Abstract

Primitivism gathers together several hegemonic lines of thinking about otherness as a function of underdevelopment vis-à-vis the Western, white male subject. This article presents an analysis of the animated dance video Ghostcatching (Bill T. Jones, Paul Kaiser, Shelley Eshkar, 1999) that offers a framework for understanding the piece’s thoughtful relationship to the history of primitivism in animation. Positioning the dancing body and the motion-capture apparatus at the center of understandings of the supposedly pre-rational and uncivilized, I argue that Ghostcatching is an expert commentary on animation’s long-standing investment in notions of human origins and development. Ghostcatching and related animations (including its stereoscopic 3-D reworking, After Ghostcatching; Betty Boop cartoons of the 1930s; the Dancing Baby meme; and work by media artist Ian Cheng) provide a lens for examining technologies and discourses of motion capture, revealing the economy of vitality through which the energy of raced, infantilized, and animalized bodies are circulated.

Contributor Notes

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Primitivism is a mode of aesthetic idealization that either emulates or aspires to recreate "primitive" non-Western or prehistoric people perceived to be "primitive", such as Paul Gauguin’s inclusion of Tahitian motifs in paintings and ceramics. Primitivism has often been critiqued for reproducing the racist stereotypes about non-Western or prehistoric people. Primitivism and the Other. History of Art and Cultural Geography. Primitivism introduced artefacts of primitive people into the history of Western art and signalled a reversal of values change in the relationship between the West and the Other and Elsewhere. This reversal of values has been important to the development of modern art. Primitivism has often been linked to race and ethnicity. Three years before the publication of Poétique de la Relation (1990), Mahagony introduces a shift in Glissant’s approach to the environment. This novel not only uses the landscape to present the historical and political contexts that were at the forefront of Glissant’s earlier work, but it also begins to articulate the tenets of créolisation promoting the rhizomatic and dialectic nature of the environment through the figure of the mahogany tree. Thus, the tree becomes a central figure in the text that allows the reader to navigate the fragmented narrative and...