SUZANNE BUCHAN

Visual Heteronym and Animation as Process in Frank Geßner's Alias Yederbeck

Alias Yederbeck is a self-reflexive media investigation by the artist Frank Geßner through a fictional, multimedia (auto-)biography of Paul Yederbeck, a figure with many referents, including Paul Valéry, Stan VanDerBeek and Geßner himself. The multimedia installation raises a number of complex questions. Who is the artist here? What is "identity"? How is the line blurred between artistic hubris and self-focused creativity? Is Yederbeck a real historical figure? What insights, if any, do the video-performance inserts provide about Yederbeck, or do they reveal more about Geßner and his (and our) own arts culture, philosophy and politics? Who is Paul Yederbeck, and why do we care? How are we to understand the art-historical range of the paintings and the heterogeneous media used, and how do these relate to famous personalities and artworks from others? In answering a few of the many questions about the installation *Alias Yederbeck*, as a conceptual exploration of self and other, this contribution attempts to unpack and contextualise Geßner's multimedia artwork through a set of themes and

motifs from specific structural techniques of film, literature and painting. I then conclude with a discussion of an expanded notion of animation.[1]

Half-Truths and Misdemeanours

In 1997, *The Falconer*, a film by British psychogeographers Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair, caused a certain amount of consternation among viewers and critics. Petit and Sinclair conjured a quasi-mythological, half-truth biography of the post-1960s British filmmaker/artist Peter Whitehead that left the viewer with more questions than answers. Stuart Home wrote that "[e]veryone got their own personally tailored version of the Whitehead myth … It seemed Whitehead was all things to all men [sic] and he told each of us exactly what it was he thought we wanted to hear from him." (Home, undated). Faced with the shifting and changing array of the images on the twelve-screen panorama of *Alias Yederbeck*, a visitor to the installation will likely walk away with the sense that *Paul Yederbeck* is a tailored myth, too, but that he is all things to one man, namely the artist who created him: Frank Geßner. Yet in the process of exploring the three installation elements (twelve-screen panorama, "documentary" film and archive) a gullible, or myopic, visitor may also gain the impression that Yederbeck did indeed exist and that the exhibition provides a rich history of a long forgotten, resurrected artist. Working with a modest budget, Petit and Sinclair called upon a constituency of artists, friends and writers to contribute to the film. In a similar way, over a period of five years, Geßner convinced a range of friends, colleagues, alumni and technicians from the University of Film and Television "Konrad Wolf" (HFF) Potsdam-Babelsberg to contribute to his complex multimedia project *Alias Yederbeck*. The end credits of the "documentary" *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur*

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1   While sound, dialogue and music are equivalent partners to visuals in the installation, I concentrate on the latter in this essay.

Teste? are almost as extensive as for a CGI feature, with listed names of staff who carry out multiple functions joining the copious and informative cultural, art-historical and film references.

In a review of *The Falconer*, Andrew Hedgecock comments on the role of the viewer:

> But this is a meta-movie too: a film about film-making, competing narratives and the tension between dialogue and image. And there's a fourth detective: the viewer. Where is the boundary between the facts of Whitehead's life and his own interpretation of it through myth? How much (if any) of this is really documentary, and to what extent is it contrived by Sinclair and Petit? (Hedgecock, 1997).

Geßner's meta-media *Alias Yederbeck* presents a similar ontological puzzle to its audience, in that biography and fiction are convoluted to such a degree that unravelling them requires some careful attention. This involves an oscillation between an enormous wealth of materials – 252 digitized panel paintings with archival and contextual material and the apparently empirical evidence of a documentary film and material-based biography of the artist – and the unsettling feeling that all may not be what it seems. While Petit and Sinclair foregrounded Whitehead and his story, Geßner does not hide his own identity: he describes the work as an "auto-(author-)construction" (Geßner, "Alias Yederbeck, Arbeit am Künstlermythos": 81); and he is easily recognisable and indeed sets himself in scene as a "Master of Ceremonies" in the interstitial five-minute performance pieces. (He has multiple roles and functions as director, author, producer, performer, cinematographer, animator, production designer, musician and other things.) Geßner works with a central conceptual method: the artist's conceit – an extended metaphor that imbues a work of art, whether it be painting, literature or cinema. Geßner's conceit is the alias / alter ego, and through it we are invited to compare the fictitious figure of Yederbeck in his role-playing games – through a hybrid

aesthetic of the (self-) portraits – with his video performances and with Yederbeck's documented "biography".

Geßner had as his cinematic model a figure no less than Orson Welles, with a specific fascination for Welles' at the time stylistically radical masterpiece *Citizen Kane* (1941) and his documentary / film essay *F For Fake* (1974). The latter's title is its topic, and like Geßner's work, the film poses many (unanswered) questions about the vagaries of artistic creation and authenticity. These questions are structured mainly around an interwoven recounting of art forger Elmyr de Hory's activities and of de Hory's biographer Clifford Irving, whose faked autobiography of recluse Howard Hughes caused a major scandal and ended with both de Hory and Irving being brought to trial for their illegal fabrications. In *F for Fake,* narrator/presenter Welles says: "There's no way of talking about Elmyr and leaving out Cliff Irving." Much the same can be said about Geßner and Yederbeck. Both artists are "tricksters" who play with their audiences. But Welles is interested in critiquing the art world of his time and with what had gone wrong. Instead of real-life forgers, Geßner's "protagonist" has more affiliation with Welles' monumental character Charles Foster Kane, and as an artist Geßner is interested in the enormous aesthetic range of this figure. While there are different conceptual and medial temporalities at work, what they share is the development and transformation of a fictional character over an extended period, played by/based on the filmmaker/artist.

There are a number of parallels between Welles's two films and Geßner's multi-media work: *Citizen Kane* portrays the protagonist's life from early childhood to death, preceded by a biographic newsreel following his death at the start of the film. *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* takes a similar approach, including a "newsreel" section that maps the artist's success and eventual withdrawal from society (also recalling *F for Fake's* Howard Hughes and de Hory's isolation on Ibiza). De Hory's forgeries range from Da Vinci to Picasso; on the twelve screens of *Alias Yederbeck*, portraits of the figure of Paul Yederbeck journey through a two-millennia span of artistic styles. As does Welles in

F for Fake, the video-performance interludes of the panorama sequences "Auflösung" and "Anima Techne" feature Geßner in both scripted roles and acting as a meta-commentator on Yederbeck's life through a range of aesthetic, philosophical, cultural and performative contexts and themes. Welles' documentary essay is self-reflexive about filmmaking when it breaks the fourth wall to show his crew, or when he is surrounded by the technical equipment of filmmaking. Geßner's "documentary" focus is on the creative process of the artist painting; we see him (as Paul Yederbeck) in the role of "Monsieur Teste" surrounded by artist's materials in his studio as he sketches and paints a number of works, and he also breaks the fourth wall when we see his team at work on the "documentary", especially in the second act where the technological apparatus of filmmaking are shown.

The self-reflexivity is not limited to painting. Describing *The Falconer*, Hedgecock observes that its "documentary format is further underlined by allusions to the work of other filmmakers: the likes of early Godard, Chris Marker, *Performance*, Petit's own *Radio On* and *Chinese Boxes*" (Hedgecock, 1997). In both the fictional documentary and in the interstitial video-performance pieces, Geßner includes elements from and allusions to dozens, if not hundreds, of films, genres and filmmakers through clips, audio sound-bites and citations, director interviews, and appropriated mises-en-scène. The menagerie of artists, authors, theorists and filmmakers is almost exclusively male: in the credits "sequence", inspiration and footage are attributed to Gance, Buñuel, Fellini, Godard, Tarkowski, Welles, Kubrick, Spielberg, Lynch, Naumann and Paik, to mention just a few names from the extensive listings. These manifold references are how Yederbeck's persona is conjured, embedding and elevating him by affiliation with hundreds of renowned creative personages. Interestingly, fewer than a dozen women are named; the only female artists mentioned are Hannah Höch, Maya Deren, Ulrike Rosenbach, Marina Abramović, Steina Vasulka and Cindy Sherman. The low percentage of women closely mirrors the actual representation of female artists in the histories of art and art economies, at least up until the last few

decades. It is clear that Geßner's project is as much about megalomania and patriarchal dominance as it is about unravelling and deconstructing male hubris. This is carried out for example in the fourth act of *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?*, when the artist swaps his male role of painter for that of a female model, or in the fifth act, when he changes into a hermaphroditic animation puppet, and especially in the portraits there is much playing with gender roles.

Pseudonyms and Heteronymic Painting

Geßner employs a number of literary techniques and conceits, two of which I will start with: the pseudonym and the heteronym, both of which are used by writers to develop a figure that, while created by them, is not autobiographical – it is an *alias*. Writing through a pseudonym (the author's name is changed, but she or he writes as the author of the work) is a literary technique that has a number of functions and purposes: to hide the author's true identity, gender, ethnic origin, profession or political affiliation (George Eliot, Lewis Carroll); to function as an alias; to function as an alter ego. (In *F for Fake,* it is claimed that Elmyr de Hory had at least sixty pseudonyms and personalities). The pseudonym also allows for the alternate storytelling of an author's own experience, with fictional embellishments, flights of fancy and imaginative alterations of the self now embedded in an idealised, satirised or (self-)ironic rhetoric that can soften the accusation of narcissism that autobiography can incur, and it is clear that *Alias Yederbeck* makes use of the pseudonym in this way.

The heteronym, on the other hand, is a term coined by Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa to describe many of the seventy-plus fictional personas he created as authors of his texts, each with his or her own biography and style. Literary theorist and critic George Steiner suggests "that heteronyms are something different and exceedingly strange. For each of his 'voices', Pessoa conceived a highly distinctive poetic idiom and technique, a complex biog-

raphy, a context of literary influence and polemics and, most arrestingly of all, subtle interrelations and reciprocities of awareness." (Steiner, 2001).

Alias Yederbeck constructs a complex biography through the interrelations of art, literature and film, and so elements of the heteronym are worth considering, particularly because Geßner complicates the literary heteronym by applying it to visual arts in what I call "heteronymic painting". Over a period of more than twelve years, Geßner created over one thousand paintings and drawings, predominantly featuring portraits with shared physiognomic features, from which he selected 252 pieces and arranged them as the panoramic visual novel *Teste sans fin*, which forms the basis for the installation. Just as an author creates a fictional character who then "writes" in a specific style, each of Geßner's portraits likewise bears a distinct visual style, many of which are recognisable from the histories of art and culture. They are grouped in twelve "blocks" of 21 images that shared a visual thinking and content theme, and each of these twelve blocks is also assigned an "author" and a "perspective". For instance, the "Block 3 I.Z" theme is "condition", the stylistic scheme is colour and grey-scale variations, and the author-construct (what Geßner calls an "Auto(r)konstrukt") is a "Roman prince metaphor" that represents the loss of childhood. The other eleven "authors" in the set of twelve are also rendered in variations of chiaroscuro and in each of these images one could denote a further painted heteronym. Because Geßner presents these author-constructs in complex groupings, the observer seeks and develops his or her own narrative relations. In current technologies of digital games and social networking, self-created and self-designed avatars can be considered a form of visual, figurative heteronym. The analogy or structural similarity here to Geßner's work is that, throughout, the "auto-constructs" – while not idealised to the extent of a games avatar – are developed using a system of stylistic categories that reference art across history and provide a type of self-figuration similar to an avatar.

It is also useful to consider the working method of Pessoa's translator and "assembler" of *The Book of Disquiet* (*Livro do Desassossego*), Richard Zenith. Working with a vast collection of text fragments (Pessoa's archive at the

National Library of Lisbon contains more than 25.000 pieces), he edited materials, predating 1913, for a book that Pessoa left open-ended at his death. Zenith had to choose from a number of text fragments, some of which were not specifically identified as belonging to *The Book of Disquiet*, and he worked with a variety of methods. He notes the impossibility of subjectivity to select and edit such fragmentary writings over a period of sixteen years, and "this subjectivity tends to sheer arbitrariness when it comes to organising this book, whose passages were scattered across the years and pages of Pessoa's life." (Zenith, 2002: 28). The writer did not suggest a chronological method, though Zenith suggests there may have been a thematic one, but that it was "like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle without a discernible picture or pattern … [and that maybe best would be] an edition of loose pieces, orderable according to each reader's fancy, or according to how they happen to fall." (ibid.). Geßner's approach to assembling Yederbeck's structure is decidedly different and more structured, but no less baffling. His archival system is rhizomatic in the Deleuzian sense; as "assembler", he interlinks the compacted contextual material into "bodies of images" which are then composed as blocks and ornamental series. Instead of the arbitrariness that Zenith mentions, Geßner developed a numerical/lunar system for his puzzle. The twelve groups of images were further organized according to duodecimal and *chronos* (twelve hours) principles on twelve screens arranged in a continuous circular placement. This transforms the nonlinear, static artworks into one that, while still presenting still images, gains a time-based narrative that tends to suggest the daily passing of time (twice twelve hours) and the annual cycle of the moon around the earth (twelve orbits a year). Geßner calls this angular-round composition a "squaring the circle": a poetic "image-narrative machine" [*Bild-Erzählmaschine*] (*Towards the Image:* 57).[2] Although the "reader" of this

2   "Squaring the circle" also refers to the twelve Block titles 1–10(X) of the painting cycle *Teste sans fin* and to the circular panorama that is composed with twelve screens that build wide open-angle corners where they are joined.

work is more guided by this structure – also to understand the twelve time-based, non-linear panorama sequences, which were developed from the twelve author-constructs – the viewer is left to construct a story.

Pessoa was not only a writer of fiction: "His legacy, enormous and in large part unpublished, comports philosophy, literary criticism, linguistic theory, writings on politics in Portuguese, English and French" (Steiner, 2001). All of this knowledge fed his heteronyms as well as *The Book of Disquiet* that Steiner describes.

> Imagine a fusion of Coleridge's notebooks and marginalia, of Valéry's philosophic diary and of Robert Musil's voluminous journal … What we have is a haunting mosaic of dreams, psychological notations, autobiographical vignettes, shards of literary theory and criticism and maxims. (Steiner, 2001).

Alias Yederbeck continues with the heteronymic method in all elements of the installation; a fusion of extensive knowledge and experience takes on tangible form as research materials from Geßner's studio archive are used throughout. Figures from literature, philosophy, cinema and art history; sketchbooks, re-productions, drawings, paintings, letters and notebooks; (semi-)autobiographical "vignettes" (the video interludes), "shards" of theories of film, art and philosophy, digital data files. These materials were partly utilised for the panorama installation, as hard matter "evidence" in the studio that was reconstructed as a room in the exhibition, and to suggest documentary "truth" in the film.

Portmanteau and Stylistic Multiplicity

I see adoption of two other literary techniques at work in Geßner's multiplicity of styles. One of these is portmanteau – the combining of two or more words or lexemes to create a new meaning. The term was coined by Charles

Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) in *The Hunting of the Snark* (1874) and used most famously in his nonsense poem *Jabberwocky* (1871). The portmanteau evokes multiple meanings and requires a complex exegesis; Geßner implements it in various ways, and I'll mention but two uses. The heteronym Yederbeck is a portmanteau word of (Max) Beckmann, (Stan) VanDerBeek, his mother's maiden name (Beck; her brother was a housepainter by trade) and the allegorical, archetypal *Jedermann* (everyman) from morality plays. The portmanteau demands a co-creational act from the reader, and depending on her or his cultural knowledge she or he will find various levels of merging meaning in the combined lexemes and fragments. The other use is of course in the portraits, which merge fragments of different artistic styles with elements of the pervasive portrait of Yederbeck throughout. In writings on visual portmanteau I have suggested: "Like the lexeme fragments of different words, the different meanings implicit in the fragments mean the reader must engage in a form of play to discover the artist's or author's intent of meaning in their particular combination." (Buchan, 2011: 51).[3] This is equally the case for observers of the Yederbeck self-portraits who engage in co-creative play, this time calling on their art-historical visual repertoire, merging the recognisable physiognomic fragments with widely differing time periods and styles. This effects a kind of art-historical geographic "time travel" for the Yederbeck "everyman" figure. Featuring a multitude of characters, heteronyms of both Paul Yederbeck and Frank Geßner, this is a metanarrative that is, as Geßner puts it, a "comédie humaine" (*Towards the Image:* 181).

The other literary technique used in *Alias Yederbeck* is a self-reflexive, ironic multiplicity of styles. While resulting in a distinctly different cultural product, and one that on first consideration follows a fairly linear narrative, the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) has a programmatic

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3   For a discussion of visual portmanteau and animation, see Suzanne Buchan, 2011: 49–52; for application of the concept of portmanteau to puppet animation constructions, see 128–132.

concept. The chapter's events are told through a mostly diachronic organisation of literary stylistic progression of the English language so as to chart conception, gestation and birth. Starting with alliterative Anglo-Saxon, then Old and Middle English through to twentieth-century colloquialism and argot, Joyce parodies John Mandeville, Sir Thomas Malory, Bunyan, Samuel Pepys, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Laurence Sterne and various late dialects including pidgin and Cockney English and Bowery slang. Geßner parades his own extensive knowledge of art styles throughout history as well as of literature, film and music. In the twelve-screen panorama, the "Flaneur" sequence alone, named inspirations in the credits and sources of the visual and audio materials used include the artists Giacometti, Monet, Meidner; authors Beckett, Joyce, Pessoa, Proust, Baudelaire, Benjamin, Hessel, Rilke, Bachmann, Döblin; filmmakers Lumiére Brothers, Ruttman, Hitchcock, Marker, Truffaut, Fassbinder, Antonioni, Bertolucci and Kren and the composers Herrmann and Wagner. As Joyce's chapter demonstrates the genesis of English language and styles, Geßner's concept – which I'm calling "hybrid gestation" – reveals the (fictitious) evolution of Paul Yederbeck's multiplicious stylistic palette.

Animating Process: Painting, Keyframes and Morphs

The biography of Paul Yederbeck is a convoluted history of art styles. Geßner uses the conceit of alter ego to play with the poetic idiom of Mannerism, an intellectually sophisticated and artificial painting style from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that synthesized a variety of sources and styles into something new through artistic virtuosity. Geßner's structural and derivative talent is apparent: the 252 panel paintings are done in an equivalent number of styles, from Rembrandt and Velazquez through Matisse, Picasso and Manet to Beckmann, Warhol and Richter. This also recalls de Hory's masterful forgeries: the multiplicity and sheer range of painting styles in the images attest

not only to a profound knowledge of art history but also to an artistic ability to render these in his own works – as appropriation. The potential of the usurpation of these historical styles achieves a contemporary actuality through new interpretations that are different from the art-historical models and the pentimento method (alteration in a painting). The original artwork Geßner bases his portraits on is altered in that he sometimes inserts a different face, but the new face has some variations of the original physiognomy (shape of the nose, eyes and mouth, hairline and hairstyle) as well as position (frontal, angled or bowed head). Clothing, makeup, setting and background are sometimes more or less true to the original artist's image, just as are the colour palette and creation of light direction and shadows – but often altered or changed. A possible effect of this is that we initially engage less with Geßner's artistry, which draws on hundreds of years of painting styles in the (self-)portraits; instead, we look for traces of any similarity to the models and to Geßner himself in them so as to discover Yederbeck. But since the styles are a basis that he reinterprets rather than mimics – which sets Geßner apart from the imitative work of de Hory – we then discover a new, (re-)constructed set through Geßner's artistic "temperament" of appropriated styles.

While Welles' and de Hory are important references in Geßner's "documentary", he states that one of his greatest exemplars is Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1956 *Le mystère Picasso* (Geßner, Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?: 20). This documentary shows Picasso in action at his easel and is painting as *process*. Filmed behind a semi-opaque canvas, as Picasso paints on the other side, his brush strokes show the developmental process – not only of adding paint and form, but also of the creative process of impulse, choices and decision-making that lead to the performative act of painting. The homage is evident in Geßner's "documentary" in the third act, where the process of painting is the central theme. Process is one of the most important themes in all installation elements of *Alias Yederbeck*, and this irrespective of the media type uses. While he utilises digital technologies, Geßner is also faithful to the tangible media of paint and canvas, of charcoal and paper. For the observer,

static artworks like these panel paintings also involve what we might call a reciprocal process, which is perceptual and requires a period of time that the observer needs to understand the image. As the observer's optical system scans the surface of the image saccadically and otherwise, a certain amount of movement is also involved. If one regards the individual images of the 252-part painting cycle as keyframes, I would argue that this work is a form of animation.

My understanding of this cinematic and digital form is notably broader and more inclusive of alternative techniques and processes than what is commonly understood by animation: usually twelve or more sequential images or incrementally adjusted objects, photographed or rendered frame-by-frame, that when projected create an illusion of movement. Implicit here is a challenge to assumptions of animation's medium-specificity, and this is also what Geßner's project undertakes. The corpus of works I am interested in includes expanded notions of time, space and perceptual engagement that do not fulfil Norman McLaren's definition that "Animation is not the art of drawings-that-move, but rather the art of movements-that-are-drawn." (McLaren, in Cloutier, 1975: 104).[4] This overarching claim can account for neither object animation nor computer animation nor extreme animation artworks like Geßner's. A sentence that is often left out of this reference to McLaren is far more relevant – and less medium-specific – in opening up the discourses of other disciplines: "What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame." (ibid.). My extended concept of animation includes works such as Phillip Parreno's *What Do You Believe, Your Eyes or My Words? Speaking Drawing* (2007), which projects a set of sequential portraits

4   The original French citation is "L'animation n'est pas l'art des images qui bougent mais l'art des mouvements dessinés … Ce qui se produit entre les images a beaucoup plus d'importance que ce que l'on voit sur l'image. L'animation est l'art de se servir des interstices entre les images." Translation by the author. For a discussion about the provenance and significance of this citation, see Suzanne Buchan, "Animation", in: Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (eds.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory,* London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

of four people, and each day one is replaced by a new one of the same person at the rate of a frame a day. This challenges notions that 24 frames a second must be a standard for animated "projection". Geßner also challenges standard notions of "animation", and what happens between his frames is significant, as I will describe in a moment.

Writing on Parreno's work, Verina Gfader also challenges medium-specificity, suggesting that "[t]he assumption that animation is a particular experience of the image presupposes the incorporation of animation within contexts other than film, such as fine art." (Gfader, 2008: 148). With a focus on animated movement and electronic art, Gfader describes what happens to static images when accompanied by a temporal light pulse:

> On the one hand, the static drawings/portraits hold our gaze by providing figuration and therefore affirming a representational quality of the image; while on the other hand, this representational mode is constantly under threat by the flickering screen whose force of a pulsating light (light on / light off) almost absorbs the figures' thin lines. (150–51).

In the twelve-screen panorama of *Alias Yederbeck*, instead of the flickering electronic pulse it is the viewer's optical saccadic movements from painting to painting that create movement, metamorphosis and "animation" between the portraits. Gfader suggests there is a "mutual relationship where flickering and figuration come together, that animation, the state of the image from static to dynamic, comes into being." (153). In Geßner's panel paintings, the transitional process from static to dynamic caused by the flicker is instead one that results from looking from one portrait to the one beside it (or another). When the twelve-screen installation shows only the twelve-image sets of the author-constructs (we never see them all at once), the viewer then has to seek relations between them to "interanimate" them.

If we think of the 252 panel paintings as keyframes, the viewer engages in what I'd call a *cadavre exquis* assemblage of co-creative activity: some observers

may consciously or unconsciously imagine the in-betweens that would fill in the metamorphic transition between different portrait styles. In "Block 3 I.Z", for instance, our uncontrolled visual "grazing" over the twenty portraits surrounding the central "prince" in any and all directions may concentrate on the ten charcoal sketches: four women, four men and a layered one that seems to portray both a woman and a man. There are also eight coloured portraits and two of animals. My own co-creative "animation" of these results in a development between male and female, creating a visual effect similar to Joyce's with transgender-portmanteau words like "shis" (she/his) and "hrim" (him/her) that in turn result in a sort of morph (more on which in a moment). This is also informed by knowledge we may have of the appropriated painterly styles used in each of the portraits, thus adding an epistemic art-historical context for each that also develops both a synchronic and diachronic relation between them. The montage here – and I would suggest this resonates with Eisenstein's montage of attractions in the textual collision of semes that effects a type of visual portmanteau – is the selection and placement of images in the arrangement. The result is a medial transformation from a set of static artwork to a stuttering animated flow in the observer's mind.

Geßner actually creates a "shis+hrim" portmanteau in the "Anima Techne" twelve-screen panorama sequence where he projects a female video head onto the head of a digitally created 3D male body. This works with a similar perceptual phenomenon created by a technical process most famously used in two popular music videos. Godley and Crème's groundbreaking *Cry* (1985) uses analogue film-dissolves and cross-fading to merge medium close-up shots of people lip-synching the vocals, and includes the two artists as well. This creates a visual palimpsest through layering and a visual portmanteau through the merging faces so as to create a new "type" of human. A similar effect is created digitally at the end of Michael Jackson's 1991 pop promo critique *Black or White*, directed by Jon Landis. (It is also self-reflexive, as it deconstructs the filmmaking process (like *F for Fake* and *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?*) by showing the viewer the cameras, sets and events behind the

camera.) It employs digital morphing to blend men and women of different ethnic and racial origins so as to effect not just a digital dissolve, but a transformation into a new, third person in those brief moments during the morphing between each of them. The keyframes in these two works are the moments where each actor's face is as yet unmodified, just before and directly after the dissolves, cross-fading and digital morphing. While these are created through technologies, the morphing effect we may perceive in Geßner's painted and drawn portraits is facilitated by the consistency of Yederbeck's facial features across the portraits; and where these are animals, the morphing effect is brought about by similarities in style and form. For instance in the "Block 3 I.Z" set of 21 images, four have something that prominently frames their faces: a sheep's wool, one woman with a veil, another with helmet-like hair and a charcoal sketch of a man with a voluminous wig. The transitional morphs that we may imagine between them are the result of their clever arrangement in the 21-image set.

Additive Animation

There are also scenes throughout where Geßner uses time-based animation techniques. He names Stan VanDerBeek as one of the inspirations for his project (the lexeme "beck" is a reference to (VanDer)Beek) and also because of his groundbreaking work as an artist researcher at Bell Labs – just as Geßner himself is an artist researcher as well as a Professor for Theory and Practice of Visual Arts at HFF "Konrad Wolf" Potsdam-Babelsberg. An artist who was, until recently, mostly excluded from the canons of experimental and expanded cinema, VanDerBeek's work is being (re-)introduced to debates on this form, notably by VanDerBeek scholar Mark Bartlett.[5] He writes that:

5   See the "Special Issue: Re: Animating Stan Vanderbeek", guest-edited by Mark Bartlett, in: *animation. an interdisciplinary journal,* vol. 5, no. 2.

> [VanDerBeek] understood that the image history of the Spectacle was a productive force that to a great degree determined what and how perception was able to function in socio-political terms … [and that] he was under no utopian illusion that the consequences [of the computer technology revolution] would lead to a better world. (2010: 117).

While *Alias Yederbeck* bears minimal relation with VanDerBeek's philosophical, social, arts-political project, it does align to this "image history of the Spectacle", as one of Geßner's most important references is VanDerBeek's *Moviedrome* (1963–65). According to Geßner, the multimedia spectacle *Alias Yederbeck* "however shall confront the observer with a relatively clearly built system in which the intermedia relations, and the aesthetic inter- and disconnections of the analog and digital media employed, are playfully performed in experimental set-ups. One could also describe the project as a specific network, as the cosmos of the synthesized alias or as a walkable model."[6]

Instead of the semi-spherical cinema of the *Moviedrome,* in which one has to lay down in a prone position and look up, in *Alias Yederbeck's* panorama cinema the standing spectator is encouraged to move about in the space to engage with the ever-changing imagery that also moves around across the space's twelve-panel circularity.

To return to the animation in Geßner's work, there are some similarities in technique and concept to VanDerBeek, as both use what I call "additive animation", "in which single frame shots of individual brushstrokes of paint on a transparent surface accumulate over time to result in a dense and rich abstract painting." (Buchan 2010: 179). VanDerBeek's *Astral Man – An Illuminated Poem* (1959) reveals his background as a painter; in this film he works with runny watercolour painted on different coloured backgrounds, additive lines that develop to form a face and white dots that additively and reduc-

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6   Communication with Frank Geßner, November 5, 2012.

tively form the outline of a hand: "the movement that the viewer perceives relies exclusively on the changing shape and developing form of the painting, rather than conventionally animated movement" that would be shot frame by frame (181). Geßner uses additive animation in animated sequences in the "documentary" and on the twelve screens. In *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* (third act), Geßner's alias Yederbeck / Monsieur Teste and a "gorilla" create three large charcoal sketches in real-time filming with some ellipses: a reclining artist's model on the left, an easel with an image in the centre, a sitting painter/gorilla on the right. The three large drawings are then each pictorially varied for the next one-and-a-half minutes using digital additive animation with lines, bold strokes and washes of colour. To create this animation, the drawings were digitally "overpainted" and simultaneously filmed via projection, to later be reworked using a computer. In this hybrid "projection painting", the tripartite image develops over time from simple, fairly figurative charcoal sketches to increasingly abstract forms that are reminiscent of Beckmann's or Bacon's triptychs. There are digital affinities with the process painting of Clouzot's film, as we see reflexive instances of the software programme's palette window. We also see additive animation in the twelve-screen panorama sequence "Entertainer", when the central "author-construct" and other portraits gradually disappear while colour sketches, drawings, photos and other archive material are added to build an animated narrative, sometimes flowing over the entire twelve screens. In these examples and elsewhere, additive animation allows Geßner to reveal the all-important element of process to his viewers. He also achieves a temporality through subtraction, where other images digitally disappear to privilege one or the other, and through changing sizes, as they become larger or smaller on screen.

Conclusion

I have here attempted to contextualise but a few of the many techniques and concepts at work in *Alias Yederbeck*, and in conclusion I return to Geßner's central conceit, the alter ego, and the intertwining of fact and fiction, the real and the fake. "Honi soit qui mal y pense" ("Shame on those who think evil of it."):[7] in *F for Fake,* Orson Welles films de Hory speaking these words that are directed at his critics, pointing the finger of guilt at those who bought his paintings, thereby eliding the aspect of forgery. It also functions as a claim of de Hory's innocence and an indication of his self-regard as an artist. With this in mind, I would like to deflect an obvious critique that could be made of *Alias Yederbeck* – that it is narcissistic, self-absorbed and hubristic. I would argue that there are a number of reasons why "Honi soit qui mal y pense" can apply here as well. Geßner's self-irony, cultural critique and long-term personal and artistic commitment, which are doubtless made at a great price to the artist, bear comparison to Welles' and to other artists working with similar commitment (and different from de Hory's very real financial gains). Overall, *Alias Yederbeck* shares a similar metanarrative structure and goal with *F for Fake:* a sympathy with and for the artist that emphasises artistic freedom.

I see a distinction between *homo laborans* ("working man", where labour is necessary for existence), to which I would assign de Hory's work for profit, and Hannah Arendt's term *homo faber*, where "[w]ork (as both *technê* and *poiesis*) corresponds to the fabrication of an *artificial* world of things, artifactual constructions which endure temporally beyond the act of creation itself." (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). In *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggests that "homo faber could be redeemed from his predicament of meaninglessness … only through the interrelated faculties of action and speech,

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7   This motto originates from British chivalry's Order of the Garter and came to mean that those who bore it had allegiance to the King.

which produce meaningful stories as naturally as fabrication produces use objects." (Arendt, 1998: 236). In the case of Geßner, I would add the use of multimedia in his metanarrative. In the creative fabrication of *Alias Yederbeck*, Geßner creates an ironic multiple story about himself and "everyman" – via Yederbeck – about art and identity, and this tale is the artist's own very specific version of the *human condition* as a *comédie humaine.* At the end of *F For Fake*, Welles declares: "Art, he [Picasso] said, is a lie, a lie that makes us realize the truth" – and the original citation from Picasso continues: "The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies." (statement in Chipp, 1968: 264). Of course it cannot be said that *Alias Yederbeck* is a lie, nor that Geßner makes any claim to innocence for his own usurpation of artistic styles. But after experiencing all elements of the installation, it tells us more about the truth of Frank Geßner and his art-philosophical stance than it does of Paul Yederbeck. In *Alias Yederbeck*, the sheer volume of works suggests *homo laborans*, and the complex conceptual framework and the multimedia extravaganza suggest *homo faber*. But along with a synthesis of these two, with due self-reflexivity and (self-)irony, Geßner introduces a third concept – *homo ludens*. This tripartite method is serious play, which is perhaps what Geßner has been asking us to think about all along.

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SUZANNE BUCHAN

Suzanne Buchan is Professor of Animation Aesthetics at Middlesex University London and was previously a Professor and Director of the Animation Research Centre at the University for the Creative Arts, UK. Her research investigates interdisciplinary approaches to animation as a pervasive moving image mode across a range of platforms and media. She is also active as a film and exhibition curator, and was founding member and co-director (1994–2003) of the *Fantoche* International Animation Film Festival, Switzerland. Her books include *The Quay Brothers: Into A Metaphysical Playroom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) and two edited collections: *Pervasive Animation: An AFI Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), and *Animated 'Worlds'* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2006). She is the editor of *animation. an interdisciplinary journal* (Sage Journals). She continues to work on her *Pervasive Animation* project, which includes the 2007 *Pervasive Animation* conference at the Tate Modern London (archived webcast), and a forthcoming co-curated exhibition for the Museum of Design Zurich.