

METROPOLIS GRAPHICS/PHOTOPLAYS

REEL ARCHIVE

1970-2000

Beginning in 1970, just after I had barely learned how to make animated films (using objects like dried beans and cut-out drawings shot with a 16mm Bolex), I began doing short sequences to be edited into longer documentary and educational films, either as a gift to friends and colleagues or as a job. My primary partner on several productions, Fred Aronow, shared the rent for a loft in Chinatown where I set up a huge, WW II-era camera stand. Referring in jest to the pompous foundations of cinema we called ourselves "Metropolis Photoplays". But when I became the sole proprietor, looking for business, the name was altered to *Metropolis Graphics* to suggest a more serious mood.

This incomplete "reel archive" selection is not arranged by genre or sponsoring client. And it is not chronological, even though the first piece, "Assembly Line" (voice by Aronow), made for "The Electric Company" (Children's Television Workshop), was my first real job. The collection's generally poor image quality reflects film sources (mainly 16mm), video transfers, duplication, and primitive digitizing processes. Unlike my independent films, which were self-funded or supported by artist grants, this is all work "made for hire," including educational sequences, non-profit public service announcements, opening title sequences, and TV commercials. Included is work for ephemeral institutions and companies as well as packages of spots (e.g. 8 for Pacific Gas and Electric). There are also sequences produced for non-profits organizations like Amnesty International, the international animation society (ASIFA), and Film Forum (directed by my wife, Karen Cooper). Not included on the reel is commissioned work (e.g. *It's an OK Life* and music videos like *You're Outa Here*) which owe their life to producers, writers, musicians, and others who hired me.

Some pieces were made to entertain elementary school kids with grammar tricks and scientific concepts, or to illustrate abstract ideas as a cut-away from a documentary "talking head," or to deliver a 10-second station I.D. announcing a TV program. In most cases I designed, storyboarded, animated, or just directed and produced, based on clients' concepts, scripts, and voice tracks. For many productions I was given full liberty to realize the basic concept. Some projects were packages of commercials, represented here in their entirety or by one sample, or just a brief excerpt within a montage of variations.

For many years I felt ambivalent, even embarrassed, that I could actually survive, even thrive, on these jobs; I never showed them as part of my "oeuvre" in a screening. But considering the meager income from adjunct teaching jobs, diminishing grants for artists, and the high cost of living and supporting a family in New York City, this high-minded philosophy of "creative poverty" now seems a bit precious. My 2-minute, independent film *New Fangled* is a satire on advertising jargon, a playful bite on the hand that fed me, yet the main voice was provided by a friend who, a few years earlier, had hired me to do animation for a film he was producing for IBM. Nothing is truly pure, nor should it be.

Some of the work was produced for MTV, PBS, ITVS, and the New York City Department of Public Health. Some was made for companies like HomeBase, or shows like Comedy Channel or Comedy Network, which soon changed their name or "went bust." Most of the advertising work came through contracts from larger companies such as Colossal Pictures, Broadcast Arts, Curious Pictures, and Inktank. My designs, which tended to be rough/simple drawing on paper with colored pencil, were seen as "authentic, casual/idiosyncratic." And I often heard from mainstream agency reps that my style was only a passing fad, that advertisers would soon return to a slick Disney-inspired look. This was amusing because it was by then clear that I was only one player in a widespread shift in commercial animation influenced by contemporary cartoonists and illustrators like Fred Mogubgub, Tomi Ungerer, and R.O. Blechman, as well as the experimental

techniques of George Dunning, Eli Noyes, and Frank Mouris. Nonetheless, many designs for my studio work came directly from client specifications, e.g. the spots for Ortho, PG&E, and most obviously Honda and the Aids Hotline (from the Keith Haring Foundation).

This work would have been impossible without the uncredited freelance animators, artists, designers, musicians, actors, and writers with whom I collaborated through the years. Many collaborated on my independent films as well. The multitasking artist/producers, John Schnall and Thessia Machado, working closely with me in the studio for many years, were indispensable. Al Jarnow, for whom I also produced work for CTW, was a decisive influence.

An incomplete list of freelance artists, designers, and animators includes: Barbara Bottner, Lisa Cupery, Steve Dovas, Jonathan Helfman, Kalika Kharkar, Siri Margarin, Jerilyn Mettlin, Allison Morse, Pilar Newton, Cheryl Pelavin, Todor Radev, Marilyn Singer, Tonya Smay, Machi Tantillo, and Lance Took. Some voices (Jack Lemmon, Mickey Rooney, Tracey Ullman) were recorded by the agencies, prior to the storyboarding. Other wonderful "voice talent" read my scripts and/or improvised: Marshall Efron, Fred Newman, Vicki Polon. Music came from Carter Burwell, Joel Forrester, Bobby McFerrin, Marilyn Singer, and the World Saxophone Quartet.

Producers and writers include Velvy Appleton, Richard Bluestone, Randy Carter, Prudence Fenton, Michael Faerman, Marjorie Gross, David Grubin, Bruce Handy, Imre Horvath, David Liu, Muffie Meyer and Ellen Hovde, Amram Nowak, Judith Pearlman, Alvin Perlmutter, Richard P. Rogers, Kirk Simon and Karen Goodman, Ann Sternberg, Barbara Van Dyke, Peter Wallach, and Edith Zornow.