



Felipe Martins is an Architect and Urbanist, specializing in the drawing. He is a researcher at the Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, where he studies the use of fiction as a purposeful and investigative tool in cartoons, focused on culture and socio-spatial issues.

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Abstract

This article discusses the use of cartoons as ideological apparatuses, disseminated by mediators who act in the daily and personal life of contemporary society with the aim of reinforcing dominant values present in discourses and actions of hegemonic powers. Making use of epistemologies proposed by several different authors, the article discusses fundamental concepts such as spectacle, experience, apparatus, memory, and collectivity, presenting in parallel contemporary and historical cartoons produced in Brazil and abroad in order to discuss the construction of information and how it is disseminated throughout the physical and digital space. The possibility of social engagement aiming for collective and shared construction of information is also analyzed, leaving behind the role of spectator, transformed into an active individual in the production of knowledge.

Keywords: Cartoon, Experience, Apparatuses, Memory, Information.

1 The spectacularization of daily life

I have been struggling for a long time with a definition of my generation, the so-called millennial generation. Given the little agreement among authors, people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s are often labeled the same (Barbosa, 2012). However, there is an abyss between these two periods.

People born in the early 1980s probably became active agents by using the Internet during their adolescence—that is what the myth suggests. Therefore their childhood was completely different from young people born

in the mid-1990s, who grew up immersed in a much less cozy place: the web.

I was born in 1992, in a town where the Internet connection is difficult even nowadays. Neither here nor there, I was born in a limbo in which the Internet was known but not really accessible. During my childhood, I enjoyed classic cartoons on television. However, in my teens, a new generation of cartoons appeared, much more aligned with the television market, in its eagerness to form new consumers. Given this personal context, I used the exploratory research method to develop this article, in which I intend to interpret new possibilities of research on the relationship between cartoons and contemporary society.

The focus of my dissatisfaction is, in fact, on the transformations of media entertainment - particularly the cartoons which, after a rapid change in actors, have changed not only our access but the kind of entertainment they provided. They began to capture our eyes by the constant seduction through image and the naturalization of the spectacle. At first, television networks were the only mediators of that kind of entertainment that pervaded our daily lives with their catalog of stories and characters. By that time they were alone in the dispute for attraction and formation of new viewers, but then they had to reinvent themselves confronted with the Internet, which gave its users an alleged power to make decisions while it was creating new advertising techniques.

The creation and distribution of information, which seemed to gain a new collaborative and shared era with the Internet, was soon held much more hostage to new mediators, which were more restrictive, relating to the information they had - and also more invasive relating to the information they look for. The constant spectacularization of life was quick and effective in putting people in a new position: they stopped caring about everyday life and were constantly co-opted for the incredible, the admirable, the amazing.

Without falling into the naive acceptance of the cartoon as ideologically neutral entertainment, it is noticeable that, by moving the cartoon to a digital and online media, its function, in general, also migrated from a moralizing attitude, that reproduced social and political values, to a version aligned with the capital, in other words, for the immediate consumption of new icons always associated with a supposed freedom.

According to Rancière (2012), the idea of spectacle as an observable act was born in the Greek Agora. That would have been the first version in which there is a clear division between the roles of actors and spectators. In the contemporaneity, we can discuss the spectacularization of daily life by the television, or by the computer screen, and the real action of those apparatuses. Rancière analyses it in the following way:

Being a spectator is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at the spectacle. And looking at it is a bad thing for two reasons. Firstly, looking is considered to be the opposite of knowing. It means to look at something without knowing the conditions of it or the reality behind it. Secondly, looking is considered the opposite of acting. One who observes the spectacle stands still sitting on the chair, without the power to act. Being a spectator means being passive. (Rancière, 2012, p. 272, our translation)

While trying to overcome this passiveness which is imposed on us as spectators, we could think that the obvious would be to eliminate the TV, computers and any other displays from our daily life. On the other hand, it is possible to visualize, even though indistinctly, a version of entertainment in which the relationship between spectators and TV spectacle changes, it transforms into education and learning, into gathering and discussion of interests, instead of simply being captured by images and selling of publicity products. In order to achieve this change, the TV spectacle needs to confront the spectator, leaving them with the need to investigate through some doubt or criticism, the exposure of utopias or dystopias.

The idea is that it would be possible to remove the viewers from this passive position, transforming them into interpreters responsible for their own learning process and entertainment. As scientists who observe a phenomenon without realizing that they are, in fact, observers. On the contrary, the action of observing the observers has the objective of reaching conclusions and producing knowledge, being necessarily active during the whole process.

To clarify what has been said, I will present here and in the following sections, an assessment of some examples of Brazilian and international cartoons that intended objectively to stimulate their audience to share information, regarding the production of their own knowledge and historical documentation.

The cartoon book *Brasil: ditadura-militar, um livro para os que nasceram bem depois* (Brazil: Military-dictatorship. A book for those who were born quite after it.), written by Joana D'Arc Fernandes Ferraz and Elaine de Almeida Bortone, researchers of the history of the dictatorship in Brazil and members of the group "Tortura nunca mais" (Torture never again) is a good example to illustrate that. Published for the first time in 2012, the book seeks to tell lost stories, or forbidden memories according to the authors. The illustrated material is aimed at children and discusses the subject of the military dictatorship lived in the country. During the reading, it is possible to color the book as you read stories of a family living through the dictatorship, from a child's perspective. The reader is invited to construct, alongside the characters of the book, the history, and their stories, becoming part of the construction of knowledge.

This work seems to demonstrate that when the spectator is active, the spectacle gains the character of experience and, given the complexity of this concept, even more relating it to the flat screens and cartoons, the path is one of conflict, movement of poles, among authors who approach the subject, and then we try to start discussing how cartoons can either enhance domination or subvert this process. In other words, they can act either as repositories of individual and collective memory or as tools for prospecting and encouraging imagination.

2 Experience and collective memory

Childhood, through the eyes of a child, can be analyzed as an experience strongly connected to the television. Could child and adult life –pervaded by visual experiences mediated by controlling agents– create a sensation of alterity through shared experiences, in order to form a community?

The idea, in this section, is to analyze the term "experience" according to two distinct authors, clarifying key points of their concepts and in this way, comprehend how experience works in our social and cultural context, more specifically, through animations.

According to Pascucci (1997), television has been neglected for a long time by academics, because they believed that it, in reality, represented the imprisonment of men and the abandoning of public life. Yet, this was a gigantic mistake, because people ended up abandoning an archival tool, with a high cultural value. So he comments:

This fear [of television replacing public space] prevents academics from conducting research on the immeasurable television archives. What is even worse, this refusal of television serves to reassure an idea that is held dear in the academia: that space is the absolute condition for an authentic public life, therefore, a life mediated by television is less real and, at some point, less public. (Pascucci, 1997, p. 41 our translation)

According to the author, if spectators could be questioning and discussing their daily lives, the essence of community life would be safe, because even though it is united by this invisible connection - which for some time seemed to segregate people in their personal lives - he points out that community is in fact made of shared memories and affections, it is not necessary to be present in the same physical space. This idea has its assumptions in technological determinism, according to which society and development keep a revolutionary mutuality, that is to say, every moment either one of them revolutionizes the whole context of contemporary life (Souza, 2010). A dissolution of all materiality of urban space and the city is also being prepared, which internet came to encourage in the last twenty years (Souza, De Souza and Malard, [s.d.] our translation) However, it was precisely this caution and the problems occasioned by the impasse between society and technology that induced the potential of animations in the production and dissemination of shared information in the public sphere. In order to illustrate this matter Pascucci affirms that this experimentation, which is visual and expressed through image on television, is beyond collective, it inhabits the imaginary of several generations acting in a temporary and powerful social formation, in which the object of its apparition manages to find an ideal place at any moment in people's lives. (Pascucci, 1997).

Goodman on the other hand (Vinhosa, 2006) proposes a theory of the 'plural worlds', and explains a constant production of realities among a variety of agents when very distinct worldviews are shared. Vinhosa points out that:

Goodman's plural world theory is invested in interest because it suggests that the construction of worlds is subjected to particular conditions of sociability and learning. Hence, the existing and always under construction worlds, such as the

worlds of art, science, religion and, more ordinarily, the daily world or simply world of the other, give the necessary raw materials to forge our own individual worlds. (Vinhosa, 2006, p.122, our translation)

Following this line of thought, the cartoon could be compared to what the author comments about art: it is produced in a context, with a specific purpose, and by different artists. The spectators, in turn, bring their own particular world with them when experiencing the artistic work at a given moment. The materialization of a third world, unique and equally real stems from the clash of these two worlds. Goodman affirms that, in order for an experience to be validated, it does not need the approval of the collective, and it can be experienced either intimately or very well socialized. The same can be said about the whole concrete symbolism of art, architecture, and urbanism: they correspond initially to an individual symbolism, that takes the shape of a natural and motivated relationship by marking its presence in the social context (Altman, Rapoport and Wohlwill, 1980; Norberg-Schulz, 1971, 1980; Rapoport, 1982).

Drawing is usually taken as the first human attempt of establishing communication among ourselves, of reaching self-consciousness and consciousness of the world, in addition to guaranteeing a form of representing it. After all, as Maturana (2001) pointed out, the experience is almost impossible when we don't have a language to describe it. Hence, to the drawing it is attributed the responsibility of the creation of the first language, it gave origin to symbols and codes, and later on, to language and discourse.

The animation reaches, through flat screens, both private and public spaces, and produces experiences alongside their spectators, who also reproduce the discourses that produced them. Once these spectators are gathered, connected and acting, they create new symbols, derived from their worlds and their private interpretations, in addition to reproducing ideas that had been introjected. Hence, when facing the space experienced as some hybrid physical-digital one, and animation as a potential tool for spreading information that reaches youngsters and adults, the engagement and the collective production of such information would only depend on those agents who are mediators and producers - those who detain and produce the discourse can make it in a manner that the others can participate in the active production of their own knowledge. The main factor in this process according to Maturana (2001), is that what spectators share is a reconstruction of each individual experience through an objectivity "between parenthesis", that is to say, the emotional individual discourse, accepted by the others.

In an almost poetical manner, the short film "Abuela Grillo" manages to show the enormous potential both narrative and of dissemination of information that animation can have, as well as its historical and documental benefits. The great achievement of this animation, was to refresh the story of Abuela Grillo -the fertility of the soil, the lady of the waters- telling it in parallel with the Water Wars that happened in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000. Due to an international imposition, the Bolivian government took the decision of privatizing the water supply, passing its control to a multinational company Agua Del Tunari. Besides imposing abusive tariffs, the company required the approval of a law that prohibited collecting rainwater.

In a playful manner, the short film presents the value of water and the necessity of access and a right for all. It points out the importance of the fight of native peoples against mercantilization, predatory and imperialist takeover. It gains importance for transforming a product of society into a document, under the scrutiny of power relations in the area, but that came in remembrance of a historical episode lived by these people (Vasconcelos, 2015). It reaches a very wide public by using the animation as a narrative tool, without oversimplifying the story. It prevents this memory from being forgotten by future generations.



Fig. 1: Frame of the movie "Abuela Grillo". Full movie available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXz4XPuB_BM&t=>. Accessed 21/10/2019.

3 The naturalization of social conducts and power games

Once we understand how a visual spectacle can transform into a rich particular experience and, at the same time, potentially collective, we need to comprehend how the cartoons, in the hands of publicity, media and controlling agents, transform into strategic power apparatuses. It is important to highlight that the concept of apparatus, used in this article, is borrowed from Agamben (2005), who analyzes Foucault's texts. According to the author, an apparatus can be anything, such as speeches, languages, philosophical propositions, practices and mechanisms. Above all, the network that connects all these things and people. It is only necessary that, in the analysis of its creation and use, the strategic functions subscribed to power relations are identified. As he comments:

I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. (Agamben, 2005, p. 13, our translation).

The banalization of the use of apparatuses resulted in the usage of everything, at any moment as a form of naturalizing actions and behaviors. According to the author it happened with the consolidation of capitalism, and nowadays there would not be a single moment in individuals' lives that are not shaped, contaminated or controlled by some sort of apparatus. Thinking of the eye-centered world (Pallasmaa, 2005) we live in, it is easy to understand how the cartoons, deconstructed to their most basic form - image - managed to transform themselves into a globalized apparatus of formation of new consumers, adult and children. According to the author Martine Joly (1996), since we are immersed in *Image Civilization*, we are all consumers of images, hence, since the moment we are born. We are exposed to countless images of different origins, and, over time, they form in the imagery of populations the references and patterns that become perceived as something natural, without any necessity of criticism or reflection (Joly, 1996)

Cartoons are not apart from these characteristics, just as other images, either animated or not. It is charged with intentionalities, it shows representations of power, and possesses symptoms of the time and the society in which they were produced. It both creates and echoes representations, be it forms, behaviors or thoughts that surround social life where it is located. The animation is presented as a fun and psychically liberating spectacle, in a critical approach such as Lipovetsky's (2009) while treating fashion as liberating. The media of mass communication can be considered a powerful instrument of socialization, an effective way of inducing ideology and values disguised as entertainment (Vasconcelos, 2015).

Possibly, the clearest example of this would be the animation "The Millionaire". It was produced, in 1963, by the soviet animation agency Soyuzdetmultfilm. In it, a rich woman leaves all her heritage to her dog, contrary to the family's will. The narrator then asks: "What could a dog do with so much money?". The answer comes immediately - "In America, anything". In less than 10 minutes of animation, it stops being a pet dog to become president of the Senate, backed by bankers and promoting wars. It is strong anti-capitalist propaganda, that substitutes the Stalinist aesthetic for another one, closer to what was made in the west, to confront Disney productions. In an explicit manner, it is an ideological apparatus. The narrative works for both children and adults and dubbing allowed it to be distributed throughout the communist world.



However, it is not about adopting the powerlessness before the media forces. In fact Agamben (2005) believes in the impossibility of remodeling an apparatus. He points out that an apparatus always accomplishes an urgency and seeks control. Even if it were proposed to be restructured, or better, "desecrated", we would still be falling on the traps imposed by the media. The author Henry Giroux (1998) who carried out extensive research on animations, particularly Disney animations, affirms that condemning the animations as "manipulative, conservative and educational tools" is underestimating the power of a good story, which is an incentive to the imagination. According to him, the cartoon:

(...) should be seen as a pedagogical venture of public policy formulation actively involved in the production of the cultural landscape of national identity and the schooling of children's minds. (Giroux, 1998, p. 79)

Therefore, the content produced may have a variety of effects depending on where it is presented and how it brings the subject to its public. Animations, as well as the cinema, must always be analyzed thinking of those who produced, when, for whom and where they were produced. Only with cautious criticism, the audience could diminish the risk of internalizing values of a hegemonic power in this scenario of globalization of cultures.

4 Future research: languages of fiction

By using these types of products as sources, it will be possible to sharpen learners' eyes, to teach them how to dismount sources and to contextualize them. Finally, it will be possible to combat historical anachronism and realize that all human action is a source. Just learn to look. (Vasconcelos, 2015, p. 124)

The objective of this section is to lead to an outcome in which I analyze two complementary concepts to what has been seen so far: the first, to understand the cartoon as a communication and information construction tool, and then as the ideological apparatus it is, without demonizing the flat screens or falling into the apocalyptic and deterministic premonition that so much portrayed TV and now portrays our cellphones, tablets, and computers, placing them as killers of collective life. As exploratory research, this theme can be correlated with the creative practice present at the origin of every communication process. From what has been commented, two vectors can guide future research: the first is to identify who are the mediators, how they disseminate information through space, and, consequently, disseminate values and norms of conduct. The second is to research the potential that animation and fiction can provide in telling a story, documenting, informing, and teaching generations critically — all without losing focus: who did it, to whom, and why. Thinking about what animation says and how it says, in other words, the intentionality of the workpiece, in order to remain critical while making use of that mediatic material (Vasconcelos, 2015).

This means that the strategy we must adopt in our relationship with apparatuses cannot be simple, as it is nothing less than releasing what has been captured and separated by apparatuses to restore it to possible common use. (Agamben, 2009, p. 14, our translation)

This second vector seems to lead to research into the understanding of the cartoon as language, and of language, in turn, as a way of perceiving and conceiving reality and our experiences in the world. It is precisely because each human being has their way of perceiving the reality that we can affirm that language is conducive to ideologies. A work shared between two or more subjects, those who produced it and those who consumed it will have no other function in the world than to give materiality to the real world. In other words, the reality of the person who produced it and its intentionality, added to the reality of the person who consumes it and their critical analysis, produce in the world a third and only story, individual and potential, that once distributed in mass, has a strong appeal and collective bond. In the animations referred to here, this is all very clear. Most of them have a strong appeal as a documentary, reproduce the story with the intention that it is not to be forgotten, but their characters in a context of struggle, and present historical facts from a variety of perspectives. The Soviet animation, which has strong political appeal, aims to reinforce a narrative that attacks the capital and protects the state. His criticism is so exaggerated and comic that the message remains memorable.

5 Conclusions

The potential of animation can be as perverse as instructive, depending on the strategies used in its production. In it resides its ability to carry messages, to bring up, contemporary and historical issues through critical analysis, to leave a doubt that will move the passive viewer into the action, rescue stories, document, and recall generations. It can present itself with the appeal of pure entertainment and make it its greatest ability - to fantasize discourses, ideologies, and knowledge, in the form of leisure.

That way the animation reaches private and public spaces produce experiences together with its spectators, who also reproduce the discourses behind them. Therefore, thinking of experienced space as the union between physical and digital space, and animation as a tool for the formation and dispersion of information, the engagement and collective construction of this information would only depend on who the mediators and producers are - those who hold and produce discourse can do so so that others, young and old, can participate in the active production of their own knowledge.

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