intervista* is about Cinecittà in particular and about the cinematic dream factory more generally. Throughout the work we see films in their production processes, the mechanisms of their creation—sets, lights, casts, and crews—exposed to the spectatorial eye: But it nonetheless consistently casts cinema as a kind of magic. In the *La Dolce Vita* segment, Mastroianni in the costume and persona of Mandrake the Magician, conjures the screen on which the old images appear

with a magic wand. The film thus makes an argument about the reality-effect of the index in its relations to human life and temporality—without, as I’ve suggested, casting the image as an unproblematic, veridical reproduction of a real world.

I want to emphasize this feature of the film as what it, and I, am describing is as much an aesthetic ideology of the cinematic apparatus—and of the cultural world of the twentieth-century—as it is a description of cinema’s material and technical coordinates. These certainly play a role, but contrary to the doxa of 70s apparatus theory, they are always open to the play of other kinds of forces. That is, while the material and institutional structures of both cinema and animation play important roles, they can never fully determine spectatorial positions, textual meanings, or cultural formations. Following Lamarre’s use of this concept, I see them as *underdetermining* features of cultural formations, contributing one set to a broader field of conditions of possibility. [3] The kind of apparatus that Fellini reveals to us here—highlighting the imbrication of image practices and discourses around life, death, gender, desire, and magic—has more in common with Michel Foucault’s broader notion of the apparatus, or *dispositif*, than it does with Jean-Louis Baudry’s “ideological effects of the basic cinematic apparatus.” [4]

I’m deploying this scene from *Intervista* not only to introduce its themes but to introduce an approach to critical mediology that I call “media ethology.” My concern is with the intertwining of material-machinic structures of image practices, particular dispositions of the sensible, and the set of cultural assumptions and epistemologies that emerge to frame and structure experience—to make sense of sense—thus producing the rhetorics and modes of existential conditioning that structure a *dispositif*. My focus within this larger field, as I’ve indicated above, is on how our conceptions of “life,” at any given moment, are deeply informed by the mediological stratum.

It would, in fact, be almost impossible to overstate cinema's mutual imbrication with both popular and theoretical discourses of life—and practices of liveliness—across the twentieth century. As Giorgio Agamben suggests, we can see cinema (broadly conceived) as a kind of “eye” with a very particular relation to the living, human body (Agamben 2000: 50). One of its most essential technical precursors, the chronophotographic camera, was developed in the physiology station of Étienne-Jules Marey and also played a central role in the development of the emerging discipline of physiology. In this context, its role was to transcend the speed of the human eye in order to break down gesture into its constituent parts. This new technologized vision was able to see the body in ways that human perception could not, thus making it available to study, analysis, and biopolitical management. One of Marey's students proclaims that he is not so much a scientist as “an engineer of life,” [5] and his chronophotographs have in fact a proscriptive as well as descriptive function, one which will find its most famous incarnation in the methods of “scientific management” inaugurated by Frederick Winslow Taylor's industrial efficiency and productivity analyses of just a few decades later. But even before Taylor, and Taylorism, Marey insists that photographic analyses of human movement can help soldiers to clean their guns more effectively and athletes to execute their gymnastic feats more efficiently.

Then, in a turn of events unanticipated by its scientific forebears, with the Lumières' synthesis and projection, this analytic sequence of bodily fragments returns as a celluloid ghost, a kind of *spectral life with a strangely oscillating relation to the “real” and to death*. As I discuss elsewhere, the gesture that is expropriated in the physiology lab is returned in spectral form in the movie theater. If the poles of cinematic life are the gestural fragment and the spectral survival of the image, the latter screens (in both senses) the former, encrypting the productive, biopolitical dimensions of cinema in the discourse of reflection, representation, and reality. And the living human body is for the most part—even in abstract film and body horror where it persists as absent referent or object to be

transgressed—preserved or conserved as an autonomous, massy anatomical entity in an anthropocentric world, even where light, the machine, and an analytic eye intervene in its “revelation.”

All of these dimensions of cinema—scientific, aesthetic, cultural—were very clearly framed in relation to rhetorics of life. In 1895, the first cinema cameras—the U.S. Vitascope, the German Bioscope, and the English Animatograph—were produced and patented almost simultaneously. Following in the footsteps of a protocinematic optical device called the zoetrope, the names of these new inventions make a powerful claim: The cinema will capture, or produce, life itself. Just one year later, the English version of a program that accompanies a screening of the Lumière brothers films proclaims: “The interval during which one picture is substituted for a succeeding one is so infinitesimal that, the retina of the eye preserving one image until the next one takes its place, an effect of absolute continuity and perfect illusion of life is obtained” (Cholodenko 2000: 20). In cinema’s early years, it was often referred to as living photography in popular parlance. In 1926, Terry Ramsaye writes that the cinema is “like the tree, clearly an organism, following organic law in its development,” while numerous other commentators reflect on cinema’s uncanny ability to revivify the dead (Ramsaye: xxxviii).

While early cinema’s zoetropic monikers will be eclipsed by the term cinema’s emphasis on movement, its interior preoccupations with—and productions of—its own particular liveliness continue unabated. In 1960 Siegfried Kracauer will claim that:

Due to the continuous influx of psychophysical correspondences thus aroused [by films, and more precisely, “cinematic films”], they suggest a reality which may fittingly be called ‘life.’ This term as used here denotes a kind of life which is still intimately connected, as if by an umbilical cord, with the material phenomena from which its emotional and intellectual contents emerge (Kracauer 1995: 71).

We can see Kracauer's comment as a kind of theoretical elaboration of Fellini's cinematic version, but here with an explicit emphasis placed on "psychophysical correspondences," on a sub-representational, visceral unconscious of the cinema which Kracauer reads as intrinsic to its vitality effects and affects. [6] Or perhaps it would be more apt, and a more powerful assertion, as framed in reverse: Cinema is composed of vitality affects that link its images to material phenomena, and it is from these psychophysical correspondences that "its emotional and intellectual contents emerge."

As we can see from this catalogue of entries into the 20th century's discourses of cinematic life, there's a kind of insistence on cinema's inseparability from life even where the discourses diverge, careening from the Lumières' "perfect illusion of life" to Ramsay's "organic" cinema and Kracauer's life-as-reality. From France to Hollywood to Cinecittà and far beyond, the world of the twentieth-century is shaped by the spectral-spectacular life/death of the cinematic image. While there's no doubt that discourses and practices of cinematic life are multiple—and at times competing, even contestatory—there are several general conclusions we can draw about this regime and its modes of production: 1) Cinematic life develops with the ascendance of the biopolitical *ratio* and is inseparable from its mode of envisioning the human body and its life processes. 2) It is likewise linked with what we might call the cinematic "reality function," that is, the means through which at least much of 20th century film and film theory understands itself as existing, if complexly, in relation to what is commonly referred to as a "profilmic real." 3) Finally, as Louis-George Schwartz remarks, this 20th century cinematic spectrality casts the philosopheme life/death into an undecidable, aporetic relation. Its liveliness is always ambivalent, oscillating, haunted. The cinematic regime operates in and as a kind of crisis in ontology.

introduction: the animatic apparatus

Today, the horizon of possibilities of simulation in both art and science—from cartoons per se and the animatic effects of CGI to various dreamt and incarnate potentials of biocybernetics—are shifting the reigning cultural paradigms of life in significant ways, moving away from questions (and broad-scale cultural assumptions) about ontology, category, and being, to ones of appearance, metamorphosis, gesture, and affect. We can see this shift in 1) transformations of biopolitics that occur around the indetermination of its prefix, that is, around the status and structure of the conception of life that has grounded modern political discourses and practices and 2) in what I'll describe as a displacement of cinema's already fraught reality-function. 3) Finally, as I've suggested, from cinema's ontological crisis we move into the domain of animation's an-ontology.

The emergence of animation as the dominant and paradigmatic (or, perhaps more properly, diagrammatic) medium of our time coincides with the decisively novel development in the biological sciences which opens possibilities for producing living beings as well as with mutations in the political dimensions of discourses and practices around life currently framed as "biopolitics." The coalescence of these transformations mark our cultural moment: While these at first might appear as disjunct cultural fields, with no causal and little conceptual relation, understanding the link between Dolly the sheep and her progeny (metaphorically speaking) and the multimedial bodies of *Avatar* is a key to understanding the time in which we live.

In their introduction to *Remaking Life & Death: Toward an Anthropology of the Biosciences*, a volume which seeks to chart and address transformations in biomedical definitions and practices around the now-unstable boundaries of life and death, Sarah Franklin and Margaret Lock remark, "We are witnessing a transformation of biology from the scientific study of being into a technology of doing, building, and engineering . . . both life and death have been recalibrated . . . The ability to create transgenic sheep with human DNA, to cross a fish with a

strawberry, or to patent genetic markers using fluorescent proteins from deep-sea creatures transforms biology from the study of natural history into a set of interventions or techniques” (Franklin and Locke 2003: 14). [7] We can see in Franklin and Locke’s description of the new biosciences a shift from representation to production. While we saw forms of engineering also as central to Marey’s images and prescriptions of the 19th century, this engineering took place on a different stratum and was based on representations of its fundamental category: the animal, and even more typically, the human animal, body. Although he was no doubt a forward-looking and transitional figure in the development of the disciplines of physiology and biology, it’s interesting to note that Marey occupied the Chair of the Natural History of Organized Bodies at the College de France. The current practices Franklin and Locke describe don’t begin with a massy anatomical organism but with biological bits, material or informatic, and these may be exchanged and recombined. Contrary to pursuing a classificatory logic, these practices eschew category in favor of novelty and the production of forms of life. And even where Marey’s images dove down below the full body of the organism—he developed a technique of graphic inscription which led to his invention of the cardiograph (with August Chaveau in 1865), the pneumograph for respiration, and the myograph for nerve and muscle action—it was in the interest of imaging the mobility of what could hitherto only be viewed in immobility. His goal, that is, was to image what he described as “the functions of life, that is to say the play of the organs which anatomy has disclosed to us” (280). [8] Life was a key term for Marey, and it is precisely *this version of life*—developed in Marey’s physiology lab and becoming-spectral in the films that the Lumières brothers and Georges Méliès would make just a few years later—that Franklin and Locke suggest no longer possesses the requisite stability to be the subject of representation, no longer may act as referent in the sense that Marey deploys it here.

In what follows I will turn to animated films of several kinds, drawn from the golden age of American studio animation, from contemporary advertising

culture, and from anime, to explore how the medio-logic of animation may help us to understand these novel forms of life.

animation's an-ontology: *duck amuck* and *koko's cartoon factory*

I want to propose a quite specific definition of the animatic here: The animatic is any aspect of (for our purposes now) moving image production—from animation as such to digital special effects to extreme camera angles—that does not deploy the cinematic reality-effect of the index, described above in relation to *Intervista*, as it produces a pro-filmic real. The example of an extreme camera angle is an important, complicating instance here because cinematic and animatic modes, as I've argued, are never fully determined by the material technicity of the apparatus. There's an ethological rather than a classificatory engine at work here. It's about how images work, how they behave, how they interact with other forces. The "real" of a photographed scene may be deformed from within, and a large portion of animatic production is informed by the register of cinematic realism. This definition of course complicates any strict boundary between cinema and animation: The two modes consistently haunt and transform one another. Cinema and the cinematic age are traversed by the animatic, and vice versa, and this goes for the ways in which the cinematic and the animatic function as cultural modalities as well. [9] [10]

The animatic mode takes up the simulacral dimensions of the image, or of audiovisuality to be more precise. It involves a displacement not only of the reality-function of cinema but of the kind of reality-principle that continues to operate in the cinematic mode. This shift is illuminated by how Gilles Deleuze, in "Plato and the Simulacrum," characterizes the difference between the model or copy, on one hand, and the phantasmatic simulacrum, on the other. According to Deleuze, "*copies* are secondhand possessors . . . authorized by resemblance," (47) where the resemblance is always "interior and spiritual" (48). The resemblance is thus essential to the ontology of the copy. The simulacrum, however, only

appears to resemble, only “produces an *effect* of resemblance” (49). But this effect is “wholly external, and produced by entirely different means from those that are at work in the model.” (49) We can say then that the simulacrum is already an an-ontological figure as it not tethered to a grounding model. As Michael Camille so succinctly explains, the simulacrum is “based upon the premise that images do not so much replicate the real or substitute for it but rather are encounters with another order of reality entirely.” [11] We need, though, to take this one step further: the simulacrum is an encounter with another order, but we may not want to call it another order of reality. The direction in which Deleuze’s phantasmatic simulacrum is pointing us, as it illuminates the animatic apparatus, is toward a domain in which images—even where they explicitly play with forms of representation of all kinds—have left the realm in which a reality principle holds sway. The simulacrum is not, of course, new—and nor is animation and the animatic. What is novel today is the dominance of animatic as a set of cultural forces, the shift of animation from a minor to a major form, and I’m using animation here—particularly at moments where it thematizes its own conditions of production—to crystallize the operations of this much larger field. We can read Brian Massumi’s comments on the simulacrum as also a commentary on the animatic, one that steers us back toward its mediological life: “The resemblance of the simulacrum is a means, not an end . . . Resemblance is a beginning masking the advent of whole new vital dimension.” (Massumi 1987: 2) [12]

There is no death in animation, because there is no being—no existence—to begin with. There are no necessary limiting features, no essential finitude—everything is shadowed by its possible metamorphosis, erasure, and resurrection—and there is thus no ontology. This is what Daffy Duck teaches us, and learns himself, through his harrowing travails in Chuck Jones 1953 *Duck Amuck*. In *Duck Amuck*, Daffy Duck is subjected to a relentless ontological deconstruction. Anything and everything that could be imagined to tether his being to an ontological ground—his body, its shape, color, costume and style,

and particularly importantly, his voice—are taken from him by an absent “director” hell-bent on reminding him of his ceaseless production-by-pencil and voiceover and the always existent threat of his metamorphosis or erasure. We first see Daffy Duck in a swashbuckler, telling his musketeers to stand aside as the enemy “samples his blade,” but as Daffy stabs forward with his sword, the background scenery disappears, and we find ourselves in the void of a blank frame. The scenery returns as a farm. Momentarily put-out, Daffy quickly adapts to his new surroundings, appearing in overalls with a hoe singing Old Macdonald (or, rather, “Daffy Duck, he had a farm . . .”). But just as Daffy settles into his new routine, his surroundings metamorphose again and he finds himself in an arctic landscape complete with an igloo. The background transformations stop—but only because Daffy himself becomes the unwilling object of the morph. His body is erased and redrawn in multiple ways; at one point an almost psychedelic parti-colored Daffy walks on all fours and has a flag for a tail. Just when it seems that the voice may be his one constant and ontological anchor, it too is stolen from him. When he opens his mouth to speak there is silence, followed by a cock’s crow and a monkey’s call. This particular assault provokes Daffy’s characteristic “I have never been so humiliated in my life!” A number of other mutations involve the cartoon’s animatic coordinates. The medium itself appears to turn against Daffy, contesting his existence at every twist and turn. The top of the frame falls on Daffy like a stage curtain coming undone. The film strip begins to roll and his image is doubled, with one Daffy in a frame above and another in a frame below. The subjective insult of his very reproducibility leads to an antagonistic encounter between the two Daffys. Finally, at the end of his last nerve, Daffy asks “Who is responsible for this? I demand that you show yourself!”

At the end of *Duck Amuck* we do in fact discover the hitherto invisible source of Daffy’s humiliation. Now, if we found, say, Chuck Jones himself (as in early animation where the animator so often played a role in his own work), one might argue that the ontological anchor of the animatic image is the animator. But here

we rather discover Bugs Bunny, sitting at a drawing table with the Daffy cartoon lain upon it—"Ain't I a stinker?" he says in his characteristic drawl, casting this ontological deconstruction into the abyss, that is, enacting it as a *mise-en-abime*, and insisting that behind a cartoon is always another cartoon. My contention here is that what *Duck Amuck* stages is the an-ontological nature of animation as a medium. Rendering enters an infinite regress. Of course, this cartoon has a very specific cultural location in the America of the 50s—in this case the object it needs most to deconstruct to reveal its an-ontology is the animal character that provides its typical anchoring—but it also enacts what I'm arguing are the essential characteristics of the medium itself.

The Fleischer Brothers' "Koko's Cartoon Factory," in which any character may animate or inanimate any other, makes this same point by means of an even more thorough appearance-dispersion of life. [13] The cartoon opens with Dave Fleischer drawing and animating Koko the Clown. In one segment, Koko builds a toy soldier. The toy soldier comes alive, in this case live-action-live, only to draw and animate other soldiers who come after Koko. As quickly as they come, Koko erases them with his animating-and-inanimating machine. The animatic body is made from scratch, coming into being with the line or pixel. There is no death in animation, only erasure or metamorphosis. Its play of animation and inanimation exist on a continuum and emerge from the feedback loop of light, hands, technics, voices, etc., that coordinate its production.

William Schaffer offers us an interesting way to think how the technicity of animation produces this metamorphic, an-ontological body. Schaffer usefully characterizes the an-ontology of the animatic body as a mode of virtuality. That is, the animatic body never *exists* precisely because it is always in a process of coming into and passing out of existence. Drawing on the single paragraph devoted to animation in Deleuze's *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Schaffer explains that a fundamental difference between the cinematic and animatic apparatuses is that while in the former the time of capture and the time of

projection coincide, in the latter they do not. While both function via the any-instant-whatever of 24 frames per second (or at least 18 in the case of animation) animation is characterized by the difference in temporality of production and projection. The animator, or animators, must engage with each frame and though there must ultimately be a minimum of 18 frames per second, one frame can take an hour or a year to produce. This difference in temporal structure has definite consequences for cinematic bodies and, most importantly for our purposes here, for animatic ones. Schaffer writes: "In cinema, as Deleuze argues, the automatic interval allows cameras to *extract* movement from bodies, even if it then decentres movement by raising to a plane of immanence opens to effects of false continuity. In animation, the automated interval *engenders* movement" (460). The animatic body—always virtual, coming into and passing out of being without ever inhabiting it—is produced via "a circuit of self-affection played out in time between human and machine" (463). Its production emerges from the circuit of hands, eyes, voices, light, camera that feed its process of emergence. The animatic body is divided against itself in time, and engendered via a machine, to now tilt Schaffer's perspective a bit, composed of human and technological "parts," functions, and rhythms.

We can see how the virtuality of the animatic body shifts the already unstable oscillations of cinematic life. It brings us back to the zero-degree of the beam of light or the blank page or the white or blue screen as it encounters the animatic machine. There's an active void, and a gesture, and it begins. Anything can be erased, but it can also always be resurrected. Cartoon style violence is a case-in-point: if a head hit with a frying pan assumes the shape of a pan, it only takes a moment to bounce—or squash and stretch—back to its usual proportions. This particular tradition obtains particularly in the American cartoon, of course, but just as time, decay, and death always shadow the living picture of the cinematic image—even where the particular *content* of the text would absolutely belie any and all of these—in the same way the possibility of metamorphosis and resurrection always shadow the animatic image. As I will discuss in the

conclusion to this essay, the metamorphic flexibility afforded by animation's an-ontology always also *includes* a variety of limiting forces, drag coefficients, and repetition compulsions which produce at least the *appearance* of static figures.

animatic pop: animation, advertising, surgery

If these classical examples provide a kind of distilled, eidetic version of the life-logic of animation, it still remains to establish where and in what ways we see manifestations of this logic in contemporary culture. Advertising and celebrity culture are often the most direct pipelines into at least a certain dimension of the cultural phantasmagoria, and here they help to illustrate animation's medial "life." In online auto insurance company Esurance's "get animated" series of commercials, the nature of animation is presented quite simply. The real Esurance customers who are chosen (now via talent search) to undergo this ontological metamorphosis are, on its other side, slimmer, more attractive, more mobile, and faster. Shown in the beginning of the flash shorts as their real-life, modestly attractive but not celebrity-ideal selves, they are transformed into mobile line. In that form they save time, they save paper, they save trees. (Many of Esurance's animations include an ecological pitch. Go virtual, they say, save the environment). Esurance's newly-animated customer-characters whisk through work and play actively with their cartoon kids. Their bodies no longer have to encounter gravity's forces, or any material resistance for that matter. One online comment reads "to be hot you don't even have to be pretty anymore, you just have to 'pop' in an exaggerated way like a cartoon character." (In another context but a similar vein, the social-networking site Facebook advertises a partner site where you can "animate yourself" which in this case means having a photo transformed into a cartoon caricature). Getting "animated" replaces being "discovered"; Adorno and Horkheimer's shopgirl now dreams of becoming an animated character rather than—or along with—a movie star. In the former scenario, the paradigm of "discovery" maintains an existence that precedes the becoming-spectacular, and continues to haunt and inflect the

dream-factory version. In the second, the crucial feature is that she receives the tools for her transformation into another form of life. The distinction marks a change in cultural logics.

It would be absurd to say, however, that there are no longer bodies to be invested. It's rather that the body has become a way station or site of transformation (rather than a final reference point). The ontological questions posed by the relay of bodies in *Intervista*, along with Eckberg and Mastroianni's nostalgic gazes, are replaced by the celebrity surgery spread where tabloid speculation asks: scalpel or photoshop? The multiple plastic surgeries of reality TV stars work to embody the animatic "pop," to re-make it in sculpted flesh and silicone, botox and restylane. The transformation *is* the story. Heidi Montag, with her 10-in-1 plastic surgeries was working to look like an ideal, a doll, and succeeded in her task (though she later expressed regret at having undertaken it). The goal of these surgeries isn't the one associated with a vast majority of plastic surgery's popular variants. It isn't conformity, enhancement, or even optimization or perfectibility. It's another kind of transformation entirely. The form-of-life that it pertains to is different—and what is distinctive about the contemporary moment is that way the old form is sliding into the new. Where Sobchack diagnosed cinema's coalescence with the older cosmetic surgical logic, here we can see its plastic, animatic twist.

A general public outcry of shame and disgust is part and parcel of the enormous amount of media coverage given to the biomedical aesthetic manipulations of Montag, as well as to the suspected metamorphics of Kim Kardashian and others, not to mention the Octomom Nadya Suleman whose combined plastic surgeries and IVFs have revealed the strange complicity—or implicity—between what may seem on their surface very different biomedical domains. Suleman not only remodeled her face and body to resemble Angelina Jolie's but also, upping the ante on Jolie's brood of six (three adopted and three biological) children, had fourteen biological children. While the number itself may not be extraordinary

in the broad scope of human history, this hyperdrive-animatic version of reproduction (the exact number of embryos transferred in the case of the octuplet birth has never been publicly released) is of course dependent on the combination of novel biotechnological possibilities and a novel (and apparently not entirely idiosyncratic) understanding of family planning. The discourse of “ethical failure” in the popular response to these examples continues to vacillate between a valorization of the “natural” “god-or-nature intended” body and a denigration of the grotesque. It explicitly advocates a return to a body-as-reference, a body grounded either in nature and biology (these are sometimes more or less interchangeable concepts in this context) or in theology. Putting aside whether or not the ethical disgust is warranted, it lacks critical force in the face of the animatic logic that subtends both the pop cultural and biomedical operations here, as both eschew, to use Franklin and Lock’s terms, both “genealogy” and “the grid of a single, unified system” –that is, all attributes which could provide ontological ballast and stability for these notions of theologically or biologically essential lives and bodies—in favor of technologies “of doing, building, and engineering” (14).

Valeria Lukyanova, who is known as the Real-Life Barbie because of her famous resemblance to the ever-popular toy, and whose videos have garnered millions of hits on youtube, spurring widespread media coverage and, most recently, a Vice documentary, *Space Barbie*, sums up the new logic of the animatic in a response to her critics: “It’s what success is like. I’m happy I seem unreal to them. It means I’m doing a good job.” [14]

from cyborg to doll: object lessons in an-ontology

The doll, as we’ll discover, is a central figure in Mamoru Oshii’s 2004 anime feature, *Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2*. This work, I’d like to suggest, provides the single most sustained meditation on and analysis of the features of the animatic apparatus. *Innocence*’s investigations unfold in the interplay between its thematic

and formal elements, and between the affective and conceptual dimensions of the modes of spectatorship that it conjures. It engages the deep structural logic of animation and also reaches out to reveal how the logic of the animatic works today, that is, how it emerges in and as regimes of aesthetics, ethics, and metaphysics. Its virtuosity doesn't make it easy to read or to discuss, however. Where *Duck Amuck* gave us a streamlined 7-minute version of animatic ontology in the familiar fancy of the Warner Brothers universe, *Innocence* scatters and proliferates its own auto-theoretical investigations across a 100 minutes of a complex plot involving an investigation of murders committed by a new breed of sophisticated sex robots run amuck and a philosophical dialogue on artificial life that refers to or directly quotes Descartes, La Mettrie, Kleist, Freud, and Villiers de L'Isle Adam, among others. [15] The very cultural conditions of possibility for the production of such a work—that is, of a deeply philosophical manifesto on contemporary mediology in the form of a hybrid drawn and computer generated animated narrative—themselves point to a number of features of animatic culture including its global dimensions and the way it thinks its own technicity. Here, I'm using a single scene from the work as a kind of machine for thinking the *still-emergent properties of the animatic*, along with some of their ramifications.

One of Oshii's interlocutors that I've not yet mentioned is Donna Haraway. Her work is not only—like Freud's or Heinrich von Kleist's—quoted in the film: A character, Coroner Haraway, is in fact modeled (up to her haircut) on the feminist science studies scholar, and the scene in which the Haraway character appears re-stages—and ultimately critiques and revises—Haraway's massively influential 1985 text, "A Cyborg Manifesto." As in the inaugural cyberpunk novels of William Gibson, as well as many other anime works, the film is set in a near future characterized by governmental corruption, corporate greed, environmental degradation, and individual alienation and anomie, and peopled by variously modified humans, cyborgs, and animals. Our protagonist Batou, a tough cyborg cop from Section 9, the special police unit designated for high-level cybercrimes, and his almost-human (that is, only minimally modified) partner

Togusa are assigned to investigate a series of mysterious deaths: the “Hadaly” gynoids, a “pet” or “sexaroid” model still in prototype with only a few examples distributed to government ministers and corporate executives, are going berserk and killing their owners and then themselves.

Coroner Haraway has one of the Hadaly bodies in her lab, where she is investigating the source of the malfunction and Batou and Togusa join her there to discuss the case. It’s clear from the beginning that Haraway’s sympathies lie with the Hadalys. She chides Batou for having shot one of them with a highly destructive bullet and laments the contemporary fate of many of these types of being (in the year 2032) who, once doomed to obsolescence, are forced to wander aimlessly or take their own lives. She, Batou, and Togusa then engage in a philosophical exchange in which Haraway asserts that the difference between humans and machines has always been merely “an article of faith.” Togusa, always the voice of more conventional humanist principles, balks at Haraway’s assertions, and Batou acts as a kind of speculative mediator, telling a story about Descartes’ construction of an automaton which would come to replace his dead daughter in his affections.

In drawing Donna Haraway into the world of the film, Oshii is explicitly engaging an established contemporary academic—and popular—conversation about technoscience, culture, and new forms of individual and political subjectivity. [16] And it is telling that Oshii gives us his own, very particular version, of Donna Haraway. Most centrally for our purposes here, where Haraway famously describes “boundary breakdowns” between machine and organism, animal and human, physical and non-physical, Oshii’s Haraway contests the ontological consistency of these categories altogether, rather positing their emergence in the an-ontological dimension of the animatic. [17]

Haraway’s well-known work probably needs little introduction, but to summarize the points of the manifesto most salient for Oshii’s film, Haraway

suggests that we are all already cyborgs, hybrids of human and machine, biology and cybernetics, and that this is a good thing, at least potentially. She explains that cyborg being is constituted by three central boundary breakdowns—between machine and organism, human and animal, and physical and non-physical. While Haraway recognizes the cyborg’s genesis as a product of the patriarchal military-industrial complex, she suggests that illegitimate children can be extremely unfaithful to their origins, and calls for a cyborg politics that would equip feminism and socialism to face the special challenges of contemporary technoculture and its political-economic coordinates by taking responsibility for the blurring of boundaries and the creation of new forms, rather than by trying to reinstate already defunct pure categories of human, animal, or machinic being.

Oshii helps us to re-think the features of Haraway’s cyborg in three new ways: by stretching Haraway’s confusions of ontological boundaries into the an-ontological dimension of the animatic, by encouraging us to think the contemporary techno-logic of the cyborg through a surprisingly untimely frame of reference: the doll, and by placing this *thought* of animatic an-ontology in its constitutive relation to the affective dimension of animatic aesthetics.

I’ll reproduce a small portion of the dialogue from the Coroner Haraway episode to demonstrate Oshii’s revisions to Haraway’s formulations:

Haraway: “Do you have children?”

Togusa: “A daughter.”

Haraway: “Children have always been excluded from the customary standards of human behavior, if you define humans as beings who possess a conventional identify and act out of free will. Then what are children who endure in the chaos preceding maturity? They differ profoundly from ‘humans,’ but they obviously have human form. The dolls that little girls mother, are not surrogates for real babies. Little girls aren’t so much imitating

child rearing, as they are experiencing something deeply akin to child rearing.”

Togusa: “What on earth are you talking about?”

Haraway: “Raising children is the simplest way to achieve the ancient dream of artificial life. At least, that’s my hypothesis.”

Togusa: “Children aren’t dolls!”

Batou: “Descartes didn’t differentiate man from machine, animate from inanimate. He lost his beloved five-year-old daughter and then named a doll after her, Francine. He doted on her. At least that’s what they say.”

Togusa: “Can we get back to reality here? I’d like your observations with respect to the Hadaly robot, model #2502, manufactured by Locus Solus.”

Here, Batou is channeling Haraway’s earlier assertion that the difference between humans and machines is merely an article of faith through a commonly told story of Descartes in which he loses his young daughter and builds a doll—typically, she is rather described as an “automaton”—which fully assumes her place in his affections. This already draws us out of the usual orbit of the cyborg. First, it shifts the historical dimension of the argument about the exchanges between organisms and machines; the questions posed by the fate of the Hadaly are referred back at least as far as the seventeenth century. This isn’t merely in the service of pointing out, however, that we have always been cyborgs, technical beings who from our very beginning have relied on clothing and buildings, fire and art, to sustain our bodies and cultures (though this is no doubt true, as well as an important part of the film’s worldview). More notably and more originally—and this is the second essential point here—it displaces the figure of the cyborg with that of the doll. The slippage from automaton to doll occurs in the story of Descartes itself, and is then reinforced by the surrounding dialogue about child-rearing and artificial life. [18]

Innocence is “peopled” with various types of beings—androids, gynoids, robots, dolls, animals, and humans—plotted between poles of animate and inanimate, living and dead—where no entity exists at any of the extremes and all are in-between. The mise-en-scène of this sequence in particular is itself a kind of catalogue of artificial lives drawn from cinema, literature, and art history—and the marshaling of these figures under the command of Oshii’s doll emphasizes his insistence on it as the central figure. The scene “quotes” Ridley Scott’s 1982 *Blade Runner*: a vat of floating eyeballs in Haraway’s lab echoes the Hannibal Chew scene in which two replicants—genetically engineered super-humans with a four year life span—look for their maker but find instead the specialist bioengineer who makes “just eyes.” A gynoid stretched on a stainless steel table where an apparently specialized medical-industrial machine either probes, assembles, or dismantles her refers to a more contemporary entry, Chris Cunningham’s 2000 music video for Bjork’s “All is Full of Love” in which Bjork herself appears as a female android. Finally, the Hadaly model gynoid itself, as well as taking its name from the female android of Villiers de l’Isle Adam’s 1886 *Future Eve* (Villiers 2000), resembles the uncanny photographs of dolls produced by German Surrealist Hans Bellmer in the 1930s and 40s. Bellmer’s dolls are clearly a particularly important reference for Oshii as Bellmer’s book, *The Doll*, makes an appearance in another scene, and Oshii flew members of his crew to New York City to see an exhibit of Bellmer photos at the ICP as part of the preparation for the production.

The ideas that Oshii’s Haraway advances in this scene, suggesting a kind of equivalence between children and dolls where both are products of a drive to produce artificial life, and where children may resemble dolls more than they do adult humans, provide a distilled image of animatic logic, revealing its distance from conventional ontologies and notions of life. The Descartes who appears here (seeming to think more along the lines of La Mettrie’s radical materialism than in terms of his own dualist notion that a god-given soul animates the

human machine) loves his progeny—biological and mechanical—equivalently. The figure of the child has been precious to humanist narratives, bundling a teleological narrative of biological development, and notions of genealogy and family, heredity and descent, into one compact ideological package, neatly tied up with connotations of innocence and imagination. We can see the resonance—and imbrication—of the image of the child with Franklin and Lock’s description of an older model of “life itself” in *Remaking Life & Death* which refers us “to the unity of all living things through the model of common ancestry and descent” (14). That the “child” is a conceptual product of the aesthetic and cultural ideologies of the Romantic and Victorian eras is often occluded by this powerful cultural narrative. Seeing the doll as an artifact of childhood reinforces this forgetting. But if we draw out Haraway’s logic we can flip this scenario, so that rather than the doll being an accessory of the child, the child is an accessory of the doll—an artifact of the modes of determining the nature of life, the relation of animate to inanimate, of play to reality that the tropes of both child and doll figure. What we find, alongside the dismantling of biological, developmental genealogy, is a life-become-animatic whose theoretical coordinates are very similar to those we saw in “Koko’s Cartoon Factory,” despite the vast contextual differences between the two works.

We can see clearly here where the cultural logic of animatic life figured by the doll dovetails with the medio-logic of animation: it doesn’t begin with genealogical succession (or a profilmic real) but with a blank page or blue screen or beam of light, as these encounter the animatic machine and unfold into a play of gestures and metamorphoses. If the blank page/blue screen/beam of light are signals of animatic potentiality, this must always encounter and engage the particular limits of the circuit by which it is engaged, as I will explain in more detail below, as well as whatever repetition compulsions this circuit includes and plays out. The limiting factors and repetitions can take different forms: one of the possibilities moving image animation deploys most often involves reproducing the cinematic reality-effect via animatic means. In certain instances, this may

come across as a transmedia mimicry. In others, its *simulation* of cinema constitutes a commentary on it, as well as a kind of opening of the cinematic to other dimensions and possibilities. One of the distinctive features of the history of moving-image animation is in fact its particular relation to representation. Where animation figures, it is also produces a theory of figuration. Because it has no necessary links to the real spaces and times of photographic media, where it chooses to represent aspects of a “real” world it has to build from the ground up, thus implicitly thematizing whatever codes of realism it chooses to deploy (or to subvert). One could say this of any non-photographic medium, but animation’s specificity lies both in its material movement in time and its historical connection with cinematic representation. Together these construct its very particular relation to modalities of “realism.” Of course, conventions within animation itself have developed in different genres and national traditions of animation itself, and where these are used without comment, they also become “invisible.” But because of the very infinite possibilities of animatic figuration, animation has a unique ability to comment on conventional codes of figuration and representation, as well as to reflect upon the existential, perceptual coordinates they conventionally represent. [19]

Because I undertake an analysis of Oshii’s aesthetics elsewhere, and in the interest of time, I’ll only give the most schematic indication of how Oshii deploys these possibilities. The composition of the Coroner Haraway scene—from its figures to its color palette to its rhythms—1) displaces the human figure as a primary site for spectatorial identification—and as a unifying feature of the landscape and movement of the work. The film as a whole is a hybrid of hand drawn animation and CGI and the backgrounds are often computer rendered, and almost hyperreal in their textural detail, while the hand drawn characters are at times so schematic they verge on the hieratic, even abstract. This tends to repel—or at least destabilize—the tendency toward identification, as well as using visual detail and intensity to reverse the conventional primacy of the living body. 2) The hand-drawn images disrupt the coherence of the CGI universe—

and vice versa. Different key animators are employed in different sequences as if to emphasize the idiosyncrasies of the artist's hand. 3) As is quite common in the film as a whole, the Coroner Haraway scene foregrounds a disorientation of conventional tropes of the lively and the inert. It opens with a vertical pan up a body-bagged, part-deconstructed, female android. The texture of the bag's plastic—a rich yellow, viscous and rippling—will contrast with the white, blanched, almost over-exposed look of the lab, as well as with the flatness of its human figures. Against the mostly pale, almost 2-dimensional scene, a few artifacts will stand out because of the intensity of their color or the detail of their texture, the “body bags” just described; the red lips, green eyes, and red and gold interiors of the Hadaly gynoids; and, most consistently of all, the warm, bright orange scrolling text and images of the lab's multiple computer displays. 4) While anime's limited animation may have initially been developed as a stylistic adaptation to lower budgets, Oshii makes its out-of-joint temporality into a philosophy of slowness, opening empty, contemplative moments in the film. The image rests on Togusa's face for so many seconds we feel we're looking at a still or hanging in a suspended animation, until Togusa finally, surprisingly, blinks. Time moves, halts, and then jerks back into motion. 5) Each character—and this includes objects—exists in its own time-and-space zone. The pace of characters walking and cloud movement are out of sync, or the relative scales of objects would be impossible in “real” space and time. 6) Oshii tends away from human-centered perception, preferring extreme tilts and pans and eschewing eye-line matches.

Overall, Oshii consistently deconstructs our natural(ized) perception. Watching the film demands that the spectator constantly work to re-orient him- or herself in the face of its multiple processes of disorientation. But the beauty of the film (one critic describes it as “eye-meltingly gorgeous”) along with how explicitly it *plays*—a series of scenes toward the end of the film perform an elaborate anagram, repeating four times where the same central elements appear in different configurations—makes its de- and re-compositions as pleasurable as

they are challenging. Its lush colors, the complex renderings of background textures and ornamental features, scenes which break the diegetic flow and appear as almost pure *display*, and the haunting soundtrack by Kenji Kawai clearly foreground and privilege the work's explicitly aesthetic dimension.

In Oshii's diagnosis of the animatic regime, emblemized in the figure of the doll, we saw the manner in which, in the absence of ontological determinations, affect and process emerge as dominant forces. Affect and sensation are always primary modalities for the simulacrum, as I discuss elsewhere. [20] Descartes' feelings for his doll-daughter and the care he shows for her are what is at stake in Oshii's version of the tale, and in Haraway's comparison of doll rearing and child care, it is the similarities of sensation and affect involved in the two processes and their gestures that open the comparison—or equivalence—of the two. Oshii comments in an interesting way about his own relationship to the film's affects, saying that the film is both about the body or rather that “the message of this movie is your body” and that the film is good for the body (“as I got older, nowadays, I make a film that is good for my body.” “Before that,” he continues, “I used to make a film only using my brain.” Oshii here asserts the centrality of questions and modes of embodiment, affect, and feeling to both the narrative concerns and formal operations of the film—and, by extension—to the contemporary cultural world the film addresses.

The relationship we see developed here between an-ontology, affect, and composition opens onto the aesthetic—and, as we will see, ethical—dimensions of the animatic apparatus where both are configured not around questions of the what? or the who?—but of the *how?* as the unfolding of gestures, operations, and affects beyond the sphere of ontological determinacy.

conclusion: from whatever being to however being

The cyborg is a hybrid figure that references a hybrid ontology – human on one side, cybernetic or more broadly machinic on the other, as well as, at least for Haraway, a particular technoscientific genealogy. The doll does a very different kind of conceptual work, performing the logic of animation’s an-ontology. While the object of Oshii’s diagnosis is, like Haraway’s, contemporary technoscientific spectacular culture, the displacement of the work of the cyborg onto the shoulders of the doll seems to be suggesting that, recalling Heidegger, “the essence of technology is nothing technological,” or high-technological, in any event (Heidegger 1982). [21] And I think Oshii is right. If what is at stake is understanding the new modes of life emerging from contemporary forms of simulation—from biotechnologies to cinematic animation to new forms of biopolitics—the key can’t be the digital or the computational or the biocybernetic. These are its features, its technical-material supports. It would be tautological—rather than diagnostic—to ascribe explanatory force to these *topoi*. The an-onto-logic of the doll is, instead, a kind of philosophical and aesthetic figure, one that has appeared in different guises at a number of historical conjunctures. It is now, however, becoming a dominant or hegemonic, rather than an eccentric or minor, cultural logic—as it appears in and as the animatic. Animation thus provides a manner of thinking and analyzing the imaginary that subtends the new simulative forces and forms emerging from this cultural and technical *dispositif*. [22] At first glance it may seem that the notion of animation as theorizing the animatic might also possess a kind of tautological structure. But the characteristic that distinguishes animation from, for example, the digital, is that *animation is a super-medium that (along with all aesthetic media) thinks*. I call it a super-medium because its diverse variants—imagine stop motion object animation and classical hand drawn cel animation (and then add all of the new technical possibilities)—create their own media within it.

While each sub-medium configures the real and the unreal, the animate and the inanimate, in its own particular way, there are a number of things that can be said of animation more generally, as we have seen. Its terrain is mapped not in

terms of a luminous, spectral life haunted by temporality, decay, and death, but rather in exchanges between the infinite potential for animatic metamorphoses and the limiting features that in each sub-medium and in each particular case shape and define it, that is, between animation's various engines of transformation and their respective drag coefficients. In animation no body fulfills the function of the human body for cinema, where (though this of course obtains only in cinematic and not in animatic forms of cinema) it grounds and unifies its operations. If analyses of biopower were contemporaneous with the cinematic regime and spoke to its particular conditions, the very concept of an animatic regime raises the question of what happens to bio-politics where the notion of bio—and the mediological image of the (usually) human body to which it was so closely linked—is displaced into the virtualization of life that we see in animatic forms in which image-body-life are always passing into or out of existence. The concept of the animatic apparatus thus calls on us to re-think all of the features of the discourse on biopolitics that constellate around its prefix, bio, whether this is interpreted in terms of Aristotelian logics of life as in Agamben, in relation to the historically-specific field of the epistemologies and practices of biology and the modes of governmentality they engender or intersect, as in Foucault, or in terms of *immunitas* and *communitas* as in Roberto Esposito's work. While my own focus is not on governmentality and concrete forms of political action but rather, as I've suggested, on media ethology as the modes of experience and action engendered by the medium-image-body nexus, there's no doubt that these spheres are intimately bound—or rather, different analytic strata of the same possibility space. The body is always an image, the image always a body (the human body, Hans Belting insists, is the original medium) and their particular informations and implications at a given moment determine potential fields of action (and inaction) (Belting 2005).

I want to conclude by revisiting the questions that frame the series of discussions I've presented: What kind of life is at stake in the contemporary *dispositif* of the animatic apparatus, the animatic regime? And how does this new logic of life call

on us to think differently—about aesthetics, about politics, and about ethics? Animation’s an-ontology also suggests a kind of dispersion and virtualization of life—its status as mutable, in transformation, open to its outside—as what in fact subtends the persistence of life as both the political object *par excellence*, in debates around abortion and stem cells, to name some of its lightning rod incarnations, and as the goal of production, where what is produced now are, first and foremost, forms and modes of life, either literally or as triggers of affective modulation produced by the spectacle-commodity form. I wonder, too, in this scenario which conjures almost the opposite of what we’d traditionally take to be the conditions for ethical thought, where can we find a possibility for ethics? If ethics has been thought in terms of finitude, the particular ontology of human being, and being-towards-death, and—finally—if at least one powerfully operational cultural notion of life no longer functions in relation to these fundamental limiting, ethical denominations, where does this scenario open onto its own immanent critique, its own positive possibility? There seem to me to be two possible directions here, back toward possibility, limit, and the real—or further into the virtualization of life. In the space opened by the latter, there can still be ethical thought, but it would have to be configured not around ontological commitments, and its questions of who? and what?, but rather around the embrace of the one an-ontological determinant: how?

Agamben points us toward a manner of thinking this *how?* in its relation to ethics, but we need to replace his concept of the whatever body—which he conceives in relation to photography and cinema and which can in fact be seen as their mediological corollary—with the however body of the animatic apparatus. I’d like to juxtapose two passages from neighboring essays from *The Coming Community*. The opening of “Ethics” reads:

The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must realize. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist,

because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would only be tasks to be done. (Agamben 1993: 43)

The end of the essay that follows it, “Dim Stockings,” concludes:

To appropriate the historic transformations of human nature that capitalism wants to limit to the spectacle, to link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated, and thus to forge the whatever body whose *physis* is resemblance—this is the good that humans must now learn to wrest from commodities in their decline. Advertising and pornography, which escort the commodity to the grave like hired mourners, are the unknowing midwives of this new body of humanity. (Agamben 1993: 50)

In the first passage above Agamben asserts that ethics is made possible, is opened, by humans’ lack of any essence or destiny. If humans had an essence or destiny, he explains, it would only be a matter of figuring out what tasks need to be done in order to accomplish it, and there would be no need for ethical questioning or, as Agamben has it, ethical *experience*, at all. The flipside of this formulation is also true for Agamben: where humans perceive their experience in terms of a particular biological destiny or spiritual vocation, the sphere of ethics is occluded.

This definition of ethics is related to what Agamben describes as the “positive possibility” of the society of the spectacle. The spectacle, Agamben writes, “disarticulates and empties, all over the planet, traditions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities” (Agamben 2000: 85). That is, it has accomplished the destruction of traditional notions of biological destiny, spiritual vocation, cultural identity, individual biography, theological destiny, etc. The positive possibility of the society of the spectacle lies in the manner in which its very destructions may reveal the domain of ethics—as the default of any

particular destiny or identity for human being and its corollary openness of its potential.

According to Agamben, the “massive manipulations” of the body (and especially the female body) in the spectacle likewise tear human notions of the body from their traditional relation to both theological and biological essences. Agamben also asserts, and here incorrectly – or rather, in a manner inconsistent with more contemporary developments – that capital’s desire is to have all transformation take place on the side of the spectacle so that the body, as in *La Dolce Vita*, continues to survive but only in its shadow. He writes, “what was technologized was not the body, but its image. Thus the glorious body of advertising had become the mask behind which the fragile, slight human body continues its precarious existence, the geometrical splendor of the “girls” covers over the long lines of the naked, anonymous bodies led to their death in the Lagers (camps) . . .” He is referring to the Tiller Girls, a dance troupe that performed in theaters and cabarets in Weimer Germany and was described by Kracauer in his famous essay of 1927, “The Mass Ornament” – but one can also think of the conceptually identical, if cinematically realized, rows of women in Busby Berkeley’s musical numbers, arms and legs swinging in perfect tandem to produce formal geometries, individual bodies submerged in his mechanically-timed, perfectly optimized optical girl-machine. According to Agamben’s example, all of these sites are possessed by the same logic of bodies whose movements are timed to the rhythm of the machine (whether factory conveyor belt or forced march), where the “girls” produce an a spectacular, “ornamental” version, making it available for consumption and enjoyment. To this example, with its very particular topography and logic, Agamben adds several others—including the transsexual body—with extremely different configurations, ones in which the body is clearly *directly* materially invested and transformed. He doesn’t, however, note the shift in topography – or in apparatus.

What's most interesting for our purposes here, however, is that in the conclusion to "Dim Stockings" quoted above Agamben in fact *calls for* the very scenario that we've already seen realized in the space of the animatic apparatus: that is, "to link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated" (Agamben 2000:50). From the fantastic dimension of the animatic body as presented in the Esurance ad campaign to its more material versions in the plastic surgeries of Heidi Montag, or the multi-modal transformations of the Real-Life Barbie, and from the new biotechnological processes Franklin and Lock describe to the cinematic-animatic compositings that produce the digital bodies of *Lord of the Rings*, *Avatar*, etc.—the hallmark of these animatic bodies is that they "link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated." In the passage quoted from "Dim Stockings" Agamben also refers to the body he summons as "a whatever body" and he explains it—in reference to both the *quodlibet* of Scholastic philosophy and the photographic lens—as "being such that it always matters." The whatever body is a kind of singularity inseparable from all of its own predicates but unrelated to any model—except by a "resemblance without archetype" (Agamben 1993: 48). It no longer maintains a reference to a theological origin, or to any model, except through the "Idea" of resemblance, a resemblance without actual substance. The "whatever body," with all of its determinate indeterminacy, feels very static in its insistence on the maintenance of the logic of resemblance—as well as in its insistence on the absolute qualification of being. It's hard to imagine that "the new body of humanity," given the field of forces from which it is emerging, could be so definitely in possession of its attributes.

It seems more apt to imagine them as however bodies, that is, in terms of their modes of production and transformation, and the forms and modes of life and experience these emergent and continually-emerging bodies produce (and, finally, whether they are, as Oshii would have it—sounding quite a bit like the Spinozist Deleuze—"good for" other bodies). These new forms are profoundly imbricated in forms and flows of capital. With the rush to gene patenting on one

hand and the wide variety of animatic-spectacular forms of commodity on the other, it hardly seems that the commodity is in decline. And if advertising and pornography are “unknowing midwives of this new body of humanity,” it is in a different manner, I would suggest, than the one Agamben has in mind here. First, in the space of the animatic apparatus, in which we find Oshii’s decentering of the human figure arising alongside “transgenic sheep with human DNA,” a fish crossed with a strawberry, and the doll-bodies of metamorphic celebrities, it’s not clear that the new bodies of the animatic are precisely human ones. What I want to retain from Agamben’s formulations here is the manner in which we may articulate the particular conception of ethics he develops as the default of essence, vocation, and *telos*—and its corollary potentiality—with the contemporary phase of what Agamben calls (after Debord, of course) the society of the spectacle and what I’m calling the animatic apparatus. If it is the case that ethics—like the however bodies of the animatic apparatus—don’t refer to a biological or theological ground or *telos*, than that opens a space to consider their forms of production and metamorphosis along new lines, that is, in relation to the *how?* of their unfolding.

What remains to be accounted for, particularly as we leave Agamben’s notion of the “Idea” of resemblance behind, is how then something like resemblance—and at least the appearance of identity—persist within the animatic apparatus. Or, to frame this in another way, how we conceive the very limits and resistances to metamorphic flexibility—as well as actual and potential misuses of it. My contention is that we need to think these questions too from within the an-ontological field of the contemporary *dispositif*. This is the case precisely because, as I’ve argued, other means—whether they refer us to the destiny or vocation of a biological body or a return to the real, or vacillate in the tabloid-dialectic of enthralled fascination and ethical disgust and censure—have lost all critical force. The concept of an-ontology provides us with a new power for thinking the forms of life emerging in the animatic regime. It also allows us to reconsider the functions of the simulacrum in relation to our current coordinates. I want to close

with a related suggestion that I've just begun to sketch here but that animates my next project: The concept of an-ontology can also generate new ways of thinking the persistence, the repetition compulsions, and the novel forms of vitality of the *figure*.

Notes

[1] There is an important reading of this scene from *Intervista* in Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Trans. Stephen Barker. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 22-24. I engage it, along with questions of cinematic and animatic temporality more generally, in my book, *The Animatic Apparatus: Biocybernetic Reproduction and the Futures of the Image*, forthcoming from Zero Books.

[2] In the interests of contextual clarity, I'm simplifying Sobchack's terminology. Cf. her fascinating discussion of "the actor's four bodies" in Sobchack 2012, esp. 433-439.

[3] Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Cf. esp. xxvi and xxxi.

[4] Cf. Jean-Louis Baudry. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986 and Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon & al. New York : Pantheon, 1980. 194-95.

[5] Quoted in Anson Rabinbach. *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 90.

[6] “Vitality affects” is a category developed by Daniel Stern to distinguish and analyze a set of felt sensations of vitality (e.g., explosive, bursting, fading) from categorical affects (e.g., anger, joy fear). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1985. He develops this concept further, as “vitality forms,” and in relation to cinema and the other arts in *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

[7] While I am focusing on the fundamental shift in the contemporary biosciences that Franklin and Locke and many of the anthology’s contributors address, I’d like to also note here the importance of the fact that the topics of many of the essays involve not only the positive potentials but the very real issues and threats around exploitation and profiteering that attend this transformation.

[8] Marey, Étienne-Jules. “Natural History of Organized Bodies.” Trans. C.A. Alexander. In *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, 1867. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868. 277-304.

[9] Although I am focusing on animation as such here, many of these same effects can be achieved by live-action cinema in an animatic mode. Obvious examples might include the magical effects of Méliès films, Ray Harryhausen’s fantastic creatures, and a great deal of contemporary CGI including the digital actors of *Lord of the Rings* or *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Further, anywhere a shot comes from an “impossible” perspective—from the crane shots that create Busby Berkeley’s girl-machines to our travels into corporeal interiors in television’s *CSI* syndicate—the real ceases to be its reason and measure and it thus takes on an animatic aspect.

[10] Alan Cholodenko, in the introductions and essays he wrote for the two inestimably important volumes of animation theory that he edited, takes on a number of the same problematics that I do here. He is also interested in 1) the kind of life that obtains in animation, 2) its relations to representation and simulation, 3) the relationship of cinematic to animatic apparatus and 4) animation's position in a history of artificial life. This work has informed my own greatly, but I am ultimately making different arguments on all of these counts. To address the first and second, Cholodenko consistently posits animation—whether its the manner in which it “suspends the distinction between representation and simulation” (1991: 22) or “between animism and mechanism, animation and cinema, human and nonhuman” (2007: 509) or in its “lifedeath” (2007:509) as a force of indetermination and aporia. Although he addresses a dazzling array of theoretical positions, his formulations ultimately return to this structure. I see this structure—also encapsulated beautifully in Schwartz's diagnosis of cinema's indetermining of the philosopheme life/death—as not only describing the ontological crisis of the cinematic regime but as a kind of *symptom* of it. When it comes to the animatic apparatus, and theoretical positions, his formulations ultimately return to this structure. I see this structure—also encapsulated beautifully in Schwartz's diagnosis of cinema's indetermining of the philosopheme life/death—as not only describing the ontological crisis of the cinematic but in fact as a kind of *symptom* of it. When it comes to its configuration at the current conjuncture, this formula is in fact no longer operative in the same way. To address the third issue enumerated above, my own conception of the relations between the cinematic and animatic is thus different from Cholodenko's in a number of ways. Please see footnote 22 below for a brief remark on the genealogy of the animatic in relation to artificial life.

[11] Camille, Michael. “Simulacrum,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*. Ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. University of Chicago Press, 1996. 40.

[12] Massumi, Brian. "REALER THAN REAL: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari." Copyright 1 (1987): 2.

<http://www.brianmassumi.com/english/essays.html>

[13] *Koko's Cartoon Factory*. Dave and Max Fleischer. 1924. New York. Out of the Inkwell Films.

[14] <http://www.fashionnstyle.com/articles/7911/20130611/human-barbie-valeria-lukyanova-before-after-pictures-living-doll-surgery-ideal-woman-photos.htm>

[15] The explicit history of dolls and automata that Oshii presents in the film, that is, the names that come up in the film's dialogue (e.g. Descartes, LaMettrie, Roussell, etc.) as well as the special visual reference of the dolls themselves – they clearly echo the dolls of German surrealist photographer, Hans Bellmer – are mostly drawn from a very Western cannon of art and philosophy. I am sure there is much more that can be said about the film's less explicit but highly suggestive references to the history of dolls and automata in Japanese culture, although this is not within the scope of the present commentary. Oshii has some very interesting things to say about the "nationality of the film" which are worth reproducing here and might provide an interesting backdrop to an analysis of the interplay between European and Japanese sources within the film: "I grew up reading European [literature] - mostly The Bible - and it wasn't until recently, when I finished making this film, that I realized I was really Japanese. The culture of your life and the culture of your movie are two different things, and after completing this movie, I felt like I was [definitively] Japanese, but the elements in the film, if you have to put a finger on them, were probably more European than American, and more European than Japanese. For those filmmakers who originally came from Europe or Hong Kong or other parts of the world and made it in Hollywood, their nationalities may have been something other than that of the U.S., but the nationality of their films are definitely

[American],” he continues. “Film gives us a nationality of its own, in a way.” Todd Gilchrist. Interview: Mamoru Oshii. September 16, 2004. *IGN.com Movies*. <http://movies.ign.com/articles/548/548854p1.html>

[16] “Cyborg Manifesto” has of course had a vast popular as well as academic impact, generating a profile of Haraway in *Wired Magazine* and appearing on sci-fi fan sites of all kinds.

[17] For an incisive critique of the logic of cyborg hybridity and boundary-blurring advanced by Haraway, cf. Thomas Lamarre. “Humans and Machines.” *Inflexions 5*, “Simondon: Milieu, Techniques, Aesthetics” (March 2012). 29-67. www.inflexions.org, esp. 29-30.

[18] Daniel Tiffany points us to the manner in which this slippage is in fact an index of a particular modern concern with the status of the image, one that begins with Kleist and wends its way through the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, the Surrealists, and others. He writes, “Although many questions arise about the displacement of the classical automaton by the doll, it is apparent in the texts of Kleist and others that this transaction pertains to the demechanization of the automaton, in a manner that, paradoxically, only enhances the autonomy of the device as a simulacrum. That is to say, it pertains to an evolving ontology of pictures in modern culture and to the enduring interdependence of pictures and bodies.” *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2002. 65.

[19] Cf. Norman Klein’s *7 Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Theatrical Cartoon*, for a number of interesting discussions of animation’s privileged access to commenting on the society of the spectacle.

[20] In *The Animatic Apparatus: Biocybernetic Reproduction and the Futures of the Image*, I provide a much more detailed look at affect and aesthetics in *Innocence* as well as relation to the concept of the simulacrum and practices of simulation.

[21] While Heidegger's conclusions in his famous essay would certainly not advance my own argument about an-ontology, it is interesting to note that this moment in the essay appears precisely as the hinge of his critique of traditional notions of essence. While I won't be able to pursue this inquiry here, I'd like to pose the question of how this formulation might open to another kind of question concerning contemporary technology, one which would might deploy this critical moment to think a further dimension of an-ontology.

[22] One of the *Innocence's* most interesting contributions to the concept of the animatic apparatus is its positioning of it in relation to a history of the quest for artificial life—a history of dolls, puppets, automata and replicants—rather than in relation to a history of visual representation. A number of film theorists have made related suggestions: one could actually delineate a literature on the topic of cinema's historical relation to automata. Animation theorist Alan Cholodenko makes this genealogical claim in a very direct way, suggesting that we put animators “in the line that extends from Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein and his creation, back to Jacquet Droz and his automata, and beyond, to de Vaucanson, and back to the Alexandrian school and Prometheus, Pygmalion, Daedalus, and Hephestus . . .” (*Illusion of Life 2*, 495). In *The Animatic Apparatus: Biocybernetic Reproduction and the Futures of the Image*, I analyze this animatic genealogy in more specific terms, dividing it into a tradition of copies and one of simulacra.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*. Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Belting, Hans. "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology." *Critical Inquiry* 31.2 (Winter 2005). 302-319.

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott. 1982.

Camille, Michael. "Simulacrum." In *Critical Terms for Art History*. Ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. University of Chicago Press, 1996. 31-44.

Cavallaro, Dani. *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii: Fantasy, Technology, Politics*. Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006.

Cholodenko, Alan. "Introduction" and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit, or The Framing of Animation." In *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*. Ed. Alan Cholodenko. Sydney: Power Publications, 1991.

Cholodenko, Alan. "Introduction" and "Speculations on the Animatic Automaton." In *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation*. Ed. Alan Cholodenko. University Illinois Press, 2007.

Debord, Guy. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Malcolm Imrie. London and New York: Verso, 1998.

Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Plato and the Simulacrum." Trans. Rosalind Krauss. *October* 27 (1983).

Director's Series Volume 2 – The Work of Chris Cunningham. Dir. Lance Bangs. New York. Palm Pictures. 2003

Duck Amuck. Dir. Chuck Jones. Warner Brothers. 1953.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon & al. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Franklin, Sarah and Margaret Locke, eds. *Remaking Life & Death: Toward an Anthropology of the Biosciences*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press and Oxford: James Currey, 2003.

Franklin, Sarah and Margaret Locke. "Animation and Cessation: The Remaking of Life and Death." In *Remaking Life & Death: Toward an Anthropology of the Biosciences*. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2003.

Haraway, Donna. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Deborah Levitt. "Animation and the Medium of Life: Media Ethology, An-Ontology, Ethics." *Inflexions* 7, "Animating Biophilosophy" (March 2014). 118-161. www.inflexions.org

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2. Dir. Mamoru Oshii. Dreamworks Video. 2004. Japan.

Intervista. Dir. Federico Fellini. Koch Lorber Films. 1987.

Klein, Norman M. *Seven Minutes: the Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon*. London: Verso, 1993.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Ed. and Trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Lamarre, Thomas. "Humans and Machines." *Inflexions 5*, "Simondon: Milieu, Techniques, Aesthetics" (March 2012). 29-67. www.inflexions.org

Levitt, Deborah. *The Animatic Apparatus: On Biocybernetic Reproduction and The Futures of the Image*. Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2014.

Levitt, Deborah. "Media and Biopolitics: Notes on 'Notes on Gesture'" in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life*. Ed. Justin Clemens, Nick Heron and Alex Murray. University of Edinburgh Press, 2008.

Deborah Levitt. "Animation and the Medium of Life: Media Ethology, An-Ontology, Ethics." *Inflexions 7*, "Animating Biophilosophy" (March 2014). 118-161. www.inflexions.org

Massumi, Brian. "REALER THAN REAL: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari." Copyright 1 (1987): 2.

<http://www.brianmassumi.com/english/essays.html>

Oshii, Mamoru. Interview.

<http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue387/interview2.html>

Rabinbach, Anson. *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Ramsaye, Terry. *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture through 1925*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926.

Schaffer, William. "The Control Image." In *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation*. Ed. Alan Cholodenko. University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Schwartz, Louis-Georges. "Cinema and the Meaning of "Life." *Discourse* 28.2 & 3 (Spring and Fall 2006): 7-27.

Sobchack, Vivian. "Being on the Screen: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Flesh, or the Actor's Four Bodies." In *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*. Ed. Jorg Sternagel, Deborah Levitt, Dieter Mersch. Beilefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2012. 429-446.

Sobchack, Vivian. "Scary Women: Cinema, Surgery, and Special Effects." *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment in Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. 36-52.

Stern, Daniel. *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Deborah Levitt. "Animation and the Medium of Life: Media Ethology, An-Ontology, Ethics." *Inflexions* 7, "Animating Biophilosophy" (March 2014). 118-161. www.inflexions.org

Stern, Daniel. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Trans. Stephen Barker. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Tiffany, Daniel. *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Auguste. *Tomorrow's Eve*. University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Wells, Paul. *Understanding Animation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Wood, Gaby. *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Artificial Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.