

BEING ANIMATED

-Reflections on the artistic and ecological possibilities in animation practices, from the mushroomcloud in *Barefoot gen* via the animation-stand to the ecosexual relationships in *Asparagus*.

The sky is falling, the globe is warming, the ozone hole persists; people are dying of radiation poisoning and other toxic agents; species are being wiped out, thousands per year; the coral reefs have nearly all gone . Huge globalized corporations are making bids for the necessities of life from water to health care. Environmental legislation is being threatened around the world. What a perfect opportunity to sit back and reflect on ideas of space, subjectivity, environment, and poetics. Ecology without Nature claims that there could be no better time.1
- T. Morton. *Ecology without nature*

This is a text on animation and ecology. How we relate to our environment through art. How power structures are contested or confirmed in image creation. Its about ecology and how the relationship between human and environment transform and its about how animation practices possibility to offer a vide variety in exploring that relationship. I have developed this text in a process of improvised lectures which I held for various audiences I wanted to have input from. I have lectured to all possible entities in the ecosystem I am a part of, from blueberries to colleagues.

in august 2014 I sit in the Tokyo subway together with my students in animated film. We are heading to the suburbs to visit a small anime studio. I notice an ad with pictures of happy young people in idyllic landscape, in their hands are baskets of fruit. The ad is for fruit orchards in Fukoshima.

For me Fukoshima is only associated with radioactivity and meltdown. The message seems absurd. After a week in Tokyo, the journey continues to the animation film festival in Hiroshima. Another place doomed to be associated with atomic technology. Experiences of radioactivity has left its mark.



Image: Pica Don (1979)

Here we are in Hiroshima moments before and after the detonation of the *Little boy*. A mother breastfeeding her baby. When the disaster occurs, the mother embrace her baby to protect it against the external danger, using her body as a shield. But radioactivity dissolve her body and cells. The embracing movement is continued by the atomic bomb in a total merging. In Akira bodies are constantly transforming in the presence of the bomb.



Image: Akira (1988)



Image: Barefoot gen (1983)

In *Barefoot Gen*, I see the atomic bomb the way I can accept it, from a distance, separated from me, over-looking a monumental sublime mushroom cloud. In the moment of disaster the atomic becomes visible as distorted bodies and beautiful cloud formations.

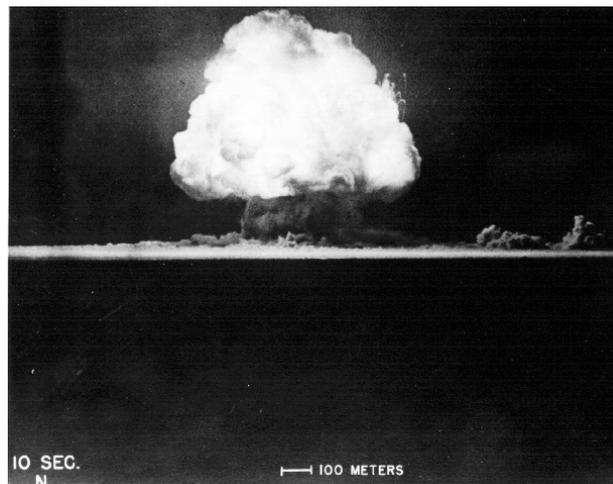


Image: Trinity detonation (1945)

These are the first images of a mushroom cloud. 1945 in New Mexico the first atomic bomb test was detonated. It is also the moment of the transition into a new geological epoch of the Earth 2. After 12,000 years in the Holocene epoch, earth enter the human era, Antropocene. During the 1900s industrialism and capitalism humans (in the sense of the excluding humanism with its Colonial & patriarchal roots), have altered Earth's geological composition at a planetary scale. The size of our ecological footprint increases and new film genres like eco-horror or climate-fiction appear. The apocalypse theme is reappearing.

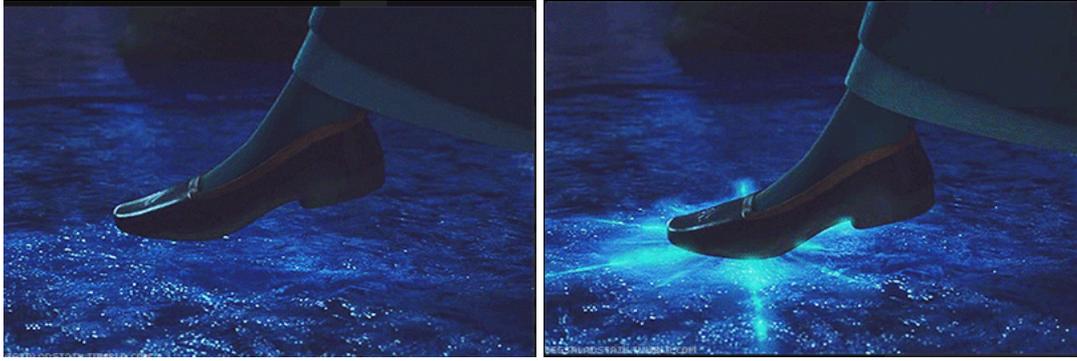


Image: Frozen (2013)

In *Frozen*, climate changes in all that the princess Elsa touch or step on. Every action effects everything around us.



Image: Simpsons The Movie (2007)

In *Simpsons The Movie* Homer becomes disappointed with how Alaska turns out to be a single oil field, so he replaces the view with an advertising poster. The obscured visibility makes them run off the road and they end up in a different direction where the landscape looks exactly like the poster. The image transform the actual reality.

Earth's geological shift can be seen in changes in methane and carbon levels in the atmosphere, sea levels, glaciers melting, average temperatures, pollen from agriculture, chemical waste from industries in the Earth's sediments, species extinction and of course; the background radiation. Radioactivity continues to exist long after the disaster and is so extensive in both time and space that is difficult for us to grasp in the human lifecycle. It pierces bodies and landscapes yet we can not see it, it is spread over great distances and remain for the foreseeable future yet we can not touch it. It gives rise to a paralyzing invisible horror, a "nuclear neurotic"³ maybe because we can not access it with our human senses? So in spite of its Omnipresence the cloud-image that is most commonly used to represent the concept of radioactivity, it creates a separation, and places it on a distance. in this excluding humanity I cannot see or grasp radioactivity. How do I get out of it? this ecological crisis that the human perspective put me in.

When the images don't work and the reality cant be handled, how do I destabilize what is taken for granted, open up for that things are bigger, weirder, different, than they appear to me in my everyday life?

During the last years, both artistic and philosophical ideas has questioned humanities dominance in defining the world. Alternatives are explored in different post-humanist perspectives. With concepts like new materialism, objectoriented ontologi, ecofeminism, animalism, actor network, speculativ realism, techno-animism, quantum-animism or in exhibitions like Dokumenta 13 or Animism at e-flux, the living world is acknowledged in diverse ways.

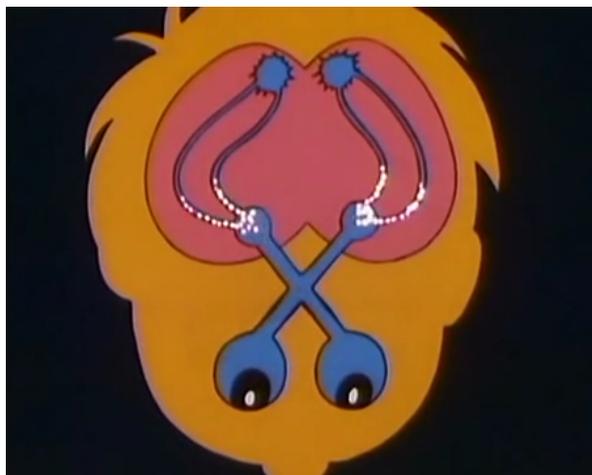


Image: Once upon a time... man (1978)

Can I imagine radioactivity in a different way than from inside a human that separated itself from the rest of the world? How do I imagine a world where humanity is not the center but just one existence among others. I could try to imagine the interactions in the world as mutual. Instead of repeating a hierarchy of the active subject doing something to a passive object and where the human is subject and the rest are objects. What If I let nonhumans speak for themselves, and let what western modernity deemed as passive or dead resurrect. Instead of categorizing things according to its value & usefulness to humans, or to their appeared activity/passivity, we could just acknowledge what exist. All that exist exist, there are no degrees in existence, we all equally exist.



Image: Sailor Moon Chrystal (2011)

And some things out there may have more agency than they first appear to have. We often think of things as having qualities and properties, that a heart shaped jewel is red. But try think of it as as powers instead, that the jewel have the power of red-ing⁴. In the tv series Sailor Moon Chrystal, even object's powers materialize in sudden lines and abrupt colours.



Image: Panda Kopanda, (1972)

When papa Panda sits down, the chair breaks with a crash. He says "This chair did not like being sat upon". When Mei is lifted by the forest spirit Totoro they invisibly fly over the fields, she yells: "We are the wind "!

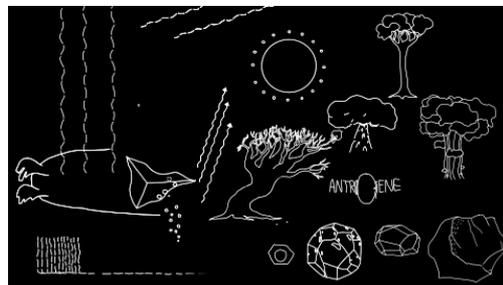


Image: Wolf wind stone shudder

Animated films have a long tradition of acknowledging the life of all the things. Teapots get eyes, sponges feet and decayed bones start to dance. This tradition is sometimes explained by that in animation we are not limited to the "reality" so we can let our imagination play freely. With reality people then sometimes mean all what human senses can perceive, and sometimes they mean the part of the reality that we can capture with the help of cameras.

The ability to depict and materialize alternative worlds in art is dependent on the access to the environment that artistic practice gives me as an artist. Animation offer me intimate connections, when I channel my thinking and making through its machinery.

The animation machinery gather its experience and thinking from a wide variety of techniques and materials. From found objects to sculpture, performance, drawing, painting, photography, compositing. The physical interaction with objects and materials is significant, sometimes to the extent that it creates an identification with it.

In stop-motion animation every detail is a result of my decisions. I build a world that has the ability of coming to life. I work the material, preparing it to become flexible, sculpting it, giving it joints. Then I animate, move and transform it in the small steps that make up every instance of its movement. As an animator, I feel the movement in my body while I transfer it to the object I animate. As an animator, I am both an actor and director at the same time. Frame by frame I develop every detail in the action, transferring the movement from my body into the animated object. In this transfer the self follows and I become the object that I animate.

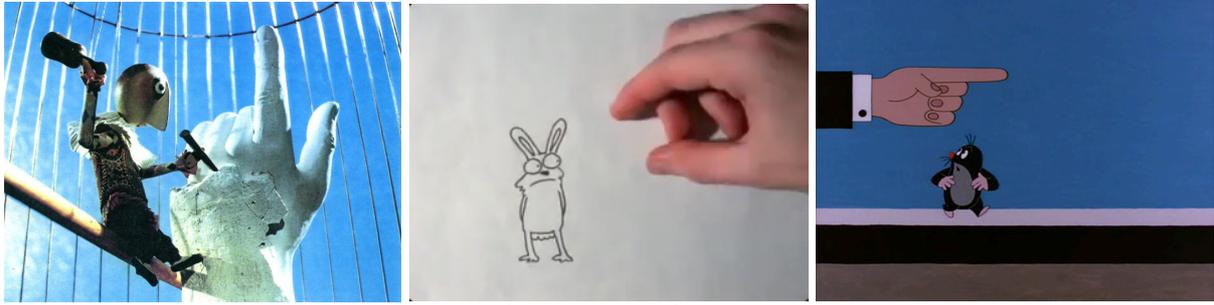


Image: *The Hand* (1965)/ *Genre* (1996)/ *Krték filmova hvězda* (1988)

Sometimes a dialogue between the director and the actor begins, between the self that animates and the self that is being animated. A dialogue included in many animated films by the presence of the animators hand. Merging these two positions creates a special experience of a power relationship, dealing with the responsibility of omnipotence and control.



Image: *La Planete Sauvage* (1978)

But sometimes its a transcorporeal enjoyment of seizing to exist as a separated entity and instead becoming one with the rest.



The animation stand is perhaps the most central technology in animation. A rack with several glass planes with a camera mounted on top. images or objects are placed on the glass layers, the camera composite the various image elements together into one image. This layer structure reoccurs in many modern digital softwares for image and animation.

In the animation stand the camera is often fixed. The camera can be moved laterally but along the depth axis the movement is very limited. Images and objects are moving and animated in and out of the cameras scene.

In cinema the camera has often actively narrative role. A cinematographer controls the camera, moving into the picture, approaching people and objects, examine them. It is this movement into the world that Virilo calles ballistic5. . Like the bullet from a firearm it penetrates the world. In the classic text *Visual pleasure and narrative film*6 Mulveys describes how the camera movements represent the viewer's gaze and makes the audience identifie with the camera. She also describes

how the conventions of cinema storytelling developed according to dominant perspectives. How it taught cinema audiences to identify with a male gaze. Where the portrayal of women's bodies emerged through a male perspective in a way that lets the female body be consumed, piece by piece, without being distracted by a subject looking back.

Media theorist Thomas Lamarre takes the camera's role as starting point when defining the difference between animation and cinema. The camera's tendency to move in parallel with the image in animation he calls animetism. The camera's tendency to move into the picture in cinema he calls cinematism.⁷ In the animetist image images and objects live, while audience gaze is passive. The animetist image is divided into several layers thanks to the glass planes. Images and objects on the glass planes are parallel with the fixed camera.

In Japanese animation, we often see one layer slide over another. A technique that in western contexts sometimes is referred to as "limited animation" but a technique that has proven excellent for depictions of Miyazaki's heroines with their solar & wind powered aircrafts.



Image: Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1982)

The picture is often divided into one image for the background and another layer for the animated character. A division that resonates with modernist division between human and environment, culture and nature.⁸ But the division between mobile characters and passive backgrounds can just as well be blurred. What was first considered as background emerge and begin to live. I notice that a part of the background is placed on its own glass plane and an expectation of life is triggered.



Image: Krték a medicina (1987)

You must think about the environment! we have heard. But what is the environment really? The environment presupposes a subject that is the center, and reduces everything else to the

background. in the Anthropocene age there is no difference between human and environment⁹. Earth has become human and the humans has become geological on both micro and macro level.

Bodies are perforated membranes, substances go in, through and out of us. All that interact changes each other in the process¹⁰. The little fish Ponyo in *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* transforms into human during the film, through love, dna exchange and pure will a new body materialize for Ponyo.



Image: Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea (2008)

Love and desire between species no longer appear abnormal in the Anthropocene. And in the ecosexual movement¹¹ sexual desires towards nature and objects are lived out. But how do I ensure consent in ecosexual relations? I recommend practicing the transcorporal activity of animation. Animate your environment and let the environment animate you. Study the rock-art of hunter & gatherer communities¹² or Karen Barads reflection of the word Responsibility¹³ for how to act to give the other the ability to respond. Because as Pom says in *Laputa: Castle in the sky* "The earth speaks to everyone.....The stones have small voices".

Sexual intercourse between human and tree may not lead to offspring, but the fruit is the plant's sexual organ, when I eat a fruit my body serves a function in its reproduction. As the intercourse between a wasp and an orchid in Deleuzes thoughts¹⁴ is a possibility of becoming, of escaping fixed identity in order to dissolve with... Eating fruit is becoming part, and *is* part of the evolution of the human being and we are symbiotically intertwined in each other's development.¹⁵



Image: Asparagus, (1979)

The human body overlap with other bodies, with nonhuman beings and with landscapes.¹⁶

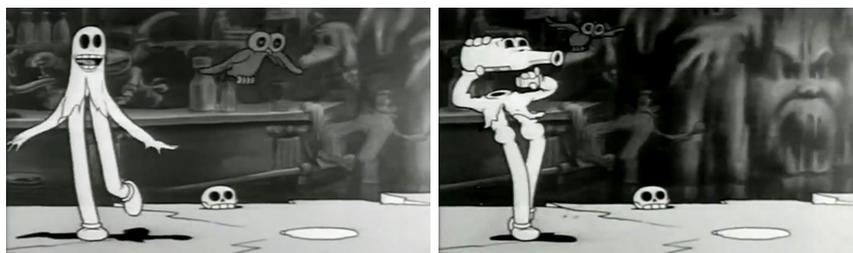


Image: Snow white, betty boop (1933)

In Fleicher's *Snow white* the character becomes the bottle he drinks from, in Signe Baumann's stories about sex the character acts in a world made from her own body. Body and landscape is turned insideout in a transcorporeal weave.

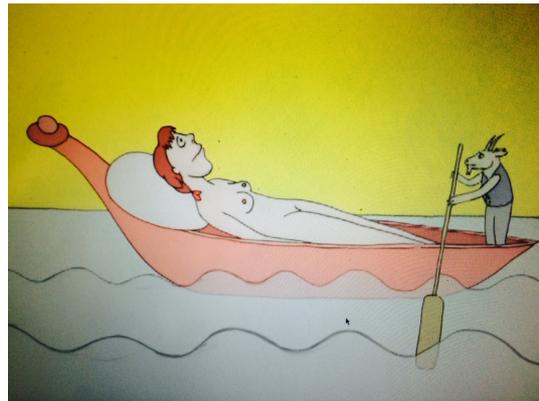


Image: *Teat beat of sex*, 2008

Radioactivity is perhaps the clearest example of how bodies and environment merge. So if I see Radioactivity, not an external threat that lurk at the horizon threatening to attack my flesh, but as something that has been part of me all along?



Image: *Shiriagari Kotobuki*, *Manga Ever Since*: 2011.3.11

In the project *Manga Ever Since*: 03/11/2011 Shiriagari Kotobuki depicts the atomic technology with other images than the paralyzing mushroom clouds. In the accident at Daichi, Fukushima radioactive particles finally got out into the world after a tedious life locked up inside the reactor. Grandfather Plutonium, big sister Cesium, big brother Strontium and the toddlers Iodine are the main characters in this story about the accident.¹⁷



Image: Once upon a time... Toxin wars (1978)

These particle characters aren't typecasted archenemies to humans as in *The toxin wars* but are simply going on with their own lives. The feeling is a bit more familiar, a bit less neurotic. Something I can deal with & accept that I share the world with. Get over the fear and deal with these troublesome relatives. Getting to know them because they will affect me, whether I'm talking about them or not.

Many people criticize the term Anthropocene as misleading or ineffective. Donna Haraway argues that the alternative term Capitalocene is more suitable¹⁸. It is the rich capitalist part of the world who stood for the geological changes, not mankind in general. It is not that part of the world worst affected by the antropocena disasters. In antropocene the differences between the poor and the rich part of the world increase when the poor have "disaster" the rich get "news".¹⁹

It is therefore primarily us here in our part of the world who need to rehabilitate our relationship to the environment. The images we surround us with become models for how we can relate to our environment. As artists we can create images that confirm existing views or that challenges and offer diverse alternatives. In the present it seems easier to imagine the apocalypse and the end of the planet than to imagine gradual social change and alternative societies.²⁰ The constantly repeated scenario of clash between man and nature makes me on the one hand long for the collapse and on the other hand regard the present situation as not too bad in comparison. I would like to see more images that makes me feel different. More images of humans, objects, environments in mutual transformations.

Kotobukis radioactive characters hint at a possibility to rehabilitate our separation with the environment. A possibility to embrace unrestorable landscapes that has been disabled by environmental destruction without deeming them abnormal²¹ in disaster tourism freakshow or ruin porn photography.

I imagine Big sister cesium introducing herself to a fukushima apple. They hit it off. I imagine feeling curiosity by the thought of taking a bite of that apple.

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La Planete Sauvage

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2 Alasiewicz , When did the Anthropocene
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3 Ryan Cook. ("Fiction Film After
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