For many years, Stas Orlovski was content to work in his studio making drawings, paintings, and prints. These works are delicate and minimalistic. Almost monochromatic, they fuse hand-drawn elements with printed sources (ranging from Victorian-era illustrations and pages from Russian children’s books, to Japanese prints and botanical illustrations) that were collaged or transferred to canvas. The works, whose subjects touch on the magic of the natural world as an ever-changing place of contemplation and awe, also present a sense of nostalgia for the printed communication of bygone eras. Featureless heads, exotic birds, flowers, moons, stars, and falling rain populate his compositions. The images range from nocturnal landscapes, in which the subject is illuminated by a beam of moonlight, to somber gardens surrounded by forests of carefully drawn trees.

Orlovski has often worked in series, repeating imagery from canvas to canvas and thinking about the relationships between them and how to weave narratives through their sequences. These works can be seen as frames comprising a growing animation. Yet rather than imply the motion, Orlovski invented a way to animate his works. The impetus to move from static to dynamic was the simple desire to see his imagery in motion. What seemed simple at the outset, however, turned out to be a complex integration of new and old techniques. Though not trained as an animator, Orlovski found collaborators to work with and arrived upon a compelling way to extend his practice, resulting in the fusion of site-specific wall drawings with collage and projected animation.

During the past few years, Orlovski has had the opportunity to present his animations in both museum and gallery contexts. Because every installation is site-specific, he has found a way to streamline his process by creating templates to facilitate the placement of the wall collages and drawings. In Chimera (2014), his most ambitious installation to date, he creates two intricate twenty-six-minute animations that morph in unexpected and uncanny ways. A chimera is defined as “a monster from Greek mythology that breathes fire and has a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a snake’s tail,” and as “something that exists only in the imagination and is not possible in reality.” Using the dual aspects of this definition as a point of departure, Orlovski brings to life an ever-changing fantasy world, in which the whole is made from the sum of disparate and seemingly unrelated parts.

At the beginning of the animation (the work is meant to be a continuous loop without a well-defined start or end point), a headless silhouette is revealed and brought into the foreground among flowing ink lines that dance like ribbons within a vignette-ed frame. The ribbons dissolve into rapid lines of rain that create puddles of pulsating concentric circles as they hit the ground. Next, musical notes flutter across the scene as day turns to night. A headless human form, upon whose shoulder rests a bird, emerges from this darkness. The image of the bird appears throughout the animation, often in conjunction with musical notation.

The who, what, and why of Orlovski’s narrative is never articulated. Rather, he takes us on a fantastical journey, in which real and imagined scenarios intertwine. As the action unfolds on the “main” wall, a video projection is reflected in an oval mirror on an adjacent wall. At times, the image in the mirror is a full-sized reflection. Yet it also becomes an animated close-up, and in some instances it even follows the quirky movements of an invisible camera. A hauntingly ephemeral soundtrack by Steve Roden envelops the space, at times in synch and at other times at odds with the projection, which loops every twenty minutes rather than coinciding with the twenty-six-minute duration of the animations.

Orlovski’s works draw from avant-garde cinema and stop-motion film techniques, while acknowledging William Kentridge’s animated drawings and Ezra Johnson’s moving paintings, as well as Nathalie Djurberg’s exotic claymations. What makes Orlovski’s work unique is the way he integrates his animations with the elements he draws and collages directly on the wall. Hidden by the darkness is the nearly invisible shape of a cutout body—which serves as the frame for much of the animation—collaged to the wall and surrounded by carefully drawn plant matter and trees. The outline of an oval—the mirror—is similarly adhered to the adjacent wall. The animation illuminates and obscures these elements at different times. The animated sequences are delightful and fascinating collages of moving hand-drawn elements. Orlovski creates discreet animations one frame at a time, and then composites them into specific sequences that are later masked and composited again to coincide in different ways with the static elements. Orlovski has amassed an archive of animated clips that he uses as raw material in much the same way that he selects from his archive of printed matter.

Orlovski has developed a personal iconography that includes images of birds, statues, busts, rain, plants, and flowers, and he carefully layers sequences of these elements within the framework of his animations. The animations fluctuate from full frame,
The Forms of the Affects
BY EUGENIE BRINKEMA
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On the turn to affect theory in the humanities, Eugenie Brinkema notes that affect “has been deployed almost exclusively in the singular, as the capacity for movement or disturbance in general” (xiii). If affect has functioned as a conceptual trapdoor out of textual analysis, gripped by a “not that, but this” rhetorical model, The Forms of the Affects is organized around the contention that “we do not yet know all it is that form can do” (261). Brinkema argues that affect theory has not activated the potentialities that inaugurated it, employing New Criticism’s “affective fallacy” to push against the idea that theoretical work is being done when inaccessible, irrefutable “intensities” become the site of theory (33–34). In this refreshing resistance, the formal constitution of affective achievement in film is asserted as the path into critical revelation.

Brinkema argues that attention to film form can create a safeguard against the vagueness and wistful recalcitrance that characterizes much work in affect theory, making the useful if medicinal argument that theorists must not be let off the hook of close reading. The permission to renounce textuality was collectively granted in the same move that brought theoretical camps together over suspicion of 1970s psychoanalytic and poststructuralist film theory’s perceived omission of materiality, embodiment, and sensation (26–31). Brinkema holds that affective force stems from the slow, careful reading of formal properties rather than any immediate or universal apprehension. The Forms of the Affects offers important new strategies for discerning the structure of affect in the time–based medium of film, positing that duration and transformation are more generative loci of analysis than symbolism or narrative.

The project of this book responds to anti–poststructuralist claims about affectivity, made by such thinkers as Steven Shaviro and Brian Massumi, that “intensities are necessarily and utterly divorced from all that signifies” (28). While on the face of it formal analysis is nothing new, Brinkema takes a cold, hard look in the mirror at affect theory’s continued resistance to visual semiotics and the replacement of poststructuralism/psychoanalysis with a blank of refusal—the “negative ontology of the humanities” (31). The Forms of the Affects calls for film theory’s reorientation toward formalism to challenge the assumption that film exists to, or for, the spectator; that affect is primarily conveyed to viewers through narrative and expressive drama rather than through formal properties; and therefore that visceral “immediacy” is a theoretically valuable lens through which to consider affectivity in film (and beyond).

Given Brinkema’s interest in wrenching affect from the realm of the unsayable or insurmountably subjective, her treatment of disgust is a highwire act. She cautions against defining an affect by merely enumerating its objects or symbols, advising that “theory should resist the urge to align so squarely with [disgust’s] insistence on an iconography of its own” (130). She links the horror (and pleasure) of disgust to the “promise of worsening” (130), as “a structure of generative negation” (137), in which aesthetic boundaries are enmeshed into “a desirable element of the revolving” (165). While there are other meditations on this doubleness of disgust, like that of the uncanny, one strength of Brinkema’s interpretative example is structural: her explorations of philosophical history consistently open up surprising and invigorating formal insights into the very nature of affectivity. The foundational exclusion from aesthetics that has historically marked the notion of disgust is tracked chromatically and gastronomically in Brinkema’s lucid reading of Peter Greenaway’s film The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover (1989). She demonstrates that the power and tastefulness of disgust lie in the formal establishment of entanglement with the forces of nature and their effects on an imagined landscape.

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