

palgrave▶pivot

HYBRID PRACTICES IN MOVING IMAGE DESIGN

Methods of Heritage and
Digital Production in
Motion Graphics

Iain Macdonald



Hybrid Practices in Moving Image Design

Iain Macdonald

Hybrid Practices in Moving Image Design

Methods of Heritage and Digital Production
in Motion Graphics

palgrave
macmillan

Iain Macdonald
Merchiston Campus
Edinburgh Napier University
Edinburgh, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-3-319-41374-7 ISBN 978-3-319-41375-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-41375-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016954319

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover illustration: Abstract Bricks and Shadows © Stephen Bonk/Fotolia.co.uk

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland

I would firstly like to thank Prof. Chris Atton and Prof. Pam Meecham for their supervision and encouragement in taking on a PhD by Publication.

I am also grateful to Liz Friedman who nurtured and developed my professional practice at the start of my career in the BBC, at a time when it could so easily have been trampled on and cut short. Thank you to all the talented and creative people who contributed to this book and were prepared to share their insights and experience with the wider audience.

I dedicate this book to my parents, who did not blink at letting me follow my own path from school to Edinburgh College of Art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the permission to reproduce images from Kemistry, Nobrain, Eric Dyer and Momoco.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
Part I	Hybrid Motion: Past, Present and Future	7
2	Heritage and Digital	9
3	Skills and Educational Research	15
4	Hybrid Futures in Art & Design Education	19
5	Political Economy: Conditions of Production	27
Part II	Narratives of Production	43
6	Graham McCallum: Executive Creative Director of Kemistry	45
7	Nobrain: Directors and Animators	59
8	Richard Stammers: Visual Effects Supervisor	69

9	Adam Valdez: Visual Effects Supervisor	79
10	Eric Dyer: Moving Image Artist	87
11	Momoco: Motion Graphic Designers	99
12	Conclusion	117
	Index	121

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1	BBC graphic designer using Quantel Paintbox 1988 (author)	34
Fig. 6.1	Jane (1982)	46
Fig. 6.2	Graham McCallum at the Kemistry Gallery, London 2014	47
Fig. 6.3	Crystal Tipps and Alistair (1971–1974)	48
Fig. 6.4	Nederlandse Publieke Omroep NPO (2003–2014)	51
Fig. 6.5	London Live (2013)	55
Fig. 7.1	BBC2 christmas (2011–2015)	62
Fig. 7.2	BBC2 christmas pitch visual	64
Fig. 7.3	BBC2 christmas model under construction	65
Fig. 7.4	Close up scene	66
Fig. 10.1	Eric Dyer in his studio 2005	88
Fig. 10.2	Copenhagen cycles (2006)	90
Fig. 10.3	The bellows March (2009)	92
Fig. 10.4	The bellows March (2009)	93
Fig. 11.1	<i>Great Expectations</i> winning pitch board (2008)	100
Fig. 11.2	<i>Fortitude</i> opening titles (2015)	101
Fig. 11.3	A presentation storyboard for Luther opening titles (2015)	105
Fig. 11.4	Old letterpress typefaces used as source visual material	107
Fig. 11.5	<i>Ripper Street</i> opening titles (2012)	108
Fig. 11.6	Ripper Street logo ideas	109

Introduction

Abstract The introduction sets out the aims of the book which are to recognize moving image design as an important dynamic part of contemporary culture, and bring to the attention of media historians, practitioners and students alike the innovative practices of leading moving image designers. Central to their practice is the hybridisation of digital and heritage methods. ‘Heritage’ can be defined as traditional, analogue and handmade practices that predate or overlap digital technology. ‘Digital’ is considered in this book as a description of the means of production and also a medium of communication. Recognising the media theories of Lev Manovich (2007; 2013) the author discusses the merging of previously distinct processes and media that have formed a whole new experience and language.

Keywords Hybridisation • heritage • digital • moving image design • metamedium

Moving image design, whether viewed in the form of title sequences for television and cinema, movie visual effects, animating infographics, branding and advertising, or as an art form in itself, is being increasingly recognised as an important dynamic part of contemporary culture. For many practitioners this has been long overdue. This book is written from the perspective of a practitioner and educator and aims to bring

to the attention of media historians, fellow practitioners and students alike the innovative practices of leading moving image designers. Central to their practice is the hybridisation of digital and heritage methods. ‘Heritage’ can be defined as traditional, analogue and handmade practices that predate or overlap digital technology. ‘Digital’ is considered in this book as a description of the means of production and also a medium of communication.

The media historian Lev Manovich (2013) in his book ‘Software Takes Command’ makes the argument that ‘hybridity represents the next logical stage in the development of computational media’ (Manovich 2013: 243). The ‘velvet revolution’ of software and more affordable personal computing hardware in the 1990s has contributed to the development of a new aesthetic and language in the moving image. Manovich describes this new aesthetic as ‘deep remixability’ where media from different sources can be overlaid and combined in the same frame in endless variations without loss of quality. ‘The new hybrid aesthetics exist in endless variations but its basic principle is the same: juxtaposing previously distinct visual aesthetics of different media within the same image’ (Manovich 2013: 244). Graphic designers such as April Greiman quickly recognised the opportunities that Apple Macintosh afforded to weave a hybrid of digital and photomechanical techniques for print into a multi-layered ‘metamedium’ (Greiman 1990).

For those animators and motion graphic designers who have worked in film opticals and analogue video this is not new. Indeed, artist Tacita Dean (2011) continues to explore the techniques and forms of multiple exposures and image combination using analogue film that were established by the Lumiere brothers in the 1880s. Digital technology has provided greater opportunity to many more designers and artists in moving image by making image combination more affordable, quicker, complex and media independent. Multiple layers and renderings can be combined without loss of quality, and non-destructively. Both film and analogue video suffered image loss each time a layer was combined and rendered, and changes involved remaking, and in the case of film and early video, cementing physical celluloid or magnetic tape. Manovich goes beyond the end image but describes the encompassing ‘media hybrids, interfaces, techniques, and ultimately the most fundamental assumptions of different media forms and traditions, are brought together resulting in new *media gestalts*’ (Manovich 2013: 167). The merging of previously distinct processes and media has formed a whole new experience and language.

For the generation that has grown up in digitally dominated media, there is a growing inquisitiveness to explore older media and processes that have either a more tactile quality or a slower process of production that allows for creative thought and reflection. In my research (Macdonald 2012) I have found ‘digital natives’ (Prensky 2001), those born after 1990, and the launch of Adobe Photoshop, to be eager to challenge the digital orthodoxy and to work with hybrids that capture the unique expression of heritage and analogue practices with the flexibility and malleability that digital software affords.

Back in the 1980s, graphic designer April Greiman was a pioneer of hybrid graphics in print that was known as the ‘Pacific Wave’, who used ‘new’ digital tools to ‘extend new opportunity to the traditional relationship between hand and eye’, in a post-modern weaving of a variety of technologies to express ‘a unity within diversity which is particularly contemporary’ (Greiman 1990: 13). Like many graphic designers, she has used a combination of digital and traditional techniques to redefine her conception of the hybrid image. Three decades on the concept of ‘meta-medium’ (Greiman 1990; Manovich 2007) has changed little. Heritage practices appear to be timeless, and it is the unrelenting upgrades of digital software that make prior software and hardware versions quickly obsolete.

This book aims to examine hybrid moving image designs that reinvigorate heritage practices, the handmade and the analogue crafts. Wells and Hardstaff (2008) describe a ‘reimagining’ of animation that has been necessary since the change in moving image cultures following the digital revolution and the expansion of animated forms across previously separate disciplines. Their study of creative animation work marks an important beginning to the debate concerning the implications that affect the teacher, student and practitioner. Manovich and Wells are among an increasing body of academics that recognise the rising status of design in this form. Now is the time to ensure that heritage skills do not atrophy and wither, but that their qualities and provenance are understood as potent components with digital practices in new hybrids.

SELECTED WORKS

The moving image designers from the UK, France, Japan and the USA that are featured in this book have a similar background to the author, but they also exemplify the different aspects of the field from channel branding, title sequence design, and visual effects to practice-based research and curation. All the designers involved have had an art college or university

education where conceptual thinking was nurtured and drawing skills were practiced. They recognise the importance of transferring their knowledge to students and new practitioners, as guest speakers or as lecturers.

Graham McCallum has gone further than many to raise the public awareness and status of design through his gallery in Shoreditch, London. The Kemistry Gallery sits beneath his design studio offices and offers a window to contemporary graphic designers, as well as celebrating some of the legends of past 50 years, himself included. McCallum's long career covers the most radical and challenging developments in television graphic design: the introduction of colour, video and digital technology. He moves with the times, and his inquisitive exploration of materials and processes is fuelled by his creative and intellectual curiosity as a designer. McCallum's perspective is rare, and he provides an eloquent critique of the business and moving image culture.

In the process of researching the material for this book, it was clear that each of the contributors has had an early interest in computing. Some, the author included, can remember being introduced to the first Apple Macintosh and then the first Quantel Paintbox, immediately seeing the interface of a tablet, keyboard and screen as the future of graphic design production in print and on screen. Computer literacy and the advantage of being early adopters have propelled many of these designers at the beginning of their careers. Being on the front foot to embrace new technology, as well as having an eye on the past to appreciate the value of heritage practices, has also been instrumental to their career success. But it is the strength of ideas that count in the end.

The French studio Nobrain, comprises directors Saii, Charles and Niko, who began their careers as compositing artist, computer graphics editor and post-production supervisor, respectively. Despite what may appear to be a digital orthodoxy, they were responsible for the acclaimed multi-media animation sequence for the Christmas on BBC2 (British Broadcasting Corporation) ident (2011–2015). Nobrain prefers a rougher, more organic texture and aesthetic to the once ubiquitous smooth veneer of computer-generated imagery (CGI). Their CGI experience informs their process to exploit the speed and cost-efficiency of computers to often imitate heritage practices. The Christmas BBC2 idents involved puppeteers working as consultants to provide the raw movement of characters, which were then imitated with greater flexibility, which is only possible with CGI software.