

Panel D2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Theoretical perspectives on the animated documentary



Cristina Formenti

Walt Elias Disney and the Animated Documentary of the Classical Era

Walt Elias Disney hasn't been a key figure in the history of animation only in relationship to this medium's fictional production, but also in relationship to the animated documentary (or the "cartoon documentary", as he preferred to term it). Indeed, starting from the years of Second World War, not only he had his studio produce a vast number of animated works illustrating aspects of reality, but also he himself had a crucial role in the development of the animated documentary as a proper filmic form. More precisely, the paper will start by showing how, aside from producing animated documentaries, Disney has also undertaken a series of actions aimed at spreading worldwide the notion itself of animated documentary as well as at stimulating and favoring, between the early 1940s and the late 1950s, the raise of what I suggest to term the animated documentary production of the classical era. In so doing, particular attention will be devoted to the articles Disney has written on nonfiction animation, among which is a 1955 piece that can be considered this form's first theorization, and wherein he provides a precise model for the creation of this kind of nonfiction animated works. Indeed, in it Disney raises as animated documentaries *par excellence* a series of shorts created by his studio in the early 1940s in partnership with the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, among which *The Winged Scourge* (Bill Roberts, 1943) and *Defense Against Invasion* (Jack King, 1943), inviting to look up at such films when creating an animated documentary and suggesting that this is what his animators were doing.

Subsequently, drawing also on textual analysis, the paper will illustrate how the elements and aesthetics that Disney conceived as the defining traits of the animated documentary not only have actually become the defining traits of this form in general during its classical era, but also still mark its contemporary production, although with some variations. Stemming from this discussion, the paper will therefore suggest a new, articulated definition of the animated documentary.

Biography

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Cristina Formenti is an Adjunct Professor in Film Studies at Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy. She holds a doctoral degree from the same university, which she has obtained defending a thesis on the theory, history and aesthetics of animated documentary. She is author of the monograph *Il mockumentary: la fiction si maschera da documentario* (Mimesis 2013) and editor of *Mariangela Melato tra cinema, teatro e televisione* (Mimesis 2016). Her work has appeared also in various national and international journals, among which *Bianco & Nero*, *Studies in Documentary Film* and *Alphaville*. Currently, she is the interim co-editor of *Animation Studies 2.0*.