Fairy Hands: A Video Game

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Abstract

Lotte Reiniger, the stop-motion silhouette animator from Germany, was a filmmaking pioneer, deploying a unique animation technique that challenged the distinction between "high," fine art and "low," craft art. She modernized the then-antiquated silhouette cut by animating it to adapt fairy tales to the silver screen.

Using only free tools like Unity and GarageBand, I modernize her films by adapting them to platformer games, which resonate with the original aesthetics and material conditions of her films. The game, still in development, features quasi-8-bit music and will be easily accessible through any device's internet browser. The goal is for players to experience Reiniger's films and aesthetics in a new and exploratory way.

Source Material

Reiniger's *Harlekin* (1931) is a love story based on the Italian theatre genre called *commedia dell'arte.* Throughout the film, Reiniger frequently makes metacommentary, referencing her innovative filmmaking process. Above, the Harlequin is shot, represented by the humorous and cartoonish disarticulation of his body.

Resonances
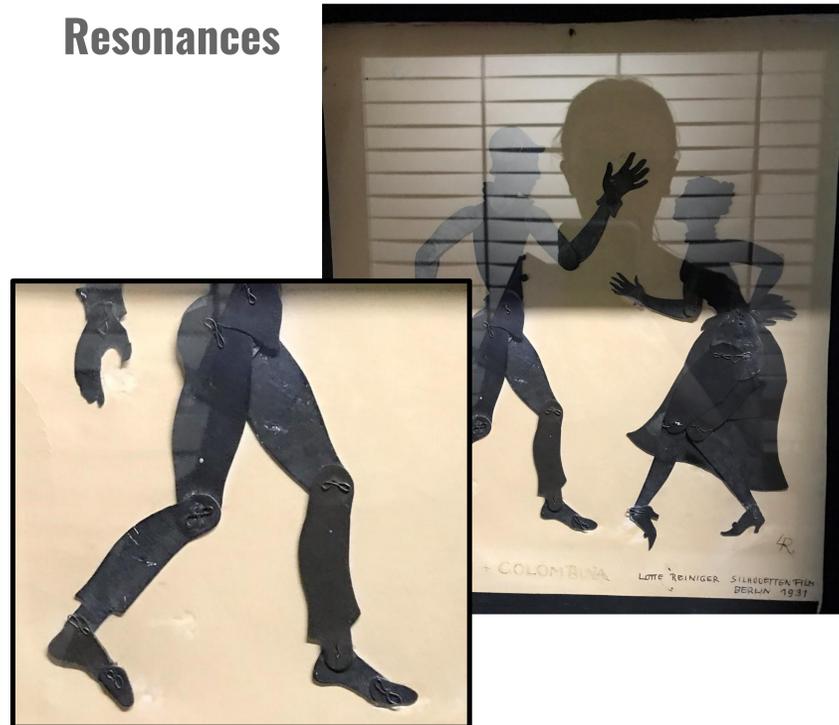
Reiniger's materials are largely archived at the Stadtmuseum Tübingen. Above: the silhouette puppets she used for the protagonists in her film. The Harlequin is on the left, and Colombina, his love interest, is on the right. A closer look shows how she articulated her puppets, namely, with small bits of wire connecting the cardboard limbs.

Unity allows game creators to similarly articulate their puppets (called sprites), the characters that players can control. By mapping so-called "bones" onto sprite art, the game maker can choose where the joints go and how the bones and joints effect each other when animating the sprite.
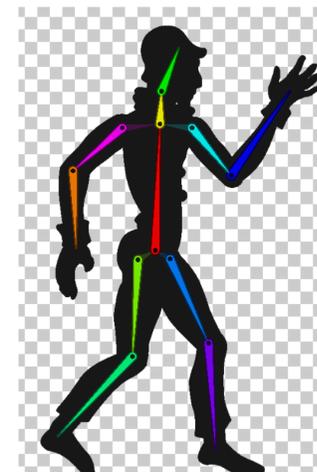
Terrain and Items

Pixel art references early video game aesthetics. Grass and flowers make up the terrain over which the main character walks. Fences and stones add variety. The player can interact with items that have special meaning in the film, like the flute, the scissors, and the jug. A filmstrip frames the play area, directly referencing the origins of the aesthetic. The Unity program needs these items clustered together.
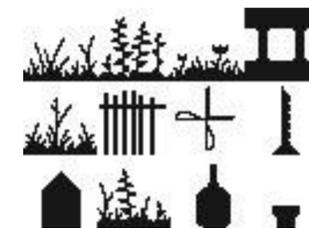
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Acknowledgements