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Animators of Atlanta
Layering Authenticity in the Creative Industries

by

Colin Wheeler

Under the Direction of Ethan Tussey, PhD.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores post-authentic neoliberal animation production culture, tracing the ways authenticity is used as a resource to garner professional autonomy and security during precarious times. Animators engage in two modes of production, the first in creating animated content, and the other in constructing a professional identity. Analyzing animator discourse allows for a nuanced exploration of how these processes interact and congeal into common sense. The use of digital software impacts the animator's capacity to legitimize themselves as creatives and experts, traditional tools become vital for signifying creative authenticity in a professional environment. The practice of decorating one's desk functions as a tactic to layer creative authenticity, but the meaning of this ritual is changing now that studios shift to open spaces while many animators work from home. Layering authenticity on-screen often requires blending techniques from classical Hollywood cinema into animated performance, concomitant with a bid to legitimate the role of the authentic interlocutor for the character. Increasingly animators feel pressure to layer authenticity online, establishing an audience as a means to hedge against precarity. The recombined self must balance the many methods for layering creative and professional authenticity with the constraints and affordances of their tools, along with the demands of the studio, to yield cultural capital vital for an animator's survival in an industry defined at once by its limitless expressive potential and economic uncertainty.

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INDEX WORDS: Animation, Atlanta, Authenticity, Creativity, Digital media, Discourse Analysis, Ethnography, Globalization, Media industries, Neoliberalism, Performance, Precarity.

Animators of Atlanta
Layering Authenticity in the Creative Industries

by

Colin Wheeler

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Film, Media, and Theater

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2022

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2022

Animators of Atlanta
Layering Authenticity in the Creative Industries

by

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DEDICATION

This project would not have been possible without the support of my family, many of whom are doctors themselves, and I am happy to add my name to the list. I dedicate this project to my mother, Elyse Wheeler, who instilled in me a deep love of learning when she read to me books beyond my reading level, patiently pausing and clarifying whenever necessary. I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, Dr. Norman C Wheeler, the first doctor in our family. Though I never met him, he remains a kernel in my origin story. I owe a debt of gratitude to my uncles, Kay William Wheeler and Wayne Blackburn Wheeler, who provided many forms of avuncular support. Beyond the wonderful family of my birth, I also dedicate this to Marc LaFountain, who always encouraged my research with amicable curiosity and a handful of book recommendations. As true now as it has ever been, I stand on the shoulders of giants.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Authenticity is dead,¹ and the internet killed it,² so goes the grim prognostication of new media scholars assessing the digitally enabled entrepreneurial ethos of self-promotion,³ but the animation industry has a long history of recombining materials to create authentic performances from a medium that actively calls attention to its construction. Rather, just as animation and special effects raise problems surrounding the indexicality of film,⁴ the ways in which the animation industry layers authenticity has always been “post-authentic,” in the ways that animators fabricate performances, market products, and themselves. As a remarkably mercurial profession strapped to the edge of modernity, animators are in a unique position in the creative industries, acting as canaries in the post-industrial coal mine.

Literary critics define authenticity as the ongoing quest to find one’s inner self,⁵ which supposedly “engenders a narcissistic compulsion,”⁶ functioning as an assertion of one’s identity to resist social pressures.⁷ The term often connotes a local region or place at odds with the global spaces of chain restaurants and corporate hotels, such as far-flung artisanal manufacturers still

¹ Owens, Jay. “Post-Authenticity and the Ironic Truths of Meme Culture.” *Post Memes*, 2019, pp. 77–114., <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hptdx.7>.

² Moeller, Hans-Georg, and Paul J. D'Ambrosio. *You and Your Profile: Identity after Authenticity*. Columbia University Press, 2021.

³ Baym, Nancy K. *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*. New York University Press, 2018.

Duffy, Brooke Erin, and Emily Hund. “‘Having It All’ on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding among Fashion Bloggers.” *Social Media + Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2015, p.1-14, 205630511560433., <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337>.

Marwick, Alice E. *Status Update: Celebrity*. Yale University Press, 2013.

⁴ Prince, Stephen. *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality*. Rutgers University Press, 2012.

⁵ Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. United Kingdom, Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁶ Han, Byung-Chul, and Daniel Steuer. *Saving Beauty*. Polity Press, 2018, 33.8%

⁷ Gabriel Giorgi; Improper Selves: Cultures of Precarity. *Social Text* 1 June 2013; 31 (2 (115)): 69–81. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2081130> pg. 70

making use of traditional techniques and materials,⁸ working class cuisine from the local greasy spoon,⁹ or music that accurately evokes a region like blue-grass and western.¹⁰ Others define it as an act of grounding some element of the self in response to an increasingly precarious economic environment demanding flexibility and mobility.¹¹ In this case, precarity does not merely refer to the fragile qualities of life, but a phenomena brought about by neoliberal economic policies that enervated and destroyed labor rights and the welfare state.¹²

Richard A. Peterson uses the term fabricating authenticity to highlight the ironic fact that such a quality must be constructed through practice, negotiated continuously between consumers, managers, and creative laborers.¹³ However, animation as a medium is unique in that it is the layering of images that allow animators to harness and manipulate the power of the multi-planar moving image.¹⁴ Animators composite distinct elements to enact a single performance, this research explores the ways that animators layer authenticity into the everyday in order to legitimize their particular role as a professional creative performer. These characters often come into conflict, demanding that animators balance tasks that legitimize these positions distinctly. Layering professional authenticity entails learning software and corporate etiquette, creative authenticity requires imaginative displays, while embodied authenticity legitimizes the

⁸ Zukin, S., 2010. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, New York. Oxford University Press

⁹ Johansen, Emily, and Aase, Emily Johansen. *Beyond Safety: Risk, Cosmopolitanism, and Neoliberal Contemporary Life*. United Kingdom, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

¹⁰ Peterson, Richard A. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Wiley, 1999.

¹¹ Giorgi 2013, pg. 70

¹² Massood, Paula J. Pamela Robertson Wojcik; Note from the Editors: Precarious Mobilities. *Feminist Media Histories* 1 July 2021; 7 (3): 1–18. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2021.7.3.1>

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.3%

¹⁴ LaMarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. United Kingdom, University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

animator's unique capacity to become the character as a performer. This cultural capital¹⁵ is rendered all the more precious by a precarious industry. Animators that persist in such an environment make use of what Wells defines as "ongoing "recombinancy" strategies,"¹⁶ freely adopting from previous forms and practices across media. While digital platforms incentivize the fabrication of profiles reflecting an "edited self,"¹⁷ this dissertation follows the ways in which animators form recombined selves, layering authenticity on screen and off.

To better describe the ways in which authenticity may be layered and performed, this research turns towards the illustrative words of Henry Rosemont Jr., who used the metaphors of peaches and onions:

“People may be seen as peaches: an external skin that is public, the fruit itself which is our body.... And then there is the peach pit, our self, that which endures, does not change from day to day. . . . But think instead of an onion. I peel off successive layers; first son, then husband, father, grandfather.... And what is left when there are no more layers? Nothing at all.”¹⁸

Animation, like the process of layering an identity, also involves the layering of motion and meaning onto mute form. Professions and identities are relational, all socially contextualized

¹⁵ As opposed to economic capital, cultural capital tends to determine who in the field is considered legitimate, or who is the legal owner or leader of the field. (Bourdieu 1991, 230) Cultural capital refers to such manners and education necessary to authentically perform a social role, articulating which practices, strategies, and forms of knowledge are useful or usable in the field. The cultural capital necessary to operate will vary from field to field, as hanging with punk-rock enthusiasts demands a very different cultural display than playing polo with the boss's son or winning over the soccer moms at the bake sale.

¹⁶ Wells, Paul. "Smarter than the Average Art Form." *Animation in the Television Era.* *Prime Time Animation Television Animation and American Culture*, edited by Carol A Stabile and M Harrison, Taylor and Francis, 2013, pp. 15–32.

¹⁷ Marwick 2013, 191-195

¹⁸ Henry Rosemont, Jr. 2015, 14, as cited in Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2021, pg. 138.

roles.¹⁹ These become the layers that define the self, all semi-transparent and refractory, such that deciphering the intentions of another becomes an infinite maze of mirrors. Authenticity creates the impression that all these layers cohere to some core-identity, a concrete center pitted against the shiftiness of ordinary social interactions, but precarity on the Web 2.0 has rendered such a performance fragmented and contradictory, functionally breaking the era of authenticity under the weight of ubiquitous surveillance.²⁰

Animators must layer authenticity in their characters no matter how fantastical, the reflexivity of the medium forecasted the era of proficility as an animated ogre once said, “Onions have layers. OGRES have layers. Onions have layers... you get it. We both have layers.”²¹ Like identity, animation involves the manipulation of discrete images which layer together to express something alive, functioning as an unstable, metamorphic, “metaphysical object.”²² The layered and reflexive nature of the medium denies the animated medium the capacity to claim authenticity as filmed or live-performances, but animators learned to layer this value to create characters that could endure beyond the screen, allowing for cartoon characters such as Felix the Cat to take on celebrity status.

While Richard Dyer defines authenticity as a vital component of stardom;²³ in which the boundary between the human performer and the fictional character appears to collapse, the existence of animated celebrities such as Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny necessitates a reassessment of how authenticity functions once this authentication process no longer maps to

¹⁹ “The very common process of layering and compositing...has been an essential part of many forms of animation....” Torre, Dan. *Animation - Process, Cognition and Actuality*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. pg. 34.

²⁰ Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2021, pg. 65.

²¹ Dreamworks. (2007). *Shrek*. US. youtube.com

²² Torre 2017, pg. 44.

²³ Dyer, Richard. “Charisma” *Stardom*, edited by Christine Gledhill, Routledge, 1991, pg. 136.

another human body.²⁴ Layering “the authenticity effect” demands selecting from a variety of aesthetic choices to give the appearance that there is some breakdown between what ought and ought not to be visible to the audience.²⁵ This supposes the star’s continued existence outside of the media in which they appear, such that one can get a sense of the “real” star in behind-the-scenes specials and backstage interviews. Demonstrating a breakdown in an otherwise carefully curated appearance, authenticity creates the impression that who one is appears to actually be what one is supposed to be.

Animated characters perform authenticity by insisting that they will still exist once the show is over, a belief reinforced by theme park meet and greets with costumed mascots performing as metonymic celebrities.²⁶ Authenticity thus can be understood as a series of markers established by media texts, which indicate how honestly their origins and history reflect on their current role and how clearly it expresses an inner essence or true self.²⁷ The question then becomes how one can perform so personally without an individual actor or animator in charge. Animation remains an industry deeply involved with the fabrication of authenticity, while celebrities continue existing from show to show, animators must string together thousands of carefully crafted frames to layer a consistent cartoon personality across multiple media texts.²⁸ If authenticity is requisite to stardom, animators have navigated the artificial nature of the medium with the demands for authenticity since the beginning of the industry, thus following the

²⁴ Crafton, Donald. *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation*. Univ. of California Press, 2013. pg. 86.

²⁵ MacKinnon, Carla. “Autobiography and Authenticity in Stop-Motion Animation.” *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-Based Animation and Cultural Value*, edited by Caroline Ruddell and Paul Ward, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019, pp. 99–126. pg. 102.

²⁶ Williams, Rebecca. *Theme Park Fandom: Spatial Transmedia, Materiality And Participatory Cultures*. Amsterdam University Press. 2020. pg. 134.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 100.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 136.

ways in which they utilize authenticity as a part of their profession provides insight into a broader cultural industries in the throes of a post-authenticity era.

At a time characterized by increasing demands for pliant and compliant global laborers, authenticity remains anchored to place, an identity stable like a homeland.²⁹ Precarious professions incentivize relocation over community-formation, disrupt routines, and diminish the value of delayed gratification due to the high-stakes of failure and the burden of risk.³⁰ While romantics such as Wordsworth and Rousseau defined authenticity as antagonistic to a polished beauty,³¹ a precarious economic environment punishes behaviors lacking potential pecuniary value, so presentation of the authentic coincides with the promotion of the brand.³² This dissertation explores post-authentic neoliberal animation production culture, tracing the ways authenticity is used as a resource to garner professional autonomy and security during precarious times, layered through the animator's tools, desk-decoration habits, character acting, and online profile-building, to argue that this process need not be considered intrinsically self-absorbed, but reactive, recombinant, and deeply playful.³³

Animation and navigating the animation industry both require a type of performance, a discipline that animators hone to layer authenticity, acting as cartoon characters and networking as professionals. The field of anthropology generally understands performance in two ways: one involves rituals, ceremonies, and theater; the other refers to the “presentation of self in everyday

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

³⁰ Sennett, Richard. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. Norton, 1998., 93/145

³¹ Trilling 1971, 95

³² Byung-Chul Han 2018, 32.3%

³³ Playful in the sense that these behaviors conform to the rules of the industry's social game, and “deep” in that the stakes are so high that detached reasoning takes a back seat. (c.f. Bentham 1931, as cited in Geertz, C. (2005). “Deep play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” *Daedalus*, 134(4), 56–86. <https://doi.org/10.1162/001152605774431563>)

life.”³⁴ Professionally, the animator is responsible for transformative doubling, turning a teapot into a dancer, for example, in which both the animator and the character are at once “not themselves” and “not not themselves.”³⁵ Authenticity manifests as a professional value in the animation industry, entailing the performer convince others that they legitimately embody the role,³⁶ the authentication process compares this behavior to previous actions, interactions, and expectations. Centering on the everyday ways that animation is produced necessitates an appreciation for the many ways that animators animate, as a hobby and a profession, a means of work or leisure. Although animators are constrained by certain realities of the industry, they traverse these frontiers fearlessly as they improvise methods for turning situations into opportunities.³⁷ This perspective centers on the everyday, distinguishing between the broad set of institutionally-approved best practices, or strategies, from the tactics utilized by individuals as they negotiate with these strategies in the quotidian.³⁸ Together these strategies and tactics compose the ‘rules’ of the field, while shifting economic and sociocultural realities incentivize some strategies over others, as the animation industry has long negotiated the contradictory impulses vital to layering authenticity.

Distinguishing between prominent strategies and tactics utilized in the animation industry allows one to identify the spoken and unspoken values widely held by practitioners in the field. As individuals practice animation, they are animated by their own sense of purpose, evaluating their actions according to countless codes, rules-of-thumb, and facts-of-life that characterize the

³⁴ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Books, 1990.

³⁵ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater & Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985., pg. 6.

³⁶ Roe, Annabelle Honess. “Animation and Performance.” *The Animation Studies Reader*, 2019, p. 69., <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501332647.ch-007.>, 24.5%

³⁷ “situations to opportunities” is a phrase often used by de Certeau, (c.f. Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984. pg. 35.)

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1984, pg. 28

profession's discourse.³⁹ Animators, in other words, are actually engaged in two modes of production, the first in creating animated content, and the other in deriving meaning from the process. The latter occurs through the construction of significance according to the elements available, and while each individual is relatively free to come to their own conclusions, animators have standards. Defining the ways in which animators are animated by their profession necessitates an exploration of their "art of practice" in their own words, using their discourse to describe the animation profession from bottom to top.⁴⁰ This method, as the name implies, studies discourse, or the analysis of how language is structured within the different domains of life.⁴¹ Analyzing animator discourse allows for a nuanced exploration of their practices, as a means to delineate the ways in which novel experiments become common sense in the animation industry.⁴²

These rules define the 'best practices' of animation which also reflect how animated texts are produced and authenticated as discourse.⁴³ Focusing on the animators rather than the content they produce, this method is particularly suited to reject notions of artistic, cinematic, and aesthetic excellence as historically or culturally transcendent. Any study of animation as a medium remains fundamentally incomplete without understanding the logics that inform production.

As commercialism pervades the internet, a renewed emphasis on authenticity emerges, privileging creators who can conceal the economic nature of their requests, thereby incentivizing

³⁹ Webb, Jen, et al. *Understanding Bourdieu*. SAGE, 2002.

⁴⁰ Certeau 1984, pg. 25.

⁴¹ Jørgensen, Marianne, and Louise Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. Sage, 2011.

⁴² Arribas-Ayllon, Michael, and Valerie Walkerdine. "Foucauldian Discourse Analysis." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, edited by Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton Rogers, SAGE, London, 0217, pp. 110–123.

⁴³ Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology*. Macmillian, 1977.

techniques that can frame the transactional processes through the cultivation of para-social relationships.⁴⁴ Those who have amassed a particularly large and devoted following are said to have a star ‘quality,’ in that the star has to appear as if they really are what they say they are.⁴⁵ The presentational logic of stardom supposes a distance between the star and their audience, with a “public private self” mediated through celebrity gossip channels in which fans constantly question their authentic self from afar.⁴⁶ However, as Hochschild wrote, “the more the heart is managed, the more we value the unmanaged heart.”⁴⁷ With the pervasive logic of the market across media, consumers become increasingly savvy to such presentational modes of branding, incentivizing a shift towards the production of authenticity through relational labor⁴⁸ instead.⁴⁹ Digital tools such as social media do not merely mediate, they offer methods to quantify what was once purely qualitative, namely reputation as a resource which can be measured by a certain number of followers, likes, retweets, etcetera. This has anchored a growing cultural trend towards treating one's authentic identity as a kind of self-branding which makes use of personal values, and differences, as a form of cultural capital.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Hair, Lee. “Friends, Not Atms: Parasocial Relational Work and the Construction of Intimacy by Artists on Patreon.” *Sociological Spectrum*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2021, pp. 196–212., <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2021.1875090>., pg. 196.

⁴⁵ Dyer, Richard. “A Star Is Born and the Construction of Authenticity.” *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, edited by Christine Gledhill, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 136–144. pg. 137

⁴⁶ Marshall, P. David. “The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media.” *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 35–48., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392390903519057>., pg. 44.

⁴⁷ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. University of California Press, 1983. pg. 192.

⁴⁸ This subtype of emotional labor refers specifically to the relationship cultivation to fans that remains a vital part of the layering of a creative career through online support.(Baym 2018, 18)

⁴⁹ Pruchniewska, Urszula M. “Branding the Self as an ‘Authentic Feminist’: Negotiating Feminist Values in Post-Feminist Digital Cultural Production.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2017, pp. 810–824., <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1355330>.

⁵⁰ Lim, Elisha. “Personal Identity Economics: Facebook and the Distortion of Identity Politics.” *Social Media + Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211017492>.

Animators remain in a unique position in the creative industries, actively making use of a variety of strategies as part of the production process. In this way, they can provide valuable insight into how create laborers balance security with autonomy, as they recombine strategies in order to adapt to the neoliberal era. Still, this layering becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as self-branding practices become increasingly competitive, ubiquitous, and blatantly commercial. Arendt named our species *homo faber*, as the animal that literally constructs its own world, emphasizing our collective heritage of craft and a nostalgia for meaningful labor.⁵¹ Foucault, on the other hand, criticizes the regime of the entrepreneur as rendering us all *homo economicus*, defined by self-interested economic rationalism over civic-mindedness.⁵² Animators are in the business of infusing humanity into the non-human, and through their constant endeavors to reinvent themselves and the medium, they draw from every conceivable definition in the book to navigate the contradictory nature of their profession.

These ongoing cultural transformations can be understood from the perspectives of the individual animators as they orient themselves towards a common set of professional skills and disciplines, navigating an industry always-already in flux. The animation industry has undergone various permutations throughout its history, from the round and lively characters of the classical theatrical era to the angular design aesthetic developed for television, to the ultra-realistic CGI of the present day. In focusing on the mercurial and contested aspects of the industry, this research challenges the myths around which animation strategy can dominate another, along with those fables casting the profession as making progress or in decline. Rather, the animation industry

⁵¹ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958. pg. 22.

⁵² Danaher, Geoff, et al. *Understanding Foucault*. Allen & Unwin, 2000. pg. 226.

remains a form of media most sensitive to cultural and technological shifts, foregrounding its variability and versatility, remaining vital through ongoing “recombinancy strategies.”⁵³

The recombinancy strategy highlights animation's intrinsic citationality, which freely adopts from previous forms and practices without respecting traditional boundaries between the artistic, the professional, and the personal. It remains a self-reflexive medium, one that cannot help but demonstrate its own intertextuality as it probes the boundaries between illusion and artifice.⁵⁴ Operating in zones suspended between irony and sincerity, it plays with ambiguity and illusion, in which something authentic may glimmer through the ink and paint.

With every hiccup of technological progress, the animation industry has not so much progressed with it, as it has undergone constant stages of retransformation from the ground up. At the beginning of the industry, performances were necessarily mechanical, as animators needed to develop acting techniques that worked within the confines of the medium. Sound synchronization and color allowed for greater realms of expressive potential in the theater, but television upset this momentum, as cartoons needed to run for entire seasons while remaining legible on a tiny black and white screen.⁵⁵ According to Wells, the industry had to start over, functionally returning to the origins of the industry.⁵⁶ The modern style of blocky characters pioneered by studios like UPA became the experimental precursors to the productions of Hanna-Barbera.⁵⁷ As the quality of animation on television gradually developed, digital tools and computer generated images offered new possibilities and parameters. Pixar struggled with naturalistic textures and appealing characters in the early days of computer animation, as the

⁵³ Wells 2003, pg. 15.

⁵⁴ Wells, Paul, and Johnny Hardstaff. *Re-Imagining Animation: The Changing Face of the Moving Image*. AVA Publishing, 2008. pg. 24

⁵⁵ Wells 2003, 18

⁵⁶ Wells 2003, pg. 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

uncanny baby from Tin Toy (1988) illustrates. Today, while studios like Disney have achieved photo-realistic animation techniques for theatrical releases, virtual reality and augmented reality remain limited by render times and computational power, forcing them to flatten textures and abstract individuals into designed characters reminiscent of animation from the aughts.⁵⁸

On the one hand, recombinancy has much in common with contemporary patterns of identity formation in the creative industries. Media is entering a state of hyper-fragmentation, as innumerable genres in countless forms and formats are produced for proliferating platforms and appliances.⁵⁹ This has blurred the lines between professional and amateur, as media production enters varying phases of precarity and casualization.⁶⁰ Digital platforms dramatize this contradiction, as media diffuses, so too must the professional identities of those that produce it.⁶¹ One is told to follow one's authentic desires, seeking out careers that inspire passion, but this often amounts to trading security for autonomy.⁶² The cohering of a stable identity relies on trust, a process fractured by neoliberal risk culture.⁶³ As technology becomes more immediate, instant transmission causes space and time to contract, informatization disrupts self-relations and thereby identity formation.⁶⁴ Self-expression at a time of prolificity is likened to a game, in which one strategically presents oneself according to an increasingly mobile and global culture.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Chanthanakone, Peter. "Lessons Learnt in 3d Animation Production x VR and AR." National Conference of the Popular Culture Association, April 13-16, 2022. Online. 2022

⁵⁹ Gegenhuber, Thomas, and Dave Valliere. "Entrepreneurial Remixing: Bricolage and Postmodern pg. 2014

⁶⁰ c.f. Ross, Andrew. *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*. New York University Press, 2010.

Gregg, Melissa. *Work's Intimacy*. Polity, 2011.

⁶¹ Elefante, Phoebe & Deuze, Mark. (2012). *Media work, career management, and professional identity: Living labour precarity*. Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook. 10. 9-24. 10.1386/nl.10.1.9_1. pg., 10

⁶² McRobbie, Angela. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Polity Press, 2016.

⁶³ Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Polity Press, 1991. pg., 3

⁶⁴ Rosa, Hartmut. 2013. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press. 224

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

On the other hand, such a perspective risks falling into a deterministic perspective, concluding that such an authentic identity formation remains impossible in a time of rapid globalization and technological progress, while treating everyone as rational actors equally engaged in stratagems of self-presentation.

The recombancy strategy breaks from this prophesying in a number of manners, namely that this crisis of authenticity is new, as the animation industry has always struggled against the intrinsically indexical medium that cannot help but call attention to its construction.⁶⁶ Instead of presenting identity as undergoing various phases of evolution in line with technological development, animators recombine tactics and strategies from across the industry's history with anachronistic abandon, as every technological disruption forces them back to the drawing board. Recombancy provides insight into creative careers undergoing increasing digitization and abstraction under a neoliberal regime. Animators must dig through the layers of their medium, the history of the industry, and their bodies, to construct the forms of authenticity that can ward off neoliberal precarity. As contemporary culture promotes individualistic ideologies and digital tools standardize formerly distinct labor processes, layering authenticity allows the animator to assert themselves as experts in their field, even as each technological disruption threatens these claims with automation, off-shoring, and obsolescence. The recombined-self amounts to more than a mere game of guileful manipulation; animators intuit, improvise, and subvert modes of presentation for their characters and themselves as a part of the everyday tactics that define their profession. Thus, the formation of identity in the animation industry remains an ongoing negotiation between the individual and the texts that layer their

⁶⁶ Wells, Hardstaff and Clifton 2008, 24

identity, as well as the studio, with patterns emerging around or in spite of technological upheaval during precarious times.

The recombined self suggests that the production of authenticity has long been part of the animator's rotating set of tools to apply for the next job. This research explores recombination across various contexts in the animation industry. Digital tools have enabled a recombination of professional and creative identities like never before, allowing animators to cultivate multiple professional personas online and off. Animators are expected to work across a broad variety of media, from digital to traditional, in which they tactically make use of analog processes to overcome the software's constraints. Thus, animators draw from their own experiences and expertise to layer authentic performances behind the screen, always searching for ways to put their transmutational talents to the test.

By tracing these survival strategies across the worlds of production, one can observe the self-reflexive nature of the animation industry as it adapts to new technological and cultural transformations. Animators have always had to make-do with the materials available, recombining elements as a tactic to re-position and re-present themselves. Across the media industries, animation remains the most sensitive to these shifts in the world, as it is the language of metamorphosis.⁶⁷ For every cultural and technological divergence, animation will reinvent itself, as animators find new ways to make meaning out of labor. The recombination strategy does not consign the animator to merely copying the past, rather, it centers the animator's ongoing process of re-orienting themselves according to the demand for quality and the limitations of the medium. A relatively diffuse or insular field of animators can borrow from a cornucopia of historical approaches across media, reproducing and remixing their products and

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 31.

themselves in search of fresh approaches. This recombancy strategy is what lends the industry its adaptability and versatility, remaining "the intrinsic language of metamorphosis."⁶⁸

While many commercial cartoons may appear derivative, they make up for this with their capacity to recombine material and brands, embracing cross-overs and recognizable icons. The cartoons for television after the 60's saw a remarkable increase in celebrity tie-ins, such as The Beatles (1965), and video game characters like Pac-Man (1982),⁶⁹ lifting the brand/star's image and applying it to a figurative puppet.⁷⁰ Many of the iconic animation studios of the 1970's, such as Hannah-Barbera, Ruby Spears Productions and De Patie Freleng Enterprises, outsourced the majority of their animation production to Australia, Korea, Spain, and Taiwan.⁷¹ While the producers claimed that the labor base in LA could not meet demands, in reality, their motivations were primarily pecuniary.⁷² Once companies discovered that animated content could sell toys, the amount of cartoon programming on television tripled over the course of the 1980's, but nearly half of Hollywood's animators were unemployed.⁷³ While outsourcing became a common practice for children's programming, The Simpsons delegation of in-betweens to South Korea demonstrated that mercenary production strategies were no obstacle to building an authentic brand, especially if one lampoons these labor concerns as a part of the comedy.⁷⁴ As the years continued and other countries like Japan became serious competition for animated material,

⁶⁸ Wells 2003, pg. 31.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 26

⁷⁰ Wells 2003, pg. 25.

⁷¹ Culhane, John. "Television; an Animated '88 Awaits on the Drawing Board." *New York Times*, 27 Dec. 1987. pg. 148.

⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁷³ *bid.*,

⁷⁴ Yale 2010, pg. 152

producers found leveraging licensed properties a cost-effective strategy, incentivizing animators to recombine different styles and techniques from the craft to the cutting edge.⁷⁵

1.1 Site

This research explores the discourse of the animation industry in Atlanta, to address a dearth of attention paid to the production of this medium within these intermediary cities, relative to larger coastal cities. The city of Atlanta functions as an intermediary media capital within the global flow of cultural production and creative laborers, which enriches a large portion of its post-industrial economy, as it must accumulate and maintain vast amounts of fiscal resources.⁷⁶ Attracting runaway production from major coastal cities such as Los Angeles and New York City, Atlanta will rebrand itself as necessary in order to stay ahead of other states and countries engaged in the same strategy.⁷⁷ As a machine of aggregating creative capital, the city's culture is heavily influenced by entrepreneurial ideology imported from California's media and tech industry, in which digital exceptionalism rides in on the Web 2.0.⁷⁸ Thus, Atlanta's status as an in-between production capital functions as the ideal site for researching the tactics of creative laborers caught amidst global cultural and commercial hierarchies.

The animation industry in Atlanta began with the arrival of Turner, with small studios creating materials for Cartoon Network, with the afterhours programming of Adult Swim deriving much of its success from its location in a black mecca.⁷⁹ The theme song for Aqua Teen

⁷⁵ Deneroff, Harvey. "Tooning In." *Hollywood Reporter: Animation Special Issue*, Jan. 2001.

⁷⁶ Curtin, Michael. "Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital." *Media Industries History, Theory, and Method*, edited by Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren, Wiley, Hoboken, 2011, pp. 1979–2009.

⁷⁷ LaRoche, Lealan. "Introduction." *Fostering the Creative Class: Creating opportunities for social engagement*, 2008. georgiaplanning.org

⁷⁸ The Web 2.0 delineates the internet of 1997-2001 from the "2.0" era, characterized by a renewed emphasis on "transparency, participation, and openness." (Marwick 2013, 6)

⁷⁹ Ryan, Kyle. "Aqua Teen Hunger Force Sued over Theme Song." *The A.V. Club*, The A.V. Club, 11 Oct. 2006, <https://www.avclub.com/aqua-teen-hunger-force-sued-over-theme-song-1798210143>.

Hunger Force, for example, was written by one of the progenitors of gangster rap, Schooly D.⁸⁰ The show also featured a black voice actor playing one of the stars, Carey Means as Frylock. In 2007, Williams Street's SVP Jason DeMarco established Williams Street's Records, teaming up with Cartoon Network to produce independent hip-hop artists and compilation albums. Killer Mike, "Atlanta's Grammy-winning elder statesman of rap"⁸¹ came into contact with Adult Swim when he did voice work for Frisky Dingo followed by contributing a single to the Aqua Teen Hunger Force movie soundtrack. DeMarco partnered Killer Mike with El-P, creating the hip hop duo Run the Jewels; they release albums to this day. Flying Lotus tells the story of seeing an ad on Adult Swim calling for song submissions. He recorded a few, sent some in, and they used his music for a promotional bump for *The Boondocks*.⁸² Adult Swim exposed these relatively unknown artists to an audience hungry for unusual and edgy content, rapidly expanding their fame overnight. By 2014, for example, Flying Lotus would be one of the most well-known electronic musicians in the world.⁸³

Atlanta's position within the global flow of media requires it to differentiate from its competition in the east and north, and its assertion of a very southern sort of grunge has proven a very effective strategy. As Karen Cox observes, studying the South in the US is reminiscent of a sideshow at a county fair, the spectacle at once repels and delights.⁸⁴ Reed argues that local southern values still play a role in the construction of national media, typically in the form of

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

⁸¹ Stutz, Colin. "Williams Street Records, Killer Mike Defy Music Business Model by Teaming with Adult Swim (Q&A)." *The Hollywood Reporter*, The Hollywood Reporter, 25 July 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/williams-street-records-killer-mike-354542>.

⁸² Zadeh, Joe. "The Evolution of Flying Lotus." *VICE*, 26 Sept. 2014, Vice.com

⁸³ Barnes, Tom. "How Cartoon Network Became the MTV of the 21st Century." *Mic, Mic*, 20 Aug. 2014, <https://www.mic.com/articles/96760/how-cartoon-network-became-the-mtv-of-the-21st-century>.

⁸⁴ Cox, Karen L. *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*. University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

locally produced mass culture, but he also contended that the south did not use this mass media to maintain their own regional and cultural values.⁸⁵ The image of the south as represented in mass media has become caught in the trap of second-order observation, in which the perceptions of a culture shift in accordance with another, rather than expressing anything independently. The idea that the south does not produce mass culture may not be factual today, but it speaks to a sort of cultural truth that assumes the pristine globalist aesthetic belongs to the north.⁸⁶ This, in contrast, cements the south as the anti-north, combatting a polished globalist regime with a very intentional southern grunge.⁸⁷ Adult-Swim made use of this as part of its establishment in the city, animation has been priced at bargain-basement rates, two 15-minute Adult Swim episodes cost \$150,000.⁸⁸ While their relative freedom from corporate censors gave them unprecedented creative autonomy, it also took place in a lightly renovated warehouse described as “early post-apocalyptic: ratty couches, exposed ceilings, dim lighting, a beat-up foosball table.”⁸⁹ This frat-house like culture would only perpetuate the animation industry in Atlanta as symbolically southern and male.

Animation studios in Atlanta have allowed for a number of careers in animation, strategies managed within a municipal ambivalence reflective of a local/global dialectic. This original philosophy predicated on creatives bumping into each other in a studio space gradually

⁸⁵ Reed, John S. *The Enduring South Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society*. Univ. of North Carolina, 1972. pg. 86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁷ “Outsiders also tend to associate Atlanta with reality TV, trap music, and strip clubs.” Carmichael, Rodney. “ATLieNation A Dystopian Meditation on Atlanta’s Disappearing Afrofuture.” *Creative Loafing*, 5 Oct. 2016.

⁸⁸ An episode of *The Powerpuff Girls* had a budget of \$500,000, while primetime animated shows like *The Simpsons* went for twice that amount. (Kempner, Matt. “Funny on a Budget Turner’s Cartoon Network Operates Mini-Studio in Midtown.” *The Atlanta Journal*, 1 Sept. 2001., *The Atlanta Journal*)

⁸⁹ Cohen, Alan. “Free Swim.” *Fast Company*, Fast Company, 1 Jan. 2005, https://www.fastcompany.com/52263/free-swim?itm_source=parsely-api.

disappeared. Adult Swim began programming live action content, which was cheaper to produce, and proven a viable option by the Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! (2007-2010) By January 2011, animators in Atlanta worked on a third of Adult Swim content, by June 2015 this would be down to a quarter. Today, nearly all their animated content for Adult Swim has been outsourced to studios in Burbank and New York City. ASIFA-Atlanta has since rebranded to ASIFA-South, scrubbing itself clean from the weed-related branding, for better or worse. Nevertheless, the impact of the past is still felt today, largely in how cheap the cost of production has remained in Atlanta.

Compared to cities such as LA and Vancouver, Atlanta remains a relatively affordable place to live, allowing for a somewhat less competitive environment. LA and New York eclipse Atlanta, in that they maintain a distantly felt relationship, as the dim outline of one city can be seen in another. Atlanta's population may or may not aspire to this sort of prestige, but their relationship to LA and New York belongs to a "phantom epistemology" as Peterson calls it, a subject simultaneously elusive yet obvious.⁹⁰ Disney animators might characterize those in Atlanta as hack artists, but anonymous craftsmen care little for notable properties or studios, given that their identity is not in the work nor do they own what they produce. Rather, meaning is found in the process of creation. The work available in Atlanta may not be the sort of labor that allows for conspicuous authorship, it is not a city that cares for the kind of authenticity stemming from the golden age of filmmaking, but instead one whose animation scene began with ultra-cheap recombination of archival footage for cable television. Thus, Adult Swim and the studios that support it have managed to carve a particular brand of authenticity, which remains in

⁹⁰ Peterson, Kristin. "Phantom Epistemologies." *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*, edited by James D. Fabian and George E. Marcus, Cornell University Press, New York, NY, 2009, pg. 37.

dialectic tension with the financial imperatives behind managing media according to global appeal.

1.2 Method

This inquest of animator professional values draws primarily from a collection of in-depth interviews undertaken between January 2018 to April 2019. These participants needed to meet two requirements; first, they were employed in the production of animated content, or had received training as an animator; second, they had lived in Atlanta for at least a year. Keeping the research constrained to Atlanta represents an effort to control the vast number of variables at work in everyday interactions; at least they have a geography in common. Participants range in age from twenty to fifty plus, with the average being in the late twenties and early thirties. Everyone had an undergraduate education or vocational training, with some even having MA's or MFA's specifically in animation. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an absolutely legendary four and a half hours, although they averaged around ninety minutes. These interviews followed a structure according to twenty-five pre-written questions, although participants often wandered into topics to be asked about later, resulting in omitting questions and reordering on the fly. Conducting interviews face to face proved difficult for the many who work late hours. In the end, the majority took place over Google Meet.

Of these thirty, twelve had managed to stay at the same studio for over two years. The others hopped from short-term contract to short-term contract, either working from home or moving from workplace to workplace. Neither of these categories are fixed; they may already have changed as of writing this. Additionally, while all twelve studio-based participants worked on animated content, not all of them are considered "animators" by professional nomenclature. Rather, the twelve consist of mostly animators, but also background designers, composers for

animated content, riggers, and illustrators. A few have animation degrees and/or industry experience but pivoted to working full time in animation adjacent careers such as motion design, game design, or visual effects.

The views expressed by participants in this study represent uncharted territory, as does this study. This research scrutinizes the quotidian, incorporating data from thirty animators living in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area, or around the city's perimeter. Some worked on television shows, usually comedy in the raunchy styling of Adult Swim. Others found fulfilling careers in advertising houses, exercising their graphic design skills as much as their ability to make something move, or animating characters for video games. A few found themselves in-between positions, encouraging them to strategically network and bolster their presence on social media. Through friends or friends of friends, this project grew as one interview led to another, until a small network began to form. Out of 30 animators, 56.66% presented as women at the time of the interview, 43.33% presented as men. 46.66% were in their twenties, 36.66% were in their thirties, and 16.33% were forty plus. Half of the participants were white, 23.33% African American, 20% Asian, and 6.66% Hispanic. All of these perspectives underwent a series of transformations, from in-person interviews, to audio-recordings, and finally transcriptions. From these transcriptions, this research divided these conversations and sorted them according to broad categories. All of this data was aggregated and composed through one of the most complicated and faulty machines known to mankind, the human brain.

Avoiding bias, or minimizing the impact of researcher subjectivity, remains an issue of significant importance in the field of the social sciences, acknowledging that an objective viewpoint represents more of an ideal than a reality.⁹¹ This is a concern across the sciences, but

⁹¹ Galman, Sally Campbell. *Shane, the Lone Ethnographer*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, pg. 70.

few methodologies take the time to consider that whatever constitutes data will be very different according to a psychologist, sociologist, or anthropologist. The term science itself connotes something 'real,' but this supposes that one can take what is real as self-evident, a conviction increasingly difficult to defend. Matt Hills argues for reconceptualization of the empirical as a realness that not only encompasses everyday discourse, but also in the lack of discourse, or discursive gaps.⁹² These discursive gaps come about due to the differing identities of the researcher and the participant. Hills reasons that one must "create a partial inventory of the infinity of traces to be deposited within the self by cultural and historical processes."⁹³ This is a practice of self-estrangement, in which the researcher scrutinizes their identity and position within the text. This mode of constant questioning, or reflexivity, facilitates the perspective that critical analyses of animation production culture are themselves a form of discourse.

The researcher must take the theoretical methods and critical language used to explore participant experience, and turn it on themselves.⁹⁴ While certain autoethnographic texts have been criticized for their narcissistic insertion of the author's identity, Hills reverses this, arguing that the ego begins shaping discourse the minute one ceases this self-interrogation.⁹⁵ However, this introduction is already quite long, so a chapter attending to these discursive gaps will be included as a methodological appendix.

The application of critical media industry studies into the animation industry carves a niche for human experience.⁹⁶ If one were to liken different levels of analyses to map-making,

⁹² Hills, Matt. *Fan Cultures*. Routledge, 2002, pg. 42.

⁹³ Hills 2002, pg. 43.

⁹⁴ Couldry, Nick. *Inside Culture Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies*. Sage, 2000, pg. 126.

⁹⁵ Hills 2002, pg. 44.

⁹⁶ Havens, Timothy, et al. "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach." *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2009, pp. 234–253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01037.x>, pg. 239.

micro-level analysis would resemble describing a location on foot while macro-level would approximate mapping a city from a jet plane. To continue this analogy, mid-level would provide a “helicopter” view, in which one can appreciate the details obscured by the jet’s height and speed, but still with enough height to appreciate the overall layout. For a sociologist, these on-foot and jet-plane perspectives emerge from conducting individual interviews versus evaluating thousands of individual behaviors condensed into a data set. A mid-level study focuses on social forces as they are experienced and communicated by participants; it incorporates professional perspective to describe industry discourse and practices. This is made urgent by the reality of constant change, in which the animation industry is shaped by the unrelenting eruption of technological innovation and cultural shifts. From the dimly-understood yet powerful digital tools to the overwhelming force of the market, the ethical frameworks and shared values of the profession are always under some form of attack. Although this particularly qualitative approach is not suited for making broad claims that neatly apply to an industry of millions, it does provide a nuanced view of the particular situations and opportunities that these professionals are facing.

This is already a well-worn path in the vein of media industries; some early examples include Leo Calvin Rosten’s *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers*⁹⁷ and Hortense Powdermaker’s *Hollywood the Dream Factory*,⁹⁸ which study the ways in which creative laborers in Hollywood become alienated from their work. Hesmondalgh and Baker undertake a study of three different areas of the cultural industries, television, music recording, and magazines, to form a larger theory of ethics and labor.⁹⁹ Areas adjacent to animation as a field,

⁹⁷ Rosten, Leo. *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers*. Arno Press, 1970.

⁹⁸ Powdermaker, Hortense. *Hollywood the Dream Factory*. by Hortense Powdermaker. Little Brown and Co., 1950.

⁹⁹ Hesmondalgh, David, and Sarah Baker. *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. Routledge, 2011., pg. 14.

such as game development,¹⁰⁰ or web design,¹⁰¹ have undergone mid-level analyses in which interviews from laborers inform arguments about the industry's power-laden structure. However, critical media industry studies have never been applied to animation, especially not specific to Atlanta.

While scholarship on the recombinancy strategy has largely focused on the ways in the animated medium recombines its own elements, this research adds to the conversation surrounding the fabrication of authenticity by following the ways in which animators interweave their own layers of identity into the production process, as means of understanding such practices in an era of informatization and proficity. In some ways, it appears as if the rough-and-tumble production tactics of the creative industry has more or less become the strategy for survival in the mainstream. De Certeau stresses the difference between strategies and tactics lies in the former's capacity to "produce, tabulate, and impose," where the latter may only "use, manipulate, and divert."¹⁰² Manovich argues that this Web 2.0 mentality can strategically account for the tactician's improvisations, as digital tools allow for ubiquitous "hackability and remixability."¹⁰³ Companies have discovered that they can derive a profit by constructing tools that enable the tactical activities of everyday life, injecting commercial values into humanity's seemingly innate drive to socialize, while extracting profit as an intermediary service. This does not mean that tactics and strategies have collapsed, far from it, they reconfigure according to the transformative influences of informatization and proficity.

¹⁰⁰ O'Donnell, Casey. *Developer's Dilemma: The Secret World of Videogame Creators*. The MIT Press, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy, Helen. *Net Work Ethics and Values in Web Design*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹⁰² de Certeau 1984, pg. 30

¹⁰³ Manovich, Lev. "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?" *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 319–331., <https://doi.org/10.1086/596645>. pg. 325

Informatization has provided myriad tools for transferring, archiving, sampling, and editing existing media; prolificity suggests a general shift away from originality as a signifier for authenticity. Fans who create fan-fiction, fan-edited anime music videos, fan-modded video games, blogs and so on, are often accused of producing pastiche, yet such media has proliferated.¹⁰⁴ This has proven to be a major hurdle for platforms out for a profit, as they manage a triangular relationship between themselves, their content-producers, and advertisers,¹⁰⁵ intensifying the demand for major social media companies to curate their content to promote brand-safe and copyright-respecting material.¹⁰⁶ This is but one example of how institutional strategies struggle with the anarchic and subversive capacities of the medium, to illustrate that the imposition of strategies and the improvisation of tactics remain contested and unpredictable.

1.3 Chapters

Each of the following chapters explores a specific strategy for managing the layering of distinct authenticities in animation, to consider the ways informatization and prolificity as a process have influenced the ways in which creative laborers tactically adapt to an ever-changing industry. “Digital Labor” explores Bjarke Liboriussen’s argument that digital natives often struggle to demonstrate creativity in the workplace; this research continues this vein of inquiry by delineating the ways traditional and haptic technology can layer creative authenticity by centering the animator’s body in the production process.¹⁰⁷ Focusing specifically on the use of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁵ YouTube, for example, maintains this dynamic. (Farchy, Joëlle. “Economics of Sharing Platforms: What’s Wrong with Cultural Industries?” *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm, 2009, pp. 360–372. pg. 362.)

¹⁰⁶ Jarrett, Kylie. “Beyond Broadcast Yourself™: The Future of Youtube.” *Media International Australia*, vol. 126, no. 1, 2008, pp. 132–144., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x0812600114>., pg. 137.

¹⁰⁷ Expressions of identity that do not necessarily represent any personal commitment to what the badge signifies. Liboriussen, Bjarke. “(Digital) Tools as Professional and Generational Identity Badges in the Chinese Creative Industries.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2015, pp. 423–436., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856515579850>. pg, 432

software as it impacts the animator's capacity to legitimize themselves as authentic creatives and experts, the first chapter makes inquest into the role of traditional tools as a means to bridge the gap between layering professional and creative authenticity. The ways animators view the digital/traditional divide in their industry from a post-authentic perspective, noting the ways in which traditional media can recombine with the digital in surprising ways. There persists the belief that traditional skills represent authentic creativity, while mastering software accrues professional prestige, but this implicit bifurcation fails to appreciate the ways that these processes articulate how a professional may derive meaning from their work, as identity becomes layered through the haptic feedback of production. Thus, tradition need not represent greater authenticity, so much as a locus through which other practices become meaningful as a means of layering authenticity as a professional creative. The capacity to create innovative material remains bounded within a desire for a fulfilling career that demonstrates a consistent self through a continuum of practice. Recombining traditional and digital skills allow animators to leverage their expertise while navigating a constantly changing profession, tactically employing both practices to overcome the precarious and abstract aspects of their career.

The next chapter, "Bring Your Toys to Work," scrutinizes the practice of decorating one's desk, as a tactic to layer creative authenticity, but the meaning of this ritual is changing now that studios shift to open spaces while others work from home. Desk-decoration was once enacted to dramatize the dichotomy between authentic creatives versus the commercially-oriented "suits." This divide has been long-felt in the industry, with animators resisting managerial demands with pranks and hijinks, in which authentic creativity negotiates the commercial demands of the industry. Today, animators still wear hoodies and bring toys to their desks to layer an authentic creative self in opposition to more professional presentations,

sometimes decorating their bland cubicles in elaborate and flashy ways. While researchers such as Anne McCarthy and John Caldwell have read this as a tactic to resist work-place alienation, corporate strategy has integrated the desk decoration process as a means to brand their offices as ‘fun’ places to work, encouraging animators to adopt more cynical and resistant strategies of self-expression.¹⁰⁸ Animators are forced to reconsider their presentation in the workplace, recombining practices of office decoration within the studio’s aesthetic regime. Resulting in ironic or sarcastic displays, along with abstaining from decoration altogether, this process remains anchored within the everyday presentation of the self in the creative industry.

“Acting as an Animator,” follows the layering of embodied authenticity strategies as a bid to legitimate the role of the authentic interlocutor for the character, blending techniques from classical Hollywood cinema with animated performance. The discipline of embodying a character stems from a combination of acting theory and “Nature Philosophy”¹⁰⁹ from the early twentieth century, eventually mutating into the dominant strategy for classic Hollywood cinema and Disney films.¹¹⁰ This performance strategy ties the animator’s identity to the character while still producing a coherent final product, functioning within a spectrum of authenticity without outright asserting the presence of the animator, while legitimizing the animator’s role as the performer. The appeals to nature and science conceal the hegemonic structures this method has cemented in creative labor, disproportionately affecting minorities who must conform to a particular vision of authenticity constructed by white cis-males. Layering authenticity through

¹⁰⁸ McCarthy, Anna. “Geekospheres: Visual Culture and Material Culture at Work.” *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2004, pp. 213–221., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412904044800>.
Caldwell, John Thornton. *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Duke University Press, 2008

¹⁰⁹ Whyman, Rose. *The Stanislavsky System of Acting: Legacy and Influence in Modern Performance*. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2011., 3

¹¹⁰ Jenkins 2014, pg. 208

performing a character is anchored by the hegemonic standards at the studio, presenting challenges to animators of minority identities already struggling to establish themselves at the workplace.

“Animators Online” continues this theme by following the ways that animators layer authenticity online, legitimizing persona designed to amass an audience, once again encouraging the animator to imaginatively recombine and sell elements of themselves and the production process. Animators layer authenticity online to establish an audience as a means to hedge against precarity. Scholars such as Nancy Baym and Alice Marwick explore the ongoing and increasingly ubiquitous labor of identity management online, arguing that such a culture has placed authenticity at a premium, but animators face several challenges specific to their intensive and indexical medium of choice.¹¹¹ As a self-reflexive medium that calls attention to its own fabrication, animators practice tactical disengagement to keep a part of themselves private, while playfully incorporating elements of themselves into their online persona. While social media may offer new opportunities for some animators, it is undercut by the demand for the presentation of a single authentic self, something which goes against the animator’s desire to embody multiple personas. The animator is a part of “a culture that seeks multiple personality,”¹¹² they are “dissociative” in the sense that they reject the association with a single character, embracing multiple lives as a part of their profession.

Cradled in the nexus of ongoing cultural and technological transformations, animators embrace the layering of authenticity as a composite process of recombination. Frederic Jameson claims the postmodern condition hinders the potential of authentic art, arguing that contemporary

¹¹¹ Marwick 2013, Baym 2018

¹¹² Azuma, Hiroki, and Jonathan E. Abel. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009. pg. 111.

creatives can only imitate dead styles rather than produce something aesthetically novel.¹¹³ This condition of creative limitation mirrors the animation industry in the 1920's, as the recycled vaudevillian gags grew stale and the prominence of the comic-strip protagonists waned, so animators recombined themselves into their work to create increasingly authentic characters that could survive beyond the stereotypes fomented on the stage.¹¹⁴ Rather than finding themselves imprisoned in pastiche, the wildly mercurial medium of animation allows for the recombination of myriad public and personal elements, producing infinite variations on and behind the screen. The recombined self must balance the many methods for layering creative and professional authenticity with the constraints and affordances of their tools, along with the demands of the studio, to yield cultural capital vital for an animator's survival in an industry defined at once by its limitless expressive potential and economic precarity, as the following chapters illustrate.

¹¹³ Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. United Kingdom, Duke University Press, 2013., pg. 17–18

¹¹⁴ Crafton, Donald. *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898-1928*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

2 DIGITAL LABOR:

LAYERING CREATIVE AUTHENTICITY IN ANIMATION

Digital tools present a challenge to animators seeking to demonstrate authentic expertise; software standardizes, automates, and obscures much of the labor visible in more artisanal production methods; today many animators recombine traditional and digital expertise to layer authenticity for self-promotion and derive meaning from their practice. Developing a portfolio in sculpting, painting, and drawing remains a viable strategy; layering authenticity in this way draws on the wistful desire for the hand-made and hand-crafted, inscribing a nostalgic temporality onto marketable objects which capitalize on tensions between modernity and generational concepts of authentic creativity and tradition.¹¹⁵ Often the ‘real’ thing has been digitally modified to be more accessible, immediate, and genuine than what would be possible in actuality,¹¹⁶ but this does not necessarily mean that such practitioners blindly cleave to a more authentic imagined past. Rather, they tactically blend elements from their traditional training to overcome limitations inherent in a highly collaborative studio environment. This recombination does more than merely legitimate their status as authentic artists, it serves as a node to which they may link their current practice to the past, allowing them to derive meaning from abstract digital processes and recombination. This chapter explores the way in which animators use digital and traditional tools as a means of authenticating their role as creative laborer, to argue that haptic tools and modes of engagement function as tactics to bridge the professional with the creative, while enriching the production process.

¹¹⁵ Outka, Elizabeth. *Consuming Traditions Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic*. Oxford University Press, 2008. pg. 19

¹¹⁶ “After all, the ‘real’ thing is not as well-preserved, readily accessible and pleasing as the copy...” (Nünning, Vera. “The Invention of Cultural Traditions: The Construction and Deconstruction of Englishness and Authenticity in Julian Barnes’ *England England*.” *Anglia - Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1515/angl.2001.58.>, pg. 69)

Bjarke Liboriussen introduces the concept of the “identity badge,” a method of expressing identity without necessarily committing to what the badge signifies, behaviors which layers authenticity as a form of cultural capital in a time of prolificity.¹¹⁷ This cultural capital functions as a vital resource for hedging against precarity, creative laborers are incentivized to master a broad array of digital tools as means of developing and expressing their professional authenticity, legitimizing their role as a skilled user.¹¹⁸ In part, this is responsible for the regime of interactive intensity many creative laborers endure: in which one is always expected to be “plugged in” for professional purposes, be it training, retraining or networking.¹¹⁹ Generational identity badges, on the other hand, serve to delineate birth cohorts, often taking the form of one group assigning traits to another based on changing technology, explaining why some creative laborers cling to traditional skills as indicators of authentic creativity and mastery.¹²⁰ The tactics enacted to layer professional authenticity does not always signify creativity, and the layering of creative authenticity typically conforms to generational values. The movement across the gap of tradition and innovation becomes vital for those seeking vantage points on either side.¹²¹ Animators must selectively cultivate both forms of cultural capital, to navigate the contradictions inherent in the industry.

Animators are creative laborers, sharing many aspects of their profession with practitioners across the media industry, but they have a distinguished capacity to adapt to a mercurial career. However, the next generation of animators must compete with reskilled

¹¹⁷ Liboriussen 2015, 432

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 433

¹¹⁹ This is a pun drawn from Martin et al.’s research on children bidding for parental attention, interactive intensity referring to the vigor in which the youth seeks interaction, with low interactive intensity relating to unobtrusive and solitary behavior. (Martin, Maccoby & Jackson, 1981.) Here, I argue that software also compels the user with interactive intensity, due to its omnipresence and ongoing transformations.

¹²⁰ Liboriussen 2015, 433

¹²¹ Outka 2008, pg. 12

veterans, as the new generation of CGI artists in the 2000's worried about traditional animators learning 3D.¹²² During the seventies, unions such as IATSE successfully negotiated anti-runaway clauses which locked producers into using local studios, but they forfeited this clause for a 26.2% pay increase in 1981, opening the floodgates for international competition.¹²³ The disruption of animation as a practice is an especially painful process for those who have invested their lives into the discipline. Veteran animators found themselves presenting their portfolio alongside college kids, their role in the production becoming increasingly abstract as software developers continue to promise tools that animate more efficiently, for cheaper. The amount of energy and time that animators must invest in their profession makes it likely that such practices inform a major aspect of their identity; its loss can shatter any sense of authentic humanity to which one cleaves.¹²⁴ The abstraction and outsourcing of animation labor was deeply felt, as digital tools shocked the industry's collective nervous system; five Guild animators took their lives between 1998-2003.¹²⁵ Their loss speaks to the very real stakes behind these upheavals at the heart of modernity, as layers of professional identity are peeled away to reveal nothing at all in the center.¹²⁶ By 2003, one-third of the Hollywood Animation Guild members had lost their jobs to studios internationally and domestically.¹²⁷

The role of the animator was also becoming harder to explain in relation to the increasingly complex network of human and non-human actors. Spielberg describes using

¹²² Sito, Tom. *Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the Animation Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson*. University Press of Kentucky, 2006. Pg. 335

¹²³ Yale 2010, 150

¹²⁴ Moeller and D'ambrosio 2021, pg. 232.

¹²⁵ I don't mean to argue that they did this solely because they were left behind, but Sito strongly implies that their loss of professional identity was a factor. (2006, 30)

¹²⁶ Giddens 1991, pg. 16.

¹²⁷ Harwell, Drew. "America Has Never Had so Much TV, and Even Hollywood Is Overwhelmed." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 7 Nov. 2016, washingtonpost.com

motion-capture for CGI-animated films as “an art form.... I can underwrite or overwrite a performance and through the animators put [something into a performance] that even the actors didn’t bring to the bay.”¹²⁸ Defining his role as acting through the animators to enhance the live-action performance, Spielberg characterizes his director’s vision as the creative process which binds all of this technical stuff into a cinematic masterpiece. This is in keeping with the industry’s long tradition of largely anonymous collaborative production, but the contributions that animators and motion-performers provide are becoming hazier, rendering their capacity to layer creative authenticity all the more tenuous. Indeed, CGI gives greater power to the director, both in terms of control over the final product, but also through influencing public perception of digital tools. The animation industry presaged the disruption that digital tools would bring about across the cultural industries, and animators in Atlanta were already negotiating with Hollywood while competing with the rest of the world.

Animators adapt to the upheavals of their industry through recombancy, adopting techniques and styles no matter how obscure or antiquated. This is in part because the material that may have inspired the animator as a child may not resemble what will be in demand once they become a professional. Thus, the recombined self tactically adopts animation techniques as a means of bridging what one does professionally with what drew them to this career in the first place. Nadine, for instance, is a millennial animator who cut her teeth on the Disney Renaissance of 1989-1999, which informs how she perceives and layers creative authenticity, or that which defines her from the next cohort of animators in the United States.

COLIN What inspired you to pursue animation?

¹²⁸ Boucher, Geoff. “Tintin’: Steven Spielberg says ‘the medium isn’t the message’” *The Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 02, 2011, latimes.com

NADINE Pick a Disney movie. I did grow up in America! Aladdin, Little Mermaid, Lion King. That's the age that we are at... Ten years, fifteen years from now... all the kids are going to be vis-dev artists because they will have seen Disney but grown-up with all the CG versions. Those guys are going to be hella talented, if that's what they're going for. They're still animators, animating the lions. It's cool.

Nadine defines herself against a generational other, even as she acknowledges that all of it falls under the mantle of animation. The future generation promises not only talent, but competition, encouraging the youthful to leverage their perceived affinity for digital technology.¹²⁹ This is not to say that 2D animation has disappeared, so much as fallen from the graces of the globalized Hollywood system, but both 2D and 3D animation production requires mastering a variety of software. Informatization renders the role of the animator more nebulous, and generational identities align with the media of their youth, the capacity to layer authenticity as a creative and a professional becomes increasingly difficult to balance. Animators have long contended with runaway production, but the switch to digital animation opened up international competition, while abstracting the traditional process of drawing and sculpting to a limited computer interface. This chapter focuses on animators operating in a collaborative studio environment, as they cannot easily assert their contributions as an author would their text, rendering the layering of creative and professional authenticity amongst a network of semi-local

¹²⁹ Liboriussen 2015, pg. 426.

co-workers and clients all the more vital, to argue that creative laborers incorporate haptic modes of production and creation as a tactic to bridge the creative with the professional.

In order to derive meaning and professional satisfaction from digital labor, animators draw on a continuum of experience in their tradition of practice, relying on haptic modes of sensing and shaping their medium to inform how they layer creative authenticity, which can differ significantly from the professional values of the time. Many make use of scanners to interface their drawings with the digital, and some studios offer 3D scanners for translating sculptures into data. Others rely on devices like a stylus to draw directly on the screen, although the haptic qualities of these tools do not necessarily enable a haptic mode of creative receptivity. Digital tools can render the presence of the creator precarious through automation and abstraction, inciting many in the creative industry to tactically introduce haptic modes as a means of bridging their expertise across multiple interfaces. Gloriously ultra-realistic CGI reboots, in the manner of *The Jungle Book* (2016) and *The Lion King*. (2019), introduce a panoply of rich textures, but they all serve the purpose of referencing the earlier animated films, a paratextual forced perspective like the Renaissance paintings aligning reality to the optical cone.¹³⁰ Corporations reach towards nostalgia to reclaim the profits of yesterday's intellectual property, but the audience remembers not just a corporate past but a labor past, in which authenticity lies in the specificities of the craft. Manovich, quoting Reigl, argues that the cultural development of mankind has oscillated between haptic and optic modes of understanding the world.¹³¹ This suggests that the industry's shift towards photo-realistic visual effects represents a move towards

¹³⁰ Elsaesser, Thomas. "Media Archaeology as Symptom." *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 2016, pp. 351–388., <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048529964.013>. pg. 205

¹³¹ Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press, 2001. pg. 219.

the optical as the dominant strategy in the creative industry, with haptic modes representing tactics to reintroduce tactility and imperfection to bridge creative and professional divides.

As the profession keeps its fingers on the pulse of technological metamorphosis, the haptic aspects of the animation practices remain vital for animators to derive meaning from their work, particularly for those making use of digital tools in a studio environment. Much of traditional and stop-motion animation offer haptic feedback as physical materials, presenting characters abstract enough to draw the viewer into an imaginative state in which they become sensuously enmeshed with the character's experience,¹³² what Byung-Chul might describe as a "haptic compulsion."¹³³ Differentiating between passive skin sensation and the probing fingertip allows one to grasp the distinct experience of "active touch," or the proactive aspect of tactile exploration.¹³⁴ Active touch at once calls to mind the act of sketching, in which the artist begins drawing without a clear trajectory in mind. The animator and their subject likewise share a dialogical space, in which the lived-body becomes sensible, as opposed to sensing.¹³⁵ Haptic visuality enables embodied perception, in which the viewer can respond to another body as if they were their own, even if that body is mediated across a screen.¹³⁶ Engaging somatic experiences, a haptic image urges the beholder to close the distance between themselves and the subject.¹³⁷ While digital tools have radically transformed the industry, such that ultra-realistic CGI animation has become dominant in mainstream theaters, animators of previous generations can trace the evolution of their profession and derive meaningful continuity through their

¹³² Jenkins 2014, pg. 22.

¹³³ Han 2019, 10%

¹³⁴ Sherrington, Charles S. *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*. Scribner's Son, 1947.

¹³⁵ Sobchack, Vivian Carol. *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1992, pg. 77

¹³⁶ Marks, L. U. "Video Haptics and Erotics." *Screen*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1998, pp. 331–348., <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/39.4.331>., pg. 333

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 341

engagement with the craft. This delineation informs their layering of creative authenticity, forged by that experiential linking, which can become dislocated from the demands of the industry.

While the proliferation of information technology shifts the industry towards optical modes of production and consumption, creative laborers can turn to the haptic as a form of palliative care for the ambivalence intrinsic to a precarious career bound to a regime of interactive intensity which one is always expected to be “plugged in” for training, retraining and networking.¹³⁸ This interactive intensity hastens the fluctuation of software in demand in the industry, creating rifts between what studios consider the qualities that define an authentic professional, versus the personal values that signify authentic creativity to the individual. Thus, the optic abstracts and dislocates the personal from the professional. Haptic tools, on the other hand, bridges between analogue and digital experiences, connecting the abstract to the tangible. As the number of software increases, animators face pressure to adopt the newest tools, in order to remain competitive with others, leading to a sense of dread towards a future in which this regime becomes overwhelming. Mastering a number of different software becomes a means to guard against precarity, but this can often conflict with the need to deepen existing traditional skills or indulge in creative exploration. Returning to Nadine, who has managed to balance a mastery of software and traditional skills, she finds the notion of continuing to layer professional authenticity in the future utterly overwhelming:

COLIN Where do you see yourself in 20 years?

¹³⁸ This is a pun drawn Martin et al.’s research on children bidding for parental attention, interactive intensity referring to the vigor in which the youth seeks interaction, with low interactive intensity relating to unobtrusive and solitary behavior. (Martin, John A., et al. “Mothers’ Responsiveness to Interactive Bidding and Nonbidding in Boys and Girls.” *Child Development*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1981, p. 1064., <https://doi.org/10.2307/1129112>.)

Here, I argue that software also compels the user with interactive intensity, due to its omnipresence and ongoing transformations.

NADINE I read this question on your website and I could not think of an answer. I don't know, unfortunately. I have no freaking clue.... I have no idea what it looks like to be fifty in our age, in our field. There are only a handful of employees that are fifty.... Less than that in my building. If there are only three of them, and one-hundred twenty-somethings, how am I possibly going to be one of those three? It's intimidating.

COLIN Why do you think it's so difficult?

NADINE I really don't know. I think people fall off practicing and keeping up with the technology. So, I think people naturally end up dropping out, because the technology for animating has changed dramatically in the last... it changes dramatically every five years. It's like five years ago, we were using Adobe Animate. Now we're on Harmony. Who knows what's in development right now? There's Spine that's developing. There's TV paint. More and more studios are picking it up. There's also Clip Studio, that company has developed their own new animation software that uses a lot of the same stuff that Harmony does, only they're doing it more efficiently for cheaper. So, it's going to be like, everybody's going to switch to that. I think the change in technology, there's a lot to keep up with in the field. I think students coming out of academia have a lot more advantage because they get that experience and exposure so they can... they're

ready to go, you know? Versus someone who, as you get older, if you're tired after work every day for fifteen years, do you really feel like spending, you know, another twenty hours at home learning a whole new thing? That's my guess, I really have no idea.

Animators face distinct pressures to adapt to whatever visual aesthetic has risen to popularity, digital tools in animation demand constant training and retraining to master, forcing veterans to compete with younger animators who have very different methods for layering creative and professional authenticity. To compete amongst other digital tools in a regime of interactive intensity, software aims to occupy particular niches in the animation industry, with Adobe Animate aiming for simplicity, while Toon Boom Harmony offers high degrees of customization and flexibility. While these tools may make it easier for newcomers, processes automated away are lost through deskilling, but animation remains complicated enough that re-skilling has become the predominant professional stressor. Without clear strategies for selecting digital tools, animators must tactically adopt whatever appears to be widespread or useful. Animators will recombine any number of tools to accomplish the task at hand, but informatization has led to a vertiginous proliferation of such devices, making it difficult to train or invest in new skills. Shifting audience expectations and the realities of limited budgets create an environment in which studios must decide between remaining subscribed to a particular developer or jumping to something else and thereby necessitating a thorough restructuring of the whole pipeline. Thus, the logic which informs what software becomes dominant in the industry rarely coincides with what individual animators may desire.

The haptic represents another form of tactics which function to bridge the authentic professional with the authentic self, as creatives come to identify with a tradition of skills. In this

way, an animator can layer authenticity by drawing on their past, arguing that in spite of the ever-shifting software they must learn, at least they have been doodling since childhood. The sensation of drawing, this haptic connection, functions as a talisman to ward off the precarity brought about by the proliferation of digital tools. Nadine, for example, has acquired a high level of professional authentication or cultural capital at the studio, rising to a lead position, but much of this capital can be wiped away with the introduction of new software. While the precarity inherent to the creative industries encourages one to adopt a broad portfolio of mastered digital tools, it also renders much of this investment speculative, reducing the desirability of skills which take a long time to learn. The incentive to attain mastery over a particular software is undercut by the relative instability of the industry, in this case, risk is clearly detrimental to craftsmanship. The anonymous craftsman cannot rely on authorial presence to hedge against precarity, making it all the more vital to demonstrate authentic professional skill, albeit to a relatively smaller group of loosely networked professionals.

While the animation industry strongly favors digital tools for their flexibility and capacity to automate tasks, many animators tactically incorporate traditional media as a means to maintain a haptic connection with their otherwise abstract workflow. Maria, for example, specializes in 3D animation production, but surprisingly software was not at the top of her list of tools intrinsic to her craft.

COLIN What are some essential tools you need to animate?

MARIA Definitely pencil and paper.... Mechanical pencil...
 .57 lead. That's what I grew up with. But for
 animating, I absolutely have to have Maya. We're
 pretty up-to-date, I think. I use Maya 2018 for 3D.

For 2D, I use After Effects and Photoshop and Illustrator.... I use a lightbox right now.... And then I use a scanner, I have to have my Epson scanner.

COLIN Doesn't that slow you down? Why go through the trouble of drawing something and then scanning it, rather than working entirely digitally?

MARIA I can capture more motion, traditionally. I'm fine drawing at a computer but I can't really let loose and get my... what I want the shape to feel like. So, drawing like I'm kind of free to be, I guess free to just... kinda, get the most out of what I want for, like, a shape. Or how a shape should move or feel. And when I put it into the computer, it can ... trace over it, basically just use that as a framework to go off of.

Maria's emphasis on feeling speaks to the necessity of haptic feedback in the animation process, or tools with consistent tactile qualities, such as the weight of a pencil and the friction as it draws across the paper. Nadine and Maria are anchored by their love for drawing itself, considering the ways animation invites haptic compulsion, animators trace these influences into the more abstract realm of the software as a means of making sense of their profession in relation to others in the industry. The pencil and paper allow her to feel the object in motion, associating traditional media with a kind of cognitive freedom. Active sketching allows one to develop mental models in a vague and blobby process, part draftsmanship, part intuition. These half-

drawn figures function through their incompleteness, representing ideas and connections to explore, without committing to anything too early. It is a useful practice for what Csikszentmihalyi refers to as the period of incubation during the creative process.¹³⁹ Experienced users of both digital and traditional media, like Maria, will use software to elaborate from the original sketches, but drawing it out remains a vital tool for incubation, regardless of the software. While Maria finds sketching more freeing, clients tend to perceive training in traditional media as a sign of legitimacy. Sketching in the middle of a pitch serves to demonstrate expertise and make the project all the more convincing.¹⁴⁰ Of course, digital expertise is also in demand, if not more so, but animators benefit from sketching as a central aspect of even the most abstract labor processes. Drawing out diagrams, graphs, charts, and scribbles facilitates problem-solving, understanding, and inference.¹⁴¹ This is not to say that a line drawn with a pencil is somehow more creative or authentic than something drawn with a mouse or stylus, as such an argument would obscure the reality that sketching remains a fundamental component of digital media and computer animation.¹⁴² However, in an era of prolificity, using traditional tools can layer authenticity by signaling an expertise often associated with creativity, while differentiating themselves from those with strictly digital affinities.¹⁴³ Thus, traditional skills align with the layering of creative authenticity, while haptic tactics

¹³⁹ Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 17.0%

¹⁴⁰ Liboriussen 2015, pg. 428.

¹⁴¹ Suwa, Masaki, and Barbara Tversky. "How Do Designers Shift Their Focus of Attention in Their Own Sketches?" *Diagrammatic Representation and Reasoning*, 1997, pp. 241–254., https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-0109-3_14., 2002.

¹⁴² Hosea, Birgitta. "Made by Hand." *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-Based Animation and Cultural Value*, edited by Caroline Ruddell and Paul Ward, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2019. pg. 355.

¹⁴³ Liboriussen, 2015.

enhance their applicability to professional strategy and maintain a reputation of authentic skill at a time when digitization threatens their obsolescence.

Before animating, Maria uses a pen and pencil to sketch the character's motion paths, feeling the movement of their bodies as her hand translates this experience into a spatially coherent diagram. The informal sketch connects creative play to a working procedure, preventing the premature conclusion of an idea. In this way, sketching is its own form of cognition, in which one isn't quite sure what one will achieve. Vilppu argues that drawing and animation remain vitally linked because the former provides means for pragmatically planning the visual representation of a concept.¹⁴⁴ Studies on the drawing practices of architects celebrate "architectural perception" as a form of kinetic and tactile mode of reception,¹⁴⁵ or hailing their mastery of diagrammatic design reasoning.¹⁴⁶ Through this schematizing, creative laborers can articulate imaginative faculties to legitimize their role as a creative designer, directly tying the process to their hand.

This binary between traditional and digital media becomes harder to defend with the advent of Sketchpads, Apple Pencil, RAND and WACOM tablets. The existence of these devices demonstrates the act of drawing as a vital human feature of engagement.¹⁴⁷ Harold, in his fifties, has managed to navigate the animation industry for over thirty years by mastering the ability to draw. He began as an illustrator for some of the early Adult Swim shows, but found animation preferable because he enjoyed completing more drawings in a workday. Picking up Flash and

¹⁴⁴ Vilppu, Glenn V. *The Vilppu Drawing Manual*. Vilppu Studio, 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 2013. pg. 240.

¹⁴⁶ Goldschmidt, Gabriela. "The Dialectics of Sketching." *Creativity Research Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1991, pp. 123–143., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419109534381>.

¹⁴⁷ Holliday Christopher. "In Good Hands? Indexes and Interfaces in *A Computer Animated Hand* (Ed Catmull & Frederic Parke, 1972)." *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-Based Animation and Cultural Value*, edited by Caroline Ruddell and Paul Ward, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2019., pg. 163

eventually Harmony as part of his skillset, he's now directing a fully 3D film, relying on others to navigate the 3D animation software.

COLIN Are you working from home or at an office?

HAROLD Yeah, I work at an office now! I've had this full-time gig for about 2 1/2 years. Doing half-hour shows every year. Half-hour animated shows, unlike my previous work this is all... the final version is CG animated. So, I'm still drawing. Still doing hand-drawn storyboards for the thing but the final production is 3D, which I don't do. But my actual hands-on work ends when it hits the screen and they start doing the animation. We hired them to do the animation for our studio.... I have a producer in 3D animation that I work with every day, and we get along great! At this time of year, I hire a group of storyboard artists, visual development guys to start working on a new script. And I start working out the storyboard. We started working at the animatic. It's kinda getting into crunch time now....

Harold produces “hand-drawn” storyboards to guide the leads and other animators, but his “actual hands-on work ends when it hits the screen...” suggesting that hands play an important role in the layering of creative authenticity. There is an implied dignity to hand-

crafted, as felt in the resonances of other languages such as: the French *artisanal*, the German *Handwerk*, or the Russian *mastersvo*.¹⁴⁸ Even though Harold moves comfortably between traditional and digital modes of production, making use of a WACOM tablet allows him to utilize skills acquired over a lifetime of drawing, providing a sense of progress and competence to strengthen his generational identity and layer creative authenticity.

It is only through his cultural capital accrued over his professional career that allows him to delegate the 3D CGI aspects to another. Animators at studios have been working to conceal their fingerprints since the profession's industrialization, their goal was a cohesive final product, in which the author's lack of presence becomes a feature rather than a bug, as the invisibility of the craftsman testifies their expertise. However, the ease in which digital labor can smooth over individual differences also makes it an ideal tool for outsourcing. This adds to the impression that using such technology is inherently less creative, because older and more established animators can hand off the digital grunt work to the tech-savvy youth, while claiming that their background in traditional methods informs their aesthetic sensibility or even entrepreneurial spirit.¹⁴⁹ In this way, animators can earn seniority, because regardless of age or technological upset, the haptic sketch signifies authentic skill. Harold, to his credit, has invested considerable energy into keeping up with the regime of intensive interactivity, and he's very willing to acknowledge the creative contributions of those with which he has worked. In the end, he seems less interested in claiming creative authorship as director, so much as continuing a career characterized by a pencil on paper or stylus on surface, but even he worries that making use of digital tools can lull him into an overly efficient mindset:

¹⁴⁸ Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. Penguin Books, 2008.

¹⁴⁹ Liboriussen 2015, 429

COLIN So what has kept you going, all these years? How have you stayed motivated?

HAROLD I just like to draw! I've done... I've been taking figure drawing classes for years. I'm using brush pens to try to work more directly. I used to pretty much always start with, like, a pencil first. Pencil and paper, charcoal, maybe. I decided I need to be more decisive! Get the drawings down! Brush pens give me some flexibility. They have, you know: simple light gray, dark gray, black pastel for highlights. It's cool. You can get drawings very quickly. You can get some volume out of them and you're done. If I'm going to do some painting, I'll just do it in Photoshop. I'll just get it in and then work the color... like that way. I don't have the time or patience for traditional media... I hate it. I wish I did. I used to enjoy watercolor and acrylics and that type of stuff. I don't know I don't have as much time to do that. I'd like to.

Software and plug-ins facilitate certain aesthetics and styles of design over others, although limitations will always exist with any device, it is necessary to consider how the tool guides the craftsman.¹⁵⁰ Sennett compares the butcher knife to the scalpel, the former

¹⁵⁰ Sennett 2008, 53.0%

dramatizing the event with its heft, while the latter suggests a variety of purposes which demand more processes of trial and error.¹⁵¹ The fact that all these years of practice has not dulled Harold's curiosity towards the medium speaks to the mindset of the craftsman as Sennett defines it: in dialogue with thought and practice.¹⁵² Here, Harold evaluates his use of tools and seeks out the question of whether the use of erasable media may hinder his artistic progression in the long run, paradoxically encouraging him to play it safe. The WACOM may introduce some haptic qualities to the recombinatory process, but the software can hinder haptic modes of attention.

This is not to say that animators who hone their traditional disciplines are always leery of the digital tools with which they earn their living, rather animators recombine material to negotiate with the process's abstraction. For example, Oscar, a 3-D character sculptor in his late thirties, has worked in the United States for over a decade since he immigrated from South America, maintaining an expertise in traditional sculpting while working full-time sculpting digitally characters for animation and toy design. Rather than using digital tools to strictly maximize efficiency and output, he overcomes the optic and abstract limitations by making use of different tablets to better relate his body to the project.

COLIN What kind of tablet do you use?

OSCAR Intuos, an old Intuos 3 from Wacom. It's very small and it fits in my desk pretty easily and that's why I like it. It takes very small space in my hands, so like... the space that I draw in is about the size of my hand. So, some people have these big Wacom tablets and I tried using one from the office the other day. Like, they just gave

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 54%

¹⁵² Sennett 2008, 2.4%

me one to work with, and the size is the size of an A4 page, right? So, I constantly end up trying to reach for the “close” button. On the top right, when I went to close the program... and I couldn't reach it! And I keep moving my hand up to the right and I'm like, what's going on here? And that's when I realized, I have to push my hand all the way to the top. A lot of people use Cintiq and it's good especially if you're doing 2D work. That's, like, the best tactile feeling you can get. The same kinda feeling like paper, like as close you can be. But for 3D, I've been feeling that the Intuos are a bit nicer to me. They take less space and I don't have to switch from the mouse to go back to Cintiq. And that's one way I cut down on work. I got this little USB drive that has like all my brushes and my hotkeys. My presets and stuff. My hotkeys are really what cuts my workload down to like half, right?

Far from an imposition, Oscar responds to the regime of interactive intensity with a tinkerer's approach, recombining material and immaterial tools to suit his purposes, fabricating creativity with digital tools. Adapting to larger and smaller tablets can prove tricky however, as this slows down one's capacity to rely on reflex and muscle-memory. Mastering software to layer professional authenticity relies on the laborer's capacity to efficiently automate production processes, but Oscar also finds ways to automate himself, leading to a comic disconnect between where his hand thinks the button is positioned, versus its actual location. His discourse on

creativity seems to contradict the digital tool's universalizing strategies, defying the usual body/mind divide by situating his own somatic experience in the discussion of digital tools.

Contemporary scholars of media and technology grapple with the immateriality of virtual space by scrutinizing the techno-corporeal or “technosomatic” attributes of digital tools.¹⁵³ The hand reaching for the button speaks to the rather mundane ambiguities that emerge in the non-space between the tool and its user, ontologically blurring the body and the machine.¹⁵⁴ In this way, layering professional authenticity informs a procedural discipline, rather than creative exploration through haptic modes. Describing the memorization of minute keystrokes and gestures necessary to operate his software efficiently, Oscar depicts a discipline quite specific to the hand-Wacom-keyboard contextual relation, in which the body literally inclines itself metaphorically and corporeally to the device.¹⁵⁵

The variable and relational qualities between the human and non-human actors involved in the production of digital assets speaks to the animator's capacity to recombine elements of themselves to layer authenticity in a variety of circumstances. Recombinancy doesn't necessitate strapping oneself to the forefront of the contemporary, Oscar's Cintiq is at least eleven years old at the time of the interview, but his creative authenticity affords him the cultural capital to use tools that fall outside professional standards. Rather than strictly relying on the newest software, Oscar finds ways to tactically introduce texture into his work by incorporating a methodology informed by his body specifically. Here, the recombancy strategy works in both directions, akin to becoming cyborg, a hybrid assemblage that blurs simple technological and biological

¹⁵³ Richardson, Ingrid. “FCJ-032 Mobile Technosoma: Some Phenomenological Reflections on Itinerant Media Devices.” *The Fibreculture Journal*, The Fibreculture Journal, 2005, fibreculturejournal.org, paragraph 8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., paragraph 10.

divisions.¹⁵⁶ The specificity of his hotkeys such that he can operate the keyboard with one hand while holding to the other demonstrates the harmony with which he can coordinate these disparate elements, more like playing the piano than writing a spreadsheet, his layering of creative authenticity hinges on mastering the relationship between the left and right hand.¹⁵⁷ The archetypal cyborg promises the superior union of human and machine, the myth that technology can overcome biological limitations. This speaks to the layering of professional authenticity as a skilled performer and the creative authenticity as part of a tradition of the body in dialogue with the medium. Creative and professional authenticity are expressed through a union of the biological and mechanical as a synchronized entity, in which each component part of the organism is evaluated, discarded, or maintained. The monsters on Oscar's desk also anchors this expression of creative authenticity.

COLIN What's that behind you?

OSCAR I recently got this, like, an anatomy model, you know?
So, it's just, like, a naked guy who's standing in front of me... and half of it is just muscles. It shows all the muscles on the bones, and the eyeballs, and stuff. Yeah, that's really helpful. I've been using books, but this kind of thing is easy to just look for... like, what you're looking for, the right muscle. Looking through books, well... you're just searching for the right angle, so it's confusing because they'll show you the same arm... but

¹⁵⁶ The cyborg is a well established figure in anthropology, best known through Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." (Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Posthumanism*, 2000, pp. 69–84., https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-05194-3_10.)

¹⁵⁷ Sennett 2008, 44.5%

the same muscle at every angle is different. In my background, I'm not so much checking for animation. But I'm checking more for like, the quality of the character, right? If they show a sculpture, the first thing I check is the faces. And I always grab the sculpture and tilt it so it's facing from the chin up. So that's one thing that a lot of 3D artists kinda struggle with. They come from a 2D background, sometimes. So that's why you tilt it, to see the curvature that kinda connects. The front of the face to the side and that's one of those things that I don't do consciously, right?

Digital sculptures require an understanding of three-dimensional space, but the interface with which this sculptor works remains bound behind a two-dimensional screen. As a means to bridge this gap, he keeps an anatomical toy on his desk, an object he can freely manipulate in actual space in accordance with the virtual object that he sculpts. Behind the simple ingredients of the face, the bones, the muscles, the eyeballs, and "stuff," lie infinite possible combinations and recombination. Oscar relates authenticity to an expertise with anatomy and form, a strategy born from years of studying sculpture as a fine art. Displaying anatomical models and mastering traditional skills function as Oscar's authentic claims to creativity, tactically incorporating this into the demands of professional authenticity related to optics and automation.

Research into the effects of technology on the labor process have focused on the ways in which it has promoted competition between laborers to the benefit of transnational businesses,¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Schiller, Herbert I. *Communication and Cultural Domination*. International Arts and Science Press, 1976.

or the ways in which the knowledge professions were doomed to increasing layers of regimentation, resulting in widespread “deskilled” workers united in their precarity.¹⁵⁹ The reasoning holds that such digital software abstracts the labor process, rendering processes as disparate as baking bread or laying pipe identical through layers of electronic interfaces.¹⁶⁰ Crafts that required managing different tactile tasks are now squeezed into an interface, complex reality reduced to windows, icons, menus, and pointers, or “WIMP.”¹⁶¹ Digital tools can automate processes away, but they can also work to close the experiential gap between electronic and traditional animation processes. While vibrotactile elements have long been implemented into toys and video game controllers, a relatively niche array of Tangible User Interfaces (TUI) has emerged as an answer to WIMPification.¹⁶² The haptic stylus presents a compromise, a pen which provides force-feedback sensations, communicating sensations in relation to the digital object such that the user may feel the material.¹⁶³ These products remain fairly expensive however, ranging from \$650 to \$13,000,¹⁶⁴ while a simple anatomical doll costs \$30. As powerful as these haptic tools may be for educational and artistic purposes, they must still compete with the inexpensive tactics that animators have already developed, such as using models, or scanning sculptures.

While each generation of animator will have a unique relationship to the tools they use and the media they consume, this chapter has focused on the ways in which animators use these

¹⁵⁹ Braverman, Harry. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. Monthly Review Press, 1998.

¹⁶⁰ Sennett 1998, 38.6%

¹⁶¹ Shaer, Orit, and Eva Hornecker. “Tangible User Interfaces: Past, Present, and Future Directions.” *Foundations and Trends® in Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 3, no. 1-2, 2009, pp. 1–137., <https://doi.org/10.1561/11000000026>. pg. 3.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, pg. 4.

¹⁶³ Talbot, David. “A Cheaper Tool for Virtual Sculpting.” *MIT Technology Review*, MIT Technology Review, 9 May 2014, technologyreview.com

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

instruments to balance the layering of professional and creative authenticity, along with the ways haptic tools can bridge this gap. As millennials become the first generation in constant communication, or what Sherry Turkle calls "growing up tethered,"¹⁶⁵ many claim they are more defined by technology than ever.¹⁶⁶ The role that these tools play in the layering of generational, professional, and creative authenticity cannot be understated. However, the notion that future generations will abandon traditional skills entirely is unclear, given the myriad ways in which creative laborers can introduce haptic modes of production into their everyday work. Creative laborers often find themselves layering authenticity for conflicting professional and creative purposes, tactically adopting tools as a means of cohering these identities. Creative authenticity can also generate cultural capital by othering another generational cohort, delegating digital toil and denigrating technological contributions as a means of elevating those above the line. Thus, those able to layer professional authenticity may still find themselves lower in the studio's hierarchy, if they cannot claim contributions considered 'creative.' As digital expertise becomes increasingly relevant, professional authenticity will be more highly valued for filling key roles in production. Layering professional authenticity necessitates the careful selection of relevant software, which must be adopted strategically and dropped at a moment's notice. Analogue tools like sketchbooks and pencils provide access to imaginative processes that legitimizes the practitioner as a creative, but animators recombine these elements with their identity through their portfolio. Professional and creative authenticity require mastering both optic and haptic modes of production, balancing choice and creativity with automation and efficiency, while

¹⁶⁵ Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2014

¹⁶⁶ *Confident. connected. open to change.* - pew research center. Pew Research. (2010, February). Retrieved April 24, 2022, from pewresearch.org

haptic modes of engagement present an avenue for improvisation and recombination in this process.

3 BRING YOUR TOYS TO WORK: DESK DISPLAYS AT THE ANIMATION STUDIO

While animators find ways to introduce friction into impossibly smooth digital production processes, they also make use of colorful decorations to layer authentic creativity from bland commercial office-spaces. John Caldwell reads this ritual as a tactical adaptation to the alienating power of the studio sorting animators into anonymous “cubes.”¹⁶⁷ Such an act resists the studio’s purview to categorize and designate spaces, as animators use an aspect of this power to reclaim their space. These desk decorations are rituals in that they represent a habitual practice that stand in for some greater social or transcendental value.¹⁶⁸ For Émile Durkheim, rituals function as a system of ideas through which individuals imagine their society and their relations within it, externalizing values onto ritual objects and defining the sacred from the profane.¹⁶⁹ In Pierre Bourdieu’s eyes, the artist accrues cultural capital by adopting the strategies autonomous to the field, which necessitates a rejection or downplaying of heteronomous commercial influences.¹⁷⁰ So animators decorate their desks to ward off the inauthentic “suits,” particularly to alleviate their own anxieties over finding themselves stuck in a similarly abstract and commercial position.

¹⁶⁷ Leff, Lisa. “The Creative Spirits of Nickelodeon Animation Studio Have Turned Their Drab Office Cubicles into Celebrations of Personal Style.” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, 28 Nov. 1999., as cited in Caldwell 2008, pg. 78

¹⁶⁸ Couldry 2002, 3

¹⁶⁹ Durkheim Émile, and Karen E. Fields. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The Free Press, 1995., pg. 227.

¹⁷⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity, 1992. pg. 1996.

This chapter continues this thread of research, drawing from participant interviews to argue that animators make use of desk decoration rituals for helpful, inspirational, expressive, and resistant purposes. Open, mixed-use, and modular office spaces do not necessarily promote decorating one's desk, especially if the studio is already packed with toys. However, these practices have changed as studios rebrand themselves as 'fun' places to work, while the majority of freelance animators work from home.¹⁷¹ Animators were early indicators of an emerging class of precarious home workers, sharing an even greater dependence on open communication and trust between the creative and the client,¹⁷² rendering the layering of authenticity all the more vital as one works against the social disconnection inherent to the profession.¹⁷³ Desk decoration practices layer creative authenticity in the media industries by playing into this managerial invitation to make their workplace fun, as a means of hedging against precarity through the legitimization of their position, while home workers display their decorations through a webcam and photos posted to social media platforms. However, changes in office space and homework have reduced the efficacy of this practice, with creative laborers refusing to lay down roots in an inconsistent and transient environment, or suspending creative authenticity in a zone of ambiguity through the application of irony and sarcasm.

Caldwell draws his conclusions based on Lisa Leff's article for LA Times, which presents some of the animators' workspaces at Nickelodeon Studio in 1999.¹⁷⁴ The purpose of this ritual, according to the animators, is to exercise creative autonomy, as Derek Iverson says in Leff's article: "they kind of have to let us do what we want because they want to encourage

¹⁷¹ Orsini, C., & Rodrigues, V. (2020). Supporting motivation in teams working remotely: The role of basic psychological needs. *Medical Teacher*, 42(7), 828–829. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159x.2020.1758305>

¹⁷² Ibid.,

¹⁷³ Niklaus, L. (2021, June 5). *Can animators work from home?* Mount CG | Join the pilgrimage to Mount CG. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from mountcg.com

¹⁷⁴ Caldwell 2008

creative expression...."¹⁷⁵ The animators exercise the autonomy to decorate their office space in wild and whimsical ways, and they frame this power as stemming from their status as creative laborers. Caldwell turns cinema studies from an aesthetic evaluation of the frame to cultures of production, arguing that media analysis requires the cultural and symbolic significance of production spaces and the rituals of production undertaken.¹⁷⁶ Production units possess considerable power in its ability to legitimize categories and memberships, as well as the way it promotes symbolic notions like animation, play, and creativity. Rituals within media production are self-reflections in addition to expressions of production culture.¹⁷⁷ However, a study of production spaces would be myopic without attention to the particular practices and rituals that transpire there. Thus, it is vital to scrutinize not only the ways workers enact their trade rituals, but how they make sense of them. The infrastructure of the studio articulates the animator's social practice, who contribute with their own "poiesis" by transforming spaces into habitable places from the bottom up.¹⁷⁸ Production spaces have a culture and rituals unique to that location; they only make sense as workers enter and legitimize the site as a studio.

This research focuses on the reasons that animators bring their toys to work, in order to define how this practice has shifted from a tactic to a strategy incorporated by the studio, diminishing but not destroying the capacity to layer creative authenticity through the traditional enactment of the ritual. Animation production culture encourages the formation of *mono no katari no hitobito*, or "a person who talks about things;" a phenomenon symptomatic of the

¹⁷⁵ Leff 1999.

¹⁷⁶ Caldwell 2008, pg. 69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 70

¹⁷⁸ Calhoun, Sennett, and Shapira 2013: 197, as cited in Guano, Emanuela. *Creative Urbanity*. Univ Of Pennsylvania Pre, 2016. pg. 55.

increasing intimacy between personal identity and material possessions.¹⁷⁹ Animators bringing their toys to work has become a part of the industry's mythology, a widespread tactic to authenticate their creative role, but each of them will have their individual reasons for displaying these particular items. Anna McCarthy's study on decorating the area around the computer, what she refers to as the "geekosphere," including desk objects and stickers on laptops, delineates the ways these spaces express something about the worker and their environment.¹⁸⁰ They reflect current cultural trends within the studio, speak to the accelerated pace and increasing impermanence of the workplace, as well as expressing professional frustrations and anxieties. The geekosphere and the office space represent fields within a "a multi-dimensional space" which reflects everything from economic production to the layering of creative authenticity.¹⁸¹

Media production rituals organized around decorating one's desk belies a negotiation between boundaries of self/work, suggesting an effort to demarcate the creative self from the uncreative office space. The cultural industry has a long history of imposing structural divisions between the 'creative' work and management functions, such as account planning and strategy.¹⁸² This has led to differing production cultures, with young art directors and copywriters embracing individual fashions that distinguish themselves from the more conservative approach favored by legal and financial sectors.¹⁸³ A Joint Chairman of AMV BBDO pointed to the fact that those in sales must "dress with a certain smartness" because they have to interface with clients without distracting from the product. Contrast this with a WCRS chairman expressing pity for all those

¹⁷⁹ Ōhira 1998, as cited in Allison, Anne. *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. University of California Press, 2006., pg. 87.

¹⁸⁰ McCarthy 2004, pg. 213.

¹⁸¹ Bourdieu 1992, pg. 229

¹⁸² Bilton, Chris. "Relocating Creativity in Advertising: from Aesthetic Specialisation to Strategic Integration?" *Creativity, Innovation and the Cultural Economy*, edited by Andy C. Pratt and Paul Jeffcutt, Routledge, London, 2009, pp. 23–41., pg. 25.

¹⁸³ Nixon, Sean. *Advertising Cultures: Gender, Commerce, Creativity*. SAGE Publ., 2003., pg. 144.

“who have to wear boring suits all day.”¹⁸⁴ In addition, the desire to distance oneself from uncreative forces is motivated by the dream that work doesn’t feel standard or routine, but that each day affirms the individual’s set of particular talents and passions. In this way, minor acts of corporate rebellion reflect an investment in a creative identity.

Desk decorations reflect the economic capital necessary to purchase them, but this differs from collectible culture in that the economic value of the figure usually is secondary to its cultural meaning, as evidenced by the fact that few animators keep their desk-objects in their original boxes or concern themselves with how the toy’s condition impacts its exchange value. Thus, the cultural capital generated through the layering of creative authenticity usually supersedes the economic value. As cultural capital, they layer creative authenticity based on taste and facilitate communication by establishing common interests. These objects often reflect personal values, as shaped by one’s age, history, and context of consumption.

As desk space is primarily for digital production purposes, the vast majority of objects listed were electronic, including computer monitors, headphones, drawing tablets, and keyboards. This speaks to the informatized nature of creative labor, as digital tools take up increasing spatial prominence. Photographs, stationery and food/beverage were also common, along with the occasional house plant. Video Game controllers and puzzles allow for playful activities, which seem categorically different from the myriad toys and action figures that served an aesthetic rather than a utilitarian function. In addition to sorting the types of objects listed, this research also defines how these items are used and why they are considered significant.

A friend of a friend passed on the contact information for an animator based in Atlanta, Carmen, who was in the process of escaping from the parameters of this research’s dataset, as

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.,

she moved to California. In spite of her tight schedule, she responded to the interview questions, albeit through the relatively data-poor medium of email rather than an interview face to face. However, she left a wonderful guide to decoration etiquette in the workplace, while providing insight into her own practices as well:

CARMEN

I like to have a balance of things that inspire me and things that help me.

Inspire: I have a calendar from one of my favorite artists, plants, a sketchbook and a small packet of traditional drawing materials, typically some art books that might be helpful resources, and a very pretty stained glass lamp from my mother.

Help: A couple small personal pictures, a small bottle of calming hand lotion, and a 8x10 print out of different wrist and back stretches, water, snacks, plus a few other personal items like a stuffed animal from my best friend and a couple small toys from one of the first projects I ever worked on. Small little objects that don't distract me, but really help the space feel like my own. Oh, also a small bottle of natural cleaning solution. I like being able to clean and dust every so often.

Carmen provides *helpful* and *inspirational*, two emic categories for desk objects reflecting a dialectic tension between action and contemplation.¹⁸⁵ Many animators evaluated

¹⁸⁵ Arendt defines the human condition as an unresolvable tension between contemplation and action, Arendt, 1958. Pgs. 15-20.

their decorations in this manner, although the specifics of how they categorized these objects varied. For example, Carmen defines her sketchbook as inspirational but other animators characterized it as a helpful organizational and conceptual tool for taking notes and mapping out tough scenes. This latter category serves as a reminder against a prejudice so ingrained as to appear obvious, technology is helpful. Carmen's placement of toys such as stuffed animals within the helpful category suggest that these objects serve a utilitarian purpose in addition to the territorializing powers that Caldwell observed. Animation as an industry is unique in the way that such whimsical desk objects blur the line between purely decorative to utilitarian. For example, Oscar kept a model for anatomical reference on his desk. Blue Sky's lead sculptor Vicki Saulls does the inverse, sculpting a physical prototype, often referred to as a maquette, which she scans to in a 3D scanner to produce a digital mesh.¹⁸⁶ The maquettes remain after the scanning process to serve as reference, decoration, and promotional material. A tour of Dreamworks studios prominently juxtaposes the animators with these maquettes, while others work alongside an assortment of toys.¹⁸⁷

When toys are not actively being used, they still serve to create an affective environment around the animator, turning an occupational jail-cell into a carefully curated museum of one's favorite things.¹⁸⁸ Alfred Gell defined art as a "technology of enchantment," one becomes momentarily overwhelmed by the technical perfection and intricacy of the object, losing oneself in an aesthetic experience.¹⁸⁹ Recombining objects around them according to their capacity to

¹⁸⁶ Randolph, G. (2013, August 24). *Beyond the trailer. Rio 2, Epic, Ice Age 4 : Blue Sky Studios Tour! - Beyond The Trailer*. Retrieved April 24, 2022, youtube.com

¹⁸⁷ CNN, director. *Inside DreamWorks' Studio. YouTube, YouTube*, 9 May 2011, youtube.com. Accessed 5 Jan. 2022.

¹⁸⁸ Leff 1999.

¹⁸⁹ Gell, Alfred. "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 1992, pp. 40–63. pg. 46.

inspire, animators keep desk decorations orbiting in the periphery of their attention as they enter and exit aesthetic states of flow. Thus, their decorations allow for a free recombination of attention at various levels of the individual, cultural, environmental etc., such that one's focus orients away from the individual towards a multi-layered system of meaning.¹⁹⁰ Carmen continues her explanation of decorating one's desk with a list of reasons why she finds the practice valuable.

CARMEN I really love getting to decorate my desk and I really think it's important for a couple reasons:

1. It shows that you're excited to be there and that you're "setting up shop" / "moving in" —> aka you're there for the long haul. You're showing that you like working there and that you want to stay.
2. It helps people learn a little bit more about you. I never really thought this was that important until I started working in a studio and saw all of the people's desks that we either filled with stuff or not. I'm a visual learner so seeing all this stuff around people's desks helped me learn their names and remember more information about them.

It really helps me feel more at home. I can relax and get into the flow of work much quicker when I feel at home than when I feel uncomfortable. I mean you spend half of your time at work so why not really make it enjoyable

¹⁹⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Eugene Halton. *The Meaning of Things Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge University Press, 1981. pg. 13

for you. Have some snacks neatly stowed in a desk drawer, have a small rug if that's your thing. I can guarantee that people will notice what you're doing and genuinely enjoy it.

One word of warning: Don't have too much stuff on your desk. It overcrowds you and then everything starts getting really dusty and grimy and that's not a fun thing to have to see. So, if you're going to have figurines or little statues and such sitting on your desk, please for the love of all that is good, take five minutes to dust your desk once a week. Keep a cloth and a natural cleaning solution under your desk. This not only puts you at the pinnacle of professionalism, but it really helps with your health. Let me just say I would not feel good if I sat in a cubby full of dust every day. No thank you.

Although she doesn't define them as such, objects on one's desk also serve an *expressive* function, communicating to oneself and one's coworkers, as mute material rises out of the real world and takes on significance within a network of meaning. Unlike the relative privacy of the home, desk-objects exist in a semi-public environment and therefore not only represent what animators keep for themselves but also what they present to others. For instance, a messy and cluttered desk not only gets in the way of work, but it also reflects badly on the animator. These objects can be valuable tools, in that it becomes easier to start a conversation with a coworker if one shares a fandom, potentially facilitating communication in the workplace. This practice also allows for easier differentiation between coworkers as well, as new animators can get to know coworkers quickly with the variety of symbols arranged around their peers. Bringing one's toys

to work, above all, layers authenticity through the participation with the media ritual, doing one's part to make the office space feel genuinely creative. Laying down one's paraphernalia can feel like laying down roots, communicating commitment and enthusiasm, while an undecorated desk may reflect the expectation that the animator will not linger there for too long. The quality and quantity of the decorations functions as a tactical short-hand for investment or seniority.

The decoration practices of animators at Nickelodeon Studios in 1999 transformed each eight into an assemblage rich in personal value, from an angels and winged-goddess theme for spiritual renewal to a surfer theme for the aspiring SpongeBob animator. Studio tours seem to occur fairly regularly at Disney and Pixar studios, suggesting that these decorations are also participating in making the studio a more entertaining place to work. Here, animators have contributed to the fabrication of their studio's narrative and reputation,¹⁹¹ which has turned into a brandable strategy for recruitment. But on the online guided tour at Pixar, Nick Pitera emphasizes that the animators all did this "on their free time, they kind of collectively decide what they all want it to look like, and they go to town."¹⁹² These decorations are professional level, like Hollywood sets, demonstrating a high investment in their position if they would sacrifice their weekends to build it. Toys are ubiquitous throughout the video, on display on animator's desks and in the lobby. The tour concludes at John Lasseter's office, the appearance of which blurs the line between toy store and museum.¹⁹³ The sheer number of objects inspire awe, as if he has made it a point to display every single toy from every single film he's worked on, as a display of social and economic capital. Many of the toys appear in duplicate, and in their

¹⁹¹ Calhoun, C., et al. "Poiesis Means Making." *Public Culture*, vol. 25, no. 2 70, 2013, pp. 195–200., <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2020539>. pg. 196.

¹⁹² Pitera, Nick. "Pixar Animation Studios Tour with Nick Pitera | Disney Live." *YouTube*, Disney, 17 Feb. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV3HcxiHwrY&>., youtube.com

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*,

original container, signaling their value as a collectible by retaining their 'mint condition,' an unusual practice for animators. Lasseter pays tribute to his colleague Hayao Miyazaki by prominently displaying the head and paws of the cat-bus from *My Neighbor Totoro*, (1988) severed and mounted like a hunting trophy claimed on safari. This represents the layering of creative authenticity as a display meant to dazzle with the sheer variety of successful franchises, all tied back to the properties in which Lasseter participated.

Other figures, such as Totoro, Pikachu, and the ubiquitous Pusheen, provide a dash of cuteness, while Batman or Lt. Judy Hopps serve as reminders of the characters' best qualities. The delineation of taste reflects trends in desk accouterments, which become generational markers, as McCarthy observed the prominence of the Homies toy line placed the geekospheres in conversation with broader cultural trends.¹⁹⁴ Totoro, Pikachu, and Pusheen contrast the guns and muscles typical of Western toys with something that couples cuteness with immaculate character design, evolutions of the Hello Kitty aesthetic that entered the international scene in the 1970's.¹⁹⁵ These abstract and designedly characters serve as safe ways of expressing femininity while remaining in the pop-culture conversation. Between fans of Japanese anime and those who do not understand it, this divide is deeply felt across a generation of animators, as Lila explains:

COLIN Do you share a lot of common interests with your coworkers

LILA Oh yeah, especially like, people my own age. It's weird because the older generation at the studio... Anime. It changed animation forever. Everyone I know, who's older than our generation, never got into anime.

¹⁹⁴ McCarthy 2004, pg. 214.

¹⁹⁵ Allison 2006, pg. 22

Everybody younger than that has watched different things, their humor is different.

COLIN It warps your perspective, huh? I guess older animators aren't discussing whether you're more *tsundere*¹⁹⁶ or *kawaii*.¹⁹⁷

LILA The answer is *tsundere*, in case you want to put that in your dissertation.

Desk objects that represent characters from Japanese media function as a specific form of cultural capital, reflecting whether one is “in the know” or not. Their self-presentation at the office speaks to a form of communication involving the recombination of symbolic objects, as toys and tee shirts become conduits for layering creative authenticity and the formation of relationships. Without thinking, the interviewer layered authenticity through organically formed Japanese/English fan-speak, cracking a joke about the cultural differences between Lila and her coworkers, while signaling to her that they share this area of cultural literacy. She responds with a challenge, disbelieving such a trivial thing could make it into an academic document, while also communicating in such a way as to authenticate the fan-to-fan relationship. Briefly, the distance of an academic interviewer and participant closed, fan-speak rendering them equals from the same community. While this moment may seem insignificant, they add up over a shared work experience. These toys, and the ideas they represent, contribute to the affective qualities of studio production culture. This describes a texture that grows in richness over accumulated experience, disrupted by precarious working conditions incentivizing mobility over stability. As

¹⁹⁶ A stock character who initially acts coldly but gradually behaves more warmly over the course of the story, or one who oscillates between these emotional temperatures. (Noh, Susan. “Subversion and Reification of Cultural Identity in Global Fandoms.” *Gnovis Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2016, pp. 25–37., pg. 31.)

¹⁹⁷ “cute, loveable.” (Noh 2016, pg. 31)

local animation practices recombine and tastes lose relevance in a globalized media context, this shared fan-language marks sites that span the cultural and the affective domains.¹⁹⁸

Apple kicked off a wave of sleek office designs when they decided to implement the most cutting edge floor plan, in an effort to distinguish themselves from their competitor, IBM.¹⁹⁹ Following Apple's lead, chinos, chill-out rooms, and 'hot-desking' have become the norm for many offices, with game studios such as Electronic Arts studio in Playa Vista featuring diversions like arcades and swimming pools, all in an effort to fabricate a 'fun' space contrary to the corporate image of beige cubicles.²⁰⁰ Unlike with the Nickelodeon animators, participants added their toys to the existing assortment provided by the studio, answering the managerial invitation to ritually demonstrate their creativity. Deuze and Lewis suggest that the boundary between 'suits' and 'creatives' gives way under such forces as convergence culture and web 2.0 allows anyone to perform creative labor.²⁰¹ Florida expands this class yet further, to argue that 30% of the US work-force are creative,²⁰² including such professions as lawyers, technicians, and managers.²⁰³ The limitation of this ritual's resistant function becomes clear when one considers the ways in which 'creative' and 'suit' as terms has continued to destabilize as a category and a territory. Therefore, resistant uses of the desk decoration ritual signify an emerging trend in the precarious industries, as animators' layer creative authenticity that defies professional expectation.

¹⁹⁸ Noh 2016, pg. 31.

¹⁹⁹ Bilton, C., & Cummings, S. (2010). *Creative strategy: Reconnecting Business and Innovation*. Wiley. pg. 220.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.,

²⁰¹ Deuze, Mark, and Nicky Lewis. "Professional Identity and Media Work." *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, edited by Stephanie Taylor et al., Routledge, London, 2017, pp. 162.

²⁰² Florida, Richard L. *Cities and the Creative Class*. Routledge, 2003. op. cit., pg. 74.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 330.

Lila, for her part, doesn't engage with decorating her desk in a very elaborate manner, displaying a purposefully awkward family photograph and a plaque reading "I'm Dead Inside." While layering creative authenticity can lean on the playful or whimsical elements of the artistic, Lila instead utilizes aspects of the archetype which specifically resists the managerial invitation to conform. Studios exert aesthetic authority over those who occupy them by presenting the studio designer's image of the acceptably fun work environment as legitimate or commonsensical.²⁰⁴ Desk objects also provide a relatively safe space for ironic denial of workplace fun, some animators at Nickelodeon incorporated elements of sarcasm, such as covering one's computer in tiny bits of tape as a form of job security, because someone would have to clean it up if the animator is fired.²⁰⁵ While Caldwell is correct in reading the decoration ritual as resistant to authority, this method of layering creative authenticity is distinguished from previous research, as this resistance is complicated by the managerial invitation to participate. While decorating one's desk functionally capitulates the studio's efforts at promoting a positive image, precarious working conditions reduce the incentive to emotionally invest in the role or the space. This ritual is meant to resist or recapture the forces behind this constant state of uncertainty, what Carmen means by decorating one's desk as "moving in." Establishing oneself becomes all the more important when one's position remains tenuous, precarious conditions in the creative industry have found expression in the animator's decoration practice. Now, refusing the managerial invitation to decorate one's desk layers authenticity through rebellion, playing into the independent risk-taking mindset associated with the creative entrepreneur.

²⁰⁴ Hosein, Gabrielle, and Daniel Miller. "Food, Family, Art and God: Aesthetic Authority in Public Life in Trinidad." *Anthropology and the Individual a Material Culture Perspective*, Berg, New York, 2009, pp. 159.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.,

Not all studio spaces are quite so curated as Lasseter's office, at Dreamworks, one cubicle was themed around "found objects."²⁰⁶ While the tour guide describes it as "so random," the animators have actually converted their cubicle into a college dormitory, recombining junk into a pastiche of sleepy-stoner vibes. This is an example of layering creative authenticity by resisting the studio's call to immaculate desk decoration. Dreamworks also has a "hidden room"²⁰⁷ which the animators began using to chat and sneak a drink away from the security cameras, very much against the wishes from the higher ups. This is a story that presents the decoration as a resistant practice, done in spite of studio authority, thus layering authenticity as a legitimate creative. When very few emotional states are permissible in the workplace, snark or sarcasm becomes one of the only viable tools for communicating negative emotions, suspending authentic grievances within a relatively safe field of ambiguity.²⁰⁸ The openness of the ritual allows it to tactically resist the decoration mandate, in which the subversiveness of the action can disappear or reappear within the context of the everyday, emerging as a resistant object only relative to particular situations.²⁰⁹ The playful element likewise only adds to this capacity to ridicule or reduce the powerful, as questions of seriousness are suspended as the toys ironically establish the space of professional animators.

Out of the animators interviewed, a third of them did not adorn their personal areas with anything at all. Leff only reported one undecorated desk in her article on Nickelodeon, a background layout supervisor who would clearly rather be outside with his dog.²¹⁰ The reasons

²⁰⁶ Cole, Louis. "Amazing Dreamworks Tour." *YouTube*, 12 Apr. 2014, <https://youtu.be/rFu3Mlz1mPM?t=86.>, youtube.com

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, youtube.com

²⁰⁸ Gregg 2011, pg. 250.

²⁰⁹ de Certeau 1984, pg. 24.

²¹⁰ Neff, Gina. *Venture Labor Work and the Burden of Risk in Innovative Industries*. MIT Press, 2012., pg. 6.

that animators in Atlanta gave for opting out reflected a more atomized workforce. For example, some animators have found themselves operating in corporate environments, sharing the building with a business firm, working as the sole motion designer for a bank, or organizing film festivals. Without an environment of animators to establish a collective production culture, those working in more traditional office spaces tend to keep their desk objects understated. Animation freelancers expressed frustration with the juvenile treatment they receive from clients or higher-ups, citing animation's kiddy demeanor as a hindrance for negotiating real business. Complaining about clutter may seem curmudgeonly, but with multiple animators working alongside each other, one's space is fairly limited. Although stickers, decals, and other forms of decoration offer a way to customize computers and other tools, shared computers and workspaces disincentivize even this. Ultimately, layering creative authenticity through desk decoration functions as a form of communication in a highly contextual environment, with the refusal or subversion of this call functioning as a new method to signal authenticity in a precarious workplace. A few animators cited laziness as the primary reason they did not decorate their desk, either feeling no desire whatsoever, or taking pride in layering an authentic identity around being "the boring one," in the office.

Many of the tactics employed by animators in the 90's have since become a part of studio culture, not so much a subversion as an anticipated and endorsed aspect of hiring authentic creatives. Studios not only legitimize categories and designate spaces; they also exert an aesthetic authority around which animators must tactically navigate. The ritual of warding off "the suits" has failed, everyone's creative now, as informatization smooths the distinction between professions. Rather than engaging in the performative aspects of participating in a studio, many animators find the practice futile. Still, the majority persist in decorating their

office to some degree, if nothing more than to capitalize on that ambiguous space between serious office work and authentic expression of the self. Some hotkey presets are so specialized that only Oscar knows how to use them, as some cultural references are so obscure that only Lila could catch them, both layer different varieties of creative authenticity. Still, another aspect of these objects calls out to be seen and touched, inviting a connection between coworkers in a precarious and constantly changing environment. Animators decorate their desks as expressions of their recombined selves, speaking through a shared language of objects representing fandoms.

Drawing from these interviews, the four categories of *helpful*, *inspirational*, *expressive* and *resistant* explain broadly what animators gain by decorating their desks. The former two suggest utilitarian and aesthetic approaches that mirror findings from research on objects in the home,²¹¹ while the latter two provide a basis for communication and establishing oneself in the relative sociality of the office space. With a comparatively higher number of animators opting out from the ritual entirely, the question then becomes why this ritual has ceased to be useful for them. The animators recombine materials around them, objects that inspire, and signify important badges of identity to others. Today, the animation industry brands itself as place of play and exuberance if the behind-the-scenes featurettes were anything to be believed.²¹² This isn't to say that desk decoration was an unusual practice in any industry, but there was something outrageous about major studios. Expressions of identity are on the move, as sites of meaning seem to shift onto the personality derived from web presence and engagement. Even then, it is clear that Nickelodeon Animation Studios derived enormous benefits from animators decorating their cubicles, as evidenced by their willingness to bring tours through for fans and prospective

²¹¹ Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981, pg. 94

²¹² Kaplan, Carly and Van Slyke, T. "Nickelodeon's Animation Studio Tour: SpongeBob & Lincoln Loud | Inside Nick Ep. 3 w/ Tarreyn & Carly." *Nickelodeon*, Youtube. Apr 19, 2018 youtube.com

employees.²¹³ The animator's decorations turned the studio from anonymous cubes into a 'cool sweatshop' reminiscent of the internet startups of the 90's, where seventy-two-hour work weeks are considered a feature rather than a bug.²¹⁴

These past two chapters have explored the ways in which animators engage with recombinality as a tactic to negotiate abstract and short-term labor, demonstrating that such methods not only consider a broad set of unorthodox tools, but also find novel and multiple uses from what they have available. Traditional skills for example, not only serve as markers of professional expertise, or a tactic to layer authenticity as a creative, but provide the means to overcome software's tendency to automate away desirable processes and abstract tangible practices. These skills also yield professional value to which animators may orient themselves, to derive meaning and satisfaction from a demanding career. Animators recombine software, apps, and tools, with their own somatic capacity to interface with these devices; the recombinality strategy composes a relay between human and non-human actors, like a haptic tool providing input and output, rather than solely input. Desk decoration practices also provide insight into the ways animators negotiate the need for space with the desire to layer authenticity among their coworkers and peers. This conspicuous consumption is only part of the story, however, as such objects can oscillate between inspirational and expressive, ordinary and resistant, according to the needs of the animator.

These practices can express membership but they may also alienate, as such brand-name rituals cannot help but delineate the sacred from the profane, or those who get the reference, and those who miss it. As studios continue to brand themselves as fun places to work, cramming the

²¹³ Neff, 2012.

²¹⁴ Ross, 2004.

halls and offices with cool paraphernalia, they present a managerial invitation to be enchanted by these commodities. However, as offices trend towards more open floor plans and shared workspaces,²¹⁵ this also communicates to the animators not to attach themselves to a particular spot. Management will need to navigate between the changing needs of the studio with the value of granting employees enough aesthetic autonomy to demarcate their place. If studios shift to primarily remote work, then these rituals are incorporated into decking out the home office, although the communicative potential of such tactics remains dubious. As conditions continue to change in the industry, the rotating set of tools animators accumulate will vary in utility, encouraging recombancy to make use of limited resources and negotiate with managerial invitations. Modifying, decorating, customizing and “pimping out” of personal electronic devices, like slapping a sticker on a laptop, represent acts that deepen the bond between the user and the machine.²¹⁶ But some animators would prefer to ignore this invitation, as they see little value in creating the impression that they are like these machines, even as they become cyborgs.

The desk decoration ritual animators have employed fluctuates according to the cultural context at the studio, beginning as a means of differentiating oneself from the stifling corporate environment, but this has shifted as offices promote themselves as funhouses when they aren’t disappearing in favor of networking with remote laborers. Now that a huge swathe of laborers has become accustomed to working from home, as offices call for workers to return, many are likely to refuse.²¹⁷ In the future, studios may need to adopt yet more ‘fun’ features to entice

²¹⁵ Boland, Brodie, et al. “Reimagining the Office and Work Life after Covid-19.” *McKinsey & Company*, McKinsey & Company, 1 Mar. 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19>, mckinsey.com

²¹⁶ Zoetewey, M. W. (2010). A rhetoric of ornament: Decorating mobile devices in the aesthetic economy. *Computers and Composition*, 27(2), 138–157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2010.03.001>, pg. 140

²¹⁷ Smith, T. (2022, March 8). *Returning to the office, a moment of joy for some. others, would rather stay home*. NPR. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from [npr.org](https://www.npr.org)

workers to come back, but the individual animator's desk is unlikely to be so spectacularly contrary to the bureaucratic style, when this same bureaucratic style has absorbed play into its ethos. Studio owners must balance the desire to create an appropriate space with customizable places that encourage creatives to meaningfully layer authenticity. The conversion of a tactic to a strategy is nothing new, it is the function of a studio to capture and commodify creative energy, rendering them knowable and fungible. As labor becomes increasingly precarious and abstract however, decoration practices will enervate. This does not mean that animators have lost all recourse to mischief, however, as the ways to assert one's humanity in the face of anonymity are as myriad as they are ad-hoc, and in this way, animators will continue to spontaneously carve opportunity from precarity.

4 ACTING AS AN ANIMATOR: EMBODYING A BODILESS ROLE

The previous chapters have explored the ways in which animators' layer creative authenticity as a means of legitimizing their role in the industry, yet animators are not only evaluated by the quotidian social interactions at the office, but also in the ways in which they can perform a character. Animators layer authentic character performances by inscribing their own human experiences and memories onto an image, as the performer seeks to demonstrate superior care for the presentation of the character, cementing their role of the animator as the authentic actor. What began as an experiment in aligning acting practices with "Nature Philosophy"²¹⁸ eventually mutated into the dominant strategy for classic Hollywood cinema and Disney films,²¹⁹ establishing hegemonic concepts of what constitutes an authentic performance, as well as who is fit to embody these roles. Of the thirty participants interviewed, only three ever spoke about these practices, and all of them were cis-gendered women, two being women of color. Their efforts at layering empathic authenticity conflicted with the studio's normative and evaluative standards, revealing gendered and racial friction chafing against hegemonic production culture. Thus, the discipline of embodying a performance cannot escape the hegemonic structures it has cemented in creative labor, causing minorities to struggle relative to their white cis-male counterparts. Actors and animators can use embodiment to layer creative authenticity as a strategy to claim special insight into the character, but this must be done in addition to balancing professional demands with the expectations of the studio, imposing disproportionate pressure onto an already precarious minority.

²¹⁸ Whyman 2008, 3

²¹⁹ Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. Routledge, 2014. pg. 208

Creative authenticity asserts the actor's mimetic authority, the capacity to craft their production to provide the most exact forms of pleasure,²²⁰ a valuable claim to make in an industry rampant with runaway production, such as animation. An animator must also engage the audience, in which they assert their authority to re-enact or re-present myth through craft ritual.²²¹ Embodiment describes the performer's strategy to present and arrange these narratives authentically, then this tactic hinges on their capacity to render a character in such a way as to "give the visual synthesis of life."²²² This specific concept of vivacity is embedded in the worldview of Disney animators, Ollie Johnston characterizes the entire history of art as the pursuit of shaping stone or clay in such a way as to take on a "life of its own."²²³

The influence of Hollywood partially explains this admiration for vitality to an extent, as Disney encouraged animators to adopt it.²²⁴ This strategy also differentiated Disney from competitors like Fleischer Studios, which had until recently relied on Vaudevillian-style comedy, having just released a feature film making use of their patented rotoscope to trace live performance into an animated feature film.²²⁵ While the skill of Disney's nine old men cannot be denied, a certain amount of this was for the sake of marketing, as even Disney animators traced footage. Filming Marge Champion's performances to construct Snow White in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and the Blue Faery in *Pinocchio*, (1940) the key animators are credited, but none of the motion performers.²²⁶ The African American stage and screen actor Hattie Noel

²²⁰ CHLC, V.I, 47-49 in Kennedy, George A., editor. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

²²¹ CHLC, V.I, 44 in Kennedy (ed.), 1997.

²²² Lutz, Edwin George. *Animated Cartoons*. Gordon Press, 1926., pg. 99.

²²³ Thomas, Frank, and Ollie Johnston. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. Hyperion, 1995., pg. 13

²²⁴ Jenkins 2014, pg. 208

²²⁵ This film was *Gulliver's Travels*. (1939)

²²⁶ McFadden, R. D. (2020, October 22). *Marge champion, dancer, actor and choreographer, dies at 101*. The New York Times. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from nytimes.com

was hired to dance in an uncomfortable, skin-tight ballet costume, and endure humiliating commentary from the male animators in her role as the dancing hippos in *Fantasia*.²²⁷ (1940) By defining animation as imbuing the character with personality, Disney established the role of his animators as the actual creative performers, but this status diminished the embodied authenticity enacted by women behind the screen. Even within studios, professional and creative authenticity decide not simply who receives credit but enforces hierarchies along the lines of race and gender.

What is sometimes called “the method”²²⁸ remains tied to a narcissistic form of masculinity,²²⁹ feminist scholars have objected to its ubiquity on the grounds that actresses have hardly achieved professional success comparable to their male counterparts through this particular discipline.²³⁰ Method acting is also used as a marketing tool to layer the leading man’s creative authenticity beyond the screen, advertising the absurd tribulations a man will endure to embody a character,²³¹ while other forms of trauma that actresses sustain go unremarked.²³² Historically, minority animators have struggled to layer creative authenticity, as their status as “non-creative” justifies the lower pay for more feminized departments, such as ink and paint.²³³ As women at the studio became a more common sight, this mode of sexism would become

²²⁷ Holt, Nathalia. *The Queens Of Animation: The Untold Story of the Women Who Transformed the World of Disney and Made Cinematic History*. Thorndike Press, 2019., 21.8%

²²⁸ Lexico Dictionaries. (n.d.). *Method acting: Meaning & definition for UK English*. English. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from https://www.lexico.com/definition/method_acting

²²⁹ Wexman, Virginia Wright. *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*. Princeton University Press, 1993. pg. 167.

²³⁰ Hollinger, Karen. *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*. Routledge, 2006., pg.15.

²³¹ Ashurst, Sam. “Suicide Squad: David Ayer Made the Cast Punch Each Other in Rehearsals.” *Yahoo!*, Yahoo!, 15 June 2016, movies.yahoo.com. Bastián, A. J. (2016, August 15). *Hollywood has ruined method acting*. The Atlantic. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from, theatlantic.com

²³² Bertolucci justified the sexual assault of Maria Schneider in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) as necessary for drawing a “realistic reaction” from the actress, for example, illustrating that while men could study the method, many women weren’t even given the chance to perform. “Il Sito Internet Dell’agenzia Ansa.” *ANSA.it*, 2013, , ansa.it)

²³³ Thomas & Johnston, 1995, pg. 24.

subtler, as one female animator attests: “It’s all still there, but it’s all gone underground.”²³⁴

While male animators are celebrated for their ability to immerse themselves into a role, they are not expected to employ the same level of focus for animating female characters. As an animator from Pixar reported during the production of *Brave*, (2012) “a lot of times, the guys on the story team, or guys who would give feedback, would talk about female characters in terms of [their] wives or daughters.... You can’t afford to think of male [lead] characters in terms of husbands or brothers....”²³⁵ Only men performing men signify creative authenticity, while an expertly enacted character of a minority race or gender doesn’t offer the same cultural capital. This suggests that women in animation may take on more feminine roles, because they do not trust their male counterparts to embody the role, along with the fact that they cannot afford to approach a character in a similarly lackadaisical manner. Rather than layering embodied authenticity to justify their behavior or distinguish themselves, women in animation utilize these techniques as a central part of their standards as professionals, as they strive to respect the character and cement their position as authentic performers.

One might expect that women in animation could appeal to the hegemonic belief that places women as uniquely empathic caretakers,²³⁶ but this proves to be a double-edged sword; men move on to prestigious productions in the mainstream, while women are more likely to remain in educational or preschool programming.²³⁷ Many female animators deliberately moved away from children’s animation, which some have described as “a real ghetto” for women in the

²³⁴ Lange, Ariane. “Inside the Persistent Boys Club of Animation.” *BuzzFeed News*, BuzzFeed News, 28 Aug. 2015, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/arianelange/creative-work-in-connection-with-preparing-the-cartoons..>

²³⁵ *Ibid.*,

²³⁶ McAdam, Maura. *Female Entrepreneurship*. Routledge, 2013.

²³⁷ Vankins, Deborah. “Animation: At CalArts and Elsewhere, More Women Are Entering the Picture.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 25 May 2015, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-cm-college-animation-women-20150525-story.html#page=1>.

animation industry.²³⁸ This repudiation stems from a long history of women in animation being denied the status of “artist,” especially if this material is presumably for adolescents.²³⁹ Lotte Reiniger’s feature films are fantastic examples, her intricately detailed style was received as an ornate domestic trifles suitable for children.²⁴⁰ Layering embodied authenticity in turn represents a strategy to cement one’s status as a creative precarity, acting against the precarity and anonymity in the craft.

Today, these acting techniques are taught in arts colleges and training manuals across the world, and since the majority of college animation departments skew seventy percent female, it can be extrapolated that a fair number of women identify with these performance strategies as a central part of their profession.²⁴¹ The friction they experience at a studio occurs when such an environment doesn’t support this professional autonomy, explaining why some struggle to aesthetically enroll or empathically connect with their work. In this way, what was originally a strategy promoted by the most prestigious of animation studios and colleges has become a distinct tactic in which animators affectively double their labor, recombining motion and meaning, in an effort to authenticate the value of their practice amidst a period of precarious employment, rapid technological innovation, and runaway production.

Much of layering creative authenticity through mimetic authority involves high degrees of affective discipline and emotional labor, but animators find the practice of embodying a character to be a welcome escape from reality, while the generational aspects of what it means to

²³⁸ Dudok de Wit, A. (2022, February 14). *Rip Anne D. Bernstein, key writer on MTV's 'Daria' and 'downtown'*. Cartoon Brew. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from cartoonbrew.com

²³⁹ Ruddell, Caroline, and Katharina Boeckenhoff. “Lotte Reiniger: The Crafty Animator and Cultural Value.” *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-Based Animation and Cultural Value*, edited by Caroline Ruddell and Paul Ward, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019, pp. 75–99.pg. 75.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

²⁴¹ Vankin, D. (2015, May 25). *Entertainment & Arts*. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from latimes.com

be creative can be tied to one's personal history. Lila, for example, does not merely layer embodied authenticity as a means of strategizing against precarity, but because it reflects how she evaluates her work and herself, as well as constituting a major source of aesthetic pleasure.

COLIN What inspired you to pursue animation?

LILA I've always loved telling stories, drawing, and making stupid stories. My Beanie Babies were real, they have personalities. They had conflict! I find there's a difference between someone who animates and an animator. I think animators really have to care about their characters. They have to care about the characters that they're animating. It's all about respecting the characters and understanding that. Maintaining the lore. You feel responsible for them. You're responsible for maintaining their integrity. You're responsible for them. You're responsible for representing them directly. People who just animate, like... okay this is a job. It's all about the motion. You forget that this character thinks, this character feels. How would they know what this character will do? Does the character want to do it? Are they scared to do it? How do they do it? It's all about the character's emotion. All that matters... I don't know, I feel like there's a responsibility to know, be aware of, and respect the character.

COLIN How do you foster that in yourself?

LILA I don't know; I've always had it. Inanimate objects are important to me. If someone sits on a stuffed animal, I have a heart attack. Can you get up! You're squishing their head! How dare you? Like, I... I told you about my Beanie Babies. They were real. I treated them like they were real.

The cartoon character, like a toy or desk object, can function as a kind of totem, as Lila links animation at once with a child-like capacity for animism and a sense of respect for the represented character. She also rhetorically distances herself from the animators with mercenary motivation, to distinguish herself as one aligned to the value of representing the character as authentically alive.

Likewise, layering embodied authenticity encourages the viewer to imaginatively enfold their experience with the film's subject.²⁴² The animator must be able to clearly imagine the character in order to overcome limitations in the media to inspire imaginative engagement with the audience. Chaminade et al. used fMRI to demonstrate that, when shown footage of human actors, the social areas of their brain lit up, but an animated clown activates threat-recognition and problem-solving centers because the viewer recognized the movement as atypical.²⁴³ This suggests that animators must perform within normative expectations of what constitutes a natural performance, while motion captured from an individual with a handicap may register as uncanny in spite of the movement's authentic corporeal origin. The mind stores assumptions about how

²⁴² Richard Jenkins defines the goal of the embodied animator as animistic mimesis, the sensation of switching between understanding the animation's fabrication and getting swept up in the feeling of it. (2014, pg. 8.)

²⁴³ Chaminade et al. did not explore the possibility that fMRI results may have been affected by the clown's scariness. (Chaminade, Thierry, et al. "Anthropomorphism Influences Perception of Computer-Animated Characters' Actions." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2007, pp. 206–216., <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsm017>.)

something ought to behave as a means of object recognition, expecting a steam shovel to move in one fashion, while a dog digging in another.²⁴⁴ A realistic animatronic may appear to have a human form, but if her movements do not cohere to the viewer's expectations, she appears immediately uncanny. This describes a significant goal for animators layering embodied authenticity, who distance their work from the uncanny by establishing animistic mimetic authority, designing and performing characters in accordance with the audience's anthropo-sensorial world.²⁴⁵ In other words, the animator cannot trust the audience to simply engage with animation as the creator would, the performer needs to pass the audience's authentication via the "concentrated involvement in the activity of performance."²⁴⁶ A cultural space defined by commercial transactions, branding, and consumer relations, places a premium on expression that appear to be beyond the crassness of the market. It is this demand for authenticity that ironically renders these performances all the more lucrative, leading to brands building profiles on social media and engaging in anodyne and brandable displays of activism through advertising.²⁴⁷ Those who are able to layer authenticity can legitimize their role as genuine, as actors and animators engage in embodied performances to cement their position in a precarious industry.

Lila's research into understanding the character relates her personal experiences to the imaginary ones of the character, researching media allows her to better enfold her own memories into the world of signs representable through performance.²⁴⁸ In arguing that she has always been

²⁴⁴ Saygin, Ayse Pinar, et al. "The Thing That Should Not Be: Predictive Coding and the Uncanny Valley in Perceiving Human and Humanoid Robot Actions." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2012, pp. 413–422., <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsr025>.

²⁴⁵ A character who lacks appeal "may capture your gaze, but there will be neither the building of character nor identification with the situation that will be needed." (Thomas & Johnston 1995, 15.0%)

²⁴⁶ Graver, David. "The Actor's Bodies." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1997, pp. 221–235., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939709366187>, pg. 224

²⁴⁷ Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic Tm: The Politics of Ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York University Press.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

creative, she advocates for the opportunity to engage in imaginative labor, her enrollment in the process hinging on the freedom to try on a diversity of experiences.²⁴⁹ However, the tight schedules gives her little time to actually embody a character, which hurts Lila’s ability to derive professional satisfaction from her career.

Like Lila, Rhonda is an animator who also values the ability to get into character, learning performance and animation from the same arts-college. We have a video chat one afternoon, she calls in with her baby in her arms and informs me that the conversation may be choppy, as nap-time is imminent. When I ask her what it takes to become a skilled animator, she wastes no time looking for words:

COLIN What is an important trait for an animator?

RHONDA Empathy. I don't think you can be a good animator, if you don't have empathy. You have to put yourself into your character’s shoes. You have to think like somebody else is thinking. You can't think what you think all the time.

This characterizes the liminal space between performer and character nicely, just as an aesthetic experience can occur through practicing creative judgment,²⁵⁰ another depends on actively thinking what one isn’t thinking or getting lost in the character. Empathy describes a shift in the subject’s emotions according to another’s, or to put oneself in another’s shoes²⁵¹ Scaffolding this entire process is the belief that this other individual isn’t putting on airs, their emotions are both authentic and readable, which is assuming that they have a mind to begin with.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 53.

²⁵⁰ Siciliano, Michael L. *Creative Control: The Ambivalence of Work in the Culture Industries*. Columbia University Press, 2021., 42.

²⁵¹ Misselhorn, Catrin. “Empathy with Inanimate Objects and the Uncanny Valley.” *Minds and Machines*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2009, pp. 345–359., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11023-009-9158-2> pg. 351.

Playing with toys, watching an animated character, and animating a character, all demand this sort of mental dialogue to derive that flowing pleasure of aesthetic concentration. This emerges from the negotiation of the dual presence of the actor and the character, in such a way that they appear to be seamless.²⁵² As Schechner observes in the Arizona Yaqui's ceremonial dance, the man in the deer mask becomes "not a deer" and "not a man," their identity suspended between the character and the self.²⁵³ Animators must negotiate multiple presences on and behind the screen, such as balancing the professional with the domestic.

Rhonda does not struggle to find authentic performances among her canon of favorites, informing her generational identity and identity as a creative. Invariably this leads to comparison with more recent animated films, particularly in the ways that feature filmmaking production practices have diverged from tradition. 3D-animation pipelines, digital tools such as automatic tweening and motion-capture, or just the logic of the industry, each of these can bring the authenticity of the production into question.

RHONDA "Well, there's some beautiful animation that's been done... How to Train your Dragon II was just jaw-dropping, how subtle the performances of those characters were. It's also really easy to get homogeneous. Things are just the way things are, it's just structured now. How animators are given shots to do. Whereas there used to be character leads in every production. So, you have one animator directing the performance of a single character throughout all the

²⁵² Schechner, Richard. "Victor Turner's Last Adventure." *Anthropologica*, vol. 27, no. 1/2, 1985, p. 6., <https://doi.org/10.2307/25605182>, pg. 118.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

scenes. You don't have that thread going throughout it anymore. Imagine any live-action movie, with a dozen actors playing the same character. The way they get around having a single voice come through. They don't want any one personality of the animator to shine through, so they homogenize everything as much as possible. It makes for much less interesting performances... I can't tell the difference between all these new Disney characters. The female characters are quite literally built off of the same model. Like Elsa and Anna are... They're exactly the same. They are so boring! That's why I... I loved Little Mermaid as a kid. I went through a while where I was blasé about it. Maybe it wasn't so great, maybe I have nostalgia goggles, but after I experienced what Disney was doing lately... I went back and watched these movies. I weep for how much beauty is in them. There's so much personality! There's so much.... You notice that we don't have villains because you can't have a personality anymore for some reason. I do want to say that the CG caused it. It's just trends that happen in concert with one another that have just driven me to be less and less interested in future animation."

Rhonda places emphasis on the thought process of the animator over the role of the digital tools in layering embodied authenticity, arguing acting requires authentic animation

production practices. These technological shifts illustrate the ways in which layering authenticity as a creative becomes difficult when generations of animators' experience very different professional demands. For example, while digital tools such as visual effects software began seriously impacting labor formation and runaway production for live-action in the 1980's, the animation industry was already dealing with these ramifications on an international scale, demonstrating the industry's unique sensitivity to technological innovation and disruption.²⁵⁴ Sorting out where the animation ends and the live-action begins was already difficult with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) or *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) from the perspective of labor, but this would only become more confusing as these digital tools advanced.

Rhonda's alienation also stems from a disconnect between contemporary audience expectations for animation, which differs considerably from the Disney films she grew up watching. Digital tools have enabled the translation of performances across innumerable bodies, as a walk cycle can be applied to an alien, a robot, and so on.²⁵⁵ In the case of *Frozen*, this issue has less to do with reusing character models, than the studio's chauvinistic expectation that all female leads be held to stringent standards of prettiness, scrutinizing their appearance frame by frame for any expressions considered unsightly or "too angry."²⁵⁶ Rhonda also relates the loss of these performances to the diminution in distinctive characters, particularly villains. Disney villains from the 80's and 90's drew from a theatricality and camp that coded queerness as evil.²⁵⁷ Gaston, Jafar, and Scar were the result of the labor of openly gay supervising animator

²⁵⁴ Yale 2010, pg. 175.

²⁵⁵ cf. Chaminade, Thierry, et al. "Anthropomorphism Influences Perception of Computer-Animated Characters' Actions." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2007, pp. 206–216., <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsm017>.

²⁵⁶ Amidi, Amid. "'Frozen' Head of Animation Says Animating Women Is 'Really, Really Difficult.'" *Cartoon Brew*, 17 Oct. 2013, cartoonbrew.com

²⁵⁷ Griffin, Sean. *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: Consuming Disney Queerly*. New York University Press, 2000., pg. 108.

Andreas Dejas, who could imbue these characters with authenticity, theatricality, and elegance.²⁵⁸ Thus, while men performing men received the highest payoff of cultural capital for layering embodied authenticity through animation, the expression of queerness can also be deemed authentic, particularly if overlaid onto a suitably dark-colored villain. In a similar manner, Ralph Bakshi could justify hiring and training African American animators for the production of *Coonskin* (1975) and *Hey Good Lookin'*, (1982) because the animators of color could only layer embodied authenticity if their skin corresponded to the character.²⁵⁹

Contemporary audiences are much savvier to these racial and gendered representations, so recent Disney reboots sand down the camp and artifice.²⁶⁰ Ironically, the efforts to avoid controversy by the relegation of queerness to subtext has itself drawn criticism, while openly gay characters are relegated to the margins of the story so that they may be easily edited out when the films are sold to countries that would ban any depiction of homosexuality.²⁶¹ This reflects the changing expectations on layering creative authenticity at institutions like Disney, that must produce global content anodyne enough to dodge social media controversy and governmental censorship, material which no longer reflects Rhonda's standards of what constitutes a great performance.

The demand to layer creative authenticity can even spark rivalries between departments, such as animators and motion capture actors competing over the ability to claim the layering of authentic animated performances, although this is largely a symptom of an industry in which authorship is treated as a resource. Thus, another misalignment occurs between the domains of animation and visual effects production culture. Andy Serkis, for instance, has spent his career

²⁵⁸ Ibid.,

²⁵⁹ Cohen, K. (1997) *Forbidden Animation*, Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Co., 32.3%

²⁶⁰ Earl, Jessie. "Disney: Gay Villians Made Straight (& Boring)." *YouTube*, YouTube, 11 Oct. 2019, youtube.com

²⁶¹ Victor, Daniel. "Disney Removes Same-Sex Kiss from 'Star Wars' Film in Singapore." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 25 Dec. 2019, , nytimes.com

promoting the status of motion-capture performers since his role as Gollum in *Lord of the Rings*. In an interview with him during the production of *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2016), he claimed that animators at WETA have “schooled their animators to honor the performances that are given by the actors on set.”²⁶² Emphasizing the role of animators in tracing a perfect copy of the actor, he likens their role to digital makeup, aligning them with the likes of the rotoscoper. This continued the tradition of actors taking credit for motion-capture performances, after James Cameron managed to sell his largely animated film *Avatar* (2009) as a live-action science-fiction feature, with actors like Sam Worthington using their star power to market the authenticity of the animated performance.²⁶³ *The Jungle Book* (2016) would further confuse the boundaries between special effects and animation. Andy Serkis’s role as director in the production may have been characterized as “outside-the-box thinking” at the time, it was obvious Disney was working to capitalize on the highly successful fantasy and science fiction franchises like *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012).²⁶⁴ Jon Favreau, the director of *Jungle Book*, refused to characterize the film as animation, reasoning that even though most of the film’s content is animated, the actual-human main character would cause the audience to read it as live-action.²⁶⁵ This continued in the promotion of the photo-realistic animated film, *The Lion King*, (2019) in which Bob Iger described it as “live-action,”²⁶⁶ refusing to define it as animated in spite of its lack of

²⁶² Woerner, Meredith. “Andy Serkis Built a New World for Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.” *Gizmodo*, 28 Mar. 2014, gizmodo.com

²⁶³ Media, Magik. “Avatar Exclusive -behind The Scenes (the Art of Performance Capture).” *YouTube*, 16 Dec. 2009, . youtube.com

²⁶⁴ Kit, Borys. “Andy Serkis to Direct 'Jungle Book' for Warner Bros. (Exclusive).” *The Hollywood Reporter*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 20 Mar. 2014, Hollywoodreporter.com

²⁶⁵ Amidi, Amid. “‘Jungle Book’ Filmmakers Can’t Decide If They Made an Animated Film or Not.” *Cartoon Brew*, 25 Apr. 2016, cartoonbrew.com

²⁶⁶ Iger, Bob, and Alan Braverman. “2018 Annual Meeting of Shareholders - The Walt Disney Company.” *The Walt Disney Company*, 8 Mar. 2018, thewaltdisneycompany.com

performance capture technology.²⁶⁷ Rather, he seemed worried about what calling the film ‘animated’ would imply to an American and international audience, emphasizing that the ideal viewer would watch the film with an open-mind, and not worry about how the film is made.

Where Disney Studios had once lent animators a sense of authorship and competence, it now constructs marketing campaigns that diminish their contribution to the industry.²⁶⁸ Animators find themselves in a difficult situation because claiming ownership of their work goes against the collaborative processes intrinsic to industrial modes of production. Ironically, motion-capture performers are in the exact same position, vying for the right for credit as if it were a rare resource. Creative authenticity in the industry is an artificial scarcity, this is not a bug, but a feature to keep individual laborers competing among each other.

Authentically embodied performances, Rhonda argues, require great actors, but layering professional authenticity through the mastery of digital tools and networking mixers takes time away from this pursuit. Her valuation of the thought-process behind animation suggests that it is in this stage that authenticity is decided before the stylus touches the screen. Steven Paul Leiva makes a similar argument in his polemic against the consideration of motion-capture based performances for the Academy Awards, arguing that the frame-by-frame manipulation of inert materials to construct the illusion of life should be viewed as completely artisanal performances rather than “embellished documentation of life preexisting.”²⁶⁹ Leiva seems to present a paradox, on one hand motion-capture allows for greater fidelity between the human body and virtual space, translating the actor’s motion in such a way that it can overlay fantastical forms. Yet these

²⁶⁷ Pearson, Ben. “Is the Lion King Remake Animated? Jon Favreau Says No.” *SlashFilm.com*, SlashFilm, 30 May 2019, slashfilm.com

²⁶⁸ Amidi, Amid. “Jon Favreau Made an Animated 'Lion King,' but He Still Doesn't Want You to Call It an Animated Film.” *Cartoon Brew*, 3 June 2019, cartoonbrew.com

²⁶⁹ Leiva, S. P. (2011, June 5). *Perspective: An animation producer says performance capture is not true animation*. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from, latimes.com

tools eliminate the frame-by-frame thought processes that define artisanal animation, limiting the animator's ability to layer creative authenticity. Andy Serkis's performance in *The Lord of the Rings* film series (2001-2003) was the product of Serkis, the animators that worked on the character, and everyone else that contributed to rendering, cutting, splicing, or burning Serkis's body into the film. The same can be said for any live-action actor today, who will likely have stunt-doubles, make-up artists, etcetera. Randall William Cook, Director of Animation on the Lord of the Rings trilogy, released a public response to Serkis in which he asserts the role of Gollum was a synthesis, a collaborative act delivered by motion-capture performers and a team of highly-skilled animators.²⁷⁰

For Rhonda and Lila, the market-oriented values of the studio remain the principal issue, in which companies define professional authenticity by the revenue an intellectual property can generate, rather than its quality in representing an embodied performance. While Rhonda finds that working from home in Atlanta affords her greater degrees of professional autonomy, her time for layering embodied authenticity is undercut by her domestic responsibilities. For example, she often needed to tend to her infant child during the interview, as they sat on her lap:

COLIN So, why Atlanta? Have you thought about moving to LA?

RHONDA I know what kind of life I would have out there. *(The baby starts wiggling in her arms, fussing.)* It was really important for me to have whining crying babies, who don't let me talk to humans, and I know it sounds... It's the cost of living, it's a huge

²⁷⁰ Amidi, Amid. "Lord of the Rings' Animation Supervisor Randall William Cook Speaks out on Andy Serkis." *Cartoon Brew*, 13 May 2014, cartoonbrew.com

problem! Mostly, it's the cost of living. It's really expensive, there's really high taxes there. I need a really high-paying job to have a decent standard of living out there. In Atlanta we can sort of, we can scrape by without killing ourselves, in a way that we wouldn't be able to do in California. One of my husband's good buddies, he's had a career out there for 20 years in editorial. He said, we can't afford it anymore. He and his girlfriend just got married, I don't think they're having kids. That's just one anecdote but... and I was in my late 20's when I was thinking about what I wanted my life to look like when I was forty. I realized, if I don't have children by the time I'm forty, I'm going to be so sad... and I know it's going to be hard. I didn't know how hard!

Rhonda's creative values revolve around managing her relationship to the character she performs, mirroring the dual presence she negotiates between the dichotomous social fields of remote work and domestic labor.²⁷¹ Identity is something that must be exerted, to obligate external acknowledgement, the enactments and reenactments of 'sister of,' 'mother of,' 'daughter of,' 'wife of,' etcetera.²⁷² Women balancing a dual presence in the domestic and professional fields often find their labor blending the "invisible care market," especially for those working

²⁷¹ Bruni, Attila, et al. *Gender and Entrepreneurship an Ethnographic Approach*. Taylor and Francis, 2005. et al. 2005, pg. 194.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pg. 188.

from home.²⁷³ For women in the animation industry, this often meant ongoing interruptions related to being in the home, such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for kin.

Such labor cannot layer creative authenticity on its own, but in the context of family businesses, family relations permeate organizational practices.²⁷⁴ Layering embodied authenticity becomes a part of this, as Rhonda animates short films about her children, using her identity as a mother to claim a unique degree of embodied authenticity through the performance.²⁷⁵ The empathic and recombinatory practices involved in layering embodied authenticity also plays into the feminine art of making do, an *arte di arrangiarsi*.²⁷⁶ already embedded in the gendered experiences of women who balance a dual presence between professional and domestic fields, leveraging these experiences to embody a role and layer creative authenticity.²⁷⁷

Gender-based segregation prevents women from layering authenticity in the professional sphere due to the relationship between employment and maternity, naturalizing the position that women are unreliable in the professional arena. This reflects a general bias which fails to appreciate the emotional, affective, and domestic labor necessary for great performances to foment. Just as black actors in Hollywood struggle against being treated as mere signifiers of diversity when they desire complex and challenging roles, women in animation rarely find the opportunity to express the richness of their experience at the studio, which supports Kristin Warner's call for a diversity of characters rather than surface-level bids at representation.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ Sternadori, Miglena, and Carrie Prentice. *Gender and Work: Exploring Intersectionality, Resistance, and Identity*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 191

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 189.

²⁷⁶ Guano 2016, pg. 118.

²⁷⁷ Freeman, Carla. *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink Collar Identities in the Caribbean*. Duke Univ. Press, 2000., pg. 46.

²⁷⁸ Warner, Kristin J. "In the Time of Plastic Representation" *Film Quarterly*. 2017. filmquarterly.com

Even though these animators have succeeded professionally, there is a mismatch between their values and that of the studio, resulting in frustration over layering creative and embodied authenticity. This is further complicated by efforts to inject social value into the production process, particularly by minority animators without support from their peers at the studio. Phoebe freelances at the same studio as Lila, and they share a similar challenges as non-white women in the profession, but Phoebe specifically reflects on her responsibilities as a media producer to a potential audience of minorities.

PHOEBE The challenge is... big concept level kinds of challenges, are like social level challenges. Like, someone at work doesn't want you there. What I guess I'm trying to say is, for me, for instance: I was given a project where I needed to design a couple of kid characters. Immediately, I was like, yeah, there will be a black person.... So, I'm googling for references. If you are an African-American animator and you want to find reference photos on Google, you have to use a very specific set of language to find African-American faces. Because if you write “twelve-year-old African-American boy,” you will see a lot of dead bodies. You'll see a lot of kids in jail. A lot of mugshots. Clearly those aren't the only pictures being taken. So, a lot of times that will be like, checking out my nephew's graduation photos, some of his classmates might be black. What do black kids look like? That's kind of a challenge because I have to design fifteen options for these characters in like two

hours. Really just sketch them out. It's easy to find tons of Caucasian faces. Maybe some Asian or Hispanic faces. But references for African-Americans, especially girls, they're very difficult to find. It's getting better; Pinterest is even worse.... Then at the end of all of that, the white character got chosen over the ones that I drew. Like okay, I figured. We need diversity, so this girl could be Asian, let's just say she's Asian. It's very frustrating.

Similar to Rhonda, Phoebe's professional practices are also partially informed by an empathic connection to an imagined audience, her desire to create diverse characters stemming from a personal understanding of why such an effort would be meaningful. However, by working within the system to pitch ethnic character designs, Phoebe reveals that even on the most minute levels of creative input, one can find traces of competing narratives and struggles for layering creative authenticity. Drawing from a diffuse database of images, she recombines their aspects to layer embodied authenticity through the portraits tied to human beings, compared to if she had to rely on memory and caricature. Her identity as a minority herself negotiates with the demands of layering professional authenticity in a precarious environment, these aspects competing for expression when time remains a limited resource. Phoebe's experience reflects the way that media producers are always-already engaged in layering authenticity that will resonate across multiple cultural levels at once, as they pull from their personal and local cultural identity to

inform production decisions. Global media and local culture interact, as these values negotiate with the logic of production, including understanding the demands of the audience.²⁷⁹

This misalignment between individual animators and global media institutions presents situations in which Phoebe must contend with her desires for a blacker cast while the studio treats representation as a series of surface-level signifiers, however even reaching a degree of “plastic representation” remains a challenge.²⁸⁰ can make do with her available autonomies and resources to layer creative authenticity, tactically negotiating the creation of social value by leveraging her identity as a resource. Dominico, Hau, and Tracey present social bricolage as a theory for describing the behavior of social entrepreneurs or socially driven businesses,²⁸¹ which typically takes the form of a person or brand working toward achieving social and/or environmental goals as a means of layering creative authenticity. Common social enterprises include everything from cultural arts, education, community development and so on.²⁸² In this case however, Phoebe works as an individual within a broadly commercial institution, but her personal moral framework informs her professional decision-making, encouraging her to design a diverse cast of characters.

This infusion of value into the strictly transactional nature of the quotidian doubles as a subtle protest to hegemonic expectations of what constitutes acceptable bodies in animation, implicitly criticizing the quotidian. This is a tactic common among fandoms, who trace fictional

²⁷⁹ Tinic, Serra. *On Location Canada's Television Industry in a Global Market*. University of Toronto Press, 2005., pg. 11.

²⁸⁰ Warner 2017, filmquarterly.com

²⁸¹ Di Domenico, MariaLaura, et al. “Social Bricolage: Theorizing Social Value Creation in Social Enterprises.” *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2010, pp. 681–703., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00370.x.0>, pg. 681.

²⁸² Pearce, John. *Social Enterprise in Anytown*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2009, pp. 31-59

content onto real-world praxis, suffusing activism with the layering of subcultural authenticity.²⁸³ Anselmo adds to this by arguing that such fan-behavior constitutes its own form of labor, as they take it upon themselves to draw real world meaning from the materials around which they organize their identities as fans.²⁸⁴ Here, Phoebe traces her real-world concerns over into the construction of animated content, in the hopes that the audience will derive meaningful social value from this nod to diversity. In this way, her labor is doubled, working to create social value, while tactically using diversity to appeal to a global liberal sentimentality.

This social value at stake is the depiction of racial diversity, assumed enticing to global media markets through a liberal sentimentality that promises inclusivity to minority groups, albeit within the parameters that such different cultures do not impose or restrict others.²⁸⁵ Narratives that seek to induce sympathy from a general community have a number of tactics at their disposal, such as presenting historic inequities as a thing of the past, or homogenizing diverse voices into a manageable monolith.²⁸⁶ These are melodramas in their most concrete form but the trouble with selling diversity as sentimentality arises from a differential in power.²⁸⁷ The client seeks something with which they think the audience will identify, the animator becomes the cultural ventriloquist trying on icons.²⁸⁸

Thus, many animators take on extra labor to successfully embody a character, because relying on caricature and stereotypical shorthand damages their ability to claim creative authenticity. Sentimental texts present this intimacy as ongoing and incomplete, irreconcilable

²⁸³ Jenkins 2012: 1, 3. As cited in Anselmo, Diana W. "Gender and Queer Fan Labor on Tumblr." *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 84–114., <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2018.4.1.84>.

²⁸⁴ Anselmo 2018, pg. 93.

²⁸⁵ Cooper, Dominic. *Challenging Diversity*. Cambridge University Press, 2004., pg. 6.

²⁸⁶ Wanzo, Rebecca Ann. *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling*. SUNY Press, 2009, pg. 10.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 114

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 117

conflict between the closeness a reader feels towards the text, Phoebe manages this by drawing from real-world inspiration in the form of hair blogs and family photos. This is an emotionally motivated response to an otherwise mundane procedure, a progressive affect subtly articulated by the political consciousness of character design. As Phoebe demonstrates, inducing an emotional response in the audience necessitates mobilization of the personal into the presentational body, layering embodied authenticity through a recombination of images sourced from virtual peers.²⁸⁹ Animators do not simply animate, but layer embodied authenticity by crafting material for a particular type of audience, supporting some identity formations while delegitimizing others.²⁹⁰ Of course, globalist media logic can, and will, seek to commodify and export cultural identity if it provides profit. Phoebe's efforts are further concealed behind an informatized system of bureaucratic labor, but just as abstract labor appears stripped of enchantment, Phoebe finds a way to make her own meaning.

In the end, the client did not select any of the darker skinned characters, frustrating Phoebe, in part because of the additional labor that she performed in order to present a diverse cast, which now appears to be wasted. Many of these decisions are left to the matter of implicit and explicit biases, in which common sense conceals hegemonic racism in a stagnant pool of presuppositions and inherited thinking.²⁹¹ The friction she experiences reflects a struggle common for minorities, as they find that battles do not stay won, but must be waged again and again.²⁹² Although official company policy certainly strives for a form of color-blind equality, these small moments serve to illustrate the ways in which gender and race in the studio can

²⁸⁹ Wanzo 2009, 125

²⁹⁰ Tinic 2005, pg. 32.

²⁹¹ Derrida 2008, 120

²⁹² McGlen and Sarkees 1993, 68 ac cited in Kenney, Sally J. "New Research on Gendered Political Institutions." *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1996, p. 445., <https://doi.org/10.2307/448883>, pg. 458.

manifest as hierarchical and oppositional. Two-thirds of women of color working in animation report feelings of erasure or isolation, as if their input were consistently minimized.²⁹³ While this population already faces challenges in layering professional authenticity to secure promotions and access high-visibility assignments,²⁹⁴ Phoebe's experiences emphasize elements invisibly interwoven into the fabric of the studio which present obstacles for layering embodied authenticity, such as something as simple as using a search engine. Phoebe seems to have handled the situation in good humor, but it is critical for the studio that everyone feels a sense of earned citizenship and belonging, especially when institutional efforts to tackle inequality come up short.

Layering creative authenticity through embodied performances illustrates the ways in which a single discipline related to empathy, can morph from a justification for masculine behavior to a denigrated part of "women's work" at the studio. Arguing that this strategy solely exists for the purposes of justifying hierarchy, in which great performers are awarded with cultural capital, only tells part of the story. Animators enjoy the imaginative labor involved in embodying a character; this is not just an exercise but an opportunity to relate the performer's experiences to the character's. Lila demonstrates a precise understanding about what drives her fellow animators; she struggles with her own strategies in part because they reflect on the performance of her team. Rhonda recombines her tactics for layering creative authenticity with the demands of a highly hierarchical studio and the needs of her children, part of her struggle to maintain her profession lies in keeping up that part of her creative identity, as her family inspires her artwork. Phoebe likewise feels deeply for the characters that she inhabits, while her role as

²⁹³ Smith, Stacy, et al. "Inclusion in Animation? - USC Annenberg School for ..." *USC Annenberg, Women in Animation*, June 2019, pg. 20.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 21

designer draws her towards infusing her work with social meaning, as she collates and recombines portraits from across the internet. The recombined self manages authentic character performances on the animated screen with authentic presentations of myriad identity layers, including professional, mother, minority, and so on.

Creative laborers understand that they should not engage in uncompensated labor, yet they must make sacrifices in order to cement their role in a precarious industry, establishing a production culture in which everyone works harder for less. Minority animators are especially burdened by this reality, eager to be a part of the team, but struggling against normative expectations regarding the layering of creative authenticity. This is not to suggest that creative laborers are solely motivated by fear, on the contrary, many stay late out of the hopes that this will enable their fellow craftsmen to go home a little sooner. Sensing in them a common drive for perfection, creative laborers must work together while layering authenticity, sustaining their spirits with the aesthetic experiences of production and collective effervescence of the late night. Feeling connected to a character or a team informs the motivation of creative laborers in a highly cooperative industry, in which disrespecting a character or role means performing in a manner inconsistent with one's authentic essence, but this authenticity must likewise conform to the industry's hegemonic expectations of what constitutes a creative embodied endeavor.

5 ANIMATORS ONLINE: AUTHENTICITY AND DIGITAL PATRONAGE

Digital tools such as crowd-funding platforms have opened a new arena of production for animation, but this world of digital patronage intensifies the demand to layer authenticity online, presenting unique challenges for animators adept at such a recombinant, self-reflexive medium. Animators also find it difficult to layer authenticity predicated on consistency, as their line of work is unstable, anonymous, and poorly understood by those on the outside. The demand for online authenticity necessitates an increase in what Nancy Baym calls relational labor, strategies that can address a large audience as if they were close friends, a form of labor that requires a completely different set of skills than animation.²⁹⁵ Animators take pleasure in constructing a range of characters and performances, but only those with sufficient resources to invest in a persona over the course of months and years can expect to derive much capital from the world of digital patronage.

This chapter scrutinizes the strategies and tactics employed by animators seeking to layer authenticity online in order to break into this world of digital patronage, as they negotiate with the alienation and precarity rampant across the industry, to define how this process interacts with the logic of global production networks or “worlds.”²⁹⁶ Animators have navigated different worlds of production since the beginning of the industry, in many ways acting as the diplomats of media industries due to their always-already distributed form of performance.²⁹⁷ The strategy

²⁹⁵ Baym 2018, 18

²⁹⁶ Yoon, H., and E. J. Malecki. “Cartoon Planet: Worlds of Production and Global Production Networks in the Animation Industry.” *Industrial and Corporate Change*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2009, pp. 239–271., <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtp040>.

²⁹⁷ Disney’s diplomatic efforts in South America (Sammond 2015) is one example, but animators from the United States have a history of taking on work abroad as trainers and tech support. (Sito 2006, 258)

of conspicuous authorship²⁹⁸ layers creative authenticity by legitimizing oneself as the sole creator, a belief is closely associated with the ownership of the intellectual property. Owning what one creates asserts creative authenticity, bifurcating the literary genius from the ghostwriting hack. This authorial identity depends on a very specific relation to the property one produces for the marketplace. Many skills and practices that were always a part of animation, such as the emphasis on expertise expressed through portfolios and the careful management of intellectual property, are now becoming mandatory for members of the professional class.²⁹⁹ The introduction of platforms online which allow for careers sustained from digital patronage represents yet a new world of production, which has lasting ramifications on the meaning and value of layering authenticity online.

This research also explores the impact of the Web 2.0,³⁰⁰ or the transition to a web culture largely composed of human and non-human user-generated content.³⁰¹ Animators face increasing pressure to participate in self-branding, a strategy encouraged by an increasingly entrepreneurial ideology flourishing online, an always-on discipline of calibrated authenticity. Individuals improvise methods to manage the inherent contradictions between their restrained public persona and their private selves.³⁰² Successful online personas are highly curated, involving a mix of conscious and unconscious self-presentational strategies.³⁰³ While such persona building was once the domain of the celebrity managing their public image, an increasing number of "ordinary" social media users adopt these strategies for themselves, a phenomena Marwick dubs

²⁹⁸ Newman, Michael Z.. *The Media Studies Toolkit*. United States, Taylor & Francis, 2022. , pg. 55

²⁹⁹ Hartley, John. *Creative Industries*. Blackwell, 2009., pg. 121.

³⁰⁰ Coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004. (Manovich 2009, pg. 319)

³⁰¹ Ibid.,

³⁰² Marwick 2013, pg. 203.

³⁰³ Caldeira, Sofia P., et al. "Between the Mundane and the Political: Women's Self-Representations on Instagram." *Social Media + Society*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2020, pg. 7.

"the micro-celebrity."³⁰⁴ The "micro-celebrization" of everything describes a series of powerful forces influencing the current digital ecology, linked directly with neoliberal capitalist ideology.³⁰⁵ It is not just the technical construction of digital media, but also the relational strategies that personalize the content, which determines the successes from the failures on the internet. Discussions on the political economy of social media tend to center on discourses³⁰⁶ surrounding the micro-celebrity and self-branding;³⁰⁷ for either macro or micro-celebrities, however, building an audience requires ongoing emotional labor to maintain.³⁰⁸ Engaging with social media requires time and labor, but it also adds seemingly pedestrian issues to a wider digital discursive field, becoming a part of the wider negotiation with hegemonic power structures.³⁰⁹ As these digital tools bleed into private and public activities, it is necessary to acknowledge the intrinsic complexity and messiness of these practices, along with the ways these impulses are deeply intertwined with culture, technology, and power.

Moeller and D'Ambrosio argue that social media has brought about an era of prolificity, in which authenticity is strategically edited according to the needs of one's profile, or presence online.³¹⁰ In a culture in which it is possible to communicate immediately with a vast population across the globe, and an environment in which one is largely surrounded by strangers, they claim

³⁰⁴ Marwick 2013, pg. 15.

³⁰⁵ Maly, Ico. "Metapolitical New Right Influencers: The Case of Brittany Pettibone." *Social Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 7, 2020, p. 113., <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9070113>.

³⁰⁶ *Dis-cursus*, from the Latin meaning to run to and fro, refers to language operating via living and improvising as opposed to a set script or fixed schema. All the rivers of gossip, tributaries of scripts, and basins rich with the little stories we pass on to each other, discourse is part of the medium through which individuals form their organizational beliefs and practices. (Barthes 1977, pg. 3.)

³⁰⁷ c.f. Novoselova, Veronika, and Jennifer Jenson. "Authorship and Professional Digital Presence in Feminist Blogs." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, pp. 257–272., <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1436083>.

³⁰⁸ Marwick 2013, pg. 211.

³⁰⁹ Caldeira et al. 2020, pg. 12.

³¹⁰ Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2021, pg. 9.

one often comes to know people through their profiles or self-presentation without concern for knowing them authentically. Proficiency represents a new, dominant paradigm for the fabrication of an identity in relation to a social condition pervaded by 'second order observation' intensified information technology.³¹¹ Society has entered into a mode of perceiving that emerges in relation to something else, as one lives in a world rich with media and actual experiences are usually pre-experienced via researching reviews and ratings. One does not observe so much as observe observers,³¹² as social media invites one to spend time looking at others, relating one's experience to theirs as if one were the subject of their vacation photos. Public presentation has supplanted art and relics as the primary generator 'exhibition value,'³¹³ investing the self with symbolic capital through the presentation of one's persona. The pressure to avoid moral ostracization augments under such orders, as public identities can be subject to elaborate methods of censorship and censure-ship.³¹⁴ Rather than profile pictures depicting a rich collection of individual personalities, for example, most are layered around what the user believes will make them look attractive, signaling 'authenticity' through their choice of brands and activities.³¹⁵

The worlds of production extant in the animation industry allow animators to break off from their current job without leaving their career, seeking out positions that better negotiate

³¹¹ Ibid., pg. 11.

³¹² Luhmann, Niklas. *Theory of Society: Volume 1*. Translated by Rhodes Barrett, Stanford University Press, 2012., pg. 87.

³¹³ Benjamin, Walter, and Michael W. Jennings. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [First Version]." *Grey Room*, vol. 39, 2010, pp. 11–37., <https://doi.org/10.1162/grey.2010.1.39.11>., part V.

³¹⁴ Moeller, Hans-Georg, and Paul J. D'Ambrosio. "Sincerity, Authenticity and Proficiency: Notes on the Problem, a Vocabulary and a History of Identity." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2018, pp. 575–596., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453718799801>., pg. 13.

³¹⁵ Hancock, Jeffrey T., and Catalina L. Toma. "Putting Your Best Face Forward: The Accuracy of Online Dating Photographs." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01420.x>. pg. 385.

their authorial aspirations. Many animators still cleave to the strategy of conspicuous authorship as if failure to establish a relation to one's in amounts to an inability to become one's authentic self. Sid, for example, wishes to achieve such a status as a testament to his own identity as a creative. He has worked in the animation industry for over a decade, animating characters for a number of Adult Swim properties, an impressively long career. But as a man who recently entered his forties, he has set his sights on achieving authorial status through crowdfunding, when his hopes at the studio were dashed.

SID I do enjoy studio environments, but I need to have opportunities. I need... at the studio I felt like I was only developing somebody else's thing. So after... There are definitely advantages. The really nice people you can interact with, but... I don't know. I just... I just always wanted to achieve something...I was also a performer... that's why I was trying to build my brand outside.... You're not going to become a producer by being an animator. They like to keep people who do work in the working position. So, I also never had a pitch developed. Well almost, but then it got canceled... It wasn't a priority, because there's no budget for it, just something to do on the off time to keep people working. When I didn't hear anything about it...I went into the files for the project... and it was gone. And there was a new project in its place. That was...a kick to the balls of my soul.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Jameson once argued that Postmodernity as an aesthetic threatens to rip humanity away from "the carnal reality of the human member itself, now more phantasmic than the leather it is printed

Institutions derive free labor from promises that go unfulfilled, leading to feelings of betrayal and alienation from what was once an enjoyable practice of creation. Turning to the internet as a means of layering creative authenticity beyond the gate-keeping powers of the globalized Hollywood system appears to be an obvious solution, as these platforms advertise their capacity to allow the user to pursue their authentic passion, manufacturing promises of autonomy that they ultimately cannot deliver. Nevertheless, the social and reputational stakes for achieving a certain size of audience or successfully running a crowdfunding campaign are very high, overcoming alienation through deep play,³¹⁷ in which creative capital won from conspicuous authorship is wagered against wasted time and humiliation. The recombinancy strategy cuts both ways, as it allows animators to rapidly adapt to the industry, it also asks them to alter themselves as a part of that effort to survive, imprinting immaterial discipline and punishment onto the cyborg flesh. In this case, Sid relies on his relation to the studio to maintain his identity as an industry insider, but this milestone becomes a millstone when he tries to rise to positions that would conspicuously signify his authorship.

Like many others, Sid believed that working in the animation profession constituted layering creative authenticity, which would subsequently win him opportunities for authorial roles. His long career in animation studio production has earned him a reputation for reliability and technical skill, layering professional authenticity in a portfolio career. However, this is quite different from layering creative authenticity online, which demands managing a rotating set of

on....”(Jameson 1989) but the immaterial nature of creative labor did little to shield Sid’s figurative organ. Although it’s worth noting that such a statement remains suspended within that thin realm of jocularity in which he could claim the mere simulation of affect, a snarkiness honed in a production culture that implicitly punishes overly emotional displays. Gregg describes sarcasm as a tactic for overcoming anomie at the office cubicle, in which all difficult emotions must be filtered through a performative friendliness, presenting Sid’s agony as a notion suspended within realms of plausible deniability. (Gregg 2011, 265)

³¹⁷ Deep play describes the complex seriousness that games invoke, in which players seem to know it’s a game yet nevertheless become invested in winning. Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, 1973. pg. 15.

platforms from personal websites to Instagram portfolios and fan-art pages, resulting in a decided intensification of necessary labor.³¹⁸ The immediate feedback and connectivity of this platform encourage users to post process work and update constantly, as only the most recent work has a chance of garnering attention.³¹⁹ Alessandro Gandini introduces the term "reputation economy" to describe the dynamics of this intangible asset as it articulates the job market, functioning as a form of cultural capital for individuals in highly networked social interactions.³²⁰ In advocating for his legitimacy as an animator in the world of mass production for non-theatrical markets, he finds that the role also constrains as much as it enables. As Richard Peterson observes in the country music industry, the fabrication of authenticity demands adhering to specific markers which signify consistency and promote identification, relatability, and occasionally awe.³²¹ For powerful and well-known television creators like Dan Harmon and Dino Stamatopoulos, they can use their reputation to pitch outlandish animated material on crowdfunding platforms, garnering hundreds of thousands of dollars based on the creative authenticity garnered from previous popular productions.³²² Animators do not find the expertise expressed in their portfolio adequate capital for attaining an authorial position.

COLIN But you still got to pitch it, right? So... animators get to pitch stuff?

SID They do. They do sometimes, once every few years.

³¹⁸ Scolere, Leah. "Brand Yourself, Design Your Future: Portfolio-Building in the Social Media Age." *New Media & Society*, vol. 21, no. 9, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819833066>, pg. 14.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 13.

³²⁰ Gandini, Alessandro. *The Reputation Economy Understanding Knowledge Work in Digital Society*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016., pg. 8.

³²¹ Peterson 1999, 4.4%

³²² Amidi, Amid. "Report: Animators Are Raising Big Money on Kickstarter." *Cartoon Brew*, 29 Oct. 2012, cartoonbrew.com

COLIN Okay, but you're saying that animators don't actually have any advantage, when it comes to pitching their material and getting it picked up, as opposed to anybody else?

SID Well, no. Everybody has... I mean... People tend to put you in... in a box or a category... I also market myself as an animator on LinkedIn. I credit myself as a... an artist, animator, and idea man. Boom boom boom. I did, yeah, okay as an animator. It depends on what you're trying to do. If you're just trying to get hired as an animator, what you mostly do is, you know, have a good website with a good demo reel... and network. So, that's another reason that I'm trying to produce this animated short on Kickstarter.

In order to develop legitimacy as a producer, Sid must perform it by embodying the role, recombining his identity with the production of animated content. In this way, layering creative authenticity binds one's identity to the work, utilized by those who wish to be recognized through their products, interweaving the individual's desire for self-determination with the desperate cry for recognition. The emergence of Kickstarter appeared to be an answer to those many disenfranchised animators, but networking for crowdfunding functions very differently than the sort needed to maintain connections with peers in the relatively insular animation industry. Corrie Francis Parks, an early success story for animators on Kickstarter, funded her short project for \$12,000 after committing months to full-time campaigning.³²³ She attributes her

³²³ Amidi, Amid. "How to Run a Successful Kickstarter Campaign." *Cartoon Brew*, 14 Dec. 2012,, cartoonbrew.com

success to her capacity to constantly share updates on the project without coming off as disingenuous, balancing the need to layer authenticity with the demands of generating new rewards when funding flatlines. Controversies arise when producers use Kickstarter to fund private pitch-material, as an indie-comic duo sought out a community to pay for the production of a story reel that the project backers would ultimately never get to see.³²⁴ While the studio behind the Kickstarter feared a potential leak would hurt their chances for pitching the reel to major production studios, those funding the project felt as if the producers had failed to make this clear. This speaks to the differences between the globalized Hollywood system and the world of digital patronage, the former relies on secrecy enforced by non-disclosure agreements, while the latter demands constant engagement and transparency.³²⁵

The difficulty within the world of digital patronage is the sheer amount of relational labor necessary to layer authenticity in this way, a practice completely alien to the imaginative and creative labor that many animators desire. Part of her ‘dependence’ ties back to this emotional investment, platforms often mediate genuine relationships. Penny’s labor online may be difficult to quantify for herself and her husband, in part because extracting value from the world of digital patron systems requires a remarkable intensification of emotional labor in the form of relational labor.³²⁶ Hochschild’s definition of emotional labor describes a presentational mode, in which one is expected to manage their presence in order to produce an emotional state in another as a part of one’s job, as doctors practice bedside manners and restaurant servers are told to smile.³²⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s move from emotional to affective re-emphasizes the role of

³²⁴ Amidi, A. (2012, October 21). “Why *the goon* is a troubling Kickstarter project [updated].” *Cartoon Brew*. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from cartoonbrew.com

³²⁵ *Ibid.*,

³²⁶ Baym defines relational labor as the communicative, self-presentational, and productive skills that fans demand as a part of their patronage. (Baym, 2018, pg. 6)

³²⁷ Hochschild 1983, pg. 7.

the body in this process,³²⁸ as Penny’s precisely applied makeup, knee-length dress, and knit sweater contrast against the studio’s decor of corporate sci-fi pastiche.³²⁹ Affective labor takes into account the physical and mental work necessary to manage one’s presentational self, even as such a travail often falls under the label of “women’s work.”³³⁰ or the forms of toil women disproportionately take on so that men can focus on business matters, thereby facilitating the erasure of such contributions in the minds of those who most benefit from it.³³¹ Relational labor tends to form utilitarian relationships around emotional and financial support, rather than the kind of emotional work freely undertaken.³³² This is not to say that such utilitarian relationships cannot eventually overcome the commercial nature of the platform, but while all relationships require work, relational labor is implicitly profit-oriented.³³³

On its surface, Kickstarter appears simple, a platform which mediates projects seeking financial aid for realization. Enticing backers necessitates the production of rewards, minor goods and services to be delivered in addition to the final product. The individual loses nothing if they do not successfully fund their project, nor do they lose intellectual ownership of their product, but they also do not receive any of the money that they had raised.³³⁴ The platform has relatively little interest in the quality of the content that it mediates, it derives value from the access it gains from the community that producers bring to the site. Thus, as a part of developing

³²⁸ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard University Press, 2000. pg. 293.

³²⁹ Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern University Press, 1987., pg. 70.

³³⁰ Hardt & Negri, 2000, pg. 293.

³³¹ Smith 1987, pg. 83

³³² Baym, 2018, pg. 176.

³³³ Bonifacio, Ross, et al. “Beyond Fans: The Relational Labor and Communication Practices of Creators on Patreon.” *New Media & Society*, 2021, p. 146144482110279., <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211027961> pg. 15.

³³⁴ Amazon Payments and Kickstarter retain 5% of the total amount raised. (Heresco, Aaron. “An Ambivalent Political Economy of Kickstarter.” *The Political Economy of Communication*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 34–53., <https://www.polecom.org/index.php/polecom>. Accessed 4 Jan. 2022. 2016, 36)

one's own Kickstarter requires tapping a network of friends, family, and fans, to financially invest in the individual entrepreneur, so a few may find success at the expense of the rest. At the same time, Kickstarter's capacity to enable individuals and organizations to acquire donations directly from the public has become an essential tool for independent and underground media production companies making do without a steady stream of fiscal resources.³³⁵ The platform allowed for the production of material by minorities such as Matthew A. Cherry's *Hair Love* (2019),³³⁶ or a trio of artists from Atlanta recently crowdfunded their graphic novel into an animated short, bypassing the globalized Hollywood system.³³⁷

Crowdfunding represents a tactic to leverage the cultural capital earned as professional animators in the author-oriented world of digital patronage. More so now than ever, managing a portfolio requires cultivating an online presence, defined by the ceaseless demand for the presentation of creative endeavors, commodifying everything down to the production process.³³⁸ The animator must discover methods to sell what is invisible, their imaginative labor cannot be expressed in the same way as physical labor, no one can see the internal mental process of the creative. Animators expose their production process online to layer authenticity, providing vital cultural capital that can legitimize their role in the industry, as their online audience follows them across occupations. Animators may struggle to present their expertise in a way that is accessible to an audience; they must bring their patrons into the fold. This encourages animators to publicize their production process, leading to a rise in filming and live-streaming design,

³³⁵ Teixeira, Lina Moscoso, and Ana Jorge. "Crowdfunding Platforms in the Political Economy of Alternative Media." *Comunicação e Sociedade*, vol. 39, 2021, pp. 183–202.

³³⁶ Aguilar, Carlos. "Sony Animation Boards Matthew A. Cherry's 'Hair Love' Following Kickstarter Success." *Cartoon Brew*, 21 Mar. 2019, cartoonbrew.com

³³⁷ Rose, Sarah. "These Atlanta Artists Crowdfunded Their Comic into an Animated Film. Then, They Won Big." *Georgia Public Broadcasting*, gpb.org

³³⁸ Scolere 2019, pg. 13.

storyboard, and animation sessions. Becoming forums between fans and professionals, the process of production becomes consumable, giving animators the opportunity to genuinely display their craft. Animators coming from the studio may find themselves in a position to display their expertise as well, while this may appear to render the world of digital patronage more accessible, it is a strategy limited by the fact that only a minute fraction of the population will be able to survive off of the economic value extracted from layering authenticity online.³³⁹

The animator seeking entry into the world of digital patronage must learn to publicize their production process as a means of satisfying online audience desiring parasocial intimacy. Crowdfunding platforms turn this community into an audience of fans; co-opting other forms of cooperation. For animators, layering authenticity online demands bringing the audience into the production process, inviting them to become a part of the social fabric of the workshop. Thus, performing authenticity online demands turning production inside out, in which the more information is given, the more cultural capital may be derived by layering authenticity online.

Seeking to extract value from this new world of production proves to be a distinct challenge for animators in a studio environment. The worlds outside of digital patronage have strict divisions of creative labor; these roles being distributed hierarchically. The world of digital patronage does not so much have a division of labor as a diffusion, in which the individual is bound up in a network of other human and non-human relationships, each exerting relative and variable levels of heteronomous influence. Layering creative authenticity serves to negotiate the abstraction and precarity in the industry, as individuals tie themselves to their products as a means of amassing various forms of cultural capital. Managing precarity in this world relies less on presentational logic than relational, in which the animator-influencer cultivates micro-

³³⁹ Marwick 2013, pg. 204.

celebrity status by collecting and retaining a highly engaged and financially generous audience.³⁴⁰ Defining the precise challenges animators face in this world of production requires an exploration on how the strategies for survival in the world of digital patronage differs from others, along with how these tactics reflect adaptations to an industry historically defined by anonymity, anomie, and precarity.

Penny, for example, tactically negotiates anonymous, professional labor at an animation studio, while constructing an authorial identity by posting online. She undertakes the latter labor voluntarily, in the hopes of a full-time career online. Enjoying animating and illustrating as far as the bare reality of practice is concerned, she finds that the content she produces for her current company goes against her aesthetic sensibilities. Creating material online allows Penny to extend beyond the confines of the studio, to aggregate a fan-base more in line with her own desires to layer authenticity through creative endeavors. While her work in the industry engages intelligence, it does not spark the imagination, as inauthentic acts such as tracing do not reflect Penny's desire for authentic creativity. Participation online provides a means to escape the sense of feeling invisible or unappreciated at a studio.³⁴¹ This, along with the opportunity to make friends, allows Penny to receive genuine emotional and financial support online from girl fans like herself.³⁴² Without the autonomy to work within her preferred style for her preferred audience, much of the pleasure intrinsic in creative production is forfeit, leading her to seek more fulfilling practices elsewhere. Her use of social media to build a personal brand at once allows for professional development, but she must balance these responsibilities to her audience online with the demands of her career:

³⁴⁰ Bonifacio, Hair, & Wohn, 2014.

³⁴¹ Scolere 2019, pg. 8.

³⁴² c.f. communities on Tumblr practicing "a therapeutic heuristic that validates girl fans' difference while also destabilizing deified (and essentialist) paradigms of infallible masculinity" Anselmo 2018, pg. 94.

COLIN Do you use social media?

PENNY I'm very dependent on it, for the good and the bad. I have been for the past two years. Because currently, I am working two jobs, here and my... I've been really working at it, very hard, to build my personal brand. Who I am as an artist, my style. I have been playing the system, learning about the algorithm, taking advantage of that. Figuring out how it works, what times I should be posting. I use it very regularly because I'm trying to build myself up right now as an independent artist. I am on it a lot sometimes. I am on it more than I should be, because I am just scrolling... because I have built this codependency on it. Because I've been using it for the good, to build up who I am as an artist. I'm seeing it grow and it's starting to do well, but it also kinda bites me in the butt. Because I will be somewhere, and my husband will be like... "get off your phone!"

COLIN You're trying to build yourself up as an independent artist, in addition to animating?

PENNY I'm not doing animation, it feels like glorified tracing. For me, what I'm doing for my day job. It is completely unfulfilling. I'm working at a studio, but I don't like the work. The studio is nice, the people are nice, but I don't like the actual work and... and I am having a hard time. So, for me, I have all this pent-up creativity, so I come home and basically my reward is doing my own personal

work... so just drawing! I do so for work and then I come home and draw. That's kind of my reward. This sounds... it's not something I've been very interested in. I kind of applied just because I really needed work. So, it's not a style that I'm particularly drawn to.

Penny does not feel “drawn” to “glorified tracing,” because such a practice denies her the capacity to layer creative authenticity on her terms, catching her in an unsustainable balancing act between professional and creative development.³⁴³ The resulting professional anomie, or “chronic state of normlessness,”³⁴⁴ is a reflection of an industry constantly using digital tools to cut down on labor cost and outsource production, implementing software that facilitates tracing photographs rather than actually drawing, putting the skilled artist in a precariously deskilled position that renders the layering of creative authenticity a difficult affair.

The only benefit to this anomie is that it clearly demarcates labor from play, implying physical toil, even if performed for the production of immaterial goods.³⁴⁵ Layering authenticity online, on the other hand, blurs the line between labor and leisure. Penny defines herself as "dependent" on social media as a tool for her career, as well as her greatest source of psychological capital in the form of entertainment and interactions. She is cautious when considering the affordances and constraints within the platform, along with the consequences and potential risks in their use. Penny's husband's frustrations make for a familiar domestic refrain:

³⁴³ Durkheim, Emile, and George Simpson. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Digireads, 2013. 77.2%

³⁴⁴ Hodson, Randy. *Dignity at Work*. Cambridge University Press, 2001., pg. 25.

³⁴⁵ Graeber, David. *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Accessible Publishing Systems, 2009., pg. 523.

Radway observes that women engaging in media, such as reading romance novels, can serve as tactical "declarations of independence" from their societally imposed roles.³⁴⁶

Time spent online can be reserved for those special moments when one wants to connect with another social group, practice imaginative labor to escape the current situation entirely. Just as romance novels can provide an intelligent and independent heroine with whom the reader can identify, layering authenticity online allows one to experiment and cultivate identities in different contexts. Turkle touches on this when she observed that identity and community formation online differed radically from those based in face-to-face interaction, in which online and offline social realities become like individual windows on a computer monitor, bracketed but interchangeable.³⁴⁷ However, these perspectives do not account for the ways in which layering authenticity online necessitates a highly managed persona subject to all manner of institutional and self-imposed disciplines.³⁴⁸ Researchers such as Gregg,³⁴⁹ and Ross³⁵⁰ problematize this windowed condition by arguing that online technology has functionally collapsed the boundaries of the professional and personal, leading to a bleed of presence between work and the self.³⁵¹ Thus, Penny's husband must contend or make do with her partial presence, in which the barest physical attendance functions as a compromise for her temporary inaccessibility as she layers authenticity online.³⁵² The variety of interactions online that can loosely fall under the category

³⁴⁶ Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. pg. 60.

³⁴⁷ Turkle 2014, pg. 13.

³⁴⁸ Lovelock, Michael. "Catching a Catfish." *Television & New Media*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2016, pp. 203–217., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476416662709>., pg. 4.

³⁴⁹ Gregg, 2011.

³⁵⁰ Ross, 2009.

³⁵¹ Gregg 2011, 6.7%

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 61.4%

of networking form a practice that draws on Penny's proclivities as a girl fan and producer of pop-cultural content.

Combined with the imaginative labor of animation and illustration, working online appears to offer a great deal of autonomy, at the cost of collapsing the distinction between labor and leisure, or the public and the private, as a part of the recombination of self, character, and media already ongoing. A life spent pursuing a passionate career promises that one really can do what one loves, provided one does nothing else. As Penny navigates between her work at the studio and the world of digital patronage, she finds herself split between different standards and expectations, informing how she appreciates and approaches her labor.

COLIN How do you evaluate your work, then? How do you look at something and say, I'm finished, I can turn this in?

PENNY It's really different for work. It's just hearing good feedback from my leads. Personally, it's kind of a twofold thing. Either I've done it, and I'm just really happy with the way that it looks in an artistic sense. I'm like, "yeah, great this is awesome." Or because I've been building up my social media, this is something that really contributes is... if it takes off, a lot of people love it. I was hoping that would happen. Usually when you aren't expecting it, is when it happens. I'm experiencing that right now, with some content that I made just for fun. Just designs for these characters... I designed them initially just for fun, because I wanted to draw some and like, they took off. And like, I have so much fanart! People drawing fanart, people wanting to cosplay them,

wanting so much more content about them. To me, that fuels me. It doesn't feel like pressure for me, it makes me excited. Like, wow everyone really likes this, so I want to keep working on it. That's what makes it feel successful, if a lot of people like it.

While other worlds of production promise anomic divisions of labor for the young animator, the world of digital patronage provides the tools for layering authenticity online, cultivating a community with a common aesthetic appreciation and social conscience, establishing norms that do not exist in a studio environment. Other fans online may respond with remixes and adaptations of Penny's work, creating spaces of co-creation very different from the studio. While audiences can be fickle and capricious, a well-maintained community follows the animator from job to job, providing a sense of consistency to an unpredictable profession. Thus, the aggregation of an audience serves as a tactic against anomie by judiciously constructing a community in which the emergence of a collective conscience remains an ongoing project. Penny yields some of her creative autonomy in either world, either to her higher-ups at the studio or the more nebulous desires of her nascent crowd of patrons. The latter option grants her enough creative autonomy to feel invested emotionally in her product, but this freedom relies on an audience that will financially support her by purchasing merchandise tied to Penny's intellectual property, functioning as an ad-hoc safety net to take the place of a welfare state that no longer exists.

While affective and relational labor tends to be practiced tactically outside or beyond the standards of organizations,³⁵³ but relational labor can become especially difficult to manage due its continuous demand, taking time away from creative reflection and production.

COLIN So, you feel successful when it can move you closer to your Patreon, or whatever?

PENNY I actually closed my Patreon. I might open it up later on, but I actually closed it down just because it was too much to handle right now. I feel like Patreon is very much... what you put in is what you get out. I just couldn't put in as much as I wanted to. It ended up being more of a stressor to me than anything else, so I was like, this is too much. So, I shut it down for now. I have my... My short-term goal is to try my hands at going freelance. See if I can make a living off of doing freelance, having like a store. Having people buy merch, trying to like, brand myself as some sort of independent artist, working with clients on projects that I like, stuff like that. The long-term long dream is to have like, my own studio, where I can make various content with people.

³⁵³ Baym 2018, pg. 20.

The term "brand myself" suggests a visceral recombination of the icon with the flesh, as a cattle brand designates the owner of livestock. This somewhat reflects the nature of binding one's portfolio to an online persona, although now one expresses oneself through these logos, rather than being determined by them.³⁵⁴ Senft coined the term microcelebrity to refer to the sorts of amateur content creators associated with camgirls in the 2000's, or women who specialized in mediated 'live' productions.³⁵⁵ The microcelebrity succeeds on these platforms by cultivating an intimate yet passionate fanbase via curated persona that is at once celebrity-like yet authentic and interactive.³⁵⁶ One cannot be a micro-celebrity so much as constantly become one, always engaged in the self-conscious management of multiple personas curated and distributed across myriad devices and platforms.³⁵⁷ Animation already demands intensive levels of skill and expertise, along with the imaginative labor necessary to come up with new material, but these processes are very different from the cultivation of a microcelebrity status.

Marwick positions the self-branding imperative as a response to entrepreneurial and precarious labor models, the overwhelming success of corporate brands, and an increasingly online population.³⁵⁸ Thus, self-branding can be understood as a strategy encouraged by an increasingly entrepreneurial ideology flourishing on the Web 2.0, an always-on discipline of self-presentation. Individuals adopt tactics to manage the inherent contradictions between their

³⁵⁴ Kapferer Jean-Noël. *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. Kogan Page, 2012., pg. 8.

³⁵⁵ "In the future," musician and blogger Momus once quipped, "everyone will be famous to fifteen people." Senft, Theresa M. *Camgirls Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks*. Lang, 2008. Pg. 25

³⁵⁶ Marwick, Alice. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity and Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 114.

³⁵⁷ Marwick, A. E. (2015). You may know me from YouTube: (Micro-)celebrity in social media. *A Companion to Celebrity*, 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475089.ch18>, pg.337

³⁵⁸ Marwick 2013, pg. 166.

restrained public persona and their private selves.³⁵⁹ Although Penny enjoys her work online, she remains reluctant to form a Patreon. While some articles have hailed such platforms as the rise of a new patronage system akin to the Medicis,³⁶⁰ the creator today must negotiate small and mass audience interactions on a scale very different from the artists of the Italian Renaissance.³⁶¹ In constructing her brand, Penny influences fans to follow her, aspiring to micro-celebrity status, or the sort of DIY-fame template promising success to anyone who can layer authenticity online.³⁶²

For many, balancing relational labor with the earnest desire to lose themselves in the craft proves challenging, if not impossible. Arnold, for example, has spent years animating content for NewGrounds and YouTube, but he is unwilling to layer authenticity online if this conflicts with extant personal and professional values.

COLIN Do you use social media for promoting yourself? Like Instagram or Facebook?

ARNOLD Sometimes, I still wonder why I'm even on Facebook. Because I have, like, my cartoon, as far as the only... I don't really promote myself as an artist, really either. I mean, I have a YouTube channel that started in 2006 around the same time I opened my Newgrounds account, but Newgrounds kinda blew up a little bit. I got some attention, at least people are watching. I felt very successful. Because they were fairly popular. I mean, I remember at the time, me and my writing partner, we

³⁵⁹ Marwick 2013, pg. 204.

³⁶⁰ "The New Patronage." *The Economist*, 22 Dec. 2018, pg. 32.

³⁶¹ Bonifacio, Hair, & Wohn 2021, pg. 4.

³⁶² Abidin, Crystal. *Internet Celebrity*. Emerald, 2018., pg. 9.

were floored because we're both from, like, a very small town of five hundred people. My first video that I had, you know right now at the time, I had petered out at a hundred thousand views or something. The Mario cartoon was one of those that blew up in... That took off and we sort of... I started like in 2006. I don't remember anyone else doing it at the time. I think Egoraptor's *Metal Gear Awesome* series was taking off. I don't think anyone... I don't know of anyone who was making money. Maybe they were selling merchandise or something, but I think it was around 2008. No no, 2013, I think. I finally decided to monetize, and make money off my videos. When YouTube allows you to become a partner, and actually, they'll work with you and promote your videos. The whole program was different back then. It was back when views actually mattered. Now, it's about how long everyone is watching YouTube. It doesn't matter if they're watching your videos, it only matters if they watch a video within, like, their viewing stint. They rack up the advertising points, that's a... you make money now, not just yours, but they just have to keep watching YouTube. If your video gets to be a part of that pile, then you get a cut of that pie. That was something that I think Egoraptor was talking about. That's not really a way to make animation. I'm not going

to be able to make money off of this. You have to be really popular, to be able to take off.

Arnold defines his activity online by separating himself from the highly commercial activities of self-promotion, his tone suggests frustration with the Facebook platform, but also resistant acceptance of these entrepreneurial pursuits. His motivation for posting online back in 2006 wasn't career-driven, it came out of a desire to share his creations with an online community. Platforms such as Patreon, Kickstarter, and even Twitter had yet to come into existence in the aughts. NewGrounds, on the other hand, emerged in 1995, serving as one of the first online portals where users could upload their Flash animated content.³⁶³ YouTube wouldn't come out for another decade, a relative late-comer to the participatory culture emerging on the internet.³⁶⁴ The 2000's have been described as "the decade of web cartoons," seeing the rise of such animator micro-celebrities as Arin Hanson's a.k.a, Egoraptor. For creators like Hanson and Arnold, their initial success began on Newgrounds, video game parodies layering authenticity online through their culturally niche references and politically incorrect humor, appealing to the predominantly younger male demographic that cultivated specialized knowledge in what was then the pop-cultural margins.³⁶⁵

YouTube offered a few incentives to draw animators over to their platform, such as featuring relatively less offensive content to reach a broader audience and faster loading thanks to video compression.³⁶⁶ Only YouTube provided creators a cut of the advertising revenue that

³⁶³ Salter, Anastasia, and John Murray. *Flash: Building the Interactive Web*. The MIT Press, 2014. pg. 51.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 1.

³⁶⁵ According to a Newgrounds forum post, a random pull of 100 profiles in 2007 revealed a gender ratio of 88% male, 12% female. (Inquizitor. "Average Newgrounds Member Stats." *Newgrounds.com*, newgrounds.com)

³⁶⁶ Burgin, Ryder. "The History of YouTube Animation (Feat. Jaiden Animation): A Brief History." *YouTube*, 22 Sept. 2018, <https://youtu.be/4LJP6YelwIM?t=221>, youtube.com (3:40)

their content amassed, presenting a hypothetical future in which a hobby could become a career. Throughout 2008, many animators began posting on both YouTube and Newgrounds, and their audiences followed them, bringing in an influx of users and subscribers. YouTube remains somewhat unique from crowdfunding and digital patron platforms, as it derives its value from the number of eyeballs attracted and the duration of time they remain engaged.³⁶⁷ Companies such as YouTube manage a triangular relationship with their content producers and the advertisers,³⁶⁸ collaborating with media agencies to structure content to align with the advertiser's target audience, such as wrapping a brand targeting teenage boys around thousands of amateur skateboarding videos. Structurally, this implies that user-generated content is only desirable insofar as it can be manipulated into attention for advertisers. The individual users and content creators are simply not part of the discussion.³⁶⁹

While YouTube may offer relatively unprecedented creative freedom, it is also obligated to police the content towards broad commercial applicability, seeking the revenue derived from user-generated consumption, without the user-generated content."³⁷⁰ Those who manage to do well on YouTube in the aughts needed to demonstrate a level of expertise or exoticism, such as Tay Zonday's barely pubescent body belting "Chocolate Rain" in a creamy baritone, amassing thirteen million views and a lucrative deal with Cadbury Schweppes Americas Beverages to promote their new Cherry Chocolate Diet Dr. Pepper drink.³⁷¹ Successes are likewise

³⁶⁷ Garfield, Bob. "YouTube vs. Boob Tube." *Wired*, Conde Nast, 1 Dec. 2006, <https://www.wired.com/2006/12/youtube-2/>, wired.com

³⁶⁸ Farchy, 2009, pg. 362.

³⁶⁹ Wasko, Janet, et al. "The Political Economy of YouTube." *The YouTube Reader*, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm, 2009. pg. 383.

³⁷⁰ Andrejevic, Mark, et al. *The YouTube Reader*, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm, 2009., 2009, pg. 421.

³⁷¹ Whitney, Daisy. "Web Talent Tests Ads; Video Creators Seek Bigger Share of Revenue." *Television Week*, vol. 21, Jan. 2008.

accompanied by their horror stories, such as Nicholas Perry amassing a huge audience by filming himself binge-eating, establishing a pattern of self-harm for views that would trigger a deleterious spiral for entertainment of vulturous gawkers.³⁷² This speaks to YouTube's reliance on the authentic over the illusory, with content hinging on the physically novel and grotesque to draw in views, without directly endorsing or funding any of the content itself as a means to maintain a brand-identity appealing to advertisers. YouTube's official policies prohibit "violent or gory content that's primarily intended to be shocking..." along with pornography and sexually explicit content.³⁷³ Newgrounds did not have such restrictions, so while animators could build a career around titillating toons, they couldn't easily translate their content to other platforms.³⁷⁴

YouTube's system rewarded the number of views a video received, but this incentivized a type of predatory clickbait in which creators constructed misleading thumbnails to trick users into investigating, only to have them leave as soon as they discovered the ruse.³⁷⁵ To combat this, YouTube changed its algorithm to reward watch time instead, but since most animators could only produce a 2-3 minute clip every few months, animated material became untenable and declined drastically from the platform.³⁷⁶ Even EgoRaptor couldn't rely on animation, pivoting to filming himself playing games with his friends, rendering his continued success online slightly bitter-sweet.³⁷⁷ This YouTube-friendly content privileged animators who could

³⁷² Asarch, Steven, and Moises Mendez II. "Inside the Rise of Nikocado Avocado, the Extreme-Eating Youtuber Whose Meltdowns Have Disrupted an Online Community." *Insider*, Insider, 29 Sept. 2021, insider.com

³⁷³ "Google Sites (Classic) Program Policies - Sites Help." *Google*, Youtube.com

³⁷⁴ Ribes, Xavier. "Is the YouTube Animation Algorithm-Friendly? How YouTube's Algorithm Influences the Evolution of Animation Production on the Internet." *Animation*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2020, pp. 229–245., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746847720969990>., pg. 243.

³⁷⁵ Lardinois, Frederic. "YouTube Changes Its Search Ranking Algorithm to Focus on Engagement, Not Just Clicks." *TechCrunch*, TechCrunch, 12 Oct. 2012. techcrunch.com

³⁷⁶ Ribes 2020, pg. 244.

³⁷⁷ Hanson posted on Twitter in 2018: "I dunno if I wanna open this can of worms but, sometimes I really do miss animating. It's very inspiring to see so many talented animators grow over the years. Keep

adapt to these public-facing roles, layering authenticity through the unscripted content that they regularly released.

Animators such as sWoozie and Domics began blurring the line between static avatars and true animation, telling stories in a vlog-like format about their everyday lives on YouTube. The practice of using a drawn avatar to represent oneself on the internet has existed since the advent of message boards, with many YouTubers using largely static drawings to illustrate events discussed on their vlog. This latter strategy inspired an explosion of “story-time” animation, in which animators relayed simple and relatable narratives about their lives, layering authenticity online by tying their character to their carefully managed personality.³⁷⁸ At the same time, reducing their self-portrait to a more designed distillation of their features amplifies their capacity for expression while augmenting their universality as a cartoon, enhancing the layering of authenticity online through the power of the icon.³⁷⁹ Their simplistic styles of animation became a feature, another part of their calibrated amateurism that informed their brand, allowing more time for relational labor.

Arnold rejected this relational regime as a part of layering creative authenticity online, finding it incompatible with his own need to practice imaginative labor. At the time of his success, YouTube compensated based on the number of individual views, and animation can shock and surprise just as well as any freak or virtuoso. Much like how Sid felt encumbered by his role as animator, Arnold struggles with his audience’s expectations that he restricts himself to

drawing!!” (Hanson, Arin Untouched by Death. “I Dunno If I Wanna Open This Can of Worms....” *Twitter*, Twitter, 24 Apr. 2018, twitter.com)

³⁷⁸ Prower, Wallace. “The Second Wave of YouTube Animation (Storytime Animators) | sn0wy.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 19 July 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmlQecUzN9k>, youtube.com

³⁷⁹ McCloud, Scott. *The Invisible Art Understanding Comics*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. pg. 30.

producing video game parodies, disincentivizing the creation of content featuring original characters.

ARNOLD I still wasn't comfortable with making money off of that. I didn't feel like I'd made anything original enough to make money off of. Mario or those other IP's... I want to make something for myself. I kind of burnt myself out, because I was trying to handle different side jobs at that time. Maybe, I should do some podcast type things, so I can just put content out. Keep my viewers engaged. Well, I really wasn't creating content. I make a few podcasts here and there, but I did that for two years. The first year, I did seventeen shorts. Also, I was like, such a hermit, that I never really reached out to the other animators on Newgrounds. I really felt like that was a missed opportunity, where I could have reached out to other people. I also just wasn't at a place where I could work with others. I don't know, maybe I can anyways, c'est la vie. I can't really put more weight on doing the networking stuff. The social media stuff, I'm not a personality person type, either. I'm really lazy, I guess.

Just as Penny canceled her Patreon account due to the excess of relational and emotional labor required to maintain such a platform, Arnold finds such promotional work well outside his wheelhouse. He dreamed of being a hermit, locked into his own world of production, where he could fall in love with the characters of his own creation. Working on other cartoons conflicted with Arnold's desire to layer creative authenticity through claims of original authorship, which

pointed him towards the production of original content in the first place. At the same time, he speaks dismissively of podcasts, or other forms of labor necessary to keep his audience engaged. Just after reporting his nightmarish output of seventeen shorts in one year, he conjectures that he is 'really lazy,' reflecting an awareness that he isn't motivated by just any kind of work.

Shrewdly, Arnold has pivoted towards a career in film production, enjoying union benefits and a significant increase in pay. Working within the world of the globalized Hollywood system does not afford him the same level of creative autonomy, but it does allow him to layer and mobilize authenticity in a manner only possible outside the world of digital patronage. While working in film reduces the amount of time, he can spend animating his own material, the fact that he does not rely on the content to survive allows him to approach it as an activity suspended between labor and leisure, while also providing the hope that this may pay off one day. This speaks to the relative resilience of the creative, even if labor conditions and burnout render them incapable of deriving pleasure from what was once their passion, a shift towards a relatively more stable work-environment miraculously rejuvenates their inner-muse.³⁸⁰ At one time, Arnold adopted the strategies articulated by digital platforms to layer authenticity online, but found the relational labor untenable. However, he held sufficient cultural capital in the form of technical skill and education to find a field demanding strategies to which he could better respond, relying on professional authenticity to negotiate the precarious job market.

Animators navigating these disparate worlds of production handle distinct and often paradoxical strategies, tactically managing the dialectic nature of the creative profession. Sid's professional authenticity did not confer any particular cultural capital useful for authorial pursuits, yet it is also this cultural capital which grants him authority and relative professional

³⁸⁰ Siciliano observes a similar phenomena in music engineers. (2021, 39.5%)

autonomy over students and fellow animators. Penny would like to escape the studio's aesthetic authority, but this demands the production of a consistent persona online, requiring months and years of cultivation. Relational labor implicitly commodifies this interaction with those who would otherwise simply be peers in a fan-community, without a clear division between managing the boundaries of labor and leisure, the demands and pleasures of interacting online risk attenuating private relationships. Arnold has rejected the world of digital patronage as a meaningful source of income, but he still hopes that posting online will provide a path towards an authorial position, albeit indirectly. Each of them manages the affordances and constraints that these digital tools and platforms provide, incorporating official strategy from an insular production culture. When these strategies inevitably come up short, they tactically recombine from any component of their industry or identity to survive. Although relatively few animators will be able to adapt to the world of digital patronage in such a way that a sustainable career becomes possible, amassing an audience has become another strategy for negotiating precarity. Animators have long incorporated other worlds of production through myriad diverse approaches, layering authenticity within professional niches by consistently adhering to their professional standards.

Here, animators provide insight into larger trends in the creative industries, as the layering of authenticity online becomes an increasingly important resource for networking and navigating a notoriously precarious environment. Those with the resources to layer authenticity online can benefit from a return in economic and cultural capital, provided this identity remains continuously and carefully calibrated. This meagerly compensates for the global diminution of worker's rights and the welfare state, offering security in the form of a global community of patrons and fans. While governments are off the hook for supporting their ordinary citizens, a

rhetoric of individual entrepreneurialism has creative laborers diversifying their income streams rather than asking for government handouts, from which global media platforms can extract profit. Those who derive the benefits of authenticity online typically have high levels of economic capital, cultural capital in the form of tech savviness and online etiquette, and whose embodied cultural capital corresponds with the normative expectations of the audience. With the power that such companies exert over their users, creators tactically diversify by layering authenticity across several platforms, tailoring their content to the medium and their audience's expectation. Relational labor with actual humans and imaginative relational labor with fictional characters offer their own aesthetic pleasures, although this does not paper over the demanding regime of discipline necessary to layer authenticity online and off. Balancing professional, creative, and embodied authenticity across local and global networks remains the principal challenge of creative laborers looking to make a living on the web, with the speculative safety net an audience provides locked behind years of uncompensated labor, the pursuit of which almost guarantees burnout.

Conspicuous authorship is unnecessary if one can leverage one's technical skill and expertise as professional authenticity; a portfolio and work experience remain the primary tools of the animator pitching themselves within professional circles. The world of digital patronage significantly alters the effectiveness of strategies developed in other worlds of production, particularly by tying online presence or reputation to a portfolio once meant for dedicated specialists. Informatization has brought about an authentication crisis, rendering it more difficult for immaterial laborers to adequately demonstrate expertise as they compete with a broad network of freelance professionals around the globe. This process is occurring in studios as well, but the relationship between employer and employee remains clearer and more protected than a

platform and its users. Rather than presentational modes relegated to professional arenas, the world of digital patronage demands the kind of authenticity only possible through relational labor, animators must balance recombining themselves and the characters with performing the role of the authentic influencer.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Authenticity is dead; long live authenticity! Lewis's *Introduction to the Literary West* warns scholars against writing about authenticity, as those who explore the topic only muddle up the meaning of the word.³⁸¹ To be sure, authenticity as a concept remains remarkably elusive, as savvy entrepreneurs exploit this slippage to market themselves and their products.³⁸² A highly contextual cultural category, authenticity is layered to legitimize oneself in a role, often distinguished from an imaginary disingenuous "other."³⁸³ The ubiquity of self-promotion in the creative industries reveals the myriad strategies and tactics individuals use to go about layering authenticity.

The largely anonymous animator has long layered professional authenticity as a tactic for selling the personas of their clearly fabricated characters, but authorial roles are in a more advantageous position for mobilizing their cultural capital to claim creative authenticity, as they fight to retain intellectual control over their creations. Conspicuous authorship elevates the artist's work as authentically theirs, claiming distinction from inauthentic imitators or phonies. Hence, authorship is tied to the layering of creative authenticity, in that when one sees a signed collectible, one cannot help but wonder as to the signature's veracity.³⁸⁴ Layering creative authenticity in the animation industry recombines personal, cultural, and material elements to produce creative authenticity, while professional strategies layer authenticity around consistency of practice, even as they are denigrated for their mechanical or imitative expertise. However, the professional still needs a degree of creative authenticity to justify their upward mobility, while

³⁸¹ Lewis, Nathaniel. *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship*. University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

³⁸² Duffy, Brooke Erin. *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. Yale University Press, 2018, pgs. 127-128.

³⁸³ Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. Yale University, 1999. pg. 101.

³⁸⁴ Lewis 2008, pg. 4.

the creative must also demonstrate a degree of professional acumen to secure positions online and off, the recombined self-binds the presence of the creator to their work, imaginatively entangling the author and the text through the presence of their signatory marks, as they claim authentic expression through the text. Animators working in the industry also make use of this recombancy, but they are under no such obligation to assert their identity, granting them greater freedom to explore the metamorphic qualities of their craft. Thus, they recombined themselves with the collaborative body of a studio, as Messmer functioned as the head to guide his animators arranged like a spinal column.³⁸⁵ This allows animators to negotiate the complex and collaborative demands of the industry, tactically introducing friction to otherwise abstract production while finding ways to adapt as cyborgs, integrating human and non-human actors into a functionally animated assemblage.

Using traditional media can also layer authenticity, although this hardly describes the many ways in which animators engage haptically with their craft. The tactile dimensions of abstract labor remain relatively under-explored as a means to bridge the gap between professional and creative authenticity. Making use of traditional tools in a studio environment often involves improvising with the materials at hand, incentivizing novel recombinations of different production practices. These tools also function to layer professional authenticity, signaling a set of skills or traits associated with the practice, and creative authenticity underpinning relations and hierarchies related to their generational cohort.³⁸⁶ Deloria argues that those seeking authenticity have already defined their own lives as inauthentic, so they turn towards an imaginary other wrapped up in a nostalgic desire to return to communities and

³⁸⁵ Crafton 1993, pg. 313.

³⁸⁶ Liboriussen, 2015.

cultures of sincerity.³⁸⁷ In a similar manner, the cultural products of the past are often held to be more authentic than contemporary manifestations, as discerning tastes prefer the real Shakespeare, Bach, Austen, and so on.³⁸⁸ Software, hardware, tools, and decorative paraphernalia can all layer authenticity within specific demographics, the clever recombination of which allows animators to create material with broad or niche appeal. Animators also experience nostalgia for a set of tools or practices; the form of animation they were raised on will rarely reflect what they produce in the present day, as the industry changes so rapidly that one cannot help but look back.

In addition to appealing to membership, layering authenticity as a creative can involve going out of one's way to perform as an artist, recombining one's public persona with cultural expectations associated with the carefree and whimsical. This ties into the *mono no katari no hitobito*, layering creative authenticity relies on conspicuous consumption, speaking through increasingly immaterial objects as a means of bridging interpersonal gaps by reaching towards a shared intimacy between personal identity and material possessions.³⁸⁹ But these languages can distinguish as much as signal membership, undercutting their capacity to cross interpersonal divides, although decorating remains a tool for expressing resistance within a zone of suspended authenticity. A highly mediated and diffuse working environment incentivizes representing the self with immediately recognizable objects and brands, allowing the rapid layering of authenticity as cultural capital in a precarious industry, but this is never the entire story. Studios can impose an aesthetic hierarchy which incorporates fun as part of the mandate, causing creative laborers to layer creative authenticity in defiance of the regime by abstaining from

³⁸⁷ Deloria 1999, pg. 101.

³⁸⁸ Lewis 2008, pg. 5

³⁸⁹ Ōhira 1998, as cited in Allison 2006, pg. 87.

decoration or resorting to snark. These desk objects imply a relationship only partially visible from the outside, as they shift functionality according to the tactics of the user.

Layering authenticity embeds the presence of the creator in the product, but in a manner that gestures more broadly to human sensibilities. The imaginative recombination of personal experiences with the character ties directly to the discipline necessary to perform authenticity through animistic mimetic authority, in which the animator layers embodied authenticity to legitimize their role as a virtuoso of the screen. Such a set of skills in this environment demands empathy with the subject that one produces, the audience that one imagines, and the peers with which one works. Honing these empathic capabilities may also relate to the capacity to understand one's coworkers, providing valuable insight into their motivations and demands, although this can result in alienation and burnout like any other form of affective labor. However, for creative laborers of minority genders and races, the layering of authenticity remains disproportionately difficult, as the framework that constitutes an authentic performance butts up against the hegemonic standards endemic to the industry.

Anxiety over authenticity compounds within a culture as technology becomes increasingly facile at producing imitations, as photo-realistic CGI transfigures traditional cinema.³⁹⁰ The irony of this addiction to authenticity often comes about in the offensive and unpolished, from *Squidbillies* (2005) to *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, (2008) the rowdiness of the performance appears to proclaim that the characters are who they say they are.³⁹¹ Animators in Atlanta once layered authenticity through their difference from the globalized north, recombining materials to produce something that transcends the limitations of the budget.³⁹² This

³⁹⁰ Orvell, Miles. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 2.8%.

³⁹¹ Orvell 1989, 3.0%.

³⁹² Lewis 2008, pg. 10.

tactic has always been a part of the festival circuit of artisanal animation largely coming from outside the United States, but it is now a widely adopted strategy for layering authenticity online, the imperfect signifying realness by virtue of their outsider status removed from mainstream media discourse.³⁹³ But this roughness also emerges as a result of a lack of resources to invest in the production of animation, particularly for individual creators just starting out in the world of digital patronage, who must layer authenticity online by investing much of their time into relational labor.

Undergoing various transformations and upsets since its origin over a century ago, the animation industry has restarted and recombined again and again, from its classical and reduced eras, adapting to the latest format.³⁹⁴ While digital tools have greatly multiplied the possibilities for production, they have renewed concerns over inauthenticity, resulting in an increasing demand for relational labor. The potentialities for recombancy that digital tools enable boggle the mind, allowing for the integration of the self, the character, the professional, the portfolio, and the profile, as layers of identity capable of producing various forms of capital. As it becomes possible to pull media from across the corners of the internet, the obscure and forgotten re-emerge in surprising contexts, mimetic authority spontaneously revitalizing through a hyper-fragmented media economy.³⁹⁵ While the recombancy strategy invokes intertextuality, the recombined self-positions one's identity as a component of production, as part of a paratextuality which integrates the creator into their creation.³⁹⁶ Tracing the recombancy strategy as it is mobilized across worlds of production reveal the subtle tactics that occur across a highly diffuse

³⁹³ Duffy 2017, pg. 101.

³⁹⁴ Wells, 2003.

³⁹⁵ Valiere & Gegenhuber, 2014.

³⁹⁶ Wells, 2003.

network of professionals. Each world allows for novel tactics of layering authenticity through the most self-reflexive and self-enunciative of media, demanding an ongoing re-interrogation and repositioning of not just production, but the creatives' roles as well.

As informatization and prolificity place greater pressure on the individual to incorporate themselves into the construction of an online persona, animators likewise exploit opportunities to derive value from their layers of identity through the recombined self, but there are lessons to be gleaned from their willingness to playfully and improvisationally layer authenticity. The increasing demand to demonstrate authenticity can render the paradoxical nature of this endeavor apparent enough, but this does not necessarily lessen the pressure of achieving the appearance of authenticity through the careful management and alignment of disparate identity layers. This can lead to a paranoia revolving around one's originality, overemphasizing individual concerns, while doubting the authenticity of others.³⁹⁷ Any discipline related to identity can grow pathologic if zealously pursued, and collaboration is the antidote to an authorial overdosing on subjectivity. Ultimately, the identity zealot clings to their singular perception of themselves, hurrying away from that which contradicts their psychic unity. The animator embraces these contradictions as an opportunity to experience a diversity of lives, acting out each role, with attention paid to the most minute of details. This is not to say that the craftsman does not rebel, surreptitiously enacting the artist, as animators find ways to assert their identity throughout the production process. Still, the practice is so complex, that collaboration seems intrinsic to the medium, as Miyazaki explains:

“To my way of thinking, creating animation means creating a fictional world. That world soothes the spirit of those who are disheartened and exhausted

³⁹⁷ Moeller & D'ambrosio, pg. 231.

from dealing with the sharp edges of reality, or suffering from a nearsighted distortion of their emotions.... Those who join in the work of animation are people who dream more than others and who wish to convey these dreams to others. After a while they realize how incredibly difficult it is to entertain others.

Anyone who has tried to describe the wonderful or bittersweet qualities of his dreams should be able to understand how hard this is. And, because it requires group effort to create a film, animation is further complicated.”³⁹⁸

Animators layer creative authenticity because fabricating the fantastic provides intellectual and imaginative respite from the everyday, rendered ambivalent through the conflicts of their profession. Ironically, the sharp edges of their reality are implicated in the relationship to their media, what they watch and animate becomes a part of them. A dream represents a recombination of the experiential, layering the impossible and unreal without concern for logic or coherence. Those who awaken from these may grieve over the ephemerality of dreams, beginning to labor over an unreality, to reconstruct its appearance and affect. In animation, the anguish of communication is magnified and dissected, to build an authentic soul through an amalgamation of dead bodies, dissected voices, and ghostly gestures. Those who have taken on the role of Dr. Frankenstein often find the motions too mechanical, not everyone has the patience to imbue a wild and disparate dream with mimetic authority. Rather than turning inward and growing silent, animators learn to not only speak through these golems, but embody them as well. Incorporating anything and everything into their imaginary forms, animators infuse static images with phantasmatic life, but only through a carefully orchestrated ritual performed at home or at an animation studio.

³⁹⁸ Miyazaki 2009, 4%

An actor may come to master their characters, believing themselves at the heights of their Edgars, Cordelias, and King Lear, but the disordered body of the cartoon character has a long history of rebelling against their creator.³⁹⁹ Animators must adopt personas and layer disparate authenticities, motivation only matters insofar as the animated figure can embody them, the challenge lies in imbuing motion into the defiantly inert. In exchange for this collaborative and chaotic process, the animated body transcends the limitations of the physical, unifying the labor of many into a singular performance. While the animated body remains infinitely malleable, to a cartoon, the animator appears bound to the same oppressive silhouette. The individual may hold a secret wish to accomplish everything, legitimizing every role, but the animator learns to bring with them a little bit of each part that they have performed. The Church condemned the actor for the “heretical multiplication of souls,”⁴⁰⁰ but such arbitration could not have accounted for the polymorphous perversity of the animator, ready to embody and authenticate what never was. Today, a similar ideology demands authenticity as a part of success, condemning the contradictory as disingenuous, but the animator remains eager to recombine themselves into countless cartoons.

³⁹⁹ Sammond, Nicholas. *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation*. Duke University Press, 2015. pg. 40.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

The reason for relegating the reflexive methodological elements to the appendix relates to its capacity to clarify, rather than justify, functioning as a section of specialist interest.⁴⁰¹ The reader can think of this like the extra-features that come bundled on DVD's and Blu-Ray's, in which the audience can see the monster without their makeup on, as a means of learning about the production. The story presented here was never conceived of as such an organized thing, with an introduction and conclusion. Rather, much of this work represents a rather chaotic procedure of reviewing transcribed interviews and field-notes, followed by wildly exploratory periods in which I flitted from book to book, experiencing my own form of aesthetic enrollment. There are innumerable elements lost in the selection of narratives, the sanding down of materials into a self-contained text. Even the most truthful documentaries need editing.

Autoethnography as a method of inquiry turns the camera back on the researcher to explore their own experiences and biases, so as to make these apparent to the reader.⁴⁰² As this research has extrapolated broad theories from extremely local and specific phenomena, it has also rendered the participants more abstract in the process. This general trajectory from specific to broad also distances the researcher from the subject, what Hart calls the "ladder of abstraction," a discursive gap that all too often conceals the researcher's presence or implicitly justifies their worldviews.⁴⁰³ The Appendix makes amends by moving in the opposite direction, revealing the researcher behind the research, not to celebrate his presence, but to cast light on his

⁴⁰¹ Down, Simon. *Narratives of Enterprise: Crafting Entrepreneurial Self-Identity in a Small Firm*. Edward Elgar, 2006., pg. 118.

⁴⁰² Gullion, Jessica Smartt. *Writing Ethnography*. Sense Publishers, 2016. pg. 25.

⁴⁰³ Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*. University of Chicago Press, 2011, pg. 55.

role in this performance. These methods explore the power of discursive practices to articulate the self through reflexivity and repetition.⁴⁰⁴ The uncriticized self cannot perceive the ways in which one's ego shapes the discourse,⁴⁰⁵ so critical theorists are obligated to turn their methods on themselves.⁴⁰⁶ Autoethnography as a method addresses the researcher's identity, attributing agency equally between participant and researcher, and working to unsettle similar dualisms that symbolically divide the researcher from the participant.⁴⁰⁷ Making use of an autoethnographic methodology allows the researcher to comment on their role as the instrument of recording. If one's subjectivity obligates bias, then it follows that one can reduce the effects of these biases, if the researcher can adequately explain how their subject position informed the results.⁴⁰⁸

Closing the symbolic distance between myself and the participant is aided by its intrinsically "sideways" perspective, defining the ways the researcher shares a social class with the participants, as opposed to those who study "down" to relay the experiences of the dominated or studying "up" to scrutinize the ways of the powerful.⁴⁰⁹ This does not mean that tracking down fellow animators was an easy task. Those in the cultural industry can be a tough lot to pin down for a date, as schedules are so tight that few have much time to spend with their families, let alone a researcher. While I had little trouble nailing down interviews with my female classmates and male peers, women and those outside the binary were less likely to respond to my emails, with few agreeing to meet me in person. Statistically, these individuals are more likely to be in difficult work situations, or navigating domestic responsibilities with children or family

⁴⁰⁴ Hills 2002, 43

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., pg. 44.

⁴⁰⁶ Couldry 2000, pg. 126.

⁴⁰⁷ Hills 2002, pg. 51.

⁴⁰⁸ Galman 2019, pg. 68.

⁴⁰⁹ Siciliano 2021, 81.6%

members, although my apparent maleness may have played a role as well. Fortunately, networking with ASIFA-South gave me a pretense to reach out to younger animators of minority identities, who were struggling to establish themselves as professionals. This would not have been possible without other friends advocating for me, and my continued presence on the committee. Nevertheless, this meant my population of participants tended to be my classmates, my classmates' friends, or involved in the non-profit at which I volunteer.

Because these are also my colleagues, I found it difficult not to default to their position, and it is in my professional interests not to burn any bridges. In general, I liked the individuals that I interviewed, but my awareness of this encouraged me to keep track of my emotional responses to participant interviews and criticize them. An aspect of why I feel the need to protect these participants is out of a sense of loyalty and personal investment in the people who aided me in this study. Other studies have commented on the blending of friend and participant, as collegial relationships emerge from qualitative research.⁴¹⁰ First-time researchers on the field may struggle, but I had the benefit of beginning my foray by interviewing some of my close friends and classmates, who not only gave me the benefit of the doubt, but aided me in reaching out to new participants.

While the experiences of animators are what is being studied, I have left out material that was evocative but inevitably too revealing or personal. This is out of an ethical obligation not to divulge too much about myself or those interviewed. In addition to violating their privacy, such practices can make one vulnerable fall into the unbridgeable epistemological gap between subjectivities, or worse, succumbing to navel gazing. On one hand, I am deeply honored by the

⁴¹⁰ Kondo, Dorinne K. *Grafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
Holliday, Ruth. *Investigating Small Firms: Nice Work?* Routledge, 1995.

extremely personal stories to which they entrusted me, narratives which certainly informed my appreciation for how the medium of animation can take on a spiritual aspect, as moments of aesthetic bliss grant one brief respite from more enduring trauma. I did not include these stories out of a sense of privacy, but I remembered how their narratives of the past inform who they are today, as I continue to refine my theories of personal values and professional identity. Navigating the subjects and subjectivities that one encounters on the field necessitates parsing complex emotional terrain, opening the researcher to social and emotional pain as well. During interviews, I would joke and downplay the gravity of the project as a means of ameliorating participant anxieties while anticipating their criticism. If conversation became heated, I would pivot to diffuse the situation, even if the conversation was productive. In these ways, my position as the “impartial observer” was colored by my relative vulnerability on the field.⁴¹¹ Perhaps it is inevitable that I would share a certain anxiety with a number of participants in this study, faced as we are with a market saturated by highly specialized laborers. Like animators, I still wear the rose-tinted lenses that allow me to believe that creative work represents an escape from useless toil, although the color has faded into an exsanguinated tone.

This dissertation has allowed me to cultivate a deep sense of respect for those who bravely venture outward in search of a life defined by their autonomous passions, however the field may shape their trajectory and orientation. Each of them is on a personal quest to carve out a sense of stability in a market defined by precarity, driven by the same "rational" desire for self-determination that informs the goals of everyone from the artistic bon-vivant to the anonymous craftsman. Both compel a great deal of undercompensated labor performed in the name of autonomy or flexibility, pursuing what one loves. Indeed, many in academia orient themselves

⁴¹¹ Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Beacon Press, 1997.

towards the values of the artist, seeking to fuse their personal identity with the material they produce.⁴¹² If one takes into account that over two-thirds of academics in the US today are adjunct professors, temporary instructors who typically receive short contracts, no benefits, no job security, no office or workspace, and it becomes clear that like other creative professions, the drive for distinction remains intense.⁴¹³ This seems to be a trend across industries, in which freelancers and interns come to make up the majority of the workforce, as whatever constitutes the middle class appears to be in the process of eating itself alive. Academics must also be mindful of the ways heteronomous influences affect their field, beset on all sides by political, cultural, and commercial forces.⁴¹⁴ However, I cannot meaningfully criticize my participants as if I occupied a vantage point removed from theirs. I am an animator myself, but even if I were not, the differences between animator and academic are not as deep as one would believe.

For those most familiar with scientific ways of thinking, the social sciences can appear unbearably malleable and shifty. Unlike a trusty machine which translates qualitative phenomena into a quantifiable data, such as seismographs or speedometers, the social sciences are necessarily filtered through the researcher's cerebral convolutions. If the reader is familiar with more positivist schools of science, they may feel inclined to judge the work according to such variables as validity, bias, N-size and so on.⁴¹⁵ This chapter provides the tools to evaluate this research according to the author's terms, confronting the biases of the reader with that of the writer. Qualitative researchers advocate for the examination of three principle concerns regarding the researcher's relation to the subject matter, the participants, and the research process.⁴¹⁶ In the

⁴¹² Duffy 2018, pg. 212.

⁴¹³ Almanac. "Tenure Status of Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty Members." *Chronicle.com*, 16 Aug. 2020, the chronicle.com

⁴¹⁴ Duffy 2018, pg. 215.

⁴¹⁵ Gullion 2016, pg. 43

⁴¹⁶ Savin-Badin & Major 2013, 76; as cited in Gullion 2016, pg. 41.

first section, I will briefly describe my career and how it played a role in articulating my research. Sketching out how I decided on this topic and went about interviewing, this will clarify how my engagement has shaped the topic. After working to undo the binary between myself and the participants, I will attend to certain discursive gaps that are a product of my subject position differing from the participants'.⁴¹⁷

One reason that I gravitate towards these anti-essentialist narratives is that I dislike being quantified or categorized myself. My academic life has long consisted of trying and failing to translate my artistic passions into a world defined by standardized testing, so I clung to a vision of an authentic self that existed outside the strictly quantitative method of sorting students, developing a certain distaste for overly prescriptive methods and procedures that persist to this day. The refusal to be categorized is a common sentiment, researchers react differently when it comes time to acknowledge their own position in the research, ranging from resistance to ambivalence.⁴¹⁸ Nevertheless, if this dissertation focuses on what animators think, as opposed to know, then it stands to reason that I should discourse how my thinking has shaped the text.

A dissertation must not just contain existing theory, for example, but demonstrate a synthesis of knowledge, thus obliging me to write on the topics that are relatively novel in the field of animation studies. Beginning within Bourdieu's framework, I blended in new materials ad-hoc, until a thin layer of generalizable theory sublimated from the reaction. Beyond my own perspective as a scholar and practitioner, I have had no particular advantage in parsing through this discourse, although I made use of helpful tools such as my notes, journal entries, interviews recorded in audio and textually transcribed, and so on.

⁴¹⁷ Hills 2002, pg. 43.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 56

There are still limits to the story, namely the fathomless epistemological ravine between two subjectivities, begging the dreary question of what one can really know about another person. For example, a participant told me that he had been diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder and was taking medication. I asked him how he managed his condition, in his line of work. Grimacing, he was offended that I would draw any relation between his career and his mental health. Later, I would scrutinize this moment for hours. Did he really believe that his mental health had no bearing on his work? Had I upset him by insinuating his job affected his illness? Wasn't it a factor? How do I parse the moments in which my understanding of the world contradicts the participant's? This is the nature of data as it interacts with one's personal values and sense of self, just as eye-witness reports and court evidence is never complete, qualitative research can never be as comprehensive or exhaustive as one would wish. For those concerned that whatever exists in the authors present colors their capacity to reflect objectively on the past, this distortion is part of the point, as our identity and values are themselves informed by past narratives which likewise hold an unstable relationship to the present day.⁴¹⁹ The aforementioned methods and tools provide no special insight into the nature of the true self; I am bound to present the discourse filtered through my own brain, cross-referenced with myriad scholars, in order to explore this briefly shared period of Atlanta's animation production culture.

My personal career can only be understood as consistent under a certain perspective: I have survived within the labor market through the performance of the prerequisite entrepreneurial flexibility, accumulating a work history best described as omnivorous. Marketing a *mélange* of creative and scholarly skills, I jumped through myriad short-term contracts in the world of advertising, instruction, and producing corporate training material. Every job offered

⁴¹⁹ Down 2006, pg. 202.

another notch in the resume, such is the life in which one's professional identity remains inextricable from the portfolio. There were points where I felt cursed, every contract seemed to fall through, while I wasted weeks taking tests for studios. Stability came from unlikely clients, such as medical companies, but my efforts to take on advertising also fragmented my demo-reel to the point of incoherence. My presence online was likewise inconsistent, I found the vast majority of my work through contacts I had met in person. When participants discussed anxieties over their visibility online, or lack thereof, I was likewise forced to reflect on my own presence. A junior scholar and a junior animator are both under pressure to distinguish themselves, negotiating the aspirational demands with the quiet love of doing good work.

My interests in media are likewise variegated: new media, animation, video games, along with theater, puppetry, and masks. What these have in common is an appreciation for the obscure, experimental, and trashy. This does not mean that I didn't have adoration for mainstream material, particularly television, film, and online content animated in the US, Canada, and Japan. I grew up watching shows that fit into my traditionally masculine demographic such as Pokémon and Teen Titans, but later My Little Pony and Voltron as well. I perpetually lurked on websites such as Reddit and Tumblr, but rarely took part in the often raucous and contentious discourse, out of a mixture of temerity and aloofness. In contrast to the enthusiastic, emotional, and often feminized fans of this content, I cultivated the persona of the self-consciously detached, *geek-flâneur*.⁴²⁰ While I enjoyed the mainstream, I exalted the texts which I observed to be at the margins of the mainstream, cultivating sub-cultural capital in the form of "fine-tuned hipster knowledge."⁴²¹ Maintaining my status as academic allowed me to

⁴²⁰ McRobbie, 2016.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.1%

hold on to certain pretensions, in that I could argue that my work held cultural merit, if not commercial success. Was I using this snobbery to mollify my artistic ego? Absolutely, although this does not entirely account for the delight in discovering material lacking in credibility outside of highly-knowledgeable insiders. These fan objects inform my rather haphazard sense of masculine agency and power, since I seek out obscure material to reclaim as a means of distancing myself from the mainstream while enhancing the subcultural capital so prized in fan circles and fan studies. In this way, among others, I construct authenticity.

Due to the nature of working from home rather than sharing an office space, this research did not involve the lengthy or continuous observation of a specific studio or participants in a particular environment. For lack of a shared space, we share a common cultural field, even during those times when full-time animated work became impossible when managing the demands of scholarship. I may have been an industry insider, but rarely a coworker. Most in Atlanta are already accustomed to using a webcam to conduct meetings, and this became the most natural way to perform interviews while respecting the participant's boundaries. This dearth of continuous observation is less a defect than a reflection of the emerging dominant forms of interpersonal communication. The researcher's presence on the field does not necessarily promise fresh and insightful analysis.⁴²² Nevertheless, I draw upon my experiences as a freelance animator and motion-designer, as a key element for this inquiry. In the end, I found myself apart from my classmates and peers, having never shared a studio space with them, but I had their contacts to lend context. My own identity as another professional was instrumental, aided by the fact that my bearded Caucasian cis-self already looked the part of the "generic professional and/or creative" depending on if I wore a button down or a tee-shirt. Inevitably, my capacity to

⁴²² Maanen, John Van. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. University of Chicago Press, 2016., pg. 12.

blend in also blinded me to the many forms of social friction that accost minorities in the cultural industry, along with the specificities of animation production culture within a particular studio. I can only hone the critical lens through which I view the data, in order to correct for such obfuscations. Only by testing my intuition against the perspective of thirty other animators could I appreciate all the unexpected discursive gaps on the topic of creativity and autonomy.

The goal of this section has been to delineate how my subject position shaped the research, using autoethnographic reflexivity to better explicate the process. Additionally, I sought to close the distance between myself and the animators that I interviewed, to demonstrate our similarities as precarious professionals making our way as members of the creative class. Scrutinizing the symbolic distance between myself and the participants necessitates that I empathize with their experiences, as a means of interrogating my own role as researcher, just as in the previous chapters I made inquest into the meaning of their discourse. My race and gender also articulated my access to interviewees and the traditionally male-dominated spaces of media production. Even if I may feel somewhat marginalized by virtue of the hybridity of my position, it is worth acknowledging that whatever friction I experience is not comparable to the only African American at the studio, or the mother reforging a career after a prolonged hiatus. While we differ in related ways, our positions on the field are persistently similar, even in their variation.

As this research has demonstrated, one's agency is always-already articulated by one's demographic and cultural context, then it follows that this is also true for the researcher. To put it another way, the biases of the researcher are at once integrated and integral to the process.⁴²³

This is an issue across the sciences, but few methodologies take the time to consider how a social

⁴²³ Gullion 2016, pg. 41.

field will look very different according to a psychologist, sociologist, or anthropologist. The term science itself implies something objective, but treating one's conclusions as self-evident leads to easy aphorisms, in which the clarity of one's position is a function of the argument's reification.⁴²⁴ Hills argues for reconceptualization of the empirical as a realness that not only encompasses everyday discourse, but also the lack of discourse found in the gaps between participant culture and their identities.⁴²⁵ I prefer establishing a dualism as clear as the divide between solid and liquid in a tranquil puddle, only to muddy-up the waters like I stirred it with a stick, in an obstinate refusal to stick to essentialist arguments of 'us' and 'them.' Then again, absconding to the relativist high-ground functions as its own art-orientation, in which I distinguish myself against quantitative and positivistic research methods. I argue that befuddlement is instrumental, as the muddy water represents a novel state of diffusion between what were apparently disparate materials. This research points to the fragility of self-narratives and the inherent inadequacy of these claims to completely justify individual identity. No one can be just an animator, but a few have the chance to animate, in addition to all the other activities that inform one's sense of self.

⁴²⁴ Thomas, Calvin. *Ten Lessons in Theory: An Introduction to Theoretical Writing*. Bloomsbury, 2013, 14

⁴²⁵ Hills 2002, 42

Appendix B

Table 0.1 The Greek Alphabet Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Chapter Appearance	Gender Presentation	Ethnicity	Age	Years of Industry Experience	Current Position
Nadine	2	♀	White	1	6	lead animator
Maria	2	♀	White	5	2.5	full time at studio
Harold	2	♂	White	7	30	director
Oscar	2	♂	Latin American	3	10	full-time employed at studio
Carmen	3	♀	White	5	2.5	full time at studio
Lila	3, 4	♀	Asian	6	4	head animator
Rhonda	4	♀	White	6	15	self-employed
Phoebe	4	♀	African American	0	2	self-employed
Sid	5	♂	White	0	18	self-employed
Penny	5	♀	White	0	4	full-time employed at studio
Arnold	5	♂	White	6	24	graphic designer for film