An Introduction to *Pixilation*!

*Pixilation* is an animation technique, which essentially uses people / props as stop-motion puppets. This technique has been used since the earliest days of cinema and remains as popular as ever, and has even found a new generation of artist-makers thanks to freely-available smartphone and tablet apps!

**The Basics:**

The easiest way to explain pixilation is to use a couple of examples to illustrate the technique and its visual style. I have selected two short films, each with very different flavours and thematic concerns, but which are unified by their use of pixilation as their dominant technique.

The first film I have selected is a surreal and hugely imaginative comedy called *Gisele Kerozene* (1990) which was made by award-winning French film-maker Jan Kounen. This film is pretty unique (to say the least) and you can find it at the following URL:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUQaUwd_NXc
The second film I have selected is the Oscar-winning ‘Neighbours’ (1952) by legendary animator Norman McLaren! This film similarly uses comedy, but with a very different slant. Neighbours is a very potent comment on the Cold-War arms-race and as such works also as socio-political commentary. You can find this powerful and inventive film at the following URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_aSowDUUaY

(Still from Neighbours (1952) Norman McLaren)

So as you can see both of these films have essentially used people as stop-motion animation puppets, and that is really all there is to pixilation! As mentioned previously, there are many freely available aps which will allow you to create your own pixilations on a smartphone or tablet. By far my favourite is Stop Motion Studio which is free and is available for both Android and iPhone / iPad users from Google Play Store and the Apple App Store.

You’ll recognise the Stop-Motion Studio app by looking for this icon:

This great app uses the camera on your smartphone / tablet to create animated films. The interface is very straight-forward and offers quite a bit of manual control over the images you capture, including exposure, shutter speed and even capture rate.
Once you have downloaded the app, getting started really is as easy as clicking ‘New Movie’.

From the following screen click the cog (settings) on the bottom left which will take you to the control centre for capturing your images.

I’d recommend using the following settings when creating your pixilation.

Select the Speed icon on the bottom left and set your capture rate to 12 FPS (frames-per-second). This means that you will have to take 12 images to make one second of your pixilation sequence. This also means that your subject will have to make 12 movements to equate to one-second of pixilation.
From the **Aspect Ratio** icon select **16:9**. This is pretty much standard for video playback.

From the **Quality** icon, select **HD**. This will allow you to capture your footage at 1080P resolution and shouldn’t take up too much memory on your device.
Next exit the Settings tab and click the Camera icon at the top right of the screen. From the following screen click the Settings slider icon at the bottom right of the screen. This will allow you make further adjustments to your smartphone / tablet camera.

Click the M (mode) icon and select AL. This will allow you to lock focus and exposure when capturing your images and will help to prevent inconsistencies between the shots that you capture.

I would also recommend using gridlines when shooting. These will help you to line your shots up and keep them as steady and well-positioned as possible. You can turn these on by Clicking the grid icon at the bottom left of the screen.

You’re now ready to capture your images!
When you have finished your pixilation sequence you can view it on the main menu screen on the Stop Motion Studio app. There are multiple options to export and share it, in addition to saving your completed film to the camera / movie roll of your smartphone or tablet, or saving it as a movie file.

I hope you enjoy using this great app as much as I do and please do share your results with me if you’d like to! Maybe consider adding a soundtrack to your pixilation, or even applying some special effects in post-production? I would love to see the results of your work and I can be contacted at dan.paolantonio@plymouth.ac.uk.

Good luck, have fun and stay creative!

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