Different Horizons of Expression in Media:
The Case of Animations

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Abstract:
This paper examines the normative constraints that mass society places on movies and artistic animation. Benjamin's ideas on audience control in relation to technical media products are used to highlight the specific limitation of animations. Because they are entirely created by the artist (without employing preexistent elements, such as in movies), they can more easily simplify the scheme of representation-intention, and be bearers of politically or morally acceptable messages.

Keywords:
Mass society, technical media, animation, artistic cinema, Benjamin

Resumen:
El ensayo aborda cuestión de los límites normativos que la sociedad de masas les impone al cine y a la animación artística. Las ideas de Benjamin en torno al control de la audiencia sobre lo producido por medios técnicos sirven de apoyo para señalar la limitación específica de las animaciones. Al ser creadas íntegramente por el artista (con exclusión de elementos preexistentes, como en el cine), es posible reducirlas más fácilmente al esquema simplificador de representación-intención y a ser portadoras de mensajes aceptables política o moralmente.

Palabras clave:
Sociedad de masas, medios técnicos, animación y cine artísticos, Benjamin

Yuri Norstein, Brothers Quay, Jan Švankmajer... various individual artists have chosen animation as a method of expression and have produced free and unique works. The works of these artists are considered as art animation as a genre of animation and recognised as achieving expression which cannot be seen in commercial animation made for the masses. From commercial film works, it is possible to observe the scope of acceptable expression in film works that change over time, and commercially successful works contribute to the shaping of these norms. Norms intervene in production and attempt to limit the expression. That great individual artists express freely in animation does not mean that animation is a medium that allows individual artists to express freely and detached from such norms.

Benjamin revealed in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* that film production is strongly controlled by the audience. With Benjamin's argument as a base, in this essay, I consider the existence of a narrative base that defines expression in cinema and the existence of limits on expression specific to animation. I then refer to my own animation production and discuss the need of resisting such norms and constraints while creating animation.

A French animator Michel Ocelot speaks about the difference between the film making production as an independent artist and as a director of feature-length animated films. He explains that since the production of his most known work 'Kirikou and the Sorceress' was sponsored by three different counties, he was interfered by stakeholders about the expression in the animation.

'I've been making short cutout animated films, but this is the first time to make a CG cel-shaded film and a feature-length animation, so people are worried and say all sorts of things. 'The title "Kirikou and the Sorceress" is too simple and should be changed', 'it is not good that the black woman is showing her breasts and the child is naked', 'the dialogue scene of the grandfather and Kilik is too long, and too little movement with them just sitting' and so on. But I did not compromise at all' (Ocelot 2002, in Ono 2006, 50).

Changing from short film animator to feature-length animator wasn't so difficult. There is only one difference. You can make short films alone and quietly, but for feature-length animation; people around me worry about it and fuss about it and that makes me tired (Ocelot 2005, in Ono 2006, 66-67).

Michel Ocelot, "Kirikou and the Sorceress" (2005)
https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/365812/kirikou-et-son-createur-courent-toujours

Ocelot experienced pressure from those around him in the process of creating feature-length animation. This is because the initiative in expression in film is taken by the masses as its medium characteristics. Benjamin discusses the process. When a medium has an enormous degree of simultaneous viewability, audiences acquire the "attitude of expert appraisal" (Benjamin 2008, 36). When an event can be seen by many people at the same time, people talk about it as if they were experts. This already existed before media without technology, for instance sports viewing. "It is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert. Anyone who has listened to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race will have an inkling of this" (Benjamin 2008, 33).

To analyse the gradual process of the audiences gaining control in film, Benjamin first examines the case in literature. In literature, the relationship between writers and readers is in principle asymmetrical. "[A] small number of writers confronted many thousands of readers" (Benjamin 2008, 33). He points out that this relationship has changed and the boundary between writers and readers has been shifted. Starting with "letters to the editor", more and more opportunities for readers to submit their text are provided. Ordinary people are experts of their own occupation. And when they write, write as an expert of their own occupation, instead of an expert of writing. With this, the ability to describe one's job is now the expertise to become a writer. Thus literature finds its base not in the qualification to become an author which is specialised higher education but in polytechnic training for common workers (Benjamin 2008, 33-34).

In film, this shift happened faster than in literature. "In the case of film, the newsreel demonstrates unequivocally that any individual can be in a position to be filmed. But that possibility is not enough. Any person today can lay claim to being filmed" (Benjamin 2008, 33). Now everyone, whether he or she wants to or not, is able to claim to be filmed. Benjamin continues, that in such cases, film deals with the subject of work. As in literature, audiences become writers as experts of their own occupation, film becomes a possession of common people by setting its theme in common people's work. It is well observed in some Russian films. "Some of the actors taking part in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray themselves — and primarily in their own work process" (Benjamin 2008, 34).

Film is a medium for the masses, and film adopts themes about masses, and it is such a medium that everyone can claim to be filmed. However, the film industry cannot have everyone as actors in reality. To hide this problem invisible from the masses, they have "an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations" (Benjamin 2008, 34). It is done in such ways by focusing on actors' personal life or by including the audiences with polls and contests (Benjamin 2008, 33-34). And "[a]ll this in order to distort and corrupt the original and justified interest of the masses in film --an interest in understanding themselves and therefore their class" (Benjamin 2008, 34).

This distortion of the masses' interest in themselves continues until today where ordinary people's social media posts are equally displayed as ones by superstars, and in reality-TV shows which casts contestants with auditions, indicating that they're (illusionary) ordinary people. As of the era of social media today, the force on ordinary people to want to be filmed has become even more widely spread, and modern technology enables one to meet the desire to be filmed easily.

Benjamin analyses that actors are always aware of the judgement from the audience while performing. "While he stands before the apparatus, he knows that in the end he is confronting the masses. It is they who will control him. Those who are not visible, not present while he executes his performance, are precisely the ones who will control it. This invisibility heightens the authority of their control" (2008, 33).

When everyone wants and is able to be filmed and know everyone else will judge him or her, there are reciprocal relationships among the masses. In such a case, everyone should and would try to be liked by the masses. When one needs support from the rest of the masses, the number of the reciprocal evaluation relations are as many as the number of people in the masses (the masses - 1). This structure requires everyone to follow the norm.

Such a norm must require narratives which are likeable by the masses. It should be the highest common factor of the masses and it excludes morally corrupt stories. Such films which meet those norms share a common narrative base. It is the narrative base for good people. For stories to be based on this base, they have to consist of elements that have channels for good interpretations. For instance, when a kid is killed in a film, the film has to provide a channel for the audience to know that it is a cruel scene. If a film depicts a murderer as the main character, the film has to explain the reason why he or she becomes a murderer, such as because of traumas from their childhood. Things that are agreed in many societies as absolute wrongs such as different kinds of abuses are hardly depicted without indications that they're absolutely wrong.

I would argue that the limitation of the expression by the norms is stronger in animated film than in live action film. Why so? Because it is a visual medium and it is fully constructive. The major medium for the masses in modern times has always changed to something more visual. "Just as the illustrated newspaper virtually lay hidden within lithography, so the sound film was latent in photography" (Benjamin 2008, 21). As animation has a higher degree of constructivism on the screen, we could consider that it was latent in film. And in such a medium where every element on a screen is created by artists, the audience interprets what is depicted as the artists' intention. Therefore, the expression in animation is more affected by the norms than live action film. In film, there is room for randomness to come in. Forests, cities, or rooms as background exist before film, and they are not created by artists. Actors are human, not drawn characters. Weather can affect how a film is being filmed. On the contrary, in animation, an element is on a frame in a certain way because artists decided to include them. This leaves no room for an animator to avoid criticism from good people when they accuse an expression as a bad expression. As actors in film are always aware of the end audience, animators know "that in the end he is confronting the masses". Having the formula "Depiction = Intention" in their mind, animators are more bound to be compatible with the narrative base for good people.

As an animation artist, I am in search of the ways in which I can create works without letting norms limit expression. And I wish to avoid that my expression is reduced to mere messages. I am currently working on a feature-length animation "Egg War", and the awareness of these issues has developed over the course of its production and presentation over the years.

I have been writing fictional stories about an egg world. In 2017, I created a short animation called "The Harbour of the Egg Island" which is set in an island where eggs live and certain numbers of eggs are shipped to the human world every day. The film depicts the daily lives of two main characters, a sister and a brother, until the day arrives in which one of them is shipped. In 2021 the painter Anastasia Guzenkova and I collaborated on the abstract short film "Egg Ritual," in which eggs on an island perform a ritualistic act in

which one egg climbs up a hill and throws itself to crack and become the sun. Now I am working on a feature length film called "Egg War," in which eggs fight for egg rights in human society.
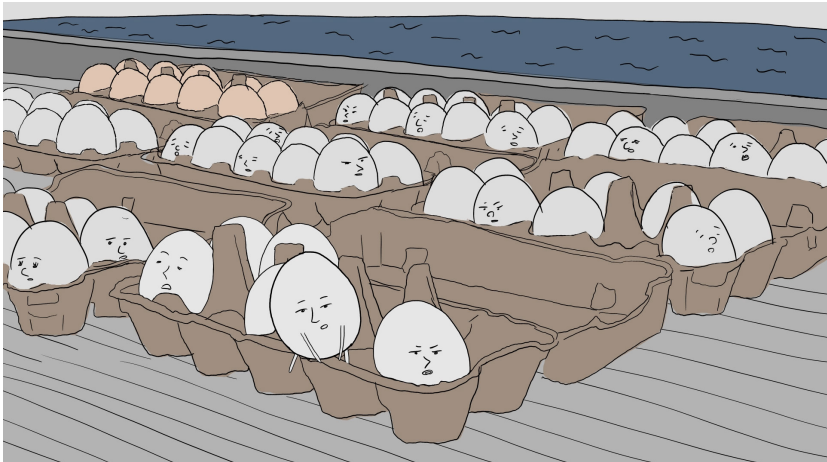
"The Harbour of the Egg Island" (2017) [digitally painted 2D animation]

"Egg Ritual" (2021, with Anastasiia Guzenkova) [3D animation, photogrammetry, oil, crayon on paper]

In my work, stories are often depicted from the perspective of the oppressed and the less privileged that has great compatibility with the current liberal political atmosphere and I feel a strong gravity towards making it so. However, even though my stories do include political messages, I want my works of art not to become a set of mere messages.

Perniola points out that works of art nowadays are used (consumed) by the masses to whom art is merely about its price value or the message that can be extracted from the piece. "In a many-sided era like our own, the world of art seems made up mostly of simpletons for whom art is resolved in its price and in the interpretation of its works, or in the effectiveness and the communicability of the message" (Perniola 2004, xvi). Han warns art is becoming signs in which what represents and what is represented are equal. "Art is not a discourse. It produces its effects through forms and signifiers, and not through the signified. The process of internalisation destroys the arts, bringing them closer to discourse and forsaking the mysterious outside for the profane inside" (Han 2019, 25). In the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", Benjamin suggested art should set its base on politics to fight against "l'art pour l'art (art for art)". In his time, art already lost its ritualistic value and allowed fascism to take advantage of its influence for the sake of manipulating the masses. In our time, it has become easier to communicate using art as decoration and the fascination of art is used in favour of his or her convenience. And works of art of artists are immediately converted into political messages and art is becoming mere signs.

If art is only possible to reproduce discourse, there is no meaning to making art. Art should be able to express feelings and imaginations which cannot be expressed in other ways and regardless of discoursal and political requests. To let art have the ability to do so, each artist has to have a strong will to resist against norms that try to prevent him or her from expressing.

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