

THE ANIMATION FILM, A FIELD OF CULTURE INTERFERENCE

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Abstract

The article attempts to rehabilitate a disparaged art - the animation film/cartoon - and removed from the shrine of arts, which in the XXIst century is more and more visible in the media landscape through a variety of productions (short films, feature films, serials, TV shows, videos, commercials, generic etc.).

The disappearance of boundaries allowed an openness to a multicultural dialogue that can be traced in all the areas of art and culture. Particularly evident there are the interferences in the audio visual arts and, specifically, the animation film/cartoon, which became adequate space for the integration various arts. Namely, the animation film/cartoon is notable for its ability to exploit various cultural formulas. The analysis of films from different geographical areas comes to highlight/ value the animation film/cartoon as art, in which on one hand cultures interfere/merge, and on the other the elements of the various cultures are valued and promoted.

Thus, elements of European culture find their place inherently in the production of the Romanian space (*The Scream*, 2010, directed by Sebastian Cosor). The other way round, in the European films elements of the Romanian culture can be traced (*Follen Art*, 2004, directed by Tomek Baginski).

An example of items interference from other cultural areas can also be the film *The Holy Thursday* (1989, screenplay by Victor Pavliuc, directed by Valeriu Curtu) produced by Moldova-film studio.

Keywords: *animation, audiovisual art, culture, Moldova-film studio.*

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europe becomes an open space for more intense cooperation not only in the field of economics but also of culture. There appears the tendency towards the formation of a unique cultural space with the same values, pattern models, enriched with elements from different cultures.

The the interferences in the visual arts are obvious and, especially, the film became an easy to penetrate medium for a multitude of genres and artistic styles. In this context a special place is held by the animation film/cartoon - one of the most abstract and symbolic arts - which wins ground more and more in the contemporary

audiovisual landscape (through short films, feature films, serials, TV shows, videos, commercials, generic etc.). That is to say animation is highlighted by its ability to exploit different cultural formulas often anchored in the national classic or contemporary culture. Today it is the cineanimation that outlines the environment where the classic culture, alongside the traditional one, the national (folk) one together with the underground one, forming a conceptual and stylistic unity. The universe of the animation film/cartoon has its origins in the cultural space that is re-transmitted in a far more encoded form than in other cinema genres.

The tough boundaries of the communist ideology, through which works of art that did not fit in the so-called socialist realism and labeled as bourgeois production could with great difficulty come through, would impose on even to creators in preconceived standards. Not only in the former ex-Soviet space the artists were limited in their creation, but also those from the other countries of the socialist camp feel the need for greater freedom, which makes them emigrate and to have their say abroad. As a result, in the 80s a number of directors left Romania, such as Michael BADICA, Stefan Munteanu for the USA, Emanuel Tet at Hollywood Eduard Sasu in Spain, Zoltan Szilagyi in Hungary at Kecskemét studios¹. In Western Europe the Poles Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk emigrated.

Besides all the inconvenience the migration is marked by some positive moments too. So, among other things it conditioned the interference process of cultures and of the different genres of art. In France, for example, the Romanian writer Eugene Ionesco meets the Polish director Jan Lenica. Deeply Impressed by Ionesco's theatre of the absurd, but also by his ideas, conveyed with great ardor in the works of criticism, the Polish

painter and animation film director produced the movie *Monsieur Tete* (1959, France). It is the first film created produced after the Romanian playwright script. The film about the human condition in contemporary society is worthy of several awards including the Grand Prix at the Festival in Oberhausen (1960). Lenica remains influenced by the work of Eugene Ionesco and pessimistic message towards reality and the dangers that can occur during the periods of transition, revolution, crisis, will dominate from now on his films. Thus, E. Ionesco's creation is found in the movie *The Rhinoceros* (1963, West Germany) after the playwright's homonymous play. Between 1966 and 1968 Jan Lenica is working on the ambitious project of an animation feature film *Adam 2* (1969, West Germany). The film presents a journey through time and space, from the memory of the biblical paradise and its loss reaching up to fights for the preservation of individuality, being a parody of Stalinism and totalitarianism.

The disappearance of borders has enabled new insights into multicultural dialogue that can be seen in all spheres of art and culture. Communication is established through various channels. First, artists from different fields perform exchanges, creating other spaces. Secondly, there is a cooperation through joint projects – it is appropriate to recall the Romanian-Polish coproduction *Crulic - The Path to Beyond* (Crulic *The Path to Beyond*, 2011, directed by Anca Damian).

The 90s were a difficult time for filmmakers in Moldova, in particular, for those in the field of animation, which began with the termination of the activity in the animation field of the *Moldova-film*. Saving the animators was possible through the collaboration with foreign animation studios: "AnimaDream" SA, Spain, the Bucharest branch (*Pelezinho* series); "Borisfen", Ukraine, Kiev (the films *The First Day*, *The Century Theft*); "Millimages", France, the Bucharest branch; "Daco-Dac" Ltd, Romania etc. Not to mention that some filmmakers left the country, such as V. Curtu, in Germany, L. Gorohov and Iu. Cațap in Israel, S. Plămădeală in Romania etc.

Being an open space for interference at various levels, the film is always attacked by information/elements from different cultures either distant in

time and space, or neighboring ones, even from subcultures. The research of the announced problem extends to some suggestive moments that demonstrate more or less the ways of intercultural interference on the eighth art level, which allows to compress time and the free passage from one space to another.

The shortest time and space travel is proposed by Gopo Ion Popescu² with his pill *Short History* (1957 Palme d'Or prize at Cannes) – in which the evolution of life on earth and the history stages proceed through the change of scenery, and the costume plays a special part. "The little man is gradually becoming a symbol laden with human characteristics"³ which set him on other orbits towards the universal.

The interference in the animated film takes place at a scenario, picture and soundtrack levels. Each element can be final in foreshadowing the message. Until the mid-80s the animation film in Moldova, like most of the animation production of the Soviet space had its roots in a pseudo folk universe, in the world of educational and instructive stories. Gradually genre area widens, the animation film, requiring more and more literary works of universal classical works or motifs from the immediate history of society for a mature, versed audience. Or, the creative freedom obtained in the post-communist period makes the Moldovan creators to expand their artistic and stylistic visions approaching social themes, but at the same time appealing to the values and traditions of other cultures. Speaking about the literary basis an eloquent example would be the film *Breakfast* (Moldova-film) inspired from the French poet and playwright Jacques Prévert. Director Sergiu Plămădeală proposes an interesting example of the interpretation of the poetic universe through codes and symbols of Prévert's both the literary and the film work.

In terms of image and style making of animation films we record several ways of using the artistic works - either inspiration, quotation, adapting or even animating them.

A sample of the exploration of the elements from other cultural areas can be the movie *Holy Sunday* (1989, Moldova-film) directed by Valeriu Curtu. The film reflects the fate of Romanian who left the countryside to the city or even other

places away from the parental home in a contemporary metropolis where the loneliness is even more pressing, the need for the national breath is felt, which would give vital energy and would find spiritual comfort. It's about the human aspiration to maintain a continuity of the spiritual need (after psychologist E. Fromm) that would guarantee the stability and safety of the human existence.

Valeriu Curtu addresses the collage technique the most appropriate for the introduction of several semiotic codes and texts in the text of the film, too, and establishing the artistic images based on the combination of fragments and borrowed quotations. The possibility of a free intertextual compilation gave rise to complex film structures. The director plunges into the space of intertextual culture based on quotes and reminiscences which gives the film either a character parody, or a sentimental - nostalgic shade. For the soundtrack, the director chose a rather diverse music - from that one of the Italian composer Marconi, the jazz, to the national one.

The presence of the painting *Thr Boy with the Cattle* (or *The Childhood*, the second name of the work in M. Grecu's triptych) in the film *The Holy Saturday* it plays the role of deciphering the present by revealing the past. Not accidentally Mihai Grecu's painting, one of the most suggestive creations of the Bassarabian painters, reflecting the people's deep spirituality is put in counterpoint with Ivan Rabuzin's paintings, prominent representative of Yugoslav naive painting. The allegorical landscapes: "My Village", "Five Big Flowers", "Three Flowers in the Field" - selected from the creation of the skilled naïve plastic artist of Yugoslavia follow in succession at the beginning of the film *The Saint Sunday*. They do not only dictate the tone of the film, but also, through their meanings they approach the spiritual world of the hero of the film story. Moreover, "... the image of a friendly polychrome world that has not endured the shadow of the ecological and social pollution, (...) a world no longer found anywhere in reality"⁴, presented in the naive paintings is contrary to the world the main character of the film lives in, it is the world that he has lost, but which he still yearns for.

The same as the Sundays of the naïve artist's soul, the hero's moments of revelation are short

too. The hero of the film being rushed by contemporary pace of big cities, stressed by the daily urban stress, he returns in his daily monotony in his apartment, in which even the black window induces us the idea of Kazimir Malevich's black square. The image of the famous *Black square* (about which the author wrote, *the square = feeling, the white field = nothing outside this feeling*) is equivalent, in the film *The Holy Sunday* to getting away both from his world and his deserted soul, while he is looking for a sense of identity.

In the context of the adaptation and the animation of the famous paintings of the great artists, the Romanian films are suggestive too. Thus, the movie *The Little Drummer* (1982) by Virgil Mocanu draws its source in the work of the foremost Flemish painter of the century. XVI - Pieter Bruegel. His paintings *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), *The Peasant Dance* (1568), *Children's Games* (1560) and others come to life in the Romanian director's film, being not just a rendering the atmosphere of a medieval world with specific traditions, but also a continuation of the message, proposed by the painter in his paintings. Or, "the works of Peter Bruegel the Elder too, where each picture is a little story concentrated in pictures, sometimes tragic, sometimes with a tinge of humor", as the Romanian director Ion Truică says "showed the existence of a film thinking"⁵. As a matter of fact, the same as the work of other creators of art, plastic artists or writers it can easily be put on the cinematic language, giving them a unique artistic look.

Among the creations of the recent years in this category, the animated film comes forth. *The Scream* (2011, director Sebastian Cosor, Romania), which was based on Edvard Munch's painting *Skrik* (1893). The title of the painting and its style was preserved by the authors of the film, who were inspired by the whole creation story of the painting: the idea coming to the painter's mind during a walk with two friends. The film is a re-interpretation of the famous expressionist works signed by Munch, (one of the pioneers of modern art) which is one of the most famous Norwegian artists and author of one of the most enigmatic and strange works in art history: *The Scream*. The painting presents a human figure, on

dense and thick shades, with lines that make you think of the sound waves and it is considered the most important work of the artist, symbolizing in the opinion of many the cry of anguish of the modern human being crushed by the everyday life fears or rather more exactly by that, hard to define, fear. *The Scream* is a prelude to the art of the twentieth century. The picture of being distorted by horror as if anticipating the main themes of modernism: the loneliness, the despair and the alienation.

The reason of Munch's desperate cry can also be detected in the last image of the shortstory *The Oasis* (1991, directed by Tamara Fincheli, Moldova-film) in which the characters of the film discover the true reality. The kid through who the two heroes proceed, metaphorically suggests the existential idea of our life in the communist society. The allusion to the existence, arising for decades in a spiritual desert, being so isolated from the authentic national values, as well as the world from the other side of the wall. This iron curtain well guarded by that time ideology, inoculated in our minds the illusion of living in an oasis. Or, the oasis in the desert, in that *in vitro* is only an illusion inoculated to the individual which he accepts as a reality. Although people have always lived with illusions... It is noat by chance that yellow is the main colour in the film that evokes disappointment that heroes live too: betrayal and uncertainty for the next day. It is only disillusionment and despair that we see in the eyes of heroes.

Music has a special connotation in this film. To complete meanings of the picture, the authors used a classic work, namely the "Lacrimosa" part from the funeral messa by W. A. Mozart. This musical part plays a determinating role, being one that highlights and enhances on the one hand, the human tragedy, in particular, strictly directed by the ideological rules kept in collectivism, reduced to artificial relationships, of individual supervision as well as the disguised freedom, amplifying the limited human condition. On the other hand, it is the tragedy of the whole society which is on the edge of disaster.

Among the latest films that have gained expressiveness thanks to music there can be nominated the Polish films of the young generation of animators. *Fallen Art* (2004) - the

second animated short film by Tomek Baginski -has in the soundtrack an excerpt from the song *Asphalt Tango* - composition and arrangement by Adrian Sical from the album Baro Biao album (1999) of those from "Fanfara Cicirlia" a band consisting of 12 Gipsies from Zece Prajini village, Iasi county. The film won the BAFTA award for Best Short Film. Thus European films use elements of Romanian culture.

More and more in animation movies there occur elements from the subcultures area, including the musical one. As argument it could be the film *Millhaven* (2010, Poland) directed by Bartek Kulas - an adaptation in the gothic rock style of the song of the Australian pop singer Nick Cave, famous for writing music for the movies *X-Files*, *Harry Potter*. The film maintains the eerie and mystical vision of Gothic feature.

The contemporary subculture is present in the animation film in Blu's films too, namely arising from the street art (*Street art*). Blu (the Italian painter Andrea Martignoni's pseudonym) is a very 'mobile' artist and creates all over the world - Spain, Germany, France and then crosses the ocean in Argentina. The evolution of the world and its possible consequences is an important subject of the Italian artist which recur in his works whenever he has the opportunity. The theme takes shape in the movies *Big Band Big Boom*, *Muto* (2008), made in Buenos Aires and which made world wide known), *Momento mori*, *Evolution of men*. The last movie ends with the slogan *There is no need to fight, to change the world* - that could be a lively epigraph to his entire animated work. He conceives his surreal films in a unique manner, in the graffiti style - calligraphic inscriptions, images painted or carved on walls or other any other public or private surfaces - which in the early twenty-first century became an urban art by which the artist intended to draw the attention on the global problems.

The traditions of other cultures have inspired filmmakers in time. For example, the bullfighting show in Spanish culture - the ritual slaughter of the animal (bull) to gods - was behind the films: *The Red and the Black* (1963, Poland) by the director Witold Giersz and *Corida* (1986, Moldova-film) directed by Alexandr Gladășev. On the screen the ritual fight ia interwoven with art, the cruelty and the danger, remain a up-to-day topic. The

director from the Moldova Republic, wanting to prove that men on behalf of their ladies' are ready for any issues his first short story, *Corida* (included in the almanac *Ladies and Gentlemen*, script by Garri Bardin). The film style reminds us of Picasso's paintings. The play of the shades of colour, the rhythm of movements, the bull bullfighter, s dance fascinates thousands of people, produce the enchanting atmosphere of the show on the life and death –the bullfighting. The pair of participants is significant: the bullfighter who fights in honour of his sweetheart and the bull, supported by the “love” his consort. In the film fierce confrontation between the bullfighter and the black bull (which symbolically embodies death) ends tragically for both parties.

Thus the animation films become bearers of both national and universal culture. According to our research the master of the Russian animation Fiodor Hitruk, is right when he speaks about animation as some basic funds of mass communication. “The contemporary animation is something more than a means of entertainment, education, information. It is now a means of

knowledge. The knowledge of the Universe and society, of the scientific progress and of the personality psychology”⁶. Today the animation film proposes a universe formed at the cross roads of the elements from various arts and cultures, foreshadowing a versatile world that facilitates knowledge through communication.

Endnotes

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