

The Visual Figurative: Animation, Puppetry, and Stop-Motion



From *La Planète Sauvage* (1973), directed by René Laloux

Course Description and Goals:

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, J. Jack Halberstam argues with academics who might dismiss scholarship of animation and other low art texts, claiming that “new forms of animation...have opened up new narrative doors and led to unexpected encounters between the childish and the transformative.” Like Halberstam, academics and creators who work with visual texts have begun to re-evaluate the ambiguity of the image, treating its openness and refusal to communicate concretely as a productive site of personal and political meaning rather than a reason to place the visual underneath the verbal in a hierarchy of modes. This course will encourage students to take a critical approach to texts that use visual languages and visual metaphors to construct narratives. Among these kinds of visual texts, we will place an emphasis on the animated cartoon, the stop-motion film, and the animation of material performers, such as puppets. Selected texts will range from the popular and commercial to the obscure and underexposed. Through radical viewing sessions, writing assignments, class discussions, and rejuvenating hands-on approaches to visual culture, students will learn to harvest critical meaning from places where many have been detrimentally trained to avoid.

Required Texts:

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. Any edition, paper or digital.

Furniss, Maureen. *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics (2nd Edition)*. John Libbery & Company Limited, 2008.*

*Only the Second Edition, which was published in 2008, will be acceptable for this course. The First Edition, which was published in 1998, is outdated, and will not be acceptable.

Grading and Assignment Values (of 500 points):

Creative Project #1 (75 Points):

Creative Project #2 (75 Points):

Writing Assignments/Weekly Discussions (250 Words) (75 Points):

Participation/Attendance (75 Points):

Seminar Paper, Initial Draft (50 Points):

Seminar Paper, Final Draft (150 Points):

Assignments

Seminar Paper:

Students are expected to compose an original argumentative essay that engages with and contributes to the scholarship around a visually figurative text (or texts). The writing will be performed in two drafts. The first draft must be 8-10 pages long, and the second draft must be 10 - 12 pages in length. Students will propose their paper idea during Week 10 and must receive approval for their topic.

Creative Project(s): [2 Projects, choose one each time:]

- Make an argument with a puppet or stop-motion figure (Accompanied by 750 word explanatory/reflection paper)
- Perform a substantial interview with a professional who creates in a visually figurative domain (not someone you know; must consult me first to see if they work) (Accompanied by 500 word reflection paper)
- Create a political cartoon that comments on a relevant, contemporary situation (Accompanied by 750 word explanatory/reflection paper)
- Write an argumentative essay in comics/photocomics form. (At least: 4 pages, 20+ images, 500+ words)
- Write the script for an animated short (750+ words). Storyboard two scenes from it.
- Write a blog-style review piece of a visual figurative filmic text. See A.V. Club's reviews of shows like *Steven Universe* and *Adventure Time* here as an example. (1000 words, 4+ images)

Additional Options: At some point early on, students are given the assignment to design an assignment that incorporates the visual figurative for extra credit; if I like it enough, I will use it, and they'll receive double and their assignment proposal will be available as an option.

Viewing Reflections:

After each viewing, students will be expected to contribute the following for Wednesday's open forum discussion class:

- Two questions for discussion about the text(s) observed.
- One comment or observation about the text they would like to share with the class.

Students are then expected to codify these comments/questions into a substantial post of 250 words or more on Canvas by the beginning of Friday's class.

Being absent from Wednesday's class does not excuse students from submitting this assignment digitally before the beginning of Friday's class.

Daily Readings:

All students are expected to read all materials and attend all viewing sessions.

Course Schedule:

Date	Class Content	Assignments Due for this Day of Class
<i>[Italicized Brackets]</i> denote film viewing days, which will always be on Tuesday.	The material to be covered or films to be watched that day in class/viewing.	*All work other than McCloud, Furniss, and hyperlinked material is either public domain or utilized under fair use, and is available on Canvas.
WEEK 1: Introductions to the Visual Figurative		
Wednesday, 1/4	<i>Introductions</i>	
Friday, 1/6	<i>Cartoon Bodies and Animation Aesthetics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> McCloud, Chapter 2: “The Vocabulary of Comics”; Furniss, Chapter 1: Introduction
WEEK 2: Modernist Origins		
Monday, 1/9	<i>Little Nemo, Magical Movement, and Cartoon Bodies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Little Nemo in Slumberland” (Public domain copy available on Canvas)
<i>[Tuesday, 1/10]</i>	“Fantasmagorie” (1908), “ Little Nemo ” (1911), “Gertie the Dinosaur” (1914), “Sinking of the Lusitania” (1918), “Out Of The Inkwell – Modeling” (1921), “ Out of the Inkwell – Bedtime ” (1923), and more.	--
Wednesday, 1/11	<i>Pressing Play on Pictures: How Comics Came to Life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Little Nemo in Comicsland,” by Jeet Heer • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 1/13	Disney, “ <i>Steamboat Willie</i> ,” and the <i>Modernization/Industrialization of Cartoons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Creators,” by Lawrence Lessig, pgs. 21-30., Furniss, Chapter 4 (61-76) • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 3: The “Pixarvolt”, Capitalism, and Cartoons		
<i>[Tuesday, 1/17]</i>	<i>Pinocchio, Monsters Inc.</i>	

Wednesday, 1/18	<i>Disney/Pixar: Corporate Monsters and Monster Corporations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> Furniss, Chapter 6 (109-127) • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 1/20	<i>The Pixar Short; Judith Halberstam's Take on the Pixarvolt</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> McCloud, Chapter 3: "Blood in the Gutter" • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 4: Queer Cartoons		
Monday, 1/23	<i>Queer Revolt, Imaginary Worlds, and SpongeBob Squarepants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> "Animating Revolt and Revolting Animation," by J. Jack Halberstam
[Tuesday, 1/24]	<i>Adventure Time: "What Was Missing," "BMO Lost"; Steven Universe</i>	--
Wednesday, 1/25	<i>Putting Halberstam into Context: Fusing Cartoons and Queer Politics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> Elli Dunn, "Steven Universe, Fusion Magic, and the Queer Cartoon Carnavalesque" • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 1/27	<i>The Good, the Bad, and the Queer: Bugs Bunny and the Powerpuff Girls</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> Furniss, Chapter 12 • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas • <u>FIRST CREATIVE PROJECT DUE</u>
WEEK 5: Conventional and Commercial Puppetry		
Monday, 1/30	<i>Adventure Time and Mixed Demographic Content</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> McCloud, Chapter 5: "Living in Line"; "Icon, Index, and Symbol" (summary of Charles Sanders Peirce)
[Tuesday, 1/31]	<i>The Dark Crystal, Thomas the Tank Engine, Star Wars Cantina Scene</i>	--

Wednesday, 2/1	<i>Discussion: Puppetry and Other Worlds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “Thomas the Imperialist Tank Engine,” by Jessica Roake; “Playing with the Eternal Uncanny: The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects,” by John Bell • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 2/3	<i>Sesame Street vs. “Don’t Hug Me I’m Scared”: Multiple Introductions to the Puppet</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 7: Avant Garde, Indie, and Formative Puppetry		
Monday, 2/6	<i>“Untitled” Puppet Death, Avenue Q, and Puppet Rebellion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “When Avenue Q Goes Local,” by Stephen Quigley
[Tuesday, 2/7]	<i>Philippe Genty’s “Lands End”; Scenes From: Cuniculus, Twin Houses</i>	--
Wednesday, 2/8]	<i>Discussion: Complicating the Puppet</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “Review: Lands End,” by Alison Croggon • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 2/10	<i>The Mighty Boosh: Complicating the Puppet Narrative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 8: Conventional and Commercial Stop-Motion		
Monday, 2/13	<i>Rudolph, Rankin-Bass, and the Christmas-ing of Stop-Motion</i>	Read: Furniss, Chapter 3
[Tuesday, 2/14]	<i>The Box Trolls, \$9.99</i>	---
Wednesday, 2/15	<i>Discussion: Critical Readings of Commercial Stop-Motion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “The Box Trolls and Why It’s Crazy to Do Stop-Motion Animation,” by Dorothy Pomerantz; “The Box Trolls, Same Sex Parents, and the Never Ending Parade of Gender Transgressive Villains” by Jeremy Redlien; “Is The Box Trolls Transphobic?” by Rachel Kolb (3 short articles) • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion

Friday, 2/17	<i>\$9.99 and The Most Popular Girls in School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Characters of Clay, Extremely Well-Aged,”</u> by Josh Andersen; <u>“Does Barbie Make Girls Want to Be Thin?”</u> by Dittmar et. Al • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 9: Avant Garde, Indie, and Formative Stop-Motion		
Monday, 2/20	<i>“Balance”: A Broader Conversation</i>	<u>Read:</u> Purves, “Evolving Into Stop Motion”
[Tuesday, 2/21]	“Fantastic Planet,” Jrni Tinka’s <u>“Ruka the Hand,”</u> <u>“Madame Tutli Putli,”</u> “Neighbors,” “The Tale of Tales,” “Dog,” and <u>“Aria”</u>	--
Wednesday, 2/22	<i>Discussion: A New Take on Stop-Motion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Balance,”</u> by Jason Sondhi • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 2/24	<i>The Logos of Legos: Star Wars, Play, and Animation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Toys,”</u> by Roland Barthes • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 10: Blending Visual Figuratives		
Monday, 2/27	<i>The Amazing World of Gumball and mixing animation modes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Interview with Ben Bocquelet,”</u> by the Marketing Site
[Tuesday, 2/28]	<i>The Little Prince, Gravity Falls: “Little Gift Shop of Horrors,” Adventure Time “Bad Jubies”</i>	--
Wednesday, 3/1	<i>Discussion: The Little Prince and Mixed Approaches</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> Furniss, Chapter 9 • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion

Friday, 3/3	<i>Barbie: Life in the Dreamhouse</i> vs. <i>The Most Popular Girls in School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Textual Strategies, Plastic Tactics: Reading Batman and Barbie,” by Kendall R. Phillips • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas • <u>PAPER PROPOSAL DUE</u>
WEEK 11: Cartooning Meets Reality		
Monday, 3/13	<i>Mixing Cartoons with Live Actors: Space Jammy Marketing Ploy, or Method toward Madness?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Film Torments: Space Jam (1996)” by Rich Kee • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
[Tuesday, 3/14]	<i>Who Framed Roger Rabbit?; Black Mirror: “The Waldo Moment”</i>	--
Wednesday, 3/15	<i>Discussion: Visual Figurative meets Reality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Pop Culture Warned Us About Trump,” By Sam Reisman • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 3/17	<i>Blues Clues and the Education Imperative of Mixing Media</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “Sesame Street’ Tackles Incarceration Through Muppet With Father in Jail” • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 12: Japan and the Visual Figurative		
Monday, 3/20	<i>One-Punch Man and Western Expectations around Anime (One-Punch Man Episode #1 and critical discussion)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> McCloud, Chapter 9: Putting it All Together • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
[Tuesday, 3/21]	Hayao Miyazaki’s <i>Spirited Away</i> , <i>Cowboy Bebop</i> #1	--
Wednesday, 3/22	<i>Discussion: Miyazaki, Ozu, and Japanese Animation: An Alternate Tradition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read:</u> “The Vocabulary of Manga,” by Neil Cohn • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion

Friday, 3/24	<i>Bunraku Puppets / Book of the Dead</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas • <u>FIRST DRAFT FOR SEMINAR PAPER DUE TODAY (8-10 pages)</u>
WEEK 13: Race, Nationality, and the Visual Figurative		
Monday, 3/27	<i>Understanding Race and Power Through Cartooning in We Bare Bears</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Allegory…”</u> by Amid Amidi; <u>“We Bare Bears signals a cultural change as an animation”</u> subreddit of r/television.
[Tuesday, 3/28]	<i>Persepolis, Burka Avenger</i>	--
Wednesday, 3/29	<i>Discussion: Islam and Animation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Burka Avenger Is the Muslim Female Super Hero We've All Been Waiting For,”</u> by Natasha Noman; <u>“Sex, Violence, and Radical Islam: Why Persepolis Belongs in Public Schools,”</u>; and “Persepolis: The Graphic Memoir and Film Adaptation,” <u>Parts 3 and 4 only</u>. • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 3/31	<i>Puppeted Caricatures, Racism, and Jeff Dunham</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Is Jeff Dunham racist? No, but his puppets might be”</u> by Mike Ross • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 14: The Visual Figurative (After Dark)		
Monday, 4/3	<i>[Safe Selections from] Fritz the Kat: Alternate Audiences for Animation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: “Fritz The Cat: A Look at R. Crumb's X-Rated Animation Masterpiece,”</u> by Tony Sokol
[Tuesday, 4/4]	<i>Rick and Morty, Robot Chicken, Moral Orel</i>	--
Wednesday, 4/5	<i>Discussion: The Visual Figurative for Adults</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read: Furniss, Chapter 11: “Animation Audiences”</u> • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion

Friday, 4/7	<i>Team America, Parody(?), and the Dangers of Abstraction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read</u>: “Team America: Racism, Idiocy, and Two Men's Pursuit to Piss off as Many People As Possible.” By Elbert Oh; “26 Ways Team America Isn't a Patriotic Movie, It's the Most Patriotic Move,” by Rob Payne • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas
WEEK 15: Expanding Toward and Expanded From: Comics, Videogames, Picturebooks, and Beyond		
Monday, 4/10	<i>Playing Papers Please: Procedural Rhetoric and Sympathy through Low-Res Cartooning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read</u>: “Persuasive Games: The Proceduralist Style,” by Ian Bogost
[Tuesday, 4/11]	Frank	--
Wednesday, 4/12	<i>Discussion: Frank; “In the Night Kitchen,” “Where the Wild Things Are”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read</u>: “Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects,” by Lawrence R. Sipe • Prepare Questions/Comment for Discussion
Friday, 4/14	<i>Comics, Woodcuts, and Early American Needlework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Read</u>: Emily Carroll, “Face all Red”; Lynd Ward “God’s Man” (Canvas); “Scenes from a Seminary” • Submit 250 word written response (questions + comment) to Canvas • <u>FINAL DRAFT FOR SEMINAR PAPER DUE TODAY (10-12 pages)</u>
WEEK 16: So What?		
Monday, 4/17:	<i>Trump, Clinton, Colbert: The Political Sting of Puppetry and Cartooning/ Trump as a Batman Villain</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Watch</u>: From the Second Presidential Debate from 2016 election; Showtime Donald Trump Cartoon; Cartoon Trump Interview with Stephen Colbert
[Tuesday, 4/18]:	--	

Wednesday, 4/19:	Conclusion	