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Animate Me is a work of fiction by Tony White, that was written in response to PEER and Animate Projects' *Out of Site* commissions 2014, by artists Savinder Bual, Kota Ezawa, Karolina Głusiec and Margaret Salmon. *Animate Me* contains some historical fact (including titles and information about any films cited), but with the exception of any public figures mentioned, such as Bob Godfrey, resemblance to any situations or characters living or dead is purely coincidental.

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ANIMATE ME

A SHORT STORY
BY
TONY WHITE

It's not *that* kind of animation; princesses and the like. Realistic fur effects. *Shrek*¹. This is something you catch sight of in the street out of the corner of your eye, or watch on your phone, rather than something to plonk the kids down in front of for two hours, if you know what I mean. It's not about holding hands in the dark anymore, or paying your money and taking your choice. You don't watch it, so much as it animates you. 'Art or industry?' we used to say. 'The Camden problem'. It's meaningless now, but seemed important then, and this is about beginnings, isn't it, some of it? Étienne-Jules Marey and the rotating shutter that enabled him to photograph movement. Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon*². Stop-motion vignettes and sleights of hand. Flick-books. So maybe this should be about beginnings too, but how far back do you want to go? Putting the parrot in the cage? Music hall? I mean, look where we are. There used to be lightning-sketch acts on the same bill as the old Hoxton howlers. No, better stick with the *nineteen*-eighties, which in my case meant watching videos in the A-level art class: *The Shock of the New*. Artists filmed behind glass, for whatever reason. Their faces pressed against it³, or painting onto it for the camera: Pablo Picasso or Jackson Pollock. Luckily for me we had animation students for lodgers in those days, and one of them had shown me how to do eyes, sideways-on and with different expressions. Little things like that. It doesn't take much to start you off. It was a small town with a big art school, and I could draw, so it wasn't long before it was my turn to escape. You were always blagging equipment. Not like now when you can do stop-motion with any old digital camera – or on your phone – bung it through whatever free graphic converter software you can find and have the Quicktime on Youtube in the space of an hour! Back then it was about booking the studio, putting your name down for a lightbox; getting in early to use the rostrum camera or one of the Steenbecks. A different world. Someone linked to a film⁴ a while ago; one silent reel of Super-8. It wasn't my year, but not far off – late '70s instead of early '80s – and the same studio. Sunlight streaming in the window, and someone horsing around with the airbrush. Those big, wire, drying racks. Everything done on paper or acetate. Walked straight into jobs, a lot of them. There always was an industrial tendency at that place – which I studiously avoided – but there was good money to be made. And I see it now, because how else would you get access to equipment to do your own stuff, to keep your hand in, expand your technique. It was Bob Godfrey⁵ in their day, but most of our lot ended up in Camden, working on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*⁶ – dropping out of college to do it, some of them. Talk about luck. How often would an opportunity like that come along? A chance to soak up all that Disney wisdom. There were dozens of them – a generation, near enough – working as 'inbetweeners' and cleaners-up, doing thumb-nailing or little animation

tests, getting to know particular characters and ending up as animators, composers. That's where it all starts: *Phantom Menace*⁷, *The Lion King*⁸, you name it. Amazing that *Roger Rabbit* wasn't done on computers, except that one Jessica Rabbit scene. So why was I the only one in the Hawley Arms not wearing a *Roger Rabbit* UK crew jacket? I already told you: 'the Camden problem'. I was more interested in the artier side of things. I used to read *Independent Media*⁹ magazine back then, not *Variety*. The revolution was not going to be televised¹⁰, remember? I liked – still do – to see the actual paper, the maker's hand flickering at the bottom of the screen, the fluctuations in light; borrowed tripods and second-hand Bolexes¹¹. 'The Camden problem' was which way to turn at Parkway or Inverness Street, left towards Gloucester Avenue or straight on to Camden Lock? The London Film-makers' Co-op or the Disney studio? *I Cat*¹² or Jessica Rabbit? It sounds ridiculous, I know, but it seemed important. At the time. Over a pint or two. It's ancient history now – mortgaged out of existence, in Camden anyway – so the distinction probably doesn't hold, if it ever really did. Art or industry? Why not both? Or neither. Watch and learn. Make your own.

- 1 Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, *Shrek*, Pacific Data Images/DreamWorks Animation, 2001 (90 mins, colour).
- 2 Georges Méliès, *A Trip to the Moon (Voyage dans la Lune)*, 1902 (18 mins, black and white) on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Trip_to_the_Moon
- 3 Stuart Brisley, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, 1973 (20 mins, colour and black and white, 16mm) on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/stuartbrisley/arbeitsmacthfreifrei>
- 4 Mercurytoons, *Farnham 1977*, 1977 (2:45, colour, 8mm) on Youtube <http://youtu.be/KeW-zz8s7IU>
- 5 Bob Godfrey (Roland Frederick Godfrey MBE, 1921 – 2013) was a British animator, most well known for the children's cartoon television series *Roobarb* (1974). Find out more at www.bobgodfreyfilms.com
- 6 Robert Zemeckis, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, Touchstone Pictures/Amblin Entertainment, 1988 (104 mins, colour).
- 7 George Lucas, *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, Lucasfilm, 1999 (136 mins, colour).
- 8 Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff, *The Lion King*, Walt Disney Pictures/Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1994 (88 mins, colour).
- 9 *Independent Media* magazine (formerly *Independent Video*) was published by the Media Centre of Southill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell, UK, from 1982.
- 10 Gil Scott-Heron, 'The Revolution will not be Televised', *Pieces of a Man*, Flying Dutchman Records, 1974.
- 11 Bolex motion picture cameras have been manufactured by Bolex International since 1927.
- 12 Jayne Parker, *I Cat*, 1980 (10 mins, colour, 16 mm), on LUXONLINE http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/jayne_parker/i_cat.html