

IMPLYING THE SURFACE IN ANIMATION

## Animating the surface of the screen and the body

by Sharon Young • February 20, 2024 • 0 Comments

X Post

– Animation goes, in all its superficiality, deeply into the substance of being, the hidden realms, the crevices beneath usual exposure, the constructions and reconstructions. [...] Film is the unknowing suspension of disbelief in stand-ins, doppelgangers, avatars, things that only pretend to be real, full-blooded, breathing, but are in fact chemical concoctions, celluloid compositions.

Esther Leslie, 2014, p. 27-28.

Watch Your Lip! originated as a text performed to self

At home

In lockdown

In isolation

I set up my camera on a tripod  
Got nice and close  
and spoke into the surface of the lens  
A mechanical device my only tool for retaining the  
movements and any visual trace of my lips  
beyond the present moment  
so inadequate

Cold and intimate at the same time  
those surfaces

Of glass  
And breath  
And flesh

It felt sensual  
Until I caught myself on

She speaks,  
Poetess,  
So says Anna Mendelssohn.

The text is a mash-up  
An amalgamation of extracts  
From a short story by Anais Nin  
Where she focuses on a male protagonist's  
Obsession with women's mouths  
Gross

I wanted to reclaim it  
For these fictional women

And to assert a feminist perspective  
Into these texts that were commissioned for an American businessman  
For \$1 each

So I began  
With instructions

instructions to performer,  
instructions to self:

\*Speak erotic words void of eroticism to camera\*

The result was too high res. but also too distant and removed.  
I pulled out my phone  
my main means of connection to the world at that time

I spoke  
I spoke to myself  
To my screen  
"To anyone who cared enough to listen"

Smearred with breath,  
my screen held my words  
And my touch  
Smearred with breath and my fingertips

The words existed only in my phone  
(My own little secret)  
And on the page  
And in my mind  
For years

Until I put it online  
I layered the audio on it

I started to take it out with me  
To lectures  
And talks  
It felt different when I showed it with myself present

My whole body  
Not half decapitated but  
Full but  
Depending on the projection  
Dwarfed by my own gigantic mouth

In real life, and in synchronised time,  
I spoke the same words alongside my recorded, surface, performance.  
Performed for screen and for life,  
Live  
Art

Through the body  
in  
mimicry, and  
repetition

The words had a life of their own and I found myself breathless, trying to keep up  
with them

When the invitations came  
I extended it  
Added more screens  
Extended the loop

And the length of the performance  
I animated the screen  
I put myself in  
Inserted myself into the text  
Physically and metaphorically

The surface was well and truly punctured.  
Putting myself in the work  
Literally

Broke the affect of the static screen  
It activated my body  
But also the screen

Breaking out of the page  
Out of the screen

Animation is something I had reserved for nights in with the children. Studio Ghibli creating magical lands of danger and beauty, a haven for imaginations to grow. *Kiki's Delivery Service* (Miyazaki, 1989) forming brave notions of girls who can do, and of flying, freedom and fun. It, therefore, surprised me how ideas from animation could be applied to an art practice rooted in moving image, the body, text and performance. Animation centres around how a surface moves. Screens are surfaces. A body has a surface.

– In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is stylised accordingly.

Laura Mulvey, 1976, p. 19.

Incorporating Laura Mulvey's feminist critique of the passive image of a woman in film I wanted to activate my subject, my self.

The film *Watch your Lip!* (2021) is a 1.30 min clip of me reading an edited text by Anais Nin (2002). I layered audio so I was not in sync with myself, creating a discord between my moving mouth, the focus of the lens, and the words I am speaking, see figure 1. By introducing the live element of this work, I was able to become a more active participant than when I was shut inside the screen. As Leslie (2014) tells us, film is a field that suspends disbelief. In this case, even with my ironic treatment of the text, the screen was not enough. The discord was enhanced and exacerbated to much greater affect by the inclusion of the live body.

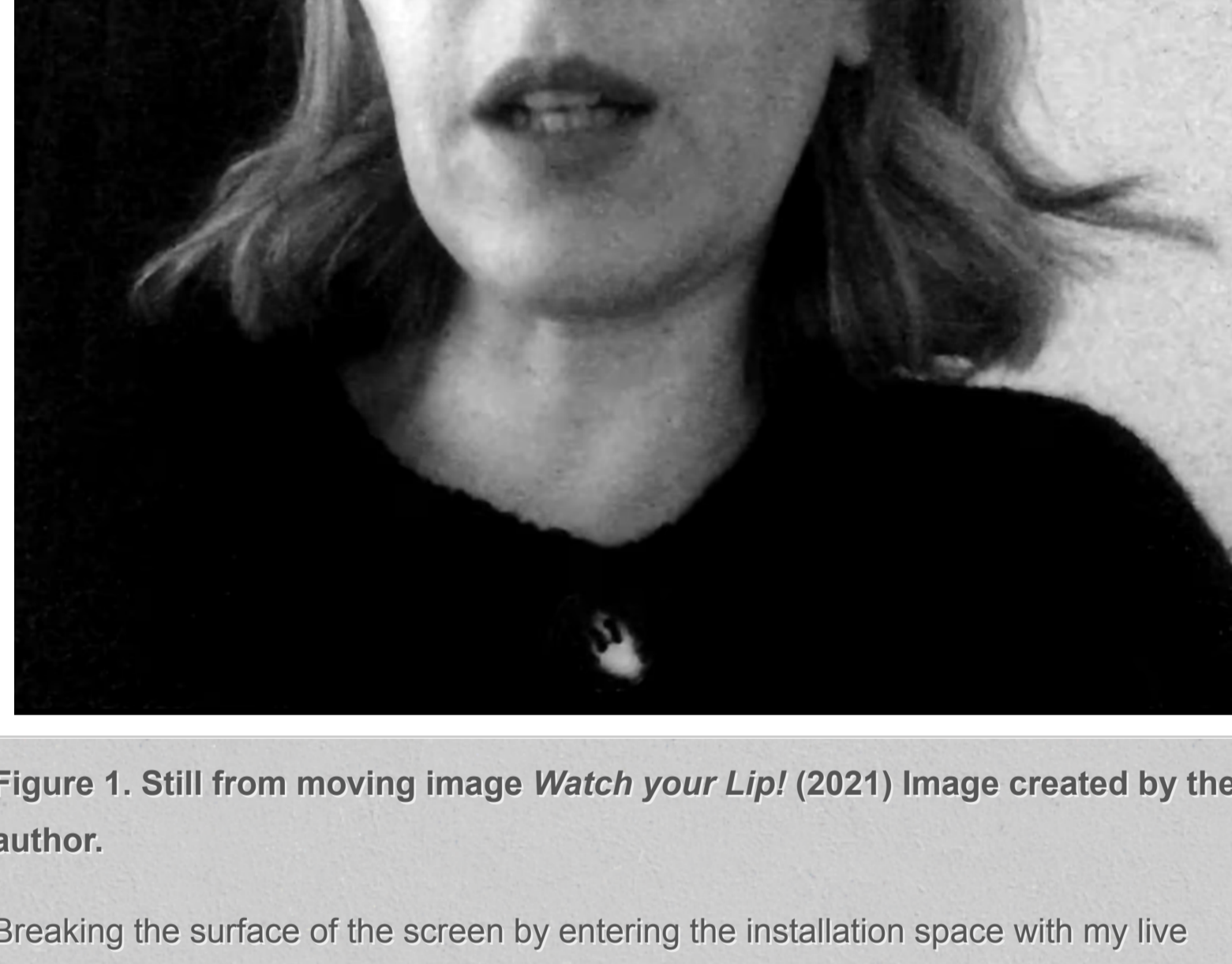


Figure 1. Still from moving image *Watch your Lip!* (2021) Image created by the author.

Breaking the surface of the screen by entering the installation space with my live body, expanded the notion of woman that was originally presented, see figure 2. Leslie states;

– Animation depicts a nature that is hybridized: speaking animals, flowers that blush, fruits that ripen in the blink of an eye, people who shrink and twist and deform and swell. Animation's nature does not obey the laws of physics.

Esther Leslie, 2014, p. 30.

By physically entering the space occupied by the moving image I was able to, as Leslie pointed out in the above citation, "not obey the laws of physics." I stepped out of the screen. I hybridized the static screen by the inclusion of my moving 'free' body. My body comes out of the screen, activated by my physical presence, my autonomy to refuse the fixed and static position the screen offers me and to enter a field beyond moving image and the imaginary. I wonder now if my methods of mimicry, live art and repetition could be framed as strategies of animation? Leslie says "Animation presents a parallel world. It presents a nature recognizable to us processed through concept, imagination, and technology" (2014, p. 30). By creating a hybridized world of film and performance I present another world.

Live art as expanded animation strategy meant that I could change the dynamic of the screen, animate the subject and give my subject back her mode of resistance – her activism. At the end of the 30 minute performance in Peckham I lay down and refused to speak this text any longer.



Figure 2. Photo of the live performance of *Watch Your Lip!* in Peckham 24, London 2023. Photography by Veronique Rolland.

### References

Leslie, E. "Animation and History" in Redrobe, K. (ed) *Animating Film Theory*, Duke University Press, 2014.

Marling, L. *I speak because I can*, prod. by Ethan Johns, Virgin, 2010.

Mendelssohn, A. *Speak, Poetess*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2024.

Mulvey, L. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, GRIN Publishing, 1975.

Nin, A. *Little Birds*, Penguin Classics, 2002.

*Kiki's Delivery Service*, dir. by Hayao Miyazaki, Studio Ghibli, 1989.

*Sharon Young is an artist and lecturer at Glasgow School of Art. She holds a PhD from Royal College of Art with the thesis Once More with Feeling: A Reinvention of Hysteria using photography, performance and autofiction. As an artist she works with photography, film, performance and writing, using modes which constantly slip between fact and fiction. Her art works have been exhibited recently at The Freud Museum and Peckham 24, and her published writing can be found in Jaws Journal, MA BIBLIOTHEQUE and Trigger magazine. She will participate in an upcoming CRASSH exhibition and events programme in Cambridge.*

Tags: [expanded animation](#) [performance](#) [surfaces](#)

← Review: Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics (2019), Ryan Pierson

The Floating Horizon and Animated Disorientation →

### Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment \*

Name \*

Email \*

Website

All new comments  Notify me of followup comments via e-mail. You can also [subscribe](#) without commenting.

Post Comment

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

### Categories

- "National" Animation
- 20 Years of Pixar Features
- 30 Years of Blue Sky Studios
- Acting and Performance
- Adaptation
- Adult Animation
- Advertising and Promotion
- AI
- Alternative/Forgotten Histories
- Analyzing Animation
- Animation Industry
- Animating Superheroes
- Animation & the Comic Book
- Animation and animals
- Animation and Holiday Traditions
- Animation and Invisibility
- Animation and Paratextuality
- Animation and Robots
- Animation and seriality
- Animation and Set Dressing
- Animation and Stardom
- Animation and the Environment
- Animation Archives
- Animation Auteurs
- Animation Franchises and the Studio System
- animationstudies 2.0
- Asian Animation
- Book Review
- Cats in animation
- Children's Animation
- Collaboration and Animation
- Conference report
- Documentary
- DreamWorks Animation
- Early Animation
- Education in/and Animation
- European Animation
- Exhibition review
- Experimental Animation
- Fantasy/Animation
- Festival report
- Festivals, Awards and Animation
- Food
- Gender and Animation
- Genesis of New Animated Works
- Genre and Animation
- Health Issues and Animation
- Implying the Surface in Animation
- Independent animation
- Interdisciplinary Opportunity of Animation
- Into the Frozen Universe
- Jim Henson's Animated Universes
- Metaphor and metamorphosis in animation
- Miscellaneous
- mixed theme
- Movement
- New Theoretical Approaches
- Norman McLaren Centenary: McLaren and Movement
- Philosophy
- Politics in and of Animation
- Queer/ing Animation
- Representation
- Research in Progress
- SAS 2020
- She-Ra and the Princesses of Power
- Sight and Vision
- Sound and Music
- Stop Motion
- Streaming Animation
- technological developments in animation (post digital)
- technological developments in animation (pre digital)
- The Persistence of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
- Theology
- Transport Vehicles
- Uncategorized
- Useful Animation
- Video essay
- Violence in Animation
- Watching Animation
- Women in Animation

Header shows still from "On Our Way" by Ruth Hayes, with Artists permission.