# Inanimation

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**Abstract**

My practice borrows from early material processes of animation. The tools and techniques I primarily use were developed for commercial entertainment but are now obsolete outside of education and experimentation. The demanding labor process of producing cel animation independently applies technical constraints to my practice and forces a close examination of motion. I find my technique of tracing acute changes in images to be generative because the action of drawing and redrawing creates unexpected and unnatural movements. The motion created by unedited hand-drawn animation is slippery and constantly appears on the verge of transformation. My animations are short compiled loops of subjects which endlessly repeat small gestures and actions. Animating compact loops creates a perpetual anticipation of change while always rejecting progression. The movement produced in my loops refuses classification under the dichotomy of still and moving and instead calls for a more complex understanding of motion.

My looping animations are primarily made for non-theater settings like galleries and web-based settings. In the current internet landscape, time-based media are regularly encountered in perpetual forms like gifs or endlessly scrolling websites. These new forms recall a history of cinema and early cinema devices where emerging technologies restricted media viewing to short repeating clips. Linear timelines as well as beginnings and ends in media have become unfamiliar with the new pervasiveness of looped forms.

Working within a late-capitalist context where political power and resistance seem to operate in terms of perpetuity, my work examines a complex kind of movement where endless motion and stillness are simultaneously depicted. My practice involves animating scenes where constrained depictions of movement, change and progress are complicated by unusual treatments of space and time.

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**INTRODUCTION**

I will be using this writing to discuss animated loops, installation (digital and material), and movement (physical and political) in relation to my studio practice. These subjects will be discussed in relation to two sensations: resistance and being stuck. I propose these feelings are useful in examining the strange loops which seem to inhibit social progress. The following questions have been guiding my practice: Animation is conventionally used to create movement and change rather than conveying stillness or static qualities. Considering the existing discourse around motion and stasis in animation, how can this dichotomy be troubled to explore a complex state of being stuck? Because of the historical prevalence of loops in early animation devices and cartooning practices, what can be understood by revisiting these structural devices in a contemporary context where the loop is now pervasive? How can a complex animated depiction of movement be used to examine resistance and social change?

Because the motion in drawn animation is generated by adjusting how much an image changes over various durations, it potentially presents otherwise impossible depictions of time and change. I propose this strange representation of progress is relevant to navigating cycles or massive perpetuating phenomena familiar in the contemporary context where a complex understanding of the relationship between movement and change is necessary. There are many manifestations of resistance to current political issues, however my research concentrates on a specific mode of resistance: boycotts.

The type of movement modeled in boycotts has become a focus of my research. In boycotts, a mass resists through refusal by blocking or preventing something which requires modification. Considering this in terms of movement seems to imply a standstill. However, this model conveys anything but stasis. Forms of production and change occur in tandem with actions of blockage and refusal. This is perhaps a generative way of being stuck. In his essay, "Productive Withdrawals: Art Strikes, Art Worlds, and Art as a Practice of Freedom," Kuba Szreder uses the term industrious boycott to describe protest similarly to how I refer to the kind of production that occurs when something is stuck. Szreder discusses boycotts in the context of contemporary art labor. He explains, "Organizing an art strike, partaking in a boycott, or occupying art infrastructure are best understood as acts of productive withdrawal" (1). This term compounds elements of resistance and change in a compelling way. Describing this kind of labor movement as industrious boycott or productive withdrawal emphasizes that this act is anything but a halt. Instead, it is a time where new and different activity and production occurs. It implies that immobilizing something is another way of mobilizing it. Szreder references large-scale art worker protests like J20, where the withdrawal of artists in response to Donald Trump's inauguration culminated in "a closure of institutions, a media campaign, protests, and direct actions" (2). He explains,

> Agents of artistic circulation mistake the decision to withdraw one's labor or participation for idle disengagement … far from destroying circulation, the refusal of art workers in moments of productive withdrawal might even accelerate social

> flows, while emancipating them, allowing for their redirection under better terms (2).

Perhaps because of its potential to depict impossible treatments of time and motion, animation can be used to explore the complexity of social movements like protest, boycott and strike given this understanding of protest as productive withdrawal. This expanded interpretation of movement can reject the notion that change and progress are futile.

**LOOPS**

I originally developed my animation practice in terms of filmmaking. I conceived of my animations as linear works which would play from start to finish. They were made to be screened. My relationship to duration shifted though my transition from filmmaking to installation because of the new need for continuous playback. I had previously used loops as a strategy to hold or extend sections of animations. My new use of loops turned my animations into continuous and distinct works that could function similarly to still images in a space. A viewer's relationship to media in installations is distinct from screenings. Viewers in a screening setting are generally passive spectators sitting still and facing forward in a dark room. In installations, viewers have the agency to navigate their bodies though a space and potentially revisit works. Installing animation nonlinearly potentially leads to spatial relationships between pieces in a way that would be impossible in a screening. As well as the shift in engagement between the viewer and the animation, installation creates new relationships between the physical space where the work is placed, the animated space in the frame, and the body encountering it. In a screening environment, dimmed lights, a single channel facing forward and seating in rows ask the viewer to ignore the physical space.

Presenting animation through short repeating fragments recalls early moments in cinema history. In "Loops and Joins: Muybridge and the Optics of Animation," Esther Leslie uses the historical cinema and pre-cinema devices to examine the complicated relationship between movement and stillness. Early film apparatuses were often hand-

cranked or initiated manually which meant that they would intermittently show still images before flickering lifelike ones. Limitations of these technologies meant they could only play back short looping scenes. Simulating movement was possible in this era but it was only repeated movement. Referring to these early devices, Leslie notes, “Animation dramatizes the leap into movement from stillness and so retains the moment of wonder and delight: that something like life can be bestowed” (28). The compelling qualities of these devices were the moments when the image would rush to movement from stillness rather than when movement would play out continuously. The static moments between movement were part of the spectacle. She employs the term “permanent” to describe animation which merges qualities of stasis and movement (38). This description becomes useful because permanence does not imply anything about movement. Instead it implies a stable and perpetual state or an unchanging condition.

Leslie uses Eadweard Muybridge’s photographs to consider a moment in moving image history. Muybridge’s studies showed the camera’s potential to dissect movement. He dismantled quick gestures into moments that were previously undetected by human vision. When these images were reanimated, the movement was condensed again. Fluctuating between the dissected still images and the fleeting simulation of motion, meant an expansion and condensation of information. Animation is the reverse of Muybridge’s breakdown of movement. Instead of revealing hidden information from existing movement by slowing it down, animation condenses a gradual process of creating stills into ephemeral moments. In this way, animation is a practice of burying

information rather than revealing. Subtle moments that take hours to create are short-lived in the conversion to video. The transition from laboriously created series of images to a rapidly played back video clip seems to imply something is lost, however, a new quality is created through the condensing. The buried information can begin to seep through after repeated encounters. Watching animation as a loop perhaps does justice to the buried details in the work. While the animation becomes a neatly packed product for rapid consumption, the viewing format of the loop slows the work back down by calling for extended attention to a short moment.

Leslie relays Walter Benjamin's responses to the late nineteenth century discussion of eternal return. This pattern is familiar under capitalism. "Benjamin interprets this as response to a historical, momentary actuality, the fact of commodity production. Its restlessness is endless, which turns it into its opposite – a staticness, a stasis of ever-sameness" (39). This permanence resonates with early animation devices and commercial animation production. Leslie goes on to describe the evolution of loops into cartooning practices:

> The early optical devices showed loops of movement. This was eternal return, but it did not incorporate newness into the images, only repetition. Later, cartooning would exemplify this hellish temporality. The cel after cel or frame after frame, churned out again and again, means that structurally it is based on such a repetition with difference (39).

Here, she references the futile nature of animation production which was amplified through the factory production of animation as the industry expanded. Traditional processes relied on the constant mundane retracing of the nearly identical image over and over. The hand-made quality inherent in drawn animation means there is no way to show complete stillness. If ten subjects are redrawn identically in a sequence, they will still appear to be animated. This is because a hand-drawn mark conducts human traces of movement. Muscle strain, fatigue and bodily fluctuations are communicated into the drawn line. The subtle gestures and habits are translated into the motion created in the image. Industry animation uses the term “boiling” to refer to the deliberate use of this effect. Boiling was originally used to assure the viewer that they are still watching animation and suspends the feeling of movement even if no significant action is occurring. The need for boiling seems to come from the expectation that someone should always be working to make sure the image is continuing to move or that someone was constantly working to keep the image moving. This technique is, in one way, a shortcut because no work is being put into changing or progressing a scene. Alternatively, it is anything but a shortcut because effort is being put into animating what is essentially a static image. This necessity for assurance of a human presence or labor is a strange notion.

In media theorist Hannah Frank’s 2016 dissertation chapter, “The Multiplication of Traces: Xerographic Reproduction and One Hundred and One Dalmatians,” Frank examines the parallel histories of xerography and animated cartoons. The development

of photocopying in the 1960s had implications on labor practices in the animation industry. Frank explains that the integration of photocopying into commercial animation practices meant a redistribution of labor in studios (182). Transferring animators' original drawings could now be done by Xerox machine rather than by the skilled craftspersons who previously traced the artwork onto cel by hand. Frank notes that the allegedly non-creative workers tracing were primarily women and the supposed creative animators were always men (184). Incorporating photocopying technologies to the animation industry meant bypassing most of the labor process previously done by women. The animators celebrated that the lifelike nature of their original line was finally preserved in the finished cartoons (184). This implied that in the act of tracing, the women laborers rendered the artwork less human than the renderings made by machines. She explains that the inkers were expected to clear their minds while they traced and keep a steady hand by skipping breaks and straining their bodies (196). The production changes that occurred in this time point to a concern around the human body's role in monotonous entertainment labor and the bodies whose traces were or were not permitted to be translated into the product. Frank explains that in this era the animation industry shifted from a factory to an office. Photocopying technologies made the circulation of animation frames resemble the flow of paperwork and the animated image began to circulate like text as it was Xeroxed and reduced to a trace of the original marks (184). The Xerox machine was a good inker because it had no wandering mind, quivering hand, or social position that would alter into the animation. It becomes evident that the act of tracing and retracing and the perpetual duplication of near-identical images is affected by the

body performing this rote action. The human inkers were asked to behave inhumanly by standardizing their line. It is easy to imagine the restriction caused by this expectation being buried into the still drawings and revealed in the condensed cartoon.

In the independent animation production process, the individual undertakes the role of the animation factory and assumes all the responsibility for the human traces in the work. *The Last Clown (*1995-2000*),* by artist Francis Alÿs, is a hand-painted animation installed alongside the physical frames and assorted images made in the process of the work. The animation is a looped scene of a man walking along a path. His hands are clutched behind his back and his stare aims at the ground ahead of him. A yellow dog enters the frame and slips into the man's path. The two encounter one another in a way that looks frictionless and it almost seems like the dog will pass without conflict. His eyes keep looking ahead of him as the dog's tail catches his foot. The thin tail suddenly takes on a rigid quality as it throws the man off balance. He tumbles to the ground and unclasps his hands to break the fall. Seconds later he gets up and continues walking as he was before. Between each moment where he trips on the dog, the man takes a shameful glance over his shoulder where his face flashes white like a clown's makeup. A laugh track plays. Loose treatment of both friction and gravity add to the feeling of the loop self-perpetuating. The loop magnifies and repeats a subtle passing moment. This turns this momentary chance occurrence into an event.

In a video interview produced by the Tate Museum, Alÿs explains his consideration of the expectation of his work to be a spectacle and the function of the artist as an entertainer (tate.org). While he withholds spectacle in the animation by looping the clownish failure of the walking man, he makes the process of the production of the animation into a spectacle of its own. The incorporation of the still frames, early sketches and unused earlier versions become a kind of entertainment by turning Alÿs' process into part of the final work. Alÿs could have shown either component of *The Last Clown* independently. The studies, sketches and paintings that became the animation could have functioned like comics by illustrating his close study of a chance encounter. As well, the condensed form of these materials—the animation—could have played independently. The paper trail would be implied. The film seems to erase the spectacle while the traces of a laborious process reassure it. *The Last Clown* fluctuates loosely between spectacle and not spectacle.

Loops are a current commonplace mode for communicating. Across social media and internet platforms, the loop has become a conventional way of exchanging information and entertainment. Gifs, which replay fragments of media infinitely in place of still photos, have become a regular format for news, art, and communication. Because of limitations to their file size, gifs play back in loops or quick repetitions that repeat the same few seconds over and over. In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Gifs," Anna McCarthy describes the unique movement of this media form:

> … What gifs share with one another is not affect but rather a particular relationship to the media infrastructures through which they move, via endless small acts of reproduction. We might put it this way: gifs are gluey. Or, gifs keep on giffing (113).

The notion that gifs are constant or always happening is far from the deliberate ways media was viewed prior to the internet. Now you can scroll past gifs and automatically playing videos and they will continue playing as you scroll. It is as if they will keep looping regardless of whether they are visible on the screen. McCarthy describes this effect,

> Therein lies the paradoxical temporality of gifs as pieces of culture. On the one hand, we encounter them in miniaturized durationality of the looped fragment. On the other, we encounter them unexpectedly, in the indeterminate *durée* that is the flow of social media. If a bound book or roll of printed film signifies some kind of cultural permanence, the mobile, mutable gif embodies a fugitive temporality (113).

This description alludes to a perpetual condition. Looped media, as in the gif, has become normalized as a communication form as these dynamic images have entered messaging and texting. We are constantly asked to view content in quick repeating succession. An example of this is news stories where a video of an event is broken into smaller looping gifs which replay fragments continuously. This turns a simple record of an event into a collection of compartmentalized looped gestures. Seeing small clips repeat creates a strange gestural environment. An event becomes a collection of

moments locked into restricted lengths. McCarthy explains, “Their layers accrue, bearing traces where they have been” (113). This implies that this viewing method leaves an impression by carving the paths of its movement into the screen. These perpetual clips do not have pause or play buttons. They do not get played in a sequence where they begin and then end. Instead, this form of media appears to have already begun when it is encountered and seems like it will continue to play forever. A short fragment or clip of media stuck repeating itself incessantly used to read as a glitch or problem like a broken record or damaged tape. Now these repetitions are familiar and understood as deliberate.

Artist and writer Paul Chan’s sixteen-minute digitally-drawn animation, *My birds…trash…the future (*2004*)*, responds to the horrifying violence of the Bush era. He made the piece after spending time in Iraq with an anti-war humanitarian organization (Wei 158). The piece was installed at various sites in two channels played back-to-back on a wide, hanging screen. The animation is informed by art historical and literary references, the bible and two characters representing celebrity murder victims. The desolate setting filled with predatory birds and a chaotic soundtrack of alarms and sirens evoke a disaster-ridden dreamscape. Writer and curator Lilly Wei describes the experience of the piece, “Since the viewer can only see one side at a time, knowledge is frustratingly incomplete, which compounds the narrative's impression of fragmentation, dislocation, uncertainty and anxiety” (157). Her description of this orientation of the screen emphasizes the disruption created by the endless circulating a viewer must do to

view the entirety of the piece. The projection obscures itself by perpetually offering an unknown moment on the reverse side. Although both sides are looped and can be expected to not stray from their repetitions, the viewing arrangement refuses to assure this. Tensions rise from the scene playing out on the screen and the discomfort of the back-to-back projections. The video begins to hint at a conclusion. Wei describes:

> *My birds...* culminates in a cold wind that whirls away everything in its path beneath a gorgeously lurid, post-nuclear-blast sky. At this point the video shuts down into a seemingly unremitting blackness—an apparently endless night, without the promise of resurrection, suggesting a nihilistic message of despair and death. But then the loop begins again, signifying cautious hope, perhaps, or a Sisyphean state of futile, relentless striving and endurance (157).

Wei seems to be describing the loop's moment of restarting as a hopeful resurrection where the continuation of the same unchanging and devastated dreamscape is a sign of resilience rather than hopelessness. This ambiguous conclusion implied in the video's ending and restarting is particularly powerful. The combination of the installation preventing a full grasp of the two separate channels and the looped playback of the animation deny resolution or relief. Though the momentary pause when the blank screen seems to imply perpetual stillness, the moment of beginning again becomes dramatized like the cranking of a pre-cinema device beginning to move images.

These notions of movement in animation relate to the relationship between perpetuity and politics. In his 1992 essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control," philosopher

Gilles Deleuze responds to Michel Foucault's description of disciplinary societies proposing a new model which he refers to as societies of control. Deleuze explains that regulation is no longer contained within closed institutions as it was theorized to be in disciplinary societies, rather, control operates freely across an open system permeating all aspects of life and society. Here, he describes this shift:

> In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything– the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation (5).

This seems to describe contemporary life as a sort of collection of loops one fluctuates between endlessly. Because of its emphasis on perpetuity, this shift in the site of power parallels the change in the location of resistance identified in Claire Fontaine's description of human strike. In *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings*, the Paris-based artist collective Claire Fontaine describes a specific mode of resistance constantly underway which they refer to as human strike.

> The term human strike was forged to name a revolt against what is reactionary even—and above all—inside the revolt. It defines a type of strike that involves the whole of life and not only its professional side, that acknowledges exportation in all the domains and not only work… its subject isn't the proletarian or factory worker but the whatever singularity everyone is (39).

Deleuze's proposition that societal control has left closed institutions and saturates daily

life resonates with Fontaine's description of human strike resisting on a human level. Both descriptions imply networks of loops that are layered and interconnecting. These are complex networks that resistance and control both seem to modulate within. If power and the forces resisting it are both operating in perpetuity, then the currency exchanged in this stronghold is perhaps movement. The complex kind of movement and change which results from these perpetual forces from above and below is what I am intrigued by. Examining these kinds of social movement by converting variations of them into depictions physical movement in a way can be approached through the complicated layered animations I have been making.

Deleuze hints at a translation from social movement to physical movement when he contrasts disciplinary and control societies. This description emphasizes sensations of modulation, perpetuity and endlessness. He describes social processes like education, training, money exchange as never complete and always imperceptibly underway. Deleuze compares the mode of control demonstrated by disciplinary societies to the rigid pre-planned movement of a mole through underground dark tunnels and associates societies of control with the movement of a serpent which can move freely across land (6). This provokes an image of how the traversing of space can allude to varying levels of complexity. In another comparison between the two kinds of society, he explains, "Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point" (4). His use of devices like molds

of casts evokes the kind of movement performed in gifs where an image is locked into the same track of movement and carves its path into the screen.

Later, Claire Fontaine explains further that human strike is related to an 'emotional strike,' referring to French labor historian Michelle Perrot's analysis of strikes (12). Since human strike is a revolt within a revolt and operates at the personal level, it acts from inside the individual and "attacks the economic, affective, sexual and emotional positions within which subjects are imprisoned" (29). They describe human strike with language that alludes to perpetuity and denies an attitude of futility:

> Human strike is not a strategy and it's not a tactic, it has always already begun when we join it is because it has always been there. Politicizing its protean forms is the task we can assume. Recognizing it in our spontaneous and unconscious behaviors, letting ourselves be nourished by the energy that every pertinent refusal emits (9).

Claire Fontaine's description of human strike could almost fit animated loops as well, which is made of protean forms and are always underway. The collective identifies a need to address the chasm between the critique of social movements and their reality:

> Once we judge the unique and exceptional movements of autonomous movements with the measure we use for ordinary life moments, we are in the process of constricting the logical and political circle that closes in on its own idiocy. No translation is capable of converting action into words, for their separation is the daily tragedy of our democratic regimes (24).

Claire Fontaine's reference here to idiotic quality of the loop leads to a consideration of how the loop can feel like a frustrating gag or cruel trick. Generally *Human Strike* seems to pose the perpetuity of resistance as a response to the futility of the perpetuity Deleuze describes.

**WORKS**

I began making my first stand-alone drawn loops in my first year of the MFA program. This was during major political shifts in the United States in 2016. Considering the changing political climate and my transition to animating for installation, I began by drawing loops of ineffective animal traps perpetually deploying and misfiring. The traps were designed with optical incongruities and recalled cartoon gags. None of the traps had victims. Each repeatedly deployed in isolation. The resulting collection of animations became *Compromised Traps* (2016) and initiated a greater exploration of the relationship between animated loops and stuckness. My use of the term stuck denotes a hybridized condition of stasis and motion. Being stuck implies stillness or an inability to progress from an internal or external force. In this idle and perpetual mode, the definition of movement becomes complicated. The powerful sensations associated with being stuck and considering ways of resisting a purely negative experience of these sensations became the focus of my ensuing research. After *Compromised Traps*, I created my first major collection of loops made for installation. *Caught Using a Trap and Liberated* was comprised of ten channels of looping trap doors playing on CRT monitors. Each monitor was placed in a stack of one or two and sat low to the ground on six inch stands along a wall. The space was narrow and the work was mainly viewed by people passing parallel to it. Though the traps were encountered at ground-level where one might expect to come across a trap, the small size of the images and placement along the wall seemed to disarm them. The fleet of monitors was placed

perpendicularly to a nearby wall in the gallery. Getting a full view of the monitors meant backing up to a position where the wall obscures part of them.

Following *Caught Using a Trap and Liberated,* I developed a more complex technique for drawing loops. Initially referencing the compounding cycle methods developed in the seventies by independent animator Adam Beckett, I began layering longer scenes into short loops. The drawings in these animations duplicated and folded from the strange collapse of time. My loops began taking the form of coils or spirals rather than simple circles. They shifted from straightforward cycles to frenetic scenes. The resulting body of work, *Traffic Loops,* is a series of five animations made in Autumn 2017. The *Traffic Loops* contain subjects that could be expected to move and accumulate. In chronological order, the series includes the following subjects: cars (*Traffic Loop 1*), a person (*Traffic Loop 2*), rabbits (*Traffic Loop 3*), rats (*Traffic Loop 4*) and ghosts (*Traffic Loops 5, 6, 7*). I began the series with cars because I had been considering automobile traffic as a way of demonstrating a quality of being perpetually stuck. Clogged lanes of cars appear idle from a passenger's perspective although the queue is usually still moving. Even as a car idles, the purr of the engine relays an unseen series of motions occurring internally. After morning rush hour traffic clears, evening rush hour traffic will eventually clog roads again. Automobile congestion is a strange contemporary dilemma because it is pervasive, predictable and somewhat preventable. We tolerate it and go as far as memorizing schedules for when the roads will be worse or better. Infrastructure surrounding main arteries limits how much they can be amended. Some roadways can

be widened to reduce jamming but the constant addition of new cars undoes improvements. Many industries rely on the permanence of traffic and indirectly invest in congestion. As well, many social factors require people to willfully participate in the same traffic jams daily. Some drivers who are in traffic often, like truck drivers, use subtle behavior changes to help prevent jams. They maintain a greater following distance from the car in front of them and avoid braking by keeping a steady pace. This means the car behind them does not have to brake and nor does the car beyond that one.

"The Chase" from Italian novelist Italo Calvino's 1967 book of collected fictional short stories based on physical and mathematical concepts, *t zero*, provides a compelling description of being stuck in a loop. It is narrated by a man who is being pursued by another driver who is separated by a few cars. Both are waiting at an impossibly long red light. Idling cars surrounding both men keep them a safe distance apart. The queue inches forward but never enough to let the two drivers through the intersection. Because the narrator seems to have infinite time reflect on his position, he methodically contemplates every angle of the chase. The conclusions he reaches seem to solidify into facts and redefine his surroundings. Eventually his conclusions layer to completely alter what was previously an unresolvable scene. The narrator decides that because he is being followed, he must be following someone as well. This conclusion closes him into a loop where everyone is both following and followed. This rationalization makes him become every person in every car. He tests his theory by checking his glove box to

see if he is armed like his pursuer and he is. The light turns green and the narrator-turned-pursuer kills the driver in from of him who he has just realized he is following. He turns onto the cross-street returning to his initial position and resetting the scene to the beginning. There is a strange mechanical quality to this story. It slips from an unassuming narrative scene to a complicated depiction of time and space then resets to a simple story. Reading it in repetition creates a speeding and slowing as the story idles in traffic and then suddenly rushes into a conscious panic. The automatic momentum of Calvino's chase sequence is self-perpetuating and infinite. The chase is constantly underway but from within the closed system there is fluctuation. The gridlock—of both the cars and the loop— is simultaneously holding the narrator in a dangerous position and ensuring his safety.

In the third animation of the series, *Traffic Loop 3*, a duplicated rabbit-like creature traverses a space. The frame is split by a line which vertically divides the scene. The characters catch slightly on the line and are mutated as they pass over it. It is perhaps luring in some way because they continuously cross it. It is unclear whether this line is the side of a plane or simply a line in two-dimensional space. The figures have a way of moving intermittently. They never all stop at the same time, but individually they seem to lock into certain positions and begin moving again seconds later. The world created across this line seems to be one without implications. The character's body is continuously stretched and altered in ways that seem uncomfortable while its gaze seems distant and unaffected. Its eyes are shaded black and it expression is not quite

legible. The smile is something between a malicious grin and a wince. Since the character is constantly repeating without changing, it never develops or adapts to its previous actions. While the animation remains the same each time it repeats, the crowded moving layers reveal new moments as the fragment of animation cycles.

There is a violent quality to the *Traffic Loops*. The treatment of bodies and body-like figures involves stretching, dividing and squishing. Gestures repeated by the loop begin to carve into the space and the figures develop a sickening rigidity. David Bering-Porter describes this effect in gifs and film in his essay, “The Automaton in All of Us: Gifs, Cinemagraphs and The Films of Martin Arnold,” Bering-Porter examines the unusual movement created in Martin Arnold’s experimental films and compares it to the experience of viewing gifs. Bering-Porter observes that the repetitions in Arnold’s films “open up the surface of the image,” and “reflect a fundamental problematic of our own age” (183). He goes on to compare these violent and mechanical repetitions to gifs. He explains, “The similarity between Arnold’s films and the animated gif suggests that the loop underscore the temporality of our time” (183). This relates back to the notion that many political forces are operating in terms of perpetuity.

*Traffic Loop 3* was installed in a single-channel projection onto a modified corner of a gallery space. A wall was installed between a slightly ajar movable wall and a permanent wall creating a rounded corner with wide angles. The projector pointed up from the ground which distorted the animated figures across the angles. They were

doubly affected as they passed the drawn line which was slightly aligned with the corner. Unlike my animations installed on monitors, the projected space was enterable. The real-body-sized figures slid across the wall and became physically relatable.

In each animation in the *Traffic Loops* series figures can be tracked as they navigate its space. Because of the crowding, it is difficult to separate the characters when viewing them all at once. When one is isolated it is surprising to feel like its path is unique. It begins to feel as if it will go somewhere the other figures in the crowd are not going. It will always disappear into the crowd because the crowd is made from the duplicated individual. Referring to peculiar loops that exist in optical illusion, music and math in his 1979 book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Douglas Hofstadter explains,

> The 'strange loop' phenomenon occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started. (10)

This implication of hierarchy resonates with a moment in *Traffic Loop 2*. In this loop, a pacing figure meanders across a frame within a frame. One of the walking people steps up and back. The movement defines a staircase or large step that is not visible. Because there is no drawn background, this gesture is odd but implies that the figure is moving up. In the next moment, the person sinks back into the flat space of the foreground. This lack of arrival recalls something like the arrival noted in my description of reaching new forms through sequential drawing. There is a strange loop natural to my studio practice where the sensation of arriving somewhere is just undermined by an

unexpected shift.

The artist William Kentridge sees animation drawing as generative. In the essay "'The Rock': William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection," Rosalind Krauss relays Kentridge's description of his studio process as one of discovery rather than invention. Kentridge draws under the camera between shooting each frame. His practice of pacing between the drawing and the camera allows for intermittent moments where can pause to think and make decisions. He calls this process "stalking the drawing" (9). The revealing or arrival that I identify in my process of slowing drawing resonates with the Kentridge's stalking. Drawing sequentially at a slow pace also creates the sensation that no movement or change is occurring at all until the animation is played back at thirty drawings per second. When consecutive frames are viewed alongside one another as images rather than animation they appear to be the same drawing. This creates the feeling that I have redrawn the same image over and over without change. It is not until the drawing becomes video that the change is apparent.

Drawn animation tends to perpetually be on the verge of metamorphosis. My animations present a disconnect between the constant movement and lack or evolution. In my recent works, the subjects begin transitioning and simply morphs back into themselves. There is perhaps something about the physics of these animated spaces that leads to the constant anticipation of these shifts. Krauss uses Eisenstein's term of plasmaticness to describe a physical behavior like this (16).

> If transformation is built into the very weft of animation— because they are drawn, the successive images can not only render the variations in a moving figure's posture, but by the same token can change the very nature of the figure, impossibly stretching or shrinking parts of its body or giving it a new identity altogether— pressure exerted against animation itself, which is to say, animations very illusion of movement. In this case the momentary stillness interleaved between the frames so to speak, the sense of a kind of rictus that brakes the forward motion, reinstating the stillness of a single drawing, would alter the conditions of Kentridge's support (Krauss 17).

Krauss' focus on the physical reality of onscreen animated space to explain or inform the sensations of movement and stillness in animation is compelling. Kentridge's reference to weightlessness, fluidity and pressure within animated spaces seems relevant to my exploration of spaces that self-perpetuate (16).

For my thesis project, I revisited animating lumber. Boards had been a subject in a previous loop and I wanted to further explore the material qualities of animated wood. The drawn boards lose their rigidity and flop and twist when played back. I moved the rectangle of the planks while tracing the grain texture in the same place. This resulted in a subtle visual lag. It also made the boards function like flashlights in the dark by revealing small sections of the stationary texture as they moved through the space. As I was beginning to ink dense circulations of lumber onto cel, I was thinking about pests and stumbled across a description of an invasive species of caterpillar. I was first struck

by its name, pine processionary, which seemed to describe the animation I was making more than an insect. The name evoked a dark and poetic imagery like a woodsy funeral march. This moth larva travels in long queues of end-to-end caterpillars. They stay in line by pheromones rather than by vision which makes them prone to mistakenly connecting into a loop and getting caught marching endlessly in circles. I was fascinated by the image of this automatic bug getting caught in a strange circular mess. The pine processionary models a kind of furious perpetuity. The poisonous worm must feel as if it is arriving somewhere to cause habitat destruction, respiratory issues in mammals or at least become moths and instead their efforts just create a revolving mass.

The three gifs that made *Pine Processionary* were installed across three CRT monitors. The animations were synched to imply that certain boards were passing across the televisions. Two stacked medium-sized monitors faced a single large monitor. The monitors were slightly elevated on columns of two-by-fours. The three televisions were in the center of the space. The animation could be viewed by standing behind either side or standing in the few feet between the screens. Most viewing angles made it difficult to see continuity between the three animations at once. Analog monitors have a quality to them that makes them seem like they are capable of intercepting signals that are already in the world that digital screens do not have. I am interested in creating a sense that the animations are contained within these objects rather than simply played on them. The flatness of projection and digital screens does not offer the depth behind the screen that comes with a cube monitor. Analog monitors are also the reason for

screensavers which loop media to keep images from being burned into the screen. Installing on monitors had a different effect than the projected loops. The installation of *Traffic Loop 3* where animation was blown and distorted by a projector meant the viewer was inserted into the animated space. The characters were confrontable and the loop was experienced rather than safely viewed in a monitor. The monitors carried a captivating effect had by television screens where the gaze is drawn to the glowing movement. A television in a room has a certain visual draw that projection cannot quite create. This effect is perhaps trained by household familiarity with television screens and passively gazing at them. What was lost on the monitors was detail, scale and response of the animation to the physical space. The monitors also blurred the traces of the method in which the animation was made.

*Pine Processionary* was made by hand-painting and inking cels. This process of handmade animation was a strange shift from working on paper as it meant eliminating most of my physical contact with the materials. I wore gloves while I worked because the presence of my hand would mean the drawings would be damaged. Working on cel instead of paper tripled the amount of work that went into making these loops. In the final installation of this work, the indicators of the laborious process were lost on the low-resolution monitors. The soft colors from the paint were approximated through the media players and the screen's settings and shifted the tones to high contrast neon shades. In the thesis defense, the conversation highlighted the effect of obscuring the labor process through the installation. Because the value of animation is often

determined by how much of a feat the labor process became, I was considering the effect of masking the methods by discarding the indicators of the work. This method of installation creates frustration because of the desire of the viewer to see the remnants of labor. In some ways animation constantly exhibits this kind of futility by condensing hundreds of hours of work into a few fleeting seconds of the viewer's time. Viewing animation in loops combats this effect by asking the viewer to see the same condensed seconds endlessly. In *Pine Processionary* the loops play the same blurred motions without a clear sense of the hours that became the product. Comments around the work described the feeling created by the loops as lulling or relaxing and perhaps that is a result of the material process being obscured. Though the monitors buried most of the quality of handmade animation, some subtle clues of the process carried through the installation. Quick jolting motions, jumps, quivers and flashing colors indicate working closely from cel to cel. These moments flash by on the screen but indicate how slowly and meticulously the images were created. Moments of inconsistency between frames indicate stepping away from the work and returning, forgetting the path a board is taking, or fatigue from long hours of drawing where the line begins to loosen. These clues are subtle but perhaps hint at the process while obscuring the spectacle. Another conversation initiated by *Pine Processionary* questioned the effect of the individual taking on all the stages of animation production and the kind of thinking that emerges from independently taking on the work usually undertaken by multiple people. Because I work so closely with the still versions of this work by creating each frame meticulously and I also work closely with the moving product when I edit the gifs and install the work,

I get to fluctuate between the different iterations of the work at its varying paces. This means I am close to the expansion and condensation of the work and the kind of thinking that comes from working this way is effected by these fluctuating relationships with time.

## CONCLUSION

Operating in a late-capitalist context where regulation is embedded in life—from how we encounter media to the extent we can incite political change, understanding the nature of perpetuity in terms of politics and media is a significant undertaking. A more complex understanding of the relationship between perpetuity and movement is important. Using the animated loop and the process involved in creating loops as a generative tool has been my undertaking over the past two years. Examining the use of loops in terms of historical and contemporary animation contexts has been useful in defining my own use of this device. The hybridized use of traditional processes and newer forms like gifs creates a strange clash which has shaped the work I make. My practice has shifted to outputs beyond film and screenings like installation in physical space and online. My consideration of boycotts in relation to animated movement are reflected in my own choices to create looping and permanent animations rather than unfolding narratives and as well my trajectory of decontextualizing my work from film and video circuits.

Moving forward in my practice, I would like to explore alternative installation outputs for my animated work both in and out of gallery spaces. One way I would like to approach this is through collective organization. Exiting the MFA program, I am forming a collective of artists working with animation techniques to work in proximity to. This is a way to bypass the isolation of working independently without entering commercial channels by reclaiming time to spend in a work setting on our own practices. I am wondering how dividing parts of the labor of animation collectively will alter my practice.

The formation of this collective will also mean potential for more complex installation across works from different artists. Independently, I would like to explore the potential of a more complex loop by involving new technological platforms and devices to present my animation.

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