

Throughout the development of 1927's work we have often found ourselves at a loss as to how to define exactly what it is we do. Even watching it like this on video does not fully get across the experience of coming to see the show. Our work has to be experienced "live" for it to be truly effective, you have to be there. However, when recently asked in an interview that same old question: "how would you describe your work?" I had a realisation. I realised that our work, though undoubtedly theatrical in scope, was actually a subversion or re-invention of a *cinematic* form of sorts and in fact nearly all of our inspiration and reference points come from the world of cinema, not theatre. Our very name 1927 relates entirely to a moment in the history of cinema. 1927 being the year in which the first "talkie" movie came out signifying the beginning of the end for the silent era.

The Silent era was a very important moment in cinematic history for us as it represents a time in which going to the pictures was still an inherently theatrical experience. In the really early days of cinema, films were presented *as* theatrical events *in* theatres, usually playing as a part of a variety bill of differing stage acts. By the time large scale silent features were being made, even though nearly all of the elements of the cinematic mode were in place, from the overwrought editing of action sequences through to the screen kiss, there was still the presence of a live accompaniment. In actual fact, the soundtrack could be different for each picture house. A cinema in a small town may just have an old organ or piano, whilst in the big cities whole orchestras would be there to play. The

filmmakers, regardless of what score was stipulated to be played along to their film, had little directorial control over what happened on the night. The introduction of sound changed this irrevocably and the totally pre-recorded cinematic experience we know today was complete. Its presentation became entirely mechanised and the “live” element was gone forever. In fact it was this shift that even allows us to think the notion of something being “live”. “Live on stage tonight!” Opposed to what? Dead on stage?? I myself am being streamed “live” right at this very moment. But I’m not sure how “live” it actually is anymore. How “live” am I? Our reality is so consumed by the cinematic these days that maybe we all feel a little bit pre-recorded.

The cinematic is all around us, inside us, a part of our conscious world, a part of the way we perceive the world. The grammar of its editing modes, the content of its sentimentalised storylines and the grinning faces of its celebrities have infiltrated every aspect of modern life. Cinema above all other narrative art forms has the most potent ability to absorb collective dreams and fantasies and sell them back to us. It is something we have become addicted to, something we cannot help but look at. You only have to sit in a pub with a television on and you will know what I mean, suddenly you find yourself turning to watch it, drawn toward the one-eyed god in the corner.

It operates upon us like a drug, and just like a drug it can have a curative effect but it can also be poisonous. When 1927 first started to make work we were instinctively aware of this and within the cinematic modes we saw around us we could recognise this level of poisonousness. We strongly felt the need to somehow break away from the slick, what

we would loosely term: “Digital”, look of the imagery we could not avoid seeing on a daily basis. We wanted crackle! We wanted that marvellously textured flickering magic of early cinema, a cinema that was still enchanted.

Needless to say, for us to be able to make the work we make we have to use digital technologies. Digital cameras, scanners, animation software, presentation software etc. Celluloid is sadly becoming a thing of the past despite the love many of us have for its look and feel. This is something I have always accepted as a filmmaker, mainly because when I first started making films digital was in the ascendancy and was the only viable option available. However, I hate the way it looks so have always gone to great lengths to make sure our imagery looks as organic and un-digital as possible. I think this is really where the problem with using digital arises, the fact that it is *too* clean. There is no randomness. When you shoot on a Bolex or on Super 8, the very medium itself gives so much back to you. The aesthetic is already within the medium. It is in fact a physical medium, with physical processes involved. With digital it is a different matter altogether. You have to work to add randomness to the image. This is something that, in my view, is not practiced nearly enough. If anything the introduction of digital has made filmmaking even more crisp, even more faultless than the finest grain celluloid. The image has become completely sanitised and clean. We are under the hyper-real tyranny of High Definition.

Of course the other element that then pushes 1927’s work away from the digital and into another realm altogether is the fact that we use animation. But again it was not the

animation of, for example, Pixar that we looked towards for inspiration. We looked back to the early pioneers of this medium, from Winsor McCay's Gertie the Dinosaur through Felix to Betty Boop. Also to the Russian master Starevich, animator of beetles. Again within these early animated films we found a naivety to the images and often a downright hallucinatory weirdness that often seems to be absent from many of the new large scale animations around today, or at least the hallucinations within these films have become something quite different, gaudy and knowing. One only has to look at the development of Disney over the years to understand this.

We wanted to bring back the weirdness, bring back the wonkiness and by doing so bring back the magic. Animation is a magical medium. It is the ability to breathe human life into inanimate things, be they drawings or objects. The very notion of CGI goes against this. A 3D CGI object has been designed to be moved entirely mechanically, there is no human touch in making it move. The hand of the animator is actually one step removed from the object. It is not actually an object at all. In lots of ways it is the apotheosis of cinematic unreality. There is *nothing* "live" within any element of it. It is entirely mechanised. Yet it is minutely representative of the real world, be that a particularly bad shower of acorns in a Lars von Trier film or some grinning green monster from Pixar that moves super naturalistically and whose hair and teeth and musculature are so lifelike that it could be real. Compare the work of the late great Harryhausen . . . with that of the modern monster movies. There is no strangeness of movement, no otherworldliness. It is too slick to be of interest, you forget it as soon as you've watched it. There is no room to add one's own imagination to the image.

Take for example the work of Norstein. It is utterly sophisticated in its technique, incomparable almost, yet it retains a childlike quality, there is naivety and the naivety is somehow in the way that things move, the way that they are animated, the human touch. It is a picture brought magically to life, and whilst there is a beautifully observed logic to the world, there is no pretence at realism, it is pure magic. All animation should contain this magic within it. It should unfold with the simplicity and joy of a child's game. The master of this and for me really the greatest animator of all time is Svankmajer. There is no point in even talking about him. We need only *look* and *feel* the textures of his work.

This is the sort of thing that we aspire towards with 1927, the likes of Norstien and Svankmajer being impossibly high bench marks to attempt to reach. We want to create work that makes no pretence at being the real world but is rather an alternate reality, a universe in which the viewer is required to make a childlike leap of imagination to enter.

Of course, *all* filmmaking supplies us with an alternate reality. The joy of going to watch a film derives from just this, we can drift out to another place for two hours and relinquish ourselves to the activities on the screen. Escape! Everyone wants to escape. The slightly unnerving thing arises when you see people escaping all around you, all the time, staring as they do into their palms, earphones in, watching T.V. on their way to work first thing in the morning. We are all here victims to this, we were born into the cinematic age, we all grew up on a diet of cheap T.V. and Hollywood Movies. However, I am of the belief that things are beginning to change in the world and it is the so called digital revolution that is heralding this change. 1927, for all our desperate attempts to

make things look old and broken, are actually completely hi-tech and utterly up to date. We are Digital with a capital D. But the important thing for us is to maintain a healthy disrespect for it, to continually look for new ways in which we can break it. And it is this ethos that needs to be encouraged and let loose. Never before has it been so easy to make films and animations. There is really no need for huge production budgets anymore and no reason why filmmaking cannot be taken back from the commercial world and re-invented in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways. Everyone is a potential filmmaker these days and this alone is quite a radical idea as it opens up a possibility for the development of entirely grass roots forms of filmmaking, forms that do not need to rely upon the traditional cinema infrastructure for their dissemination and forms that certainly do not need to conform to the conventions and formulas of traditional studio filmmaking.

1927 is certainly a product of this. We started from nothing. I myself could barely even use the software, we had a crappy camera stolen from my brother, a projector we “borrowed” from my dad, we used to build all the projection screens ourselves. The whole of our first show was put together on love alone, there was no money and it was certainly not “hi tech”. In fact we were “low fi” in the true sense of the word. This made us naturally experimental. We had restrictions and made them work for us. Within this were continual moments of discovery, moments of magic in the actual making of the work and if there is magic in making it then the end result will always contain that magic.

The important thing to remember about magic of this sort is that it cannot be formulaic and as soon as it becomes so it loses its spark. This is something we are continually

battling against. Technically I am now what I consider to be a proficient animator, however, god forbid that I should ever become an expert. I have no interest in going there. I want the process to be exactly that, a process. Nothing is finished and nothing is a success. This is sadly something that becomes less and less accepted within the current cultural climate. Everyone wants success, the idea of failure is the very worse thing. This is, in the most part, due to the pressures of the economy. Most filmmaking, most design, most of the artwork we see around us everyday is paid for by the commercial sector and within this sector the structure the work is made under correlates entirely to the structure of that economy and the structure of that economy is built around a deceptively simplistic ethos, to make monetary profit! This itself breeds a cowardice of ideas because of the so called financial risks. People are afraid to fail. Interestingly when the very thing that causes such fears itself, the economy, fails, as we have seen and are still seeing all around us, it seems to encourage even less risk taking. People want a safe bet. My argument here is that there is no need for betting to be involved anymore. The do-it-yourself hand-made era is upon us and the only thing we could realistically blame for us not taking up the gauntlet and completely reinventing, not just cinema but *all* aspects of cultural life is laziness. The technology is there for us to use and more importantly abuse. It is happening, the revolution is building steam and it needs to become just that, a Revolution. Making artwork should be a political act and *everyone* should be involved in it. But that means more than just filming your cat and putting it up on You Tube! It means engaging in a creative *process* and it means losing control, stepping out of the safety zone, veering off the all too easy paths of least resistance companies such as Mac supply us with. It means second guessing the marketing departments of such companies

who are probably right now trying to second guess ideas of this very sort. It is about taking up arms against the terrible trend toward monoculture and homogeny. About reinventing and re-enchanting a culture that in its most populist form is just as beleaguered and failing as the economy that supports it. There are no excuses anymore. The power is in our hands to go forth and fail in all sorts of marvellous and magical new ways!!

I'd like to round off by relating all of this more specifically to the main theme of this convention: Touch. The very idea of touch insists upon there being an active "live" presence. To touch something is to engage with it on a very visceral and organic level. It has to be *physical*. The more and more we dive headlong into the digital age the more *virtual* our worlds become and the more our perception itself becomes removed from the *actual*. If a hand-made revolution is to occur as some kind of antidote to all of this then touch must play an important part in it. The human hand needs to re-intervene, needs to claw its way back in and begin to mould and manipulate, pull and stretch, prod and poke. The digital medium is only a mechanical one if we let it be that way, if we let it lure us in with its snazzy effects. It can actually be used just as organically as anything else. It is our attitude toward it that needs to change and that attitude needs to be one of experimentation and openness to new and challenging ideas and new and adventurous methods of production. I believe it is our job as artists and designers to lead the way with this and we can in no way become complacent. We must stand firm against the growing tide of mediocrity and attempt at all costs to bamboozle and confound the public into

using their imaginations constructively and begin to *think for themselves* about how *they* want to interact with and touch and manipulate their culture.