Animated images and animated objects: Reflexively and intertextually transgressive mimesis

Abstract

This article explores how animation can manipulate a reflexive intertextual framework which relates to religious prohibitions on artistic mimesis that might replicate and threaten God's creative act. Animated films are most intertextually reflexive, in these terms, when they narrativise the movement of diegetic objects from another medium which also transgresses God's prohibition: sculpture. In the media of both sculpture and animation the act of mimesis is transgressive in fundamentally ontological terms, staging the illusion of creation by either replicating the form of living creatures in three-dimensional sculpture, or by giving the impression of animating the inanimate in two-dimensional film. Both media can generate artworks that directly comment on these processes by using narratives about the creative act which not only produce the illusion of life, but which produce diegetically real life itself. Such artworks are intensely reflexive, and engage with one another in an intertextual manner. The article traces this process from the pre-historic and early historic religious, mythic and

philosophical meditations which structure ideas about mimetic representations of life, via Classical and Early Modern sculpture, through a radical proto-feminist revision crystallising around the monstrous consequences of the transgression in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and finally into film and more specifically animation. The article culminates with a relatively detailed account of these processes in the *Toy Story* franchise, which is a heightened example of how animation can stage a narrative in which ostensibly inanimate sculpted toys move of their own volition, and of how this double form of animation does this reflexively, by ontologically performing the toys' animating act. The animated films analysed also engage with the transgressive and monstrous consequences of this double form of animation, which derive from the intertextual life of those narratives that challenge God's prohibition on mimesis.

Introduction

This essay positions animation within two interrelated frameworks: intertextuality and reflexivity. There is an existing body of scholarship applying these academic approaches to animation, and these form an important foundation and point of departure for my argument. What distinguishes the approach in this essay, however, is the dialectic interconnectivity of animation's intertextuality and reflexivity: both are metamorphic manipulations of how certain dialogic narrative *topoi* can be exploited in a manner which is specific to the ontological capacities of the animation medium.

By *topoi*, here, I mean a particular bundle of thematic and narrative elements which, crucially, develop over time. Ernst Robert Curtius, who re-introduced the term into literary studies, claims that *topoi* originate in Classical rhetoric, in which they are 'intellectual themes, suitable for development and modification at the orator's pleasure', but that 'with the extinction of the Greek city-states and the Roman Republic […] rhetoric lost its original meaning and purpose', so that 'topoi […] acquire a new function. They become clichés, which can be used in any form of literature, they spread to all spheres of life with which literature deals and to which it gives form' (1953:70). In this sense *topoi* are related to Richard Dawkins' concept of the meme, which is a unit that transmits cultural

ideas in a similar manner to how genes facilitate biological evolution. Dawkins draws an analogy between the evolutionary development of genes and memes – both transform their hosts (biological organisms in the case of genes, and cultures in the case of memes) through a process of variation and mutation (1989: 352). *Topoi*, then, are diachronic thematic bundles, which develop and alter over time, and they are also dialogic thematic bundles, which cross back and forth between texts, genres and media.

One such diachronic and dialogic *topos,* which culminates in animation's ontological illusion of animating the inanimate, is a prohibition about humans challenging God's monopoly on creating real life through the aesthetic representation of life, and the transgressively monstrous consequences of breaking the prohibition. Across different media, artistic challenges to this prohibition closely intertwine mimesis (the artistic replication of the world) with reflexive manipulations specific to the medium in question. This essay argues that two different media, sculpture and film/animation, are most relevant to this because their ontological capacities foreground the illusion of the non-real appearing to be real (either a three-dimensional sculpted replication of a human body or the two-dimensional illusory animation of the inanimate), and because these media can reflexively narrativise stories *about* these illusory processes.

Many animated films include narrative elements about the medium's illusory

ontology, and about the illusory nature of diegetically living sculpted figures.

Such films do not focus on anthropomorphic animals or animal-human hybrids,

which are another (and quite different) important and recurring *topos* in

animated films. Christopher Holliday (2016: 250) has recently stressed how

'computer-animated film narratives have increasingly mined the non-human

element of the splintered anthropomorph for its expressive, creative potential'.

Such anthropomorphs' man-made origins are thereby downplayed, with a focus

instead on their inherent 'non-human *morphē*' (252). For the films of interest to

Holliday, animation can explore characters which do not replicate their

technically man-made status with a diegetically man-made status. Animated

films, however, can also foreground the link between the technical animation

process and the ability of diegetic characters to move of their own volition.[1]

This essay traces the *topos* relating to aesthetic transgressions of mimesis from

its religious, mythic and philosophical origins, through Classical and Early

Modern sculpture, and into animated film. It ends with a relatively detailed

account of the *topos* in the *Toy Story* films (*Toy Story* John Lasseter, 1995; *Toy*

Story 2 John Lasseter, 1999; *Toy Story 3* Lee Unkrich, 2010), because this

franchise is a heightened example of how contemporary animation can stage a narrative in which ostensibly inanimate sculpted toys move of their own volition, and of how this double form of animation does this reflexively, by ontologically performing the toys' self-animating act.

Intertextuality and reflexivity in animation

Before addressing the diachronic trajectory of aesthetic manipulations relating to the *topoi* of transgressing the prohibition on mimesis, it is important to position my approach to intertextuality and reflexivity in animation within the context of existing academic writing. This is because, in terms of intertextuality most obviously, it is not necessary to address prohibitions about artistic mimesis in order to account for the ways in which films such as the *Toy Story*s intersect, borrow from, and hybridise with various other popular and literary texts. For Julia Kristeva (1980: 66) 'any text is the absorption and transformation of another', which is an approach which conceptualises, as Thomas Leitch (2005: 239) puts it, 'all texts as intertexts, all reading as rereading, all writing as rewriting'. The *Toy Story* trilogy has thus be thought of as an intertextual engagement with popular films such as *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) (Kemper 2015:16-17) or *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick 1968) (Cornell, 2015:18), and with canonical texts such as *Don Quixote de la Mancha*

(Cervantes, 1999) (Burningham, 2000) or *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818) (Kemper, 2015: 76-77). Such intertextual references are multifarious, rather than specific. They follow the logic of Manfred Pfister's claim that 'intertextuality has become the very trademark of postmodernism' (1991: 209), so that intertextual references are 'a playful *mise en scene* of pre-given materials and devices […] taken either from the imaginary museum of historical styles, from consumer society's storehouse of pop artefacts […] or from the repertoire of modernist aesthetics and practices' (1991: 208). However, I want to claim that as well as being polyphonous and haphazard, intertextuality can also be specific, in terms of a text's engagement with particular narrative and thematic *topoi*.

Reflexivity, too, has been conceptualised as an inherent element of the animation medium, and of filmmaking more generally (Bukatman 2012: 141; Manovich 2001: 298; Mulvey 2006:46-47). Whereas the above mentioned postmodern forms of intertextuality are nebulous and diffuse, animation/film reflexivity is more particular, focusing on an element of specific narrative concern in the animated films of interest here: the illusory movement of the immobile. Several writers have located this illusionism within the context of the uncanny. Anthony Vidler claims that 'the "uncanny" is […] a representation of a

mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming' (1992:11). This means that, for Laura Mulvey (2006: 46), from the earliest days of cinema, the medium's formal capacities encouraged an ambiguous manipulation of illusory movement with uncanny consequences: Georges 'Méliès transfers to cinema many characteristic attributes of [the] uncanny, exploiting technological novelty as well as cinema's ability to blur the boundary between the animate and the inanimate with trick photography'. Méliès, among others, could thereby exploit the uncanny capacities of the medium to reflexively generate uncanny narratives, and use 'the cinema machine to give life to lifeless representations of the human figure' (Mulvey 2006: 47).

Animation, in particular, has maintained this reflexive relationship between formal capacity and the uncanny, so that, as Lev Manovich puts it

'[o]nce the cinema was stabilized as a technology, it cut all references to its origin in artifice. Everything that characterized moving pictures before the twentieth century – the manual construction of images, loop actions, the

discrete nature of space and movement – was delegated to cinema's

bastard relative, its supplement and shadow – animation'. (2001: 298)

Animation, then, has the potential to foreground the ambiguously uncanny

status of images, whereas contemporary live action film disavows and elides

these technical origins. Consequently, for Scott Bukatman (2012: 141),

animation is 'the fantastic, refracted double of the film; the uncanny's uncanny'.

As such, there is an existing body of literature which conceptualises animated

films as intertextual and reflexively-uncanny phenomena. However, I want to

position these films within a quite specific intertextual framework relating to

prohibitions about mimesis, and identify how they exploit the medium's reflexive

potential to develop and interrogate this framework. Indeed, there is something

inherently reflexive about this intertextual framework, no matter which medium

engages with it, as I will demonstrate shortly. Therefore, just as animation can

be doubled, with diegetically self-animating sculpted figures and ontologically

animated images, so too animation's reflexivity can be doubled, with a reflexivity

derived from this specific intertextual framework in whichever medium it is

rendered, and a reflexivity inherent to the animated film medium. Each of these

intertextual and reflexive elements reinforces the others.

Creation and prohibitions on mimesis: a *topos*

This inherently reflexive intertextual framework needs exploring in detail, then. It is appropriate that there is no single point of origin for this framework,[2] despite a discursive attempt to establish one in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the creation of the cosmos by God. The male deity, here, monopolises creation, first of the universe itself (Genesis 1:1-17), and then of humanity (Genesis 2:7). This monopolisation is accompanied by a prohibition about any attempt to challenge it through mimetic representation. But before outlining this it is first important to position God's claims here within an alternative and older account of supernatural creation, both to demonstrate why God's monopolisation requires this prohibition, and because the consequences of God's claim in relation to the older account influence the reflexive nature of the intertextual framework of which the animated films of interest here are a part.

In the earlier creation myth, the ability to create life, during humanity's long pre-agricultural, pre-urban and pre-literate past, was located within a simultaneously intuitive and mystical gender-specific context. Historian Rosalind Miles (1993: 35) claims that prehistoric 'woman, with her inexplicable moon-rhythms and power of creating new life, *was* the most sacred mystery of the tribe. So

miraculous, so powerful, she had to be more than man – more than human'. Appropriately, given how the *topos* developing here eventually mutates into a thematic concern in sculpture and animated film, this divine maternalism generated numerous aesthetic representations. These are perhaps most strikingly expressed in the 'outsize breasts, bulging belly and buttocks, flaring vulva and tree-trunk thighs' (Miles 1993: 57) of figurines such as the so called Venus of Willendorf, carved in what is now Austria between 25,000 and 30,000 years ago.

The subsequent development of agriculture, writing and hierarchical states in those regions of Western Asia and North Africa which archaeologist James Henry Breasted (1916) called The Fertile Crescent, all facilitated the rise, however, of an alternative social structure and an alternative mythology. For Amaury De Riencourt (1983: 35), this new urban agricultural society focused on '[t]he divinity of the sun [which] was essentially masculine – the phallic sunbeams striking down on Mother Earth – a maleness whose rays impregnate the earth and cause the seeds to germinate'. The ultimate expression of this usurpation over the female creative act demanded, as Miles puts it (1993: 77), 'an idea of immanent, eternal maleness that was not physical, visible, fallible […] – one God, God the Father, who man now invented in his own image'.

This new patriarchal God could then claim (literally, with the spoken command

of 'let there be…' (Genesis 1:3) instantaneously overthrowing the female

monopolisation of creativity rooted in the biological rather than the verbal) to be

the Genesis of all life. This un-biological male domination over creation is the

central turning point of the intertextual *topos* relating to animating the

supposedly inanimate. Hereafter, human aesthetic replication of living creatures

is potentially transgressive principally because the male deity's usurpation is so

counterintuitive. This is because myths about matriarchal goddesses are

allegorical exaggerations of observable female human and animal behaviour

which amplify the way that females generate new life through giving birth into a

magical/religious principle. The Biblical God's verbal act of creation must be

enforced through strong prohibitions because it has no comparable analogy in

observable male human or animal behaviour – the procreation of new life

amongst humans and animals cannot be accomplished through verbal

commands. God's verbal creation does, however, have analogies with early

urban/agricultural societal developments, and the kind of textually based law-

giving authoritarianism which characterised early patriarchal societies. The

invention of writing, in these societies, facilitated the recording and

dissemination of this male authority. Texts such as Hammurabi's Code of Laws

in Babylon, or Exodus' Ten Commandments (20:3-17), expressed the injunctions of patriarchal civilisation, with an authority derived from the technology of (and socio-political system supporting) the new medium of writing.

God's un-biological verbal creation of the cosmos is accompanied by the similarly un-biological creation of humanity. It is this act which relates specifically to the subsequent prohibition about artistic mimesis. This is because the masculine deity's usurpation over female creation can only be conceptualised in terms of animating the inanimate within the context of human artistic mimesis, with the creation of man expressed as an extension of sculpture: 'And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7).

Consequently, God judges all acts of aesthetically replicating the natural world as a threat to His own appropriation of creativity, as though a mere human's replication of His usurpation might repeat the theft, and overthrow the recently won monopoly over creation. Thus, second only to the First Commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3), in the Second Commandment God aggressively defends His claim to be the source of all life:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

(Exodus 20:4-5)

The second verse of this Commandment, not bowing down to or serving images, has been used as an excuse to temper the first verse, so that mimesis without worship has, in certain contexts, been deemed acceptable. However, the first verse positions the prohibition within the creative act itself, in any media ('any likeness'), but most specifically in the medium which most closely resembled life, at least in Biblical times, and which most closely aligns with God's own non-biological form of creating life: the 'graven images' of sculpture. Prior to the invention of the film/animation medium, therefore, it is the medium of sculpture which most closely replicates God's own illusion of creating life, and

which most frequently engages with the prohibition in reflexive terms. As W. J. T. Mitchell puts it,

'[m]an is both sculpted object and the sculpting agent, both created as and creator of sculpted images. […] Man is prohibited from making [sculpted] images just as surely as he was prohibited from eating from the tree of knowledge, and for the same reason. Image-making, like thinking for yourself, is a dangerously godlike activity'. (2005: 246)

The animated films of interest here, as examples of the film/animation medium narrativising sculpted figures which themselves transgress the prohibition, combine together the two media which most ontologically create the illusion of life.

The prohibition, too, relates most directly to a specific Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture, but it is appropriate, again, that the thematic *topos* here does not have a single point of origin. The same kind of patriarchal culture which informed the Decalogue also inspired a similar, if less melodramatic, aversion to mimesis in Classical Greek culture, expressed most coherently in Plato's theory of forms. Plato claimed that the observable universe is composed of imperfect copies of

eternal, perfect forms created by a benevolent demiurge (God). The maternal creative act is thereby downplayed: mothers are not the originating forces which create children, but are merely receptacles which carry the copies of the perfect and demiurge-made form of the human. Similarly, any attempt to aesthetically replicate the form of a thing is doomed to failure because it is a copy of a copy so that, for Plato (1871: 438), an artist is merely 'an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth'.

These religious and philosophical meditations on mimetic replications of life generated accompanying aesthetic meditations, which have a complex and contested history, but which demonstrate important elements of continuity rooted in reflexivity about how different artistic media engage in the practice of mimesis. It is certainly true, of course, that neither Judeo-Christian-Islamic or Platonic forms of iconophobia eradicated figurative mimesis. Classical, Medieval Christian, Renaissance and Islamic art all included mimetic elements, to greater or lesser degrees. But some of the tensions around mimetic representation within these artistic traditions, and later traditions stemming from them, demonstrate the significance of the prohibition. This injunction is perhaps most rigidly enforced in Islamic art's focus on geometric patterns and calligraphy rather than figurative reproductions, with an, at times, violent

iconoclasm against mimetic imagery and/or its creators. Christian art has often had conflicts over oscillations between iconophilia and iconoclasm. Partly under Islamic influence, 8th and 9th Century Byzantine society was ravaged by brutal civil wars between the destroyers of, and the defenders of religious icons. The struggles between the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, too, often violently linked the aesthetic and the religious in conflicts over mimetic representations.

It is the more subtle engagements with the prohibition, however, which demonstrate some of the important and enduring intertextual elements of the transgressive nature of mimesis, and this is because these more oblique representations frequently contain reflexive elements. Sculpture is central to this close bundling of thematic/narrative transformation from the lifeless to the living with a reflexive/ontological manipulation of the metamorphosis. Classical Greek and Roman myths, and subsequent sculpted interpretations of these stories, provide some clear examples. A key recurring figure in the intertextual development of reflexive manipulations of the prohibition is Pygmalion who, in a myth collected[3] into Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2010) was a sculptor from Cyprus. Disgusted by prostitutes, Pygmalion vowed never to love a woman, but then became infatuated with a sculpture of a beautiful woman (in a later version of

the myth named Galatea) which he had carved. Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess of love, took pity on him and breathed life into the sculpture, so that it/she turned from ivory into living fresh, when he touched it/her. The narrative itself is an allegorical reworking of an older Greek myth which relates, like God's creation of man in Genesis, to humanity's sculpted origins. In the Greek creation story, man is again sculpted from clay by a male deity, the Titan Prometheus. But in this myth life is breathed into man not by the patriarchal deity, but by the Goddess Athena. As such, the Greek iteration of this creation stands somewhere half way between the matriarchal creation of the primeval Venus of Willendorf and the patriarchal creation of the Biblical God. Classical sculpture engaged with the reflexive potential of this myth. In a 3rd Century CE marble relief of Prometheus sculpting man from clay with Athena preparing to breathe life into it, from the temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias, in modern Turkey (now in the Louvre), human sculptors use the medium to replicate the deities' creation of humanity. Unlike a somewhat narratively similar mimetic interpretation of the creation of man, such as Michelangelo's famous centrepiece to the Sistine Chapel, the sculptors' manipulation of Prometheus' creation is directly replicated in the medium: God did not create Adam by making a fresco come to life, but Prometheus did create a sculpture which could be bestowed life by a goddess.

A sculpture of the Pygmalion myth, such as Étienne Maurice Falconet's

Pygmalion and Galatea (1763) can similarly extend the hubristic appropriation

of the divine creative act. Falconet sculpts both sculptor (Pygmalion) and

sculpted (Galatea), turning Galatea's flesh which, in the narrative, is just

metamorphosing from ivory, back into a lifeless material, marble. As with the

Classical sculpting of Prometheus' creative act, Falconet utilises the medium to

reflexively appropriate some of the creativity of life inherent in the subject

matter, with both examples bestowed life by a female deity.[4] The sculptors in

both of these examples replicate the act of creating life through their medium.

The logical extension of sculptural reflexivity about creating life is a form of

sculpture which not only looks somewhat real, but can also move as though it

were real. Man-made automata, transgressive sculpted or constructed objects

occupying a liminal space somewhere between lifeless and alive, are recurring

features in the other medium of interest here: film, and more specifically

animation. This again, is because of the reflexive potential of the medium in

relation to prohibitions about mimesis. I have already discussed the uncanny

ontological capacities of film and, more specifically, animation. Animated

narratives about or including sculptures frequently include movements which

allegorise the transgressive illusionistic ontology of both sculpture and of film, and frequently position this within an uncanny context. The *Toy Story* films and the titular character in *Pinocchio* (Norman Ferguson, T. Hee, Wilfred Jackson et al., 1940) are perhaps the clearest examples which depict ostensibly sculpted figures on screen which can transgressively and unexpectedly move, but there are numerous other instances of this process. These include the diegetically wooden carved figures which strike the clock in the dwarfs' mine in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (William Cottrell, David Hand, Wilfred Jackson et al., 1937), various automata in Geppetto's workshop in *Pinocchio*, the servants in *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) who have been turned into moving objects such as the mechanical clock Cogsworth (David Ogden Stiers), the *Tin Toy* (John Lasseter, 1988) which prefigures the toys in *Toy Story*, and which stresses that a sentient toy's possible movements are limited to those of an automaton, and, according to Bukatman (2012: 146), the automated splintered brooms which the Sorcerer's apprentice Mickey Mouse unleashes in *Fantasia* (James Algar, Samuel Armstrong, Ford Beebe Jr. et al., 1940). Animation can also contain visual reminders that diegetically alive characters are technically animated, when the ostensibly alive characters act like and alongside diegetic automata, such as *Frozen*'s (Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, 2013) Anna (Kristen Bell) and Hans' (Santino Fontana) jerky

robotic dance in front of the automata which emerge from a clock tower to dance alongside them when they express their mutual 'mental synchronisation'.

Monstrosity and prohibitions on mimesis

The transgressive nature of the characters' movements in these texts also demonstrates the influence of one more important historical development in the reflexive intertextual *topos* relating to prohibitions on mimesis, and this development centres around the monstrous consequences of transgressing the prohibition which are crystallised in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This narrative intuits the gender-specific context to God's prohibition. Dr Frankenstein's hubris not only challenges the patriarchal deity's usurped non-biological monopoly over creation, but also violates the earlier matriarchal biological monopoly which God usurped. Thus, as Anne K. Mellor puts it (1988:115), '[t]he destruction of the female implicit in Frankenstein's usurpation of the natural mode of human reproduction symbolically erupts in his nightmare following the animation of his creature'. Shelley's proto-feminist intervention in the intertextual *topos* here is a radical reorientation. Michelle E. Bloom (2000: 291), discussing the 'Pygmalion complex' in nineteenth-century literature argues that '[t]he "happily-ever-after" formula of Ovid's version of Pygmalion [...], in which the gynomorphic statue comes to life and its creator marries her, no longer applies'. Instead, 'the

nineteenth-century counterparts of […] Pygmalion tend to be "mad"'. Continuing this development, when filmic graven images come to life, they are frequently animated by a monstrously malignant will. Examples of this include the Chucky doll of the *Child's Play* franchise (Tom Holland, 1988[5]), the sadistic puppet Billy in *Saw* (James Wan, 2004), the demonic hounds (which will soon metamorphose into human-shaped deities) that emerge from statues in *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984), the evil Krusty the Clown doll in *The Simpsons* episode *Treehouse of Horror III* (Carlos Baeza, 1992), another monstrous clown doll (and a jack in the box) in *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), murderous *Scarecrows* (William Wesley, 1988), chthonic voodoo dolls in Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 2009), as well as numerous adaptations of *Frankenstein* (for example, *Frankenstein* James Whale, 1931; *Bride of Frankenstein* James Whale, 1935; *The Curse of Frankenstein* Terence Fisher, 1957; *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* Kenneth Branagh 1994; *I, Frankenstein* Stuart Beattie, 2014; *Victor Frankenstein* Paul McGuigan, 2015) and, as I will discuss in more detail shortly, the *Toy Story* films.

These non-biological simulacra of life (even Dr Frankenstein's quasi-biological creation is an inversion of natural biology) all have monstrous characteristics,

and these are frequently aligned with the gender-specific context central to God's usurpation over female creation and its accompanying prohibition on mimesis. Of the examples mentioned above, dolls, as vicarious children for children playing as adults, mimic and monstrously subvert the parenting aspect of biological reproduction when they develop their own evil will. *Ghostbusters*' female deities (Sigourney Weaver and Slavitza Jovan), one of which emerges from the sculpted hounds, are coded towards an eroticised, as opposed to maternal, conception of female divinity. The form of the film's Destructor, too, the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, is an enormous moving sculpted mascot[6] which is another product of the male creative imagination.[7] *Toy Story*'s most monstrous chimeras, similarly, are the creations of a sadistic male 'doctor': the toys' antagonist Sid (Erik von Detten).

Frankenstein, too, demonstrates the links between transgressing the mimetic injunction and doing so in a reflexive manner. The novel is structured in epistolary form, so that it is made up of fragments of a whole which have been authored by different voices expressing different opinions about the same events. This structure mirrors the assembled nature of the monster itself – disparate fragments of human experiences become a whole novel, just as disparate fragments of human bodies become a whole monster or, as Chris

Baldick (1987: 30) puts it, '[l]ike the monster it contains, the novel is assembled from dead fragments to make a living whole'. Film adaptations of *Frankenstein*, too, can exploit the narrative's and the monster's fragmentary status in terms of the medium's ontological manipulation of individual still images into the illusory impression of movement and life. Indeed, Ute Burns (2013: 199) goes so far as to argue that '[f]ilmmaking is Frankensteinian because filmmaking, like Frankenstein, is engaged in producing artificial (human) life. […] [T]his idea holds enormous reflexive potential for films thematising the Frankenstein narrative'. In a similar vein, and reactivating the other key intertextual point here linking the media of sculpture and film, Bloom (2000: 291, emphasis in original) claims that after the medium's invention 'cinema becomes the *privileged* space of the Pygmalionesque' because 'the very medium embodies the longstanding human desire for the animation of the inanimate'. Eric G. Wilson (2005: 31) has made a similar point linking the Jewish myth of the Golem, another sculpture given the semblance of life by its human creator which ends up on a monstrous rampage through Prague, with the ontology of the film medium. Wilson argues that a film drawing on the myth such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) can make clear reflexive connections between media (both film and 'magical' sculpture) and narrative theme since 'the artifice of the magus [the Rabbi who creates the Golem] and the illusion of the director [Ridley Scott] are sites of

liberation and control, organic exuberance and dull mechanism' (Wilson 2005: 31).

Like sculpture, then, the film medium provides reflexive tools for narratives about creating the semblance of life. Animation can extend this reflexive manipulation of the inanimate into the impression of the animated, as the name of the medium suggests. Indeed, for Bloom (2000: 292, emphasis in original), if 'the illusion of movement is the key element rendering cinema "Pygmalionesque"' then 'the single most significant concept here is *animation*'. Live action film stages 'real', moving events, and then this pro-filmic mobility is transformed into still images, and then back into the impression of movement through projection. Animation dispenses with the pro-filmic or, if there is a pro-filmic 'reality', such as in stop-motion animation, then the pro-filmic is, like the still drawings of classical animation, immobile.[8] For Bukatman (2012: 136) 'cartoon physics are actually a function of animation's reversal of the filmic production process, in which movement is constructed rather than reconstructed'. So if live action film breathes life back into that which was once moving in the pro-filmic world, animation creates that impression of movement from images that were still to begin with.

The reflexive move from ontologically mobilising the immobile to narratively mobilising the immobile is as old as the medium itself. Ladislas Starevich's stop-motion animations of dead insects are a heightened example of this process. Academic analyses of Starevich's reflexivity have focused on the way that a film such as *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1911) has these insects engaging in the voyeurism of watching cinema (for example, Lindvall and Melton 2009: 73; Nowell-Smith 1996: 76; Wells 2008: 68; Wells and Moore 2017: 122). However, the four stage process of 1) live mobile insect to 2) dead immobile insect to 3) still image of dead immobile insect to 4) illusion of movement of live insect is a more ontological form of reflexivity which engages with prohibitions about mimesis in a manner that creatively challenges and transgresses God's life-bestowing monopoly. Disney's *Pinocchio*, too, takes still images of a 'graven image' toy that should not be able to move of its own volition, and manipulates these still images into a narrative about a supposedly inanimate (and mimetic) object which is able to come to life. The film even contains reminders about the protagonist Pinocchio's transgressive (in both ontological and narrative terms) status when he dances with puppets on strings which can move only at the behest of a puppet master, and sings that 'there are no strings on me'.

Animated objects and animated images in the *Toy Story* franchise

The *Toy Story* franchise makes a useful case study of the contemporary status of the mimesis prohibition *topos* because it utilises each of these reflexive intertextual elements. At both the narrative and ontological levels it exploits, and even fetishizes, the way that the supposedly inanimate is animated. It also thematises the transgressive nature of violating the prohibition through a gender-coded form of monstrosity.

The franchise slightly complicates some of these issues because its computer-generated status somewhat clouds more classical animation's link between individual still images and their animation into the impression of continuous movement. Right from the beginning of the first film, however, there is an attempt to ground the way that the toys can move within the context of animating individual drawings. During the opening sequence of Andy (John Morris) playing with his toys, the first images shown are cardboard boxes festooned with Andy's crayon drawings and hand written labels which turn them into buildings such as 'saloon', 'bank', 'skool' and 'gereneril store' [sic]. The first toy shown is Mr Potato Head (Don Rickles), although this introduction, again, is (a computer generated image of) a hand drawing, in the form of a cowboy-era

wanted poster. The narrative's 'real' Mr Potato Head then rapidly enter the screen, brought down by Andy's hand with the camera remaining static, so that the CGI 'real' and (later) 'alive' animated character covers over the static hand drawn image. The cowboy Woody (Tom Hanks), in a medium close-up tracking shot, then moves through a more realistic Western landscape featuring the Monument Valley which is so central to John Ford's iconic Western *oeuvre*, but this is soon revealed to be another still handmade image, as the camera cuts to reveal a longer shot of Woody, being held up on Andy's back, as the boy trots horse-like past a painting of Monument Valley on the wall. Later, Andy swings Woody in front of hand drawn images of the doll which he has pinned to his wall, again superimposing the CGI, diegetically alive object-Woody over the top of a visual reminder of animation's non-animated ontological origins.

These are all immediate connections between the way that the toys can (narratively) animate themselves, and the way that the medium classically (ontologically) animates drawings. When Andy first leaves his bedroom, and Woody organises the toys for the upcoming birthday party and house move, he plays a game with an Etch A Sketch in which Woody and the Etch A Sketch riff on one of a cowboy's generic conventions. Woody shouts 'draw!' and un-holsters two imaginary guns. The Etch A Sketch is shown literally drawing the

outline of a gun on its screen. Again, the link between the illusory ontological movement of still drawings and the narrative ability of the toys to move themselves is foregrounded, this time as a joke about two different meanings of the homonym/homograph 'draw'. Indeed, even before the film itself begins, on the DVD menu screen,[9] still, hand drawn images of characters and events from the non-hand drawn film are shown.

It is central to the narrative that the toys do not move themselves, under normal circumstances, whenever a human Platonic form,[10] from which they are merely copied, might see them. At some level, then, the toys are aware of their transgressive nature – although they exhibit human-like emotional and cognitive behaviour, their man-made construction denies them unfettered autonomous status. The toys uphold the unexplained injunction about revealing their ability to move (with one notable exception that I will come to shortly) even in the face of potential death or actual torture. Woody, therefore, lies inanimate on a petrol station forecourt even as a lorry's wheel threatens to crush him, and stoically submits to the toy torturer Sid's burning with a microscope. Any doubt that the toys might not feel the pain of these acts is dispelled when Sid leaves, and Woody runs around screaming before splashing his head in the milk of a cereal bowl.[11]

Buzz Lightyear's (Tim Allen) approach to the prohibition about revealing his live autonomous status to humans is somewhat ambiguous, since he thinks he is a real astronaut, rather than a toy, at the beginning of the first film. Nevertheless, despite his protestations, he inexplicably adheres to the injunction when Andy plays with him, as though his unconscious intuits the truth even before he discovers that he is, in fact, 'merely' a toy. Buzz, too, is the only one of Andy's toys whose free will is questioned. In the second film this takes the form of another, rival Buzz. In the third film, Buzz is reset to factory settings, and temporarily sides, unknowingly, with Lotso's (Ned Beatty) totalitarian regime. Buzz's ability to understand and exercise his own volition, which is central to the toys' secret transgression, is therefore problematized. Furthermore, on his initial arrival in Andy's bedroom, in the first film, Buzz's attempt to demonstrate that his wings really work leads to a form of self-animation which, although it is described by Woody as more 'falling with style' than real flight, allegorises the way that something which should not actually be able to move can give a passable illusion of the real thing.

The toys' self-imposed ban on revealing their ability to move to humans is, moreover, something which the franchise codes as a potential punishment for

their ambiguous autonomous status. Stinky Pete's (Kelsey Grammer) attempts to forcibly de-animate Woody, in the second film, into a boxed, tomb-like afterlife in a museum, threaten to reduce the toys back to the inanimate condition that they should, logically, be confined to. Woody and Jessie's (Joan Cusack) attempts to avoid this fate centre round their desires to be played with by human owners who temporarily suspend the toys' autonomous status. The toys, after all, are never happier than when they are animated only by their human owners, who assign them motivations, personalities and voices beyond their own deferred volition. Two different forms of self-enforced passivity, then, are juxtaposed, with one associated with death, and the other associated with love and belonging. In both cases, characters have a narrative motivation to enforce the prohibition on their self-motivated movement.

Stinky Pete's attempts to enforce the prohibition lean towards the monstrous, or at least sadistic. However, the franchise primarily focuses on the toys' potential monstrosity when their creative origins are coded, like God's usurpation of the divine female, in gender specific terms. When Woody and Buzz are first taken up to Sid's room, the boy snatches a (female) doll from his sister. He plays at being a doctor, despite Buzz's claim that 'I don't believe that man's ever been to medical school'. A low angle shot positions Sid menacingly above the doll,

which he clasps in a vice. He cuts off a toy pterodactyl's head, hybridizes the

two unfortunates, and presents the dinosaur-headed doll back to his sister, who

shrieks in horror. The gender binary between the siblings here (and between

the two parts of the hybrid toy, with the red eyes and toothy open mouth of the

pterodactyl coded towards an aggressive masculinity) echoes the male deity's

usurpation of the female act of creation. And, just as with the proto-feminist

Frankenstein, when man creates life he creates a monster. Indeed, there are

several explicit intertextual links here to *Frankenstein*, beginning with Sid's

playing at being a doctor. Like Frankenstein's monster, Sid's numerous

creations, which are revealed after he leaves the room, are all monstrous

hybrids constructed from the fragments of other bodies. One of these is a

disembodied hand attached to the spring in a jack in the box (which thus also

alludes to *Poltergeist*). The hand is somewhat bloated, and coloured an off-

green. Although the novel *Frankenstein* has the monster's skin as yellow, and

Boris Karloff's monster's iconic skin was shown in black and white in

Frankenstein and *Bride of Frankenstein*, the cultural memory of this image is

that the skin is green, including in the official poster of the second of those

Universal films, and in *Toy Story 3: The Video Game*. Sid is also shown utilising

a magnifying glass somewhat like Peter Cushing's iteration of the creator in *The*

Curse of Frankenstein.

As in *Frankenstein*, Sid's monstrous creations turn on their maker. When Sid prepares to animate Buzz to the point of annihilation, by firing him into the sky on the back of a firework (again meditating on Buzz's narrative and ontological movement transgressions of his earlier attempt at flight), Woody allies with Sid's toys to break the injunction about revealing their ability to move and talk to a human. The various ways in which they do this are all monstrous in one way or another. Dominating the foreground of the screen in a replication of a telephoto lens shot, so that they look almost as tall as Sid in the background, partly melted army figures shamble zombie-like towards their nemesis. The first of Sid's creations to touch him is Babyface, a one-eyed baby doll's head attached to metal spider legs. Here, Sid's male transgression of female biological creativity is directly rooted in the travesty of a monstrous baby. This creation was also the first to fully reveal itself to Woody, earlier in Sid's bedroom. The Frankenstein's monster-like hand from the jack in the box also grabs at Sid's leg, and even Woody becomes monstrous. At first he speaks without his mouth moving, via his string pull voice box, so that his autonomous status is ambiguous. The voice box begins to resolve the ambiguity by explicitly referencing Sid's poor treatment of his toys. Finally, in the *coup de grâce* which causes Sid to scream and flee, Woody's head slowly revolves around 360° in a

reference to the possessed Regan's (Linda Blair) spinning head in *The Exorcist* (William Freidkin, 1973). Only after Woody's monstrosity is raised to the level of the demonic do his lips move to confirm Sid's horrific vision.

This *Exorcist*-like spinning head is reprised by Big Baby in the third film. As with Babyface, this example of a monstrous toy is also explicitly related to the usurpation of female biological creativity. Big Baby is a doll of a baby with, again, a physical defect to do with the eye, although Big Baby merely has one slightly closed eye, rather than one missing altogether. Nevertheless, the repeated bundling of a non-biological baby with a single eye/a defect in one eye demonstrates another potential intertextual and diachronic example of monstrosity in the form of the cannibalistic cyclops of Greek mythology. This repeat of Woody's head spin occurs when Big Baby acts as prison guard for the tyrannical Lotso, again perhaps replicating the behaviour of the blinded cyclops Polyphemus who guards his cave mouth to prevent Odysseus' escape in Homer's *Odyssey* (1996). Woody and three other toys attempt to cross the courtyard which the baby is guarding from a position atop a child's swing (again, linking this monstrous travesty of a baby with the behaviour of a human child, and juxtaposing how a playing child and a prison guard might utilise the swing).

The head swing in this instance is rapid, rather than slow, but it similarly connects to the monstrosity of *The Exorcist*.

The *Toy Story* franchise, therefore, is a mutated evolutionary stage of a very longstanding intertextual *topos* relating to the transgressive potential of mimesis. As with other variations within this intertextual framework, the *Toy Story* films are highly reflexive. In manipulating the narrative concept of objects being able to move without a basis in biological reproduction, the films also manipulate the ontological capacities of the medium, indulging in the illusory aesthetic creation of movement and life. And, as with other mutations of the *topos*, the *Toy Story* franchise encodes these manipulations as potentially monstrous transgressions of ancient, gender-specific prohibitions about the Genesis of life, with horrific repercussions to the male usurpation of female biological reproduction.

Conclusion

Prohibitions against mimesis, then, derived from God's usurped monopolisation over the creative act, have generated numerous aesthetic and narrative meditations. The *topos* structuring these meditations has developed historically in relation to underlying cultural and social pressures, but each iteration of the

topos has certain recurring features. These features include reflexivity and intertextuality, so that certain media, most notably animation and sculpture, can engage with the prohibition at both the narrative and ontological levels, and can structure these narrative and ontological elements in relation to other texts operating within the *topos.* The most reflexive examples of this process are those animated films which stage narratives about the *topos*' other principal medium: sculpture. These films have narratives with diegetic sculptures which themselves transgress the prohibition by turning into living, moving beings, and these films perform this transgression through the technical ontology of the animation medium. The *Toy Story* films provide a clear and sustained example of this reflexivity: they are doubly animated, with diegetically animated objects, and technically animated images.

Notes

[1] The *Toy Story* franchise's pig and dinosaur, for example, are not diegetically biological animals, but diegetically man-made (sculpted) simulacra of those animals.

[2] This methodological position is derived from current trends in adaptation studies. Contemporary adaptation scholars reject an earlier fidelity based model, in which the aesthetic merits and/or limitations of a 'copy' were judged against the perceived 'spirit' of a valorised 'original'. Texts, from this perspective, are always in dialogue with one another, and instead of constituting a hierarchy of unique original and direct copy, all texts, as Robert Stam (2005: 27) puts it, reflect 'the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the matrix of communicative utterances which "reach" the text not only through recognizable citations but also through a subtle process of indirect textual relays'.

[3] It is important, again, that Ovid is more curator of stories than an 'original' author, so that the mythic *topoi* which pass through him into subsequent narratives and artwork are part of an indeterminate intertextual process, without a specific beginning or end, and without a fixed and uncontested meaning at any point.

[4] Falconet's sculpture is a particularly heightened example of this reflexive manipulation of material because it relates to a narrative about a statue coming

to life, but there are other examples of sculptors manipulating other narratives about changes in material in reflexive ways. The story of *Apollo and Daphne*, for example, also collected in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, facilitates Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1622-25) manipulation of marble into the semblance of skin which, according to the narrative, is beginning to turn into wood and leaves, as Daphne metamorphoses into a tree to escape Apollo's advances.

[5] Following on from Holland's original *Child's Play* came *Child's Play 2* (John Lafia, 1990), *Child's Play 3* (Jack Bender, 1991), *Bride of Chucky* (Ronny Yu, 1998), *Seed of Chucky* (Don Mancini, 2004), and *Curse of Chucky* (Don Mancini, 2013), with an upcoming *Cult of Chucky* (Don Mancini, 2017).

[6] Like the evil Krusty doll parody of Chucky, this monstrous moving 'graven image' is also given intertextual life in *The Simpsons*, in the form of the Lard Lad Donut mascot, which runs amok with other giant advertising figure sculptures in the *Attack of the 50ft Eyesores* segment of *Treehouse of Horror VI* (Bob Anderson, 1995).

[7] When the eroticised female deity Gozer (Slavitza Jovan) orders the ghostbusters to decide the form of that which will destroy them, Ray (Dan Aykroyd) defends his unwitting decision to the other members of the team, who had tried to empty their minds of all thoughts, by locating the Marshmallow Man within the context of both benevolent (male) creation and (biological) childhood: 'I tried to think of the most harmless thing. Something I loved from my childhood'. Again, a male attempt to create something harmless actually produces something monstrous. In the 2016 reboot (Paul Feig) which shifts the gender of the ghostbusters, the giant monstrous being which attacks New York at the film's climax is the ghost of the male character Rowan (Neil Casey) rather than a moving mascot. This monster is coded to look somewhat like the Marshmallow Man, and similarly lumbers through the city during his rampage, but he is not the transgressive product of the ghostbusters' imagination now that their gender is no longer male.

[8] William Brown has recently extended animation's ontological manipulation of movement to motion-capture films such as *Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007). For Brown (2009: 158), motion-capture is also reflexively monstrous: 'The fact that what we see is not real at all, but a digital simulation adds a [layer] of

meaning: monsters themselves are more often than not unreal/imaginary. […]
[T]his monstrous cinema does not just show us digital monsters, it also renders
monstrous everything it depicts'.

9 *Toy Story* (1995) Directed by Lasseter J. USA: Disney Pixar.

10 If, for Plato, an individual human is an imperfect copy of the perfect demiurge-
made form of the human, and an image of a human is a copy of a copy and
therefore 'thrice removed from the king and from the truth' (1871:438), then the
toys in the *Toy Story* films exist as both diegetic second copy (a copy of a
human who is a copy of the perfect form) and technical third copy (a copy of a
toy which is a copy of a human who is a copy of the perfect form).

11 The toys also seem to understand expected forms of behaviour relating to the
organic beings which they replicate, although they adhere to these forms of
behaviour in an ambiguous manner. Holliday (2016: 250) has recently argued
that computer-animation is undergoing a 'representational shift towards [non-
human] form (*morphē*) at the expense of humanity (*ánthrōpos*)'. As a result,
'computer-animated film anthropomorphs are […] no longer burdened with the

anthropocentric teleology of humanity, but are instead free to indulge gesture and rhythms that are rooted in their non-humanity'. The *Toy Story* films, however, contain no such focus on non-human form (*morphē*) at the expense of humanity (*ánthrōpos*). The toy Tyrannosaurus, Rex (Wallace Shawn), for example, knows that he should be a terrifying creature, and is first shown roaring at Woody, his open jaws filling the frame. But Woody responds with impeccable nonchalance, and Rex's question 'were you scared?' will never be answered in the affirmative. Indeed, Rex is one of the more nervous and anxious members of the group, demonstrating that the man-made simulacra of a Tyrannosaur's genuinely terrifying *morphē* cannot really be captured by the medium of sculpture. Mimesis, again, transgresses, rather than directly replicates the biological original's genuine nature.

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