

Panel A3

Sala delle Colonne 2

Art and Technology in Digital Animation

Nicolò Ceccarelli

Expanding informative space with animation



More than forty years ago, at the very edge of the digital revolution, Gene Youngblood, a young American journalist and technology expert, gathered for the first time a complex array of experiences, researches and artistic experimentations under the idea of *Expanded Cinema*. With his essay, Youngblood did more than collating a set of inspiring approaches: by introducing a wide set of early explorations – from computer graphics, motion graphics to video art; from multimedia shows to hybrid performances combining film, sensors and interactivity – he outlined the seeds of the revolution of global communication, anticipating a scenario that is today quite common. Furthermore, through its suggestive metaphor, Youngblood suggested the idea of a communicative space where genres once completely separated could merge in unexpected forms. A territory that – once freed from the conventions and boundaries of traditional broadcasting – could reach vast audiences in new ways and through innovative channels.

Despite his vision of a new (by then almost entirely pre-digital) scenario, based on multimedia and on visual communication – to the point of anticipating, to some extent, the idea itself of digital convergence – Youngblood couldn't possibly imagine the long-term consequences of this process: the internet, the world wide web, the emergence of virtual communities and of social networking... The scenario unfolding before our eyes is characterized today by the explosion of the visual medium, by unprecedented levels of interactivity and by an increasing accessibility to on-line multimedia contents and information.

This new communicative landscape, described by Henry Jenkins as 'transmedial', is shaped as a hybrid distributed on-line space. Here, various multimedia contents collaborate in defining an open informative eco-system: a ubiquitous environment characterized by the new patterns typical of social and collaborative networking, capable of triggering new forms of audience participation and forcing us to radically transform the way we inform and communicate.

What makes this general scenario interesting to us is the growing role played in this communicative space by new, inspiring, informative, audiovisual products. Moreover, the language of animation is experiencing an exciting new season through the sophisticated strategies intended to spark interest in new audiences of the global information arena. Short animated films offering concise, informative, entertaining, synoptic information are often the starting agents meant to trigger viral strategies on this distributed space. Although after a first contact has been established, additional content is provided by re-directing the audience to other reference materials: text, multimedia, videos, interviews, interactive apps, some of these animated films, such as 'the Story of Stuff', or 'The clock is clicking' have become new classics, having been seen millions of times worldwide.

Along the track of its long-term contribution to a variety of ephemeral, industrial and documentary films, the language of animation is, of course, not new to informative application of such kind. Nevertheless, these new animated artifacts present traits that,

despite sharing various elements with traditional animation, appear to have an autonomous status and are hence worth being taken under scrutiny.

In the way they combine animated images, graphics in motion, typography, voice-over commentary, sound effects and narrative strategies, for instance, these informative products define new patterns of communication. Moreover, being often created by graphic designers and illustrators rather than by traditional animators, these new artifacts display illustrative, graphical, limited animations, that re-define animation's communicative powers.

By discussing some case studies, such as the 'Story of' and the 'Kurzgesagt-in a nutshell' series, and taking into scrutiny how organizations such as the 'Girleffect' initiative or the 'Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation' approach the new expanded territories of communication, this paper aims at defining some patterns in the ways animation is today used to engage and inform global audiences, and in how it can be used as a way to give access to complex contents through the emerging channels of on-line communication.

Biography

ceccarelli@uniss.it

nic_cec (Skype)

Associate Professor (Design)

Department of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sassari, Italy

Over the years Nicolò has oriented his research work towards the interactions between design and digital technology, exploring research fields such as 3D modeling and design visualization, heritage valorization, animation, the exploration of languages for making information accessible through visual design. In 2004 he co-published 'Animazione 3D' for Mondadori, one of Italy's main publishers.

He has organized the Erasmus IP 'InformAnimation' and has created the 2013 first edition of the international design conference 2CO_COmmunicating Complexity. More recently, in his Alghero research laboratory 'animazionedesign', he started exploring ways to develop a design approach aware of the local dimension, working in Morocco and Palestine. In 2015, he co-led a large research project for the re-design of the corporate identity for the Sardinia Region. The project, that integrated graphic design, exhibit design and animations had been selected for the ADI/Compasso d'Oro Design competition. Nicolò is currently working on the Neo-local Design project and has recently concluded a research effort on scientific dissemination funded by the Italian Ministry for Education, University and Research.