

**RENCONTRES ANIMATION FORMATION**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> edition**  
**18 and 19 November 2010**  
**Angoulême**  
**Summary of the debates**

The second Rencontres Animation Formation took place on 18 and 19 November 2010 in Angoulême, with a higher attendance than the first edition. It reaffirmed its founding principle : bringing together training organizations, animation production companies and studios, and institutions which play a role in accordance with their various fields of expertise (CPNEF-AV, CNC, SPFA, AFDAS, Groupe Audiens, Pôle Emploi).

The aim is to contribute to the development of a concerted training strategy, through the creation of a specific time and place to promote dialogue among the parties, the communication of information and experiences. These collective discussions were centred on a range of subjects.



## 1. Skills mobilized

### On a 3D feature film : Jacques Bled (Mac Guff Ligne)

Going back over the making of the feature film *Despicable Me* for Universal by the Mac Guff studio, Jacques Bled set out what was at stake : how to make sure that the production was on a par with the great blockbusters. Meeting this challenge naturally demands excellence of individual talents. But, in addition, it calls for structuring measures which far exceed the average French productions.

Jacques Bled highlighted the specific differences between French and American conceptions of working methods, the main one being the continually changing character of the different moments. While the overall structure is familiar to us, the interrelations are both more numerous and more complex, hence the greater requirements in the structuring of the chain, which must be *quasi industrial*, yet being applied to totally handcrafted processes. Among the consequences to be concluded in terms of training : the decisive importance of TDs (technical directors), and that, apparently less obvious, of layering, a stage which consists in checking that each layer which must be put in place for the compositing is exactly as it should be. Monitoring production obviously remains crucial, and must be in proportion to the complexity of the undertaking.

Jacques Bled considered that the result is satisfactory : his studio progressed in terms of productivity, ratios management, evaluation, recruitment, also for everything connected with maintenance, software monitoring, and technological organization in general.

In terms of skills profiles, *Despicable Me* required an extremely high level of specialisation in the personnel. However, Jacques Bled attiré drew the attention of the trainers to the fact that smaller projects – French or European, for example – will require versatility. Specialisation or versatility ? *It's a tricky question, of course ... People have to find work, and if they want to find work, it is in their interest to be specialised, and if we want them to enjoy it, then they must be a bit transversal. So, is it completely paradoxical, I don't know, but it is true that we need both types of training and it is more and more difficult to find people with genuine transversal skills.*

### For 3D production : Lionel Fages (Cube Creative) and Yannick Violin (Nayade)

Lionel Fages was very pleased about the way schools have taken 3D into account. It is essential for the development of 3D production which he hopes and prays for. But for all that, it does not present any particular difficulty, because *a good animator, who already knows how to do animation in a 2D film, who has a director behind him, who has a few notions of optics, can do 3D without any difficulty.* The rules of 3D optics are simple rules, ones that Méliès was already applying in his films. His recommendation is to apply oneself to a few fundamentals : give basic teaching in schools about what are good rules in optics, good camera movement, is short, an initiation.

Nevertheless it is still essential to understand that 3D requires specific writing, which must express itself from the storyboard onwards.

Yannick Violin insisted on the importance, for a 3D production, of checking that the work is correct on a large screen, from the beginning of the production process right through to the end.

## For production management : Marie-Pierre Journet (Moonscoop)

Marie-Pierre Journet painted a picture of the multiplicity of skills which a production manager must combine, skills which are sometimes little known, but whose number and complexity explain their scarcity ... as well as their absolute necessity. Obviously we can only give them a cursory mention here ...

Developing original programmes, in close consultation with the writers, but also within a budget and in accordance with precise techniques ; having expertise in all the stages of production and all the representation techniques, 2D and 3D; in the case of a coproduction, reach the best compromises to share out the production tasks ; set the budgets, assess the salaries, with regard to the collective labour agreement, but also depending on the reputation and the quality of the personnel, and respecting the overall budget ; have knowledge in IT, understand the tools which are adapted for each production... and which will have to be adapted again for the following production ; manage the numerous teams in terms of organization but also psychologically ; handle productions times when they intersect with artistic, technical and financial requirements ; mastering English... To which can be added the necessity of meeting the needs of the marketing department and international distribution.

Marie-Pierre Journet also pointed out the need for production managers to have short training periods, particularly for the supervision of 3D productions – how to organise, schedule, budget 3D – and knowledge of tracking tools.

She mentioned the worrying situation of older personnel who may find themselves in difficulty as a result of technological advances, and put forward a possible avenue of discussion : train this experienced personnel, or at least some of them, to become production managers.

## 2. Continuing education : for a strategy in the medium term

**Kris Ludhor (AFDAS) (ppt)**

**Philippe Couteux (CFDT)**

**Gilbert Kiner (ArtFX)**

**Stéphane Le Bars (SPFA) (ppt)**

Philippe Couteux gave a reminder : continuous vocational training is the preferred tool for updating and expanding employee skills, and thus for providing support in technological mutations and in personal choices for development, and indeed redeployment. He noted the dichotomy between initial training, which is abundant and of high quality, and vocational training, which is opaque and suffers from a *total absence of leadership*.

According to him, training concentrates mainly on initial training, in that it offers companies well-trained staff who are rapidly operational ... and renewed each year. As a result, continuous training does not really interest the companies who only consider it to meet specific needs. As proof he pointed to the fact that the action of social partners in continuous vocational training is at a standstill. He called on the SPFA to assess what is at stake, identify the needs of the companies in terms of quality and quantity and to join in dialogue at the CPNEF.

Kris Ludhor, for Afdas, noted *the beginning of something*, new initiatives, a more favourable climate for exchange and cooperation. He went back over three themes which he considered to be central :

- the start of better synchronisation between Pôle Emploi and Afdas on certain training projects concerning show business contract workers, and smoother collaboration thanks to the creation of a new measure, the POE : operational preparation for employment ;
- the desire for software publishers to be involved, in conditions which have yet to be determined ;
- the appropriation of issues relating to continuous training by organisations which provide initial training. Initiatives have been taken but he regrets that fact that some have aborted through a lack of response from the groups concerned.

Gilbert Kiner, widened the action of ArtFX towards continuous training to meet a request from postproduction studios wishing to refresh the skills of personnel in work.

He highlighted two facts – which constitute a double difficulty – that the majority of training courses have to be organized as a matter of urgency, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand, requests also come from freelancers themselves, which means dealing with very special cases and very different situations. Consequently, he called for a comprehensive reflection, led in conjunction with the companies, which would enable requirements to be anticipated, and to set up financing in a better way. At the present time, he regrets having to act as a service provider, and not being part of a logic of collaboration.

Lastly, he noted that training requests vary depending on which level of hierarchy he contacted in companies...

From the floor, Renaud Jungmann (Lisaa) expressed a wish that the studios could carry out an inventory of the relevant training areas, from which it would become possible to offer suitable continuous training programmes.

Speaking for the SPFA, Stéphane Le Bars presented the figures of the current situation in the French animation industry.

### 3. Industry figures (ppt)

**Benoît Danart (CNC) & Stéphane Le Bars (SPFA)**

**Kris Ludhor (Afdas)**

**Philippe Degardin (Groupe Audiens)**

### 4. The needs of the studios

**Alexis Lavillat (Normaal Animation)**

**Lionel Fages (Cube Creative)**

**Jean-Michel Spiner (2 Minutes)**

**Stéphane Berry (Marathon)**

**Bruno Gaumetou (Neomis Animation)**

Alexis Lavillat pointed out an apparent paradox : the good figures of French production side by side with real unemployment. Are too many people being trained in France ? (about 300 new professionals graduating each year from the best schools.)

The solution can only lie in increasing the volume of work done in France, which in turn assumes an increase in productivity and therefore technological innovations. His advice to the schools : develop in their students the ability to adapt, thanks to a solid grounding in the classical skills and keeping up to date with technological innovations.

Given his dual role of producer and service provider, Lionel Fages, on the one hand, is looking for authors and directors, and on the other hand, people with all the required qualifications in the other job disciplines of animation, but, above all, storyboard and character design.

Jean-Michel Spiner, for the part of his activity which is carried out wholly in France, gives priority to versatility, able to optimize a digital 2D production line. Hence a certain blurring of the boundaries between disciplines : character designers invited to work on machines up to the build (2D equivalent of the 3D setup ; storyboarders pushing as far as the animatics and in software ; animators taking charge of an entire episode ; designers playing a part in layout, decor and colour.

For larger productions, with animation in China, the « academic » production model is the obvious one, with the classic difficulty of handling contacts with a distant subcontracting studio. Lastly, and recently, “360 “ projects, in collaboration with distributors, concern “small games”, bringing together a team of three people : a game designer, plus a developer and graphic designer, who must all be aware of each other’s skills and constraints.

Stéphane Berry, in the context of a large production with relocated animation, expressed the needs concerning : storyboarders, animators who accept to do the exposure sheet (to control costs in the context of relocated animation), the assistant directors. He stressed the need to master English, insufficient in general, and spoke in favour of better recognition by the schools of the specific needs of TV series, a central element in the economy of the sector.

Bruno Gaumetou gave details of an empirical survey, carried out among young professionals, showing the difficulties of passing from the status of student to that of a professional. A clear lesson : there is indeed a gap, no doubt the schools should be more concerned about it as the studios are scarcely able to do so given their conditions.

## 5. Exporting talents, exporting teaching methods

**Shelley Page (DreamWorks Animation)**

**Emma McGonigle (MPC)**

**Marie-Anne Fontenier (Supinfocom)**

**Moïra Marguin (Les Gobelins)**

**Dimitri Granovsky (Georges Méliès)**

This session was the occasion, notably for Shelley Page, Emma McGonigle and Moïra Marguin to refute the commonly held idea whereby the best students graduating from French schools are attracted to foreign, American or English studios.

The analysis made by Shelley Page should be noted, and which may appear to be a warning, setting out a change in the demands of her studio towards greater technological immersion of young professionals.

The representatives of the schools were unanimous in insisting on the importance, in their eyes, of a structured international basis.

## 6. The place of writing in animation training programmes

**Virginie Boda (author)**

**Patrick Vanetti (CEEA)**

**Samuel Kaminka (Samka Productions)**

**Pierre Siracusa (France Télévision)**

**Stéphane Bernasconi (director)**

The speakers were largely in agreement on several important points, but not always recognized as such, notably : writing for animation can and must be learnt (Patrick Vanetti) ; it is not well enough understood that writing is the start of the production line (*everything is writing*, in the words of Virginie Boda).

Samuel Kaminka maintained that an initiation into writing is indispensable at least for the director and the storyboarder. He also deplored the lack of technical training for scriptwriters : *it is not the talent which is missing, nor the ideas, but the technical ability which makes it possible to take an idea to its conclusion.*

He stressed the decisive nature of the position of director of writing, for which no training is available. As a result, there are currently very few directors of writing, which is prejudicial to the industry.

Pierre Siracusa deplored that fact that dialogue is too rare between the literary approach and the graphic approach : the scriptwriter does not read any storyboards and the storyboarder does not discuss screenplays.

After Stéphane Bernasconi had mentioned a writing course at the Gobelins school, but which is no longer available, agreement appeared to emerge in favour of a diversity of writing training programmes. The job opportunities would justify it and the professional need is indisputable.

## 7. Animation Video games : shares skills ?

**Valérie Bourgoïn (CNC multimédia) : *The French video games market* (ppt)**

**Stéphane Natkin (Enjmin)**

**Renaud Jungmann (LISAA)**

**Florian Ferrier (Ouat Entertainment)**

A presentation by Valérie Bourgoïn of the figures showing the current state of the video games industry pointed up the withdrawal of many French companies from the boxed games sector where financial demands are too high (development costs from 5 to 25 or 30 M€).

Stéphane Natkin asserted that *the future of video games is outside video games*. He explained that the justification for the existence of a video games school lies in the change towards a world where all forms of media will become interactive. Training for video games is to prepare for a jobs market which goes over and above games.

A grounding in the basic skills is common to animation and video games : the latter then imposes specific constraints, its own particular tools, and even a different perspective.

Renaud Jungmann echoed this analysis, emphasizing not only the considerable technical development of the sector but also in artistic terms. He cited as examples the increasing skill of the level designer, which requires, in addition to technical ability, expertise in graphics and direction. The level designer must now receive formal training, whereas in the past he learnt “on the job”.

Lastly, he mentioned the strong growth of job disciplines which are as yet unreferenced, that are based on technical skills associated with game design.

Florent Ferrier, regarding the special case of on-line games, expressed his need for Flash animators, but with the specificity that communication between graphic designers and programmers is a decisive factor in efficiency.