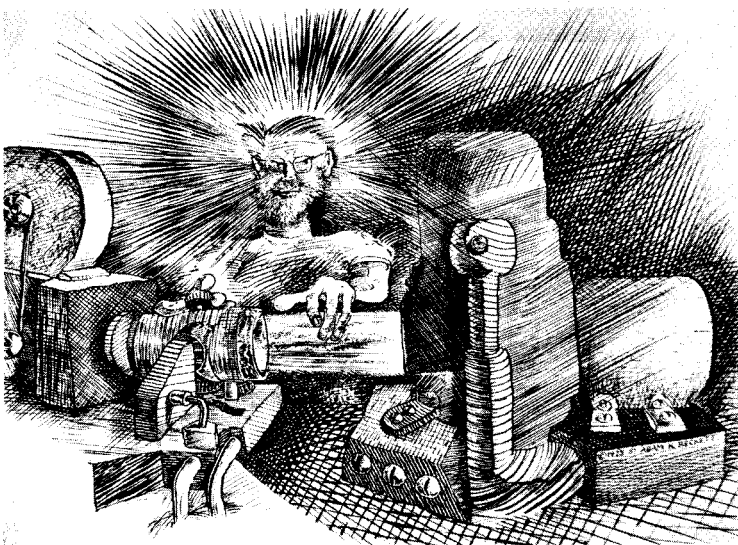


Adam Beckett

(From *Experimental Animation: An Illustrated Anthology* by Robert Russett and Ceceil Starr, 1976 - reprinted with permission of the authors.)



Adam Beckett, self-portrait in pen and ink (1975), drawn by the filmmaker for this book.

Adam Beckett was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1950. He attended Antioch College, and is currently doing graduate work at the California Institute of the Arts where he is studying animation with Jules Engel and Patrick O'Neill. As a student he has produced a number of artistically innovative animated films including *Evolution of The Red Star* and *Flesh Flows*, which have been shown extensively in this country as well as screened abroad. Beckett, who this past year formed his own production company, Infinite Animation, Ltd., is presently in the process of completing his latest film *Life In The Atom*.

INTERVIEW WITH ADAM BECKETT

Q: How did you start making animated films?

Beckett: Throughout high school I had been drawing and painting as well as doing a little cut-out animation. Just before going off to Antioch College I saw some fantastic films done by James Gore which somehow enabled

me to make a connection between my graphic work and filmmaking. When I saw his films I thought I can do this too. So I did a film on my own at Antioch using full line animation. The drawing was done on typewriter paper and the images were held in registration with nails.

Q: As an art student at Cal Art you have made a number of outstanding films including your best known work, *Evolution Of The Red Star*. Exactly how many films have you made altogether?

Beckett: I have finished four films, namely *Heavy-Light*, *Evolution Of The Red Star*, *Sausage City*, and *Flesh Flows*. In addition there are two more films in the works. One is *Dear Janice* and the other is *Life In The Atom*.

Q: As a student, how has working in an educational environment affected your film production and what, specifically, do you feel schools can do to effectively develop the creative potential of student animators?

Beckett: Besides those impalpable qualities of talent and drive, otherwise known as inspiration and perspiration, there is one thing that every artist must have and that is a great deal of free and uninterrupted working time. Schools can help the student-artist in this regard by providing 24 hour access to facilities, flexible mandatory requirements, adequate living arrangements, and other similar kinds of conveniences. The teaching is probably best done by people who are professional artists themselves and who are so wrapped in their own work that they don't have time to interfere too much in the activities of students. They should be there primarily as examples of what it is to be a working artist in the field of animation. In a medium like animation, which is so dependent on technology, the best possible equipment and facilities are, of course, also extremely helpful. As far as I can see it is a matter of the most extraordinary circumstances and luck, when an individual manages to emerge from the educational system with the autonomy of spirit and knowledge needed for him to be an artist. Too much direction is probably more harmful than too little. Ideally, the school should be a place where one can develop the independence and self-confidence to make some headway against the incredible inertia that exists in the commer-

cial arena. I think we are at the beginning of a wonderful golden age of animation, now that the last nails are in the coffin of the big studios. Schools, I believe, can in the future be very important as production centers for animated films.

Q: Would you discuss the idea behind your film, Evolution Of The Red Star, and how it developed graphically?

Beckett: *Evolution Of The Red Star* was my first technically successful attempt to apply my one and only original film discovery—animation of a cycle under the camera. There are several films involving painting under the camera such as Oskar Fischinger's *Motion Painting No. One*, [see Chapter 2], and some of Norman McLaren's work [see Chapters 5 and 7], but to my knowledge this type of film has always involved the manipulation of a single image. *Evolution Of The Red Star* was made by photographing the evolution of a six-drawing cycle, or repeating image, over a five- or six-week period. During this period pen-and-ink lines were continually added to the growing formation. Once the complete image was drawn and filmed I used optical printing procedures to produce many color variations. Carl Stone did the music when the filming was complete, and the final editing of the color variations took place after his music was finished. The idea of a cycle has, needless to say, many obvious philosophical, esthetic, and scientific implications. Cycles occur in nature on all levels from the astronomical to the psychological. The filmic idea of cyclical evolution mirrors the anti-entropic process of biological evolution.



From *Evolution of the Red Star* (1973) by Adam Beckett. A unique form of cyclic animation is used.

It provides an escape from static repetition by a process of positive feedback or continual addition. Aside from all of this, it is great to be able to make nice, long, fully animated films from 6 or 12 or 48 drawings.

Q: Although Evolution Of The Red Star is a totally visual film it does, in an unconventional way, tell a story. Are you basically interested in creating non-verbal forms of narrative animation?

Beckett: I came to animation with a background in the graphic arts, and my main interest is still in the visual image itself. Although I do use a form of narration, I am basically interested in the problems of creating coherent and organic visual compositions in time.

Q: Which filmmakers, artists, or animators have most influenced your work?

Beckett: J. S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, Goya, Ingres, Rembrandt, Saul Steinberg, M. C. Escher, R. Crumb, B. Bartok, Walt Disney and company, Marcel Duchamp, Jordan Belson, Oskar Fischinger, Norman McLaren, James Gore, John Whitney Sr., Pablo Picasso, Dick Williams, Jules Engel, Robert A. Heinlein, Harry Smith, Goedle, Hokusai, and many, many others.

Q: What special attraction does animation, as a form of expression, have for you?

Beckett: It moves; it can be a one-man show or even a spectacle.

Q: What are you working on now and what are your plans regarding the future?

Beckett: I am trying to finish *Life In The Atom*, which I have been working on for nearly five years. It consists of some rather ornate animation of an attractive young couple and their activities. I am also interested in continuing my work with special effects. For example, this past year I did the main title for the 9th International Tourn e of Animation. In the future, then, I plan to continue to make animated films, hopefully better ones than in the past.

(From a written interview conducted by Robert Russett, November 1974.)