Performing Life: Researching the Life-History of Animated Objects

In a rush to comprehend challenging new developments in performance making and mediation—to champion the value of live performance, for instance, in the face of pervasive mediatisation—recent discussions about live performance have focused attention and anxieties on newness and the now, on innovations in incorporating media technologies into popular performance and on the liveness of corporeal presence in the performance art of the avant-garde.

Shifting attention from the present to the past, such discussions could learn much from the history of animation whereby objects in performance are themselves brought to life.

Over the last few centuries, diverse practices of animated performance—including puppetry, conjuring, stage machinery, automata, animatronics, amusement rides, animated films, computer games and digital cinema—have accumulated a rich repertoire of techniques for endowing inert objects with the affects of life. For instance, recent innovations in motion capture technology, whereby an actor’s movement is captured as a temporal stream of spatial data, also capture the capacities of older techniques—such as the animator’s skills in replicating movement and the puppeteer’s skills in manipulating objects.

This forum will explore the history of animated performance as an accumulation of practical know-how for performing the affects of life. One aim will be to chart a historical series of animation practices which traverses conventional distinctions in performance history such as those between the live and the mediated, the stage and the screen, the human and the machine, the animate and the inert, the material and the imagined. Another aim will be to find ways of engaging dialogue across the distinction between live and mediated arts practices by exploring the utility of actor-network theory for researching translations between actions, objects and affects in performance.

A discussion on the conceptual requirements and practical implications of analysing the life-history of animated objects will be initiated prior to the conference through a process of developing the forum, identifying participants, circulating resources and generating discussion. There will be two stages of initiation: firstly, within ADSA to establish interest and then beyond ADSA into other networks such as visual communications, computing and new media arts. Time and space at the conference will be used for reporting on the progress of the discussion, for presenting case studies in the history of animated performance and/or for demonstrating animation techniques and performance technologies.
**Format**
This panel is envisaged as a combination of one or two papers, some kind of demonstration, exhibition or show-and-tell, perhaps a panel dialogue and some time for group discussion. This could be achieved with a standard 90 minute session for presentation, dialogue and discussion, and an option on an 'event' slot on another day for demonstration/exhibition.

The panel convenor, Jonathan Bollen, will distribute some readings to participants in order to initiate some group discussion prior to the conference.

**If you are interested in contributing to this panel—by submitting a paper or a demonstration, or being a participant in a panel dialogue—please contact Jonathan Bollen (contact details below).**

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