

# History of the Aesthetic Dimensions of American Animated Cinema

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to reveal the aesthetic and artistic applications in American animation. In this point, it considers the historical progression of animated cinema as a mainstream cinema genre in the frame of Hollywood. Hence, this article defines the ideological and political echoes on the formulation of animation aesthetics.*

**Keywords:** ideology, avangard, movie, humour

## 1. Introduction

The concept of ideology in the philosophy of cinema is related to the questioning of film theory and traditional aesthetics. Although the concept of aesthetics often turns its back on historical context and social function due to the fiction of timelessness, the majority of film theorists describe film phenomena in connection with historical circumstances and ideology. For many theorists, this is not the case for aesthetic context. Thus, they reach an apolitical aesthetic point of view that ignores history.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Propagandist cinema “militarism in the United States cannot be considered separate from communism.”<sup>2</sup> with this approach, a film art and aesthetic has emerged that captures an aesthetic understanding that is connected with historical periods and that aesthetic evaluations cannot be separated from historical intersections. In this sense, American animation cinema was clearly used as an ideologic device, especially during the Second World War, and formed its own aesthetic according to this context. American animated cinema is likened to a dream machine by film historians, and it is evident that the basis of this analogy is the intellectual share of Dadaist artists who humorously criticize mechanization in the modernist and capitalist society structure. “...American cinema was too full of excitement to be missed for adventures in the fantasy world or in distant lands. It had returned to the current world of its own concrete society, which included heroics in daily life.”<sup>3</sup> (...) American animation cinema, different techniques applied by different studios help us understand the aesthetics of animation film that began to change in the 1930s. This aesthetic change is an aesthetic that streamlines the classical narrative codes of films shot with avant-garde and animated characters.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. “Zany Humour” Approach

In American cinema, the term Zany Humour often refers to a way of behaving in a funny or eccentric way. The first animated films often consisted of stories set around funny animal characters going on different adventures. This approach continued to exist in the mainstream from the early 1900s to the 1940s, forming the backbone of Disney series such as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.<sup>5</sup> G.A Smith's Mary Jane's mishap (1903) was one of the first humorous examples

of cinema. For the first time in this film, the above-mentioned attitude developed regarding tragic situations began to be seen. This film is a ghost story in which its backdrops are entirely hand-drawn, and its humorous use of ugliness is in the mould of zanny humour. In the Hepworth Manufacturing Company's film *The Fatal Sneeze* (1907), the camera was used in motion to describe the effect of sneezing. In the latest severe sneeze, the man disappears with the smoke effect used mostly in magic shows. In the film of R. W. Paul's *Come, Along Do!* (1898) the old couple sitting on a bench between the two doors inscribed *art section* and *refreshment* make an unexpected joke of their choice and choose the *art section*. *The Big Swallow* (1091) has a humorous narrative in an avant-garde, surrealist style. In the film the man approaching the camera filming himself swallows the cameraman and the shooting is continued by another camera. In this kind of films, an absurd narrative style is combined with technical experimentalism. In order to create the situation that is funny, not the narrative structure of the cinema, but the technical elements were applied and the situation that is funny was provided by unexpected physical and spatial change. The reason for this genre in animation cinema is the general censorship policy applied before and during the Second World War and the need to address national problems. American animated films have the ability to be defined in a cultural sense rather than in a technical way. “Cartoons have another function besides acclimating the senses to the new tempo. This function is to engrave into everyone the old lesson that constant rasping and constant breaking of individual resistance is the condition of living in this society. Donald Duck in the cartoon and the unlucky ones in real life get beaten up so that those who watch them exchange their own beatings.”<sup>6</sup> This view explains the basis for the return of Walt Disney heroes to life in a humorous fashion, never dying, even if they receive physical blows. American animation cinema generally chose children as its target audience, so it was thought that it should be funny and witty as a genre. Soviet and European animation cinema was aimed at adult audiences, while American animation cinema mostly shot childish adult films that convey humorously qualified messages for children and adults.

Walt Disney's first sound animated film, 1928's *Steamboat Willie*, showed that music is not only a phenomenon that accompanies the background, but also a phenomenon that shows its power and influence in the filmic narrative, and is a

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main element in the filmic structure and visual rhythm. By 1928, characters such as Betty Boop, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy had become well-known animated film stars. Characters of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Pinocchio (1940), Dumbo (1941), Bambi (1942) and Fantasia (1940), became the dominant portrayal characters in Hollywood.<sup>7</sup> One of the most important stylistic elements of Disney animation cinema during the war is its national character creation. This style has a technical application using hybridized live footage and animation. This is the opposite of the heroic theme of the USSR. For example, in Soviet propagandist animation cinema, especially Hitler and Nazi soldiers were shown in animal form, but far from being funny, they were drawn in a scary way.

In order to analyze this grotesque situation in American animation cinema, it is necessary to return to the cartoons that were the first source of animation cinema. Comedy concept and cartoons began with attempts to reproduce and record natural movement in the 19. Century. Like cinema, cartoons reveal experiences of temporal refraction and temporal flow. But humor readers are more advantageous in controlling time than cinema audiences. Because the reader can make a vertical comeback at any time and relive moments of excitement. In humor magazines, Time occupies a space in space, and the flow of time experience can be carefully controlled.<sup>8</sup> In animated films, the protagonists, who are fast-moving and have practical intelligence, require constant and careful follow-up from the perspective of the audience. The most important feature of the zany humor character in American animated cinema is that he has a point of view that makes a mockery of life, his lack of seriousness, and his physical reflection. These characters, who are often fast-moving and therefore clumsy, perform an act called slap-stick, which is practiced in Proletkult Theatre. The comic portrayal of the characters creates a situation that belittles the enemy and mocks him. In doing all this, they also capture a catharsistic and heroic language. these are characters that fit the feelings of people who belong to everyday life.

### 3. Cartoonish Physics Technique

Cartoonish physics is the case of creating a physical reality in the process of animation that supersedes the current laws of physics. Usually, the physical impossibility continues until the character realizes what he is doing. It is the most common method used to bring humorous elements to the fore throughout the animation history. The film "the Motorist", which was shot in 1906, tried a new cinema technique, shooting fantastic scenes that until then had been deemed impossible. In the film, the car climbs straight into the wall, climbs into the clouds, and the realism in the audience's perception is broken by the use of real and animated footage together. This is also seen in the film that *The application of cartoonish physics in animation cinema is the disregard of the known rules of physics for the purpose of creating a humorous narrative*<sup>9</sup>. The humorous state of a character who realizes that he has fallen off a cliff gains a humorous aspect when he realizes that he has fallen and is subject to the laws of real physics. Character,

lengthens, shortens, flies by swelling, goes off, etc. entering into forms, he experiences a physical impact, but returns to his former state unharmed. In today's technology, the possibility of creating a animation film formed by different techniques is quite high. Before starting the animation process, the decision is made to animate and action style. In the application of cartoonish physics, it is primarily decided what type of realistic cartoons or real human movements will be. Thus, the type of action that will perform the actual performance and the intended performance is revealed.<sup>10</sup> Cartoonish physics is a technique used in similar ways in many animated films. For example, a certain time passes until a body that exists in space realizes that its existence is in space, and at that point it remains in a state of unconsciousness, or passes through a wall painted as a tunnel entrance without difficulty. In such cases, a physical reality created by the laws of physics is ignored.<sup>11</sup> Physical reality is a key concept in film theories. This concept is addressed with real-virtual coexistence. But it is the questioning of the semantic plane of reality that cinema has created as a tool rather than physical impossibility during the questioning of reality. Indeed, semantic unreality is often represented by physical unreality. *"Cinema's relationship to reality is completely unhealthy. This is the case in both directions: from screen to viewer (reality is rigged) and from the camera to 'subjects'. Cinema cannot leave reality alone if it wants to offer something to the audience..."*<sup>12</sup> Williamson's Cinematography Company Ltd.'s *An Interesting Story* can be a good example for this. In the film, the man under the tarmac machine becomes flat, but there is no bloody image. He is pumped up by two cyclists who are crossing the road, and he revives and returns to his former state. The Film is one of the first examples of the use of cartoon Physics. Cartoon physics technique is the combination of speed, comedy and clumsiness triangle provided by the slap-stick movement style. This triangle provides an impossible bodily healing by shattering physical reality, prolonging the character's time of mindfulness and creating a catharsistic influence on the viewer.

In a sense, cartoonish reality can be regarded as the first period of virtual reality trials. In both cases, the important thing is to eliminate the perception of time and space and to have the perception of time-space created by mental activity. Virtual reality summarizes a state of feeling consisting of first-hand experiences that go from the limitations of the physical world to the state of unlimited freedom in a theoretical framework. Based on the laws of cartoonish physics, it takes us to another time and place. In virtual reality, it is aimed to have an indistinguishable reality in the physical world in the first place.<sup>13</sup> Because the American tradition of animated cinema was based on the phenomenon of humor, the ridiculous one had to have magical and supernatural qualities. This has led to the adventure of creating a superhero who never dies, gets injured, can stand up even if he gets a fatal blow. the main reason for this situation is the desire to glorify the invincibility and heroic qualities of the soldiers of the country in the environment of war. The technical constructivist structure found in Soviet animation cinema showed itself in the form of a cartoonish physics configuration in American animation cinema. The

military-educational film production and character structuring program in American animation cinema gives rise to the propagandist message and presents the concept of "Warped Space", that is, distorted and deformed space, as an aesthetic use. This concept is the physical and psychological perception of space and the removal of the boundaries in the process of making sense of this perception. In order to capture a vague, ambiguous narrative, the boundaries between the real and the non-real need to be breached. In this sense, an aesthetically expressionist dimension emerges. At this point, during the questioning of the concept of space, the sense of design that replaces constructivism is encountered.

The virtual camera emerged through the study of cartoonish physics, revealing a new situation for the conceptualization of space, and the audience came across a new form of existence. The virtual camera extends beyond the space shown, becoming a simulation of self through the abstract one.<sup>14</sup> Rather than being a tool for capturing moving images, the integrity of the camera allows for the spatially specific elimination of perception. *...The aesthetics of this reflection are based on the inner consistency of its elements, not on the symbolic pointing to the first example as realized by the help of artistic methods and techniques. Decoration is by nature a delusion, but it is a beautiful delusion.*<sup>15</sup> The virtual camera becomes the spatial movement of the transient state of consciousness, which is composited on stage.

#### 4. Organic Montage

The technology in the early twentieth century of chronotography and animated photography relates to the film definition prior to the so-called film. According to Deleuze, the evolutionary state of the initial technological conditions parallels the struggle for life, which seeks to separate itself from matter. At first the image is related to immobilizing the fixed space. The shooting tool has been expanded by combining the projection tool and time. Cinema has developed its evolutionary development towards the application of fiction technology adapted from the novel. At this point, the shots cease to be a spatial category and become temporary, and the episodes go from non-moving to moving. Over time, cinema has made its way to moving images, and editing has become the key to playing with time and space.<sup>16</sup> In the early years of cinema in America, it tried to prove that it was a branch of art and to create its own entity definition within other branches of art, and it placed more emphasis on visual pleasure, a coherent and linear script than editing. In the process of comprehending the narrative structure of the film, the cinema audience had to draw references from other films and generate interest accordingly, and one text became the reference of the other. Therefore, non-linear formations connected to the narrative in the script were not favored. Visual pleasure has attempted to capture a mass interpretation level based on the audience's artistic culture and background. *"...Because motion is one of the most important features of cinema, it uses and interprets motion according to aesthetic rules."*<sup>17</sup> In this sense, all mis-en-scene values are evaluated in this motion. Action montage is also seen as one of the important phenomena that enables

the variety of creation and expression. In this sense, films need close-up, action-enhanced fiction to capture audience enthusiasm and high blood pressure. Besides the technical and aesthetic aspects of this practice, which has a high rhythm and is focused on keeping enthusiasm at the highest point, its ideological purpose can also be evaluated in different dimensions. For example, it is seen that Hollywood made many films in the pre-war period about the policy of isolation in order to prevent the development and spread of the fascist regime. The film *Victory Through Air Power* (1943) proves that the Japanese are seen as a major threat in the Pacific, and shows how to achieve victory through aerial bombardment. This film is extremely important, especially in terms of propaganda film history.

The dominant style of fiction in classic Hollywood cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s was called invisible fiction in some cases due to the necessity of continuous continuity and the lack of obvious points of fiction (...) This kind of fiction wanted to ensure clarity about the geography of the world on the screen through the communication of basic storytelling. For this reason it was often referred to as viewpoint editing or continuity editing.<sup>15</sup> The American cinema tradition developed based on fiction rather than *mis en scene*, thus making the characters more believable and reliable. The editing was used in a direct subjective level of interpretation in relation to the characters in the early periods. Directors from the theatrical tradition preferred a distinctive fictional togetherness, capturing a more concrete narrative dimension.

American animation cinema corresponds to the motion image as a genre cinema. The togetherness of technique and ideology has influenced the semantic dimension of technique in the history of cinema. American cinema played an important role as an ideological tool in the construction of national identity through the technique of emulation and organic editing. What is important at this point is that the narrative structure of the assembly is revealed. The overall plan was obtained by shooting. The series of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd are the first examples of this situation. The scripts applied classical tragedy techniques, which led to an organic form of editing in American cinema.

#### 5. Conclusion

Although animation cinema is generally considered to be a genre of cinema that targets children, there are many different genres of animation films available. Throughout the history of cinema, animated films have been used for ideological purposes as well as feature films, and these films were made propaganda material. Many of the messages of animated films relate to manufacturing the consent and effective for formulation of inclination cultures. It is important to recognize and analyze the cinematic codes for the psychological perception of children and adults in animated films. Nowadays an increasing number of computer-based animation films are being shot through

rapidly developing information technologies. Despite all these technological developments, it is important to keep the animation art alive.

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