

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF POLITICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND COMMUNICATION
SCIENCES**

**REPRESENTATIONS OF CONFLICT IN
ANIMATION**

- PhD THESIS ABSTRACT -

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KEY WORDS:

animation, violence, conflict, types of conflict, cartoons in WWII, caricature, animation propaganda, animation characters, gender stereotypes, racial stereotypes, death in animation, romanian animation, the principles of animation, animation techniques, animation script, perception, representation, aesthetics, chatarsis theory, animation for touch screen table tops

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INTRODUCTION

The illusion of motion has fascinated people around the world since ancient times and as soon as they managed to master technologies able to capture and record the movement and vibrancy of daily life, the idea of a new challenge was born: to create motion where movement does not exist, the challenge of bringing to life and giving voices to the inert, breathless objects. This new genre of cinema, which was born as a new dimension in the research of motion, gets its name from the Latin word “anima”, which means soul. Animation means to animate, to bring to life, to enliven, to put souls inside the inert. Here's a contrast, from the very beginning: how is it that an art that fought to defeat the inert, the immobility, the stillness and everything that we, the humans, perceive as death is full of representations of death, of violence, of conflicts, aggressions and deadly blood baths? Why does this visual art, with which we interact since our very early years of life wallow our eyes and minds in a patchwork of violence and crime? Is it because this is our nature, because our happiness depends on the good to overcome the evil, because we want to minimize the seriousness of violence in everyday life, or is it because we want to prepare ourselves to face with cold indifference any aggression? These are just a few potential answers. Why do we love to repeatedly watch how the good ones are bullying the wicked, even though their very nature dictates their opposite sides: the cat and the mouse, the wolf and the lamb, the hunter and the rabbit? Infinite aggressive behaviors, repeated bashing, tricks that lead to serious injuries or even death are a collection of common scenes in all the cartoons. However, cartoon characters do not die, they continue unhindered their fight for power under the gaze of the amused spectators, and if it happens that one of the characters “disappears” as a result of the bashing, we do not hold a grudge against the aggressor, we even applaud him with a clear conscience, thinking that the character, who disappeared, must have deserved its cruel fate. Maybe our brains are trained in such a way that we will always be able to find a justification for the acts of violence in cartoons: in any case, here elephants can fly, characters are miraculously cured after any kind of injury or if not, at least we have the satisfaction that our side, whatever that is, wins. Is animation really a universe of violence or, on the contrary, it steps over it, triumphant, minimizing and casting off its destructive effects? In cartoons even our last fright, death, is squashed, spurned and scattered under the gaze of the entertained public. Animation gives us for the first time the possibility to outpace the

restrictions imposed by our frail and easily destructible physique. Animation characters can do anything - they are not bounded by the limitations of our human abilities. Art Babbit, an animator at Disney Studios once said that “animation follows the laws of physics - unless it’s funnier otherwise.” Although any destiny can be chosen for the cartoon characters, the palette of their actions doesn’t vary too much and in order to achieve their goals they almost always resort to violence.

METHODOLOGY AND THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The paper uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative methods are the content analysis, monitoring, empirical research based on the situational analysis and the Grounded Theory. The quantitative research methods are the questionnaire and the statistical analysis.

General objectives:

- *Investigation of the culture of violence and conflict in animation*
- *Bringing the romanian animation into the spotlight*

Specific objectives:

- *Conducting a comparison between the national and international animations*
- *Identification and analysis of the types of conflict used in romanian and international animation, and the way they are used.*
- *Analysis of the aesthetics of the conflict scenes*
- *Identification and analysis of the conflict triggers in animation*
- *Identification and analysis of the effects of the conflict scenes upon the characters involved*
- *Character prototypes and personality*
- *The use of gender and racial stereotypes in animation*
- *The research of some of the animation’s predecessors, like caricature, Vaudeville and the slapstick comedy, and their influence upon the art of animation.*
- *Studing the way real life conflicts resonate with the fictional world of animations*
- *The role of WWII in the development of the animation*

PHD THESIS STRUCTURE

The paper is structured in ten chapters, followed by the *Bibliography*, the *Fimography* and *Annexes*. Inside the paper we used graphics and logical schemes in order to illustrate some of the principles, techniques and theories of animation and stop frames from most of the animated movies that became part of our research. As we also specified in the Introduction the for the exemplification of the conflict aesthetics, representations, sources and effects is achieved by comparing romanian animations with the international ones. In this way we have managed to bring the romanian animation into the focus. Here you have a short presentation of each chapter:

CHAPTER 1 coincides with the *Introduction*. It presents a general description of the subject as well as the research methodology and the research objectives.

CHAPTER's 2 main purpose is to identify, define and exemplify the theoretical concepts. Here we will be introduced to the main notions and terms which will be used further on in the research. The conflict's and animation's definitions, the description of the main animation techniques, traditional animation, stop-motion animation and computer animation, as well as the Fundamental Principles of Animation and a short history of the romanian and international animation are some of the subjects brought into discussion in this theoretical chapter of the paper.

CHAPTER 3 focuses on the research of some of the animation's predecessors, caricature, Vaudeville and the slapstick comedy, and their influence upon the art of animation. Since caricature is all about distorsions and exaggerations, and slapstick comedy promotes accidents, punches and violence as a recipe for a good laught thanks to the funny postures of the characters we can already presume that animation borrowed some of this characteristics for itself. This connection to caricature and vaudeville, shows that mockery, visual distortions, exaggerations and violence are part of the very DNA of animation. Another subject disscused in this chapter is the problem of realism in the representation of the animation characters, since nowadays researches confirm that an animated character that is too realistic might actually disgust the public instead of creating a better connection with them, people prefering a more caricatural look for this characters.

CHAPTER 4 investigates the culture of violence in animation starting from the multiples forms of representation that is possible to obtain through the animation techniques and the way they are percevied by the audience. Some of the subjects disscused in this

chapter are the types of conflict in animation, the role of the conflict in the animated script, the personality of the cartoon characters, the effects of the violent scenes upon the characters and death in animation.

CHAPTER 5 is a study of the aesthetics of conflict in the animated movies. In this chapter we research the way directors use the colors, shadows, lights, lines, proportions and composition in the animated conflict scenes.

CHAPTER 6 investigates the triggers for the conflict scenes in animations. The purpose is to identify the situations which incite to an immediate conflict. We analyse some literary themes and the gender and racial stereotypes, that prove to be very often the trigger of a conflict between the characters, or between the characters and the environment.

CHAPTER 7 . In order to identify the real status of violence in the animation industry it is extremely important to go back in time to the period of the WWII, since the years 1930-1950 are some of the most relevant years for the development of animation as a distinct art form. During this period a lot of famous cartoon characters that are still entertaining today's television audiences were created by studios like Disney, Warner Bros., MGM and Paramount Pictures. Characters like Mickey, Donald Duck, Popeye, Daffy, Bugs Bunny, Elmer, Porky Pig, Blitz Wolf, Tom and Jerry are shaped up to have violent outbursts, to chase and trick each other and to engage in endless brutal conflicts. Although the American animations from that period are the most popular we tried to include in our research also the USSR's, the Nazi's and the Japanese propaganda animations.

CHAPTER 8. Working with the Film National Archives I managed to complete a list of around 1500 Romanian animation movies, an amount which probably sums up almost all of the Romanian animations made since 1930. Completing this list we serve one of our main goals, the goal to bring into focus the Romanian animation movies. Using this list we managed to conduct a statistical analysis on the Romanian animation. This analysis shows the periods in which Romanian animation developed the most and also brings forward some results regarding the use of the gender and racial stereotypes, the types of the conflict and its aesthetics in the Romanian animation.

CHAPTER 9 researches the interactive animation techniques and the possibility of recreating conflict scenarios using digital applications. This chapter describes the CrossWorlds research projects to which I have contributed during my DAAD exchange grant at Technische Universität Chemnitz, in Germany. CrossWorlds is a project that investigates the virtual and real social worlds interaction through placing touch screen table tops with

active applications in semi-public areas, such as museums where a wide range of users can interact in the same time between themselves and with the table.

CHAPTER 10 coincides with the *Conclusions* of our research, which will be presented below:

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is a research that connects the Romanian animation with the international one and investigates the culture of violence and conflict using as examples some of the most famous cartoon shorts of all time. The thesis researches the evolution of the aesthetics and representational forms of animation from a new perspective, bringing the conflict in the center of attention.

Here are some of the main conclusions of our research:

- The *echoes* of the real world conflicts are reflected in the fictional universe of animation, encouraging the exploitation of violent scenarios for the sake of entertainment.
- The historical context that helped shape up animation as a new art form is very helpful in explaining the preferences for violence and conflict in most of the cartoons, since animation was firstly used as a propagandistic weapon, for demonising enemies and cheering up home troops.
- WWII was the launching pad for the industry of animation.
- The connection to caricature and vaudeville, shows that mockery, visual distortions, exaggerations and violence are part of the very DNA of animation.
- The Conflict is the spine of the animated script, deciding the characters course of actions.
- Racial and gender stereotypes are some of the most common conflict triggers in animation. From the point of view of racial stereotypes the caucasian race is always presented in animation as superior, while the other races are represented with less humanly features and are more likely to be involved in domestic work, or to be helpers for the white characters. Although in Romanian animation the presence of other races is extremely rare, still the non-caucasian races are the ones presented as inferior. Regarding the gender stereotypes the women is either presented as a helpless

but good looking character who hopes for the salvation of the man, or it is a less attractive angel of the house, performing any domestic work that is needed. The same applies to the romanian animation

- The aesthetics of the animated conflict scenes varies in regard with the explicitness level. While some animators choose to hide the nasty violent acts others have no problem in sharing the gore and blood splashing all around.
- Regarding the three types of conflict the script of the romanian animations are mostly based on the conflict vs. the environment, which is a proof of the fact many romanian animations are a satire of the society.
- More than 90% of the romanian animations are shorts.
- The '70 and '80 are the years in which the romanian animation has developed the most.

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