Position Paper
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What is my craft?

What is your craft? (define your discipline, method or approach)

During a presentation by WdKA graduate Robert-Jonathan Koeyers, he asked us to define ourselves with the help of a couple of phrases. These were:

Hi, I'm [NAME].

I'm a [PROFESSION/WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?],

With an interest in [PERSONAL INTERESTS].

We just had five minutes to answer these questions, so I hastily filled in: 'Hi, I'm Annemarie. I'm an animator and storyteller, with an interest in travel, animals and technology.' Here I want to focus on the second part of this statement, 'I'm an animator and storyteller', because when I heard the answers of the rest of my class, I felt like this might not be the best way to describe myself. For me, 'Animator' means so much more than just making drawings move. To me, it means being engaged with technology, being a gamer, being a hacker, being at home on the internet and making drawings influenced by all that stuff and more. But that's my personal definition, and not how the world defines 'animator'. In the eyes of the world, being an animator is a very specific job. It means that you're the one that makes characters move, and you don't worry about the design/story/environments/sounds/that kind of stuff. And that's just not me. Because I like to worry about stuff. ;) All kidding aside, I adore design, story, and composition. I was on the right track with 'storyteller', but if I were to do this exercise again, I'd probably leave 'animator' out of the mix.

So what is my craft? Designing to communicate. And what do I communicate? Mostly my own ideas and feelings, I'm an autonomous student after all. Perhaps in the 'interests' field, I'd like to add 'Animation film', for I do love the medium.

What are my tools?

If you work like me, you need ideas and passion, and an audience to communicate with. I can trace this back all the way to my years in primary schools, where I'd make magazines with friends, and preform improvised plays for my class. And then in Middle School, a friend and I started a band, and went online to promote it (complete with website and YouTube channel). The website is down right now, but you can still a 13 year old me on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/user/RadioDoelloos/videos). And after that, I discovered sites like DeviantArt, and Instagram… I found that making things was much more fun if you could share them with people. The online feedback that I got, had a big role in me even starting to think about going to Art School. So I'd like to add 'the Internet' to the tools of my craft.

Then there are the more traditional tools: pencils, pens, paper, paint, brushes, drawing tablet, a computer that can handle my animation and editing software. Oh, and all the different software of course. On my CV right now, it says: TVPaint, Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint, After Effects, Maya and Unreal Engine. But now, after my internship, I'd like to add: Adobe Animate and Premiere. Also, I do my sound editing in Logic Pro X, don't know why I didn't put that one on the list.

And media? I gravitate strongly towards animation film. Video games also interest me as a medium. I did make a game once, and it was a technical journey. In some aspects, I find figuring out technical things very enjoyable, but it did leave me feeling constrained by the medium. The past one and a half years, I've made a transition to a more craft-based approach. I still love technical stuff (I just hacked my 3DS this autumn break), but in my art, I'm pulled towards the simpler techniques. So that I can get designing right away.

What are the borders of my practice?

Focussing on animation, there are a lot of recent technological developments in the field. Motion capture for instance, is making it possible to have enormous amounts of life like animation in 200 hour long video games. Imagine if you had to animate all of that by hand! It's also being used in films, but I think games have benefitted the most from this new technology. AR is also on the rise, Pokémon Go got pretty huge for example. And people are still enthusiastic about VR, though I'm a little more sceptical on this one. I think it's a great technology for simulators, teaching pilots to fly, that kind of stuff. And I can also see it helping people get over certain mental illnesses (phobias for instance). But for the general consumer? The entry price to buying a headset is still high. And it's not the most comfortable of experiences. But maybe there's a room for VR in our households. I mean, there was room for the Wii, and that thing wasn't about comfort either.

Something else: I feel like it's impossible to talk about borders without mentioning the internet. The internet is expanding the borders of our craft every day. Not just as a tool for communication, but it has tons of options for artists to help with their projects: Kickstarter can help you fund a project, same goes for Patreon. There are millions of tutorials online that help you expand on your craft (you better believe I didn't figure out how to hack a 3DS all by myself). Articles and reviews on all different sorts of artworks help you to develop your critical eye. Even if your artwork isn't directly made with the help of the internet, it's almost always influenced by a bit of knowledge you got online.

As for the future of my craft… Hmmm, I could see it becoming more self-organised, where people from all over the world communicate online, and make something together. Then again, I could also see it moving in the other direction, specifically animation film. We've got powerhouses like Disney and… basically Disney. That company has the biggest monopoly on animation films, and it just keeps growing. But I'm optimistic, people are becoming more and more aware of other animation companies, outside of Hollywood. And I'm all for more diversity in the animation industry. So as for hopes for the future, that's my wish: lots of different cultures, ideas, languages and styles, finding a way to express themselves through animation.

A Historical Discourse and Some examples

Keeping with the theme of 'the internet', I'd like to talk about the role of the internet in contemporary art production. Since I'm obviously very pro-internet, let me bring up a point against it, made by one of my favourite animators: Howard Wimshurst. In one of his videos, he talks about ways to get inspired as an artist. And he specifically warns against going online, and checking image sites like Instagram and Pinterest. He talks about how you only see the most popular design options on their frontpages, and that, if you let yourself get inspired by those, you'll forever be stuck designing generic things. He argues that a better method is, to get your ideas from the real world: go outside to study people, travel to places, and if that's not possible, look through a National Georaphic magazine, or browse Google Earth. This way, you get more authentic ideas, and don't just follow the crowd. Not to say that Howard is against the internet, he definitely isn't. He makes videos talking about all kinds of art related topics, or teaching certain animation techniques. He does this so potential clients can look him up, and get an idea of what kind of person he is, so in that way, he's using the internet in his favour.

And then there's art that could only exist on the internet. Thinking back to what I said about different cultures, ideas and languages finding a way to express themselves, I've got to mention the r/place project. During April fools 2017, reddit users could each place pixels on a 1000x1000 pixel canvas, the catch being that you could only place them every 5 to 20 minutes. Thousands of people collaborated to create images on this canvas:

https://www.reddit.com/r/Art/comments/6393x4/rplace_digital_2017/ One of my favourites is the German and French flags intersecting to create the European Union flag. ;) And the My Little Pony Rainbow Dash of course.

The Position of my Practice in Relation to Newer Technologies

Well, I've written down a lot of ideas, now to bring them together. What is my position? Like I said in the first question, being an animator means a lot of different things to me. Not least of which is being engaged with technology. As for the use of technology in my workflow, I have a very mixed approach. My teachers have called it 'high-fi' and 'lo-fi', where I'll use 3D modelling software, in combination with things like, building with Knex, or cutting certain forms out of paper. What I like about this approach, is that the entry barrier for the 'lo-fi' technology is pretty low, and you can get designing as soon as possible. But at the same time, I'm aware of the possibilities of 'high-fi' technologies, and can use them to my advantage.

Apart from being used in my creative workflow, technology also inspires me. Looking at something with a technical eye, or the eye of a hacker, I can see new possibilities and twists to existing concepts. Take my previous project, where I changed the concept of a house, to something that wasn't static, but instead could move, and shift its chambers around in different ways: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBZrdbs8UFA I'd call this hacking a house.

And don't even get me started on how much the internet has inspired me, with its constant flow of ever shifting ideas, people, and practices. That's what I love about technology, someone's always coming up with something new. And even if it doesn't work, it's still interesting and fresh.

I'm a curious person by nature, so I find it very exciting to think about the future, and how many surprises are still waiting for us. So here's to the flourishing of new ideas!