**PAUL WELLS – “Understanding Animation” – 1998**

4.) 25 Ways to Start Laughing

127-Theories of comedy have proliferated ever since humankind started to laugh, and no one is any close to knowing why human beings make absurd noises in response to the innumerable things that amuse them.

127-…but it seems that everyone does not possess the same sense of humor, so what is funny remains an entirely relative thing.

127-…the animated form extends the vocabulary of humor within the liv-action film.

128-…By distorting the expected symmetries of the face, and the normal conduct of expressions, the film, ironically, draws attention both to the limitations of human expression and to the special expressive qualities of small gestures.

128-This focus on small actions, in many senses, operates in a similar fashion to the comic decentering of the body in physical comedy, because the normal balance of symmetry of the body is challenged, making the subsequent execution of movement unusual and, thus, potentially amusing.

133-In the animated film the literal can become the figurative, once more emphasizing the nature of the form, and extending the range of the visual simile.

133-[Mesmer] He notes, ‘I found that I could get as big a laugh with a little gesture – a wink or a twist of the tail – as I could with gags’.

140-[Tex Avery] He clearly understood that children would be appeased by physical slapstick while adults required a more knowing, self-conscious approach, which would engage with more mature themes. These included:  
 -Status and power, and specifically, the role of the underdog  
 -Irrational fears, principally expressed through paranoia, obsession, and the re-emergence of previously repressed feelings.  
 -The instinct to survive at any cost.  
 -A direct engagement with sexual feelings and sexual identity.  
 -A resistance to conformity, and consequently, a re-evaluation of the point of anticipated identification and empath for the audience.

140-Avery, in essence, rejected what may be termed the ‘culture of cheerfulness’ inherent in the Disney cartoon, preferring instead to be less endeared by humankind, and more engaged with the surreal madness of the universe…In moving away from the complexities of fully rounded characters, Avery was able to focus on specific kinds of relationship between characters and very environment of the cartoon.

143-Avery’s ‘gags’ reflect a modern world aware of the precarious balance between tragedy and comedy.

145-These ‘spot gags’, deliberately play on the gap in the language between the literal and the figurative and essentially extend the vocabulary of the visual pun defined earlier. [pulling yourself together, falling apart, blowing my top off, etc.]

146-…black humor emerges from the narrative preference to heighten the tragic aspects of the fine line between the tragic and the comic in the contemporary world. This usually emerges as an extension of violent conduct in Avery’s cartoons but often in unexpected contexts.

146-In order to create such a gag [death and humor], Avery often has to empty an image of its associative meanings in order to prioritize the literalism that characterizes the humor.

146-This technique becomes important in the Avery canon thought, because comic excess in the expression of black humor essentially renders the implications of the imagery, at best ambiguous, but for the most part, meaningless.

146-Avery’s black humor acknowledges the implicit relationship between horror and humor, carefully playing out the notion that something may be frightening for an individual if it is happening to them, but amusing if the very same thing is happening to someone else.

147-Amusement comes from the alleviation of the terror or anxiety and its projection elsewhere. Avery carefully place his audience in the middle of this tension, soliciting a different emotional source for laughter. This approach directly informs hi capacity to interrogate adult concerns.