Animating Failure

ENDING, FLEEING, SURVIVING

Who am I? Why a fox? Why not a horse, or a beetle, or a bald eagle?
I'm saying this more as, like, existentialism, you know? Who am I?
And how can a fox ever be happy without, you'll forgive the expression, a chicken in its teeth?
—*Fantastic Mr. Fox*

On the topic of animation, as on so many other topics, I disagree
with Slavoj Žižek (2009), who, in an article on the link between
capitalism and new forms of authoritarianism, offers up the animated film *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) as an example of the kind of
ideological sleight of hand that he sees as characteristic of both
representative democracy and films for children. For Žižek, the
fat and ungainly panda who accidently becomes a kung fu master is a figure that evokes George W. Bush or Silvio Berlusconi:
by rising to the status of world champion without either talent
or training, he masquerades as the little man who tries hard and
succeeds, when in fact he is still a big man who is lazy but succeeds anyway because the system is tipped in his favor. By embedding this narrative in a fluffy, cuddly panda bear film, Žižek
implies, what looks like entertainment is actually propaganda.
Žižek has managed to get a lot of mileage out of his reading of
this film precisely because his "big" critiques of economy and
world politics seem so hilarious when personified by a text supposedly as inconsequential as *Kung Fu Panda*. I do not totally disagree with his analysis of an emergent form of authoritarian

capitalism, but I strenuously object to his reading of *Kung Fu Panda*. Like so many animated films for children, *Kung Fu Panda* joins new forms of animation to new conceptions of the human-animal divide to offer a very different political landscape than the one we inhabit or at least the one Žižek imagines we inhabit.

Žižek also tackles the subject of failure in a book appropriately titled *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008), but rather than take failure apart, as I have tried to do in this book, as a category levied by the winners against the losers and as a set of standards that ensure that all future radical ventures will be measured as cost-ineffective, he situates failure as a stopping point on the way to success. As in his other books, he pillories postmodernism, queers, and feminism, ignores critical ethnic studies altogether, and uses popular culture with high theory not to unravel difficult arguments or to practice a nonelite pedagogy but only to keep insisting that we are all dupes of culture, misreaders of history, and brainwashed by contemporary politics. Žižek does not defend lost causes; he just keeps trying to resurrect a model of political insurgency that depends upon the wisdom, the intellectual virtuosity, and the radical insight of, well, people like him.

Whereas Žižek uses popular culture and film in particular only to keep proving his Lacanian take on everything as good and true and to accuse others of being bamboozled by the shiny candy wrappers of Hollywood cinema, I have proposed in this book that animated cinema, far from being a pure form of ideology, and hegemonic ideology at that, as Žižek claims, is in fact a rich technological field for rethinking collectivities, transformation, identification, animality, and posthumanity. The genre of animation, particularly animation for children, has been used by both the right and the left to argue about the indoctrination of youth through seductive and seemingly harmless imagery. While Ariel Dorfman's classic book *How to Read Donald Duck* (1994) positioned Disney in the 1970s as a vehicle for U.S. imperialism, Sergei Eisenstein in the 1940s saw Disney cartoons in particular as a form of revolt: "Disney's film are a revolt against partitioning and legislating, against spiritual stagnation and greyness. But the revolt is lyrical. The revolt is a daydream" (1988: 4). In this daydream, says Eisenstein, we are able to see the world differently through a series of absurd oppositions that shuffle the coordinates of reality just enough to deliver Americans from the standardized monotony of life under capitalism. As I mentioned in the introduction, Walter Benjamin also invested hope in the magical opportunities afforded by the loopy

figures of animation; before Walt Disney began meeting with Nazi officials in the 1930s Benjamin glimpsed the utopic possibilities of the riotous representational qualities of the colorful worlds of Mickey Mouse and friends. The combination of text and image, the layering of mechanisms of identification through animal avatars, and the magical mixture of color and craziness definitely allow for cartoons to serve as attractive tools for the easy transmission of dense ideologies. And yet the reduction of the animated image into pure symbol and the simplification of animated narratives into pure allegory do an injustice to the complexity of the magical surrealism that we find in animated cinema. While animation tends to be read as all form or all content, as pure message or pure image, it is in fact a heady mix of science, math, biology, and, in the case of stop-motion animation, alchemy, engineering, and puppetry.

In the first few CGI features to come out of Pixar and other animation studios, films like *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters, Inc.*, and *A Bug's Life*, animators broke away from two-dimensional animation by creating logarithms for motion in water (*Finding Nemo*), by animating hair to make it move in realistic ways (*Monsters, Inc.*), and by using swarm technology to animate crowds (*A Bug's Life*). John Lasseter, chief creative office at Pixar and director of many of the first Pixar films, has said of *A Bug's Life*, for example, "The living organism is the entire ant colony, it's not the individual ant. It's such an important thing, and it became the theme of the story. . . . Individually the ants could be defeated, but if they stand up together and work together, there's nothing they cannot do" (quoted in Sarafian 2003: 217). The combination of attention to the specificity of ant life and the development of a computer technology capable of generating crowds or swarms creates depth at the level of both narrative and form. Katherine Sarafian studied the production of the multitude in *A Bug's Life* and learned that the crowd of insects was not created by replication of one animal into many; the crowd was actually treated as a character in the film by a "crowd team" which modeled crowd behavior, motion, waves of activity, and individual responses within the crowd to create "crowdness"— a visual read on the crowd that was believable precisely because it was flexible and plastic and not rigid and homogeneous. Crowd scenes such as those in *A Bug's Life* were unthinkable before CGI and became standard fare after its introduction; once the technology is in place (very expensive technology at that) animators want to put it to good use—hence more films on social insects like bees and more ants, films with schools of fish, huddles of penguins, and packs of rats. And more narrative drifts into

21. *A Bug's Life*, directed by John Lasseter, 1998. "The men behind the bugs."

the territory of the multitude, the people, the power of the many and the tyranny of the few. Two-dimensional cartoons often dealt with individual forms in linear sequences—a cat chasing a mouse, a cat chasing a bird, a wolf chasing a roadrunner, a dog chasing a cat. But CGI introduced numbers, groups, the multitude. Once you have an animation technique for the crowd, you need narratives about crowds, you need to animate the story line of the many and downplay the story line of the exception. Obviously, as I said in chapter 1, not all animated features of recent years play on revolutionary or anarchistic themes. So what allows some animated worlds to be transformative and returns others to the mindless repetition of the same?

In a very complicated article titled "A Theory of Animation: Cells, L-Theory and Film," Christopher Kelty and Hannah Landecker (2004) try to account for the emergence of animation from scientific attempts to

176 CHAPTER SIX

record cellular life and death. In the process they link animation to a form of intelligent imaging, a mode within which images begin to think for themselves. They describe one particularly memorable animated sequence from *Fight Club* that simulates a journey through the protagonist's brain. The sequence is remarkable for being a simulation of the brain (created using L-systems or algorithms that can model plant development) that, on account of its internal logic and inner complexity, comes close to being a brain. Kelty and Landecker write, "Contemporary film, art, and architecture are replete with biologically inflected forms: L-systems, cellular automata, and genetic algorithms are used to create (among other things) the complex forests, photorealistic skin and hair, and lively and deadly animated crowds that are now regular features of software packages such as Alias Wavefront's 'Maya' or Softimage's 'Behavior'" (32). Animation, Kelty and Landecker show, merges mathematical modeling with biological systems of growth and development and then uses both to "grow" an image. In this way animation is much more than the setting in motion of a nonhuman image; it is a site where image and biology meet and develop into another form of life. Kelty's and Landecker's very useful "media archaeology" links early twentieth-century micro-cinematography, used to capture the processes of cell life and death, to computer graphic animations in the late twentieth century, used to create lively art. At stake for Kelty and Landecker is a more thorough understanding of the dynamic relations between scientific and philosophical theory and a less pronounced separation between reality and representation.

I am primarily interested in Kelty's and Landecker's work for their insight into the science of contemporary animation and CGI's seemingly magical originality. Animated worlds, they seem to imply, are more than an enhanced view of reality or even an imaginative alternative to the real; they are in fact living and breathing systems with their own internal logics, with growing and living matter. As Deleuze argues for cinema in general, animated images are disruptions to habitual methods of thought. Kelty and Landecker also remind us that life is movement; the early still photography that scientists tried to use to capture cellular transformation was useless precisely because it suspended the very processes that the camera needed to capture in motion. The dynamic between motion and stillness is the dynamic between life and death that is nowhere more dramatically captured than in stop-motion animation.

Stop-motion animation has been around in one form or another since

the late nineteenth century. Historians tend to credit Albert Smith and J. Stuart Blackton for the first use of the medium in *The Humpty Dumpty Circus* (1898); predictably in this film, as in so many that followed, toys come to life, transformed from wooden to animated. This theme is common to all kinds of Gothic literatures and is one of the definitions of the uncanny that Freud considers in his famous essay of 1925 but ultimately rejects in favor of a psychoanalytic understanding of the uncanny as something that has been repressed and returns to consciousness. This return can certainly take the form of a reanimation, but the uncanniness is not the animated creature so much as the repressed feeling that has come back to life. Freud wrote, "if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every emotional effect, whatever its quality, is transformed from repression into morbid anxiety, then among such cases of anxiety there must be a class in which the anxiety can be shown to be come from something repressed which *recurs*. This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny, irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other affect" (1958: 148). Building on Freud's notion of the uncanny we can think about animated objects as embodying a repetition, a recurrence, an uncanny replay of repressed activity. There is no question that stop-motion lends animation a spooky and uncanny quality; it conveys life where we expect stillness, and stillness where we expect liveliness.

Stop-motion animation is a time-consuming, technically challenging, precise activity. After each shot, a figure or puppet or prop is moved slightly; thus a stop-motion or claymation feature is made one frame at a time. Motion is *implied* by the relation of one shot to another rather than *recorded* by a camera traveling alongside moving objects. As the name suggests, stop-motion depends not on continuous action but on the relations between stillness and motion, cuts and takes, action and passivity. Unlike classical cinema, in which the action attempts to appear seamless and suture consists of the erasure of all marks of editing and human presence, stop-motion animation is uncanny precisely because it depends on the manipulation of the figures in front of the camera by those behind it. These relations of dependency, of submission even, are precisely the ones that we go to the cinema to forget. So the ghostly shifts that stop-motion animation records and incorporates, the shifts between action and direction, intention and script, desire and constraint, force upon the viewer a darker reality about the human and about representation in general.

In stop-motion animation the themes of remote control, manipula-

22. Wallace and Gromit in *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*,
directed by Steve Box and Nick Park, 2005.

tion, entrapment, and imprisonment are everywhere. Even in the relatively cheerful British classic *Wallace and Gromit*, man and dog are constantly manipulated by the machines they invent to make life easier. For example, in *Wrong Trousers* (1993, directed by Nick Park) Wallace, under the burden of financial problems, takes in a penguin as a lodger to make some extra money. Gromit suspects that the penguin is a shady character, and he follows him closely to see what he is up to. The penguin, Feathers McGraw, disguises himself as a chicken and commits crimes. When he finds the techno trousers that Wallace invented to walk Gromit without human assistance, he uses them to remotely control Wallace to steal a large diamond from a museum. After a long chase that concludes with a raucous ride on a model railway, Gromit captures the penguin and turns him in. Wallace throws the techno trousers in the dustbin, and he and Gromit return to their domestic routine. In the meantime the trousers walk off by themselves. In *A Close Shave*, the culprit is a robo-dog, and in *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* Wallace accidentally creates a Frankensteinian monstrous rabbit in his Mind Manipulation O-Matic Machine, a unit designed to brainwash rabbits not to eat the town's vegetable gardens.

While the *Wallace and Gromit* series uses relations between and among humans, animals, and machines to scramble conventional assumptions

about control, manipulation, and free will, in Nick Park's other stop-motion film, *Chicken Run*, the idea of entrapment and imprisonment is front and center. The claymation birds, as I discussed in chapter 1, hatch a plot to escape from the confines of the chicken farm and use Wallace-like contraptions to fly the coop. Park's films in general are cheerful, whimsical, funny, and not exactly dark, but at the same time they deal squarely with questions of exploitation, servitude, entrapment, and forced labor. Some recent American stop-motion features use the genre for distinctly dark purposes.

Coraline (2009), for example, is an incredibly dark and moody feature by Henry Selick that explores the loneliness of a young girl with busy parents who longs for a different kind of life, full of color, excitement, extraordinary events and people. Her wish comes true when she finds a secret passageway in the new apartment into which she and her parents have just moved. The passageway leads to another world, a mirror image of the one she left behind, but with seemingly loving parents, colorful and outlandish characters, and sweets and toys galore. Predictably the new world, entertaining as it is, turns out to be a monstrous land of lost souls, and Coraline has to figure out how to escape back to her own world, avoid the devouring love of her "Other Mother," and restore the lost souls of the ghostly children she finds there. In *Coraline* the symbol of the other world is the button eye, the mark of the loss of the soul and the transformation of child into doll. While many animation films and children's stories fantasize about a toy world that is a great improvement on the human world, this one paints a toy dystopia in blinding colors and hip design motifs. It merges at times with the circus, the theater, and the botanical garden, and it aligns the artificial with the monstrous and the real and true with the good.

In fact *Coraline* is a deeply conservative narrative about the dangers of a world that is crafted in opposition to the natural world of family and the ordinary. The most obvious symptom of the film's conservative commitments is the spidery Other Mother, a Black Widow who governs her mute husband with an iron claw and eats her young. Like some bad Freudian horror film, *Coraline* uses stop-motion not to revel in the glory of invention and originality, as the *Wallace and Gromit* series does; nor does *Coraline* use its uncanny stop-start jerky motions to draw attention to the mechanisms of capital, as *Chicken Run* does. In *Coraline* stop-motion is the marker of the unreal, the queer, the monstrously different, and animation opposes

the natural. Coraline transforms over the course of the film from a proto-feminist critic of the family, boys, and normativity into a submissive girl and dutiful daughter, committed not to production but to reproduction.

Obviously there is no guarantee that animation, and stop-motion animation in particular, will produce politically progressive narratives. As in the horror genre in general, monsters can offer pointed critiques of normativity and a queer alternative, or they can phobically encase the fears of the culture in queer, racialized, and female bodies. Ultimately, however, animation allows the viewer to enter into other worlds and other formulations of this world. By refusing to see animated films as simply flat allegorical statements, we can begin to understand why Žižek is so wrong about *Kung Fu Panda*. If, as Kelty and Landecker propose, cinema is not simply image or image masquerading as reality, but, as David Rodowick puts it in his reading of Deleuze, an "image of thought, a visual and acoustic rendering of thought in relation to time and movement" (Rodowick, 1997: 6), then animated cinema cannot be the staging of this or that unified set of ideological commitments. It must also always be the image of ideologically committed thought. It is also the image of change and transformation itself, so we should not be surprised to find that in animated cinema transformation is one of the most dominant themes.

The media archaeology provided by Kelty and Landecker for animation reminds us to look for the meaning of animation at the level of form as well as content. We cannot just take a film like *Kung Fu Panda*, shake it up with a little dose of contemporary politics, and pour its contents out onto the counter to look at how well it has absorbed and blended with one political message. Nor, for that matter, are young spectators simply empty vessels, SpongeBobs waiting to be saturated with adult morality. In fact *SpongeBob SquarePants* more than most animated series for children reminds us that children resist ready-made meaning, ignore heavy-handed morality, and pay careful attention to details in a film that most adults might pass over. Most animated films for children are antihumanist, antinormative, multigendered, and full of wild forms of sociality. Their antihumanism springs from both the predominance of nonhuman creatures and the refusal of individualism that is inscribed into the collective form of art making that goes on at an animation campus like DreamWorks and Pixar. The antinormative nature of animated film, as I suggested earlier, arises out of the wacky juxtapositions found in animated worlds between bodies, groups, and environments. And the multigendered forms sprout

from the strangeness of voice-body combinations, the imaginative rendering of character, and the permeability of the relation between background and foreground in any given animated scene.

To bring this meditation on stop-motion animation, darkness, and failure to an (in)appropriate conclusion, I want to turn now to *Fantastic Mr. Fox* to consider how stop-motion might bring out the queer and radical potential of a genre populated by wild animals and committed to a form of antihumanism. While *Coraline* used the antihuman in order to confirm the goodness and rightness of the world as it is, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* uses wild animals to expose the brutality and narrow-mindedness of the human. Based on a Roald Dahl novel, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009, directed by Wes Anderson) tells the story of an aspiring fox (voiced by George Clooney) who gives up his wild ways of chicken hunting to settle down with his foxy lady (voiced by Meryl Streep) in a burrow. As the film begins, we find Mr. Fox striving for something more, looking for excitement in his life, wanting to move above ground and out of the sedate world of journalism and into the wild world of chasing chickens. From his new home in a tree, Mr. Fox can see the three farms of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, which present him with a challenge he cannot refuse. "Who am I?" he asks his friend Kylie, an eager but not gifted possum. "Why a fox? Why not a horse, or a beetle, or a bald eagle? I'm saying this more as, like, existentialism, you know? Who am I? And how can a fox ever be happy without, you'll forgive the expression, a chicken in its teeth?" How indeed?

Of course Mr. Fox cannot be happy without that chicken in his teeth; the difference between a fox in the hole and a fox in the wild is just one hunting trip away. The symbols of wildness in the film have much to do with stop-motion animation technology; for example, when the foxes sit down to eat, they serve up food on tables with table cloths and observe good manners until the food is in front of them, at which point the motion speeds up and we hear sounds not of polite eating but of the foxes tearing their food apart. The jerkiness of the stop-and-go animation replaces the smoothness of the mannered movements associated with civility and humanness and aligns stop-motion with a relay between wild and domestic, destruction and consumption.

One scene in particular captures this tension between wildness and domestication, stillness and motion, survival and death. In the much debated "wolf scene" of *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the animated creatures enter the in between realm theorized by Kelty and Landecker as intelligent imaging and by Freud as "the uncanny." In this scene, Mr. Fox and his friends

zoom homeward after escaping from the farmers' traps. In a whimsical set up typical of this film, Mr. Fox is driving a motorcycle with a side-car. The wind (a hair dryer probably) ruffles the animals' fur and they bump along towards their underground hideout. Suddenly Kylie the Possum looks back and warns the other animals: "Don't turn around!" Of course, all the animals immediately turn their heads around! For a moment, the animals peer out through the camera at the audience and then we cut to a long shot and see the motorcycle screech to a halt. What follows is a shot reverse-shot sequence within which Mr. Fox looks off toward the woods and sees a lone wolf, a black wolf, standing proudly on a rock and peering back at Mr. Fox and friends. Mr. Fox hails the wolf in English, French, and Latin ("canin lupus" says Mr. Fox pointing at the wolf and then "vulpes vulpes" pointing to himself). "I have a phobia of wolves," says Mr. Fox and then, when language doesn't work, Mr. Fox retreats to gesture. He looks long and hard at the wolf, his eyes welling with tears before throwing up a fist in salute and receiving a fist back.

This scene has been questioned in the blogosphere for its odd racial references—the wolf is black and the salute exchanged between the wolf and Mr. Fox is a Black Power salute making it seem as if the wolf represents some kind of racial other as well as otherness itself. While the racial overtones are definitely there, and there could be an implication that otherness and wildness are the properties of Blackness, the scene can also be taken as a nod to the liveliness of the wild, the wildness of animation itself and the animatedness of life in general. The wolf also represents the outside of the fox/farmer dyad and the utopian possibility of an elsewhere; and in his aloneness, the wolf signifies singularity, isolation, uniqueness but also death. The emotion that wells up in Mr. Fox as he confronts his fears ("I have a phobia of wolves") brims with all these possibilities and brings us back to the Freudian theory of the uncanny— something that has been repressed recurs, the repressed instinct. The uncanny here is represented by the wolf and as he confronts the wolf, repressed feelings flood Mr. Fox and he turns to face his dread, his anxiety, his other and in doing so, he reconciles to the wild in a way that instructs the humans watching the film to reconcile to wildness, to animatedness, to life and to death.

As for the gender politics of wildness and domesticity, while this stop-motion animation marvel seems ultimately to reinforce the same old narrative of female domesticity and male wildness, in fact it tells a tall tale of masculine derring-do in order to offer up some very different forms

of masculinity, collectivity, and family. Just to touch on the highlights of the film: Mr. Fox has a sissy son, Ash, who desperately wants his father's approval but who also wears dresses and lipstick; Mr. Fox loses his tail in an encounter with the farmers but does not miss a beat in his masculine confidence as a result; the wild animals are chased underground by the farmers, where they forge new cross-species alliances, alliances that break with the human-like functions they previously performed and instead revel in the sheer animality of precariousness and survival.

Ultimately all of the radical animations I have catalogued in this book are films not simply *about* globalization or neoliberalism, individuality or conformity; they are also about what has been animated and how, what technology has been crafted, and what stories arise from the contact between that technology and the many animation engineers who use it collaboratively to craft a new narrative. Accordingly *Kung Fu Panda* is not about unworthy leaders or success; it is a story of awkward grace and odd connections between seemingly unrelated species (the panda's father is a crane, for example). *A Bug's Life* is not just about bravery in the face of tyranny; it showcases the ability to think in multiples, to move as a crowd, to identify as many. *Finding Nemo* is not about searching or the father-son relationship; it is not even about survival. It is a film about oceanic consciousness, underworld alliances, and, to quote the title of a book by Samuel Delany, the motion of light on water (Delany, 2004).

Likewise *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is not only about fighting the law and the farmers; it is also about stopping and going, moving and halting, inertia and dynamism; it is about survival and its component parts and the costs of survival for those who remain. One of the very best moments in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and the moment most memorable in terms of stop-motion animation and survival, comes in the form of a speech that Mr. Fox makes to his woodland friends who have outlived the farmers' attempt to starve them all out of their burrows. The sturdy group of survivors dig their way out of a trap laid for them by Boggis, Bunce, and Bean and find themselves burrowing straight up into a closed supermarket stocked with all the supplies they need. Mr. Fox, buoyed by this lucky turn of events, addresses his clan for the last time: "They say all foxes are slightly allergic to linoleum, but it's cool to the paw—try it. They say my tail needs to be dry cleaned twice a month, but now it's fully detachable—see? They say our tree may never grow back, but one day, something will. Yes, these crackles are made of synthetic goose and these giblets come from artificial squab

23. *Where the Wild Things Are*, directed by Spike Jonz, 2009.
"Happiness is not always the best way to be happy."

and even these apples look fake—but at least they've got stars on them. I guess my point is, we'll eat tonight, and we'll eat together. And even in this not particularly flattering light, you are without a doubt the five and a half most wonderful wild animals I've ever met in my life. So let's raise our boxes—to our survival."

Not quite a credo, something short of a toast, a little less than a speech, but Mr. Fox gives here one of the best and most moving—both emotionally and in stop-motion terms—addresses in the history of cinema. Unlike *Coraline*, where survival is predicated upon a rejection of the theatrical, the queer, and the improvised, and like *Where the Wild Things Are*, where the disappointment of deliverance must be leavened with the pragmatism of possibility, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is a queerly animated classic in that it teaches us, as *Finding Nemo*, *Chicken Run*, and so many other revolting animations before it, to believe in detachable tails, fake apples, eating together, adapting to the lighting, risk, sissy sons, and the sheer importance of survival for all those wild souls that the farmers, the teachers, the preachers, and the politicians would like to bury alive.

I opened this book with an appropriately peppy engagement with *SpongeBob SquarePants*; in chapter 5 I offered a less bouncy articulation of homosexual fascism precisely in order not to let queerness off the hook as a place where the commitment to fail and to, in the words of Samuel Beckett (1938), "fail again, fail better" tends to give way to a desire for

oddly normative markers of success and achievement. Queerness offers the promise of failure as a way of life (and here I am obviously amending Foucault's formulation of homosexuality as "friendship as a way of life"), but it is up to us whether we choose to make good on that promise in a way that makes a detour around the usual markers of accomplishment and satisfaction. Indeed while Jamaica Kincaid reminds us that happiness and truth are not at all the same thing, and while numerous antiheroes, many of them animated, quoted in these pages have articulated a version of being predicated upon awkwardness, clumsiness, disorientation, bewilderment, ignorance, disappointment, disenchantment, silence, disloyalty, and immobility, perhaps Judith in the movie version of *Where the Wild Things Are* says it best: "Happiness is not always the best way to be happy."

I have turned repeatedly (but not exclusively) in this book to the "silly" archives of animated film. While many readers may object to the idea that we can locate alternatives in a genre engineered by huge corporations for massive profits and with multiple product tie-ins, I have claimed that new forms of animation, computer-generated imagery in particular, have opened up new narrative opportunities and have led to unexpected encounters between the childish, the transformative, and the queer. In this last chapter, and by way of conclusion, I have looked at the dark side of animation, the ways animation, and stop-motion animation in particular, takes us not simply through the looking glass but into some negative spaces of representation, dark places where animals return to the wild, humans flirt with their own extinction, and worlds end. Of course in animation for children they never do quite end, and there is usually a happy conclusion even to the most crooked of animated narratives. In *Coraline*, for example, the young girl who has escaped through the walls of her apartment to a bizarre universe with an "Other Mother" and "Other Father" returns home and is finally happy to be there. In *Fantastic Mr. Fox* the hunted and haunted animals that have been driven from their homes by the farmers rejoice in their sheer survival. In *Where the Wild Things Are*— part animation, part magical puppetry—Max leaves the sad, haunted beasts with whom he has built and destroyed habitats and submits to the strong pull of the Oedipal home. But along the way to these "happy" endings, bad things happen to good animals, monsters, and children, and failure nestles in every dusty corner, reminding the child viewer that this too is what it means to live in a world created by mean, petty, greedy, and violent adults. To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately

to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures.