

Panel G2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Narration and Voice in Animation

Nichola Dobson

“Trans”formers Rescue Bots, representation in disguise



TV animation series aimed at children and teens often features subtle (and not so subtle) content aimed at an adult audience. This can be in the form of subversion for political purposes or simple pop culture references and more sophisticated humour to placate the adult viewing along with their child. In recent years, this mixed approach has changed with shows developing more politically progressive themes which adults will recognize while presenting educational messages of positive representation for the children watching.

Shows such as *Steven Universe*, *Adventure Time* and *My Little Pony* include positive messages of representation of a wide group in terms of race and sexuality. This is continued in the preschool/pre teen variation of the *Transformers* series, *Rescue Bots*. The series' main message is of co-operation, teamwork and acceptance of others different from you. The message is not presented in a patronizing way but through smartly written self-reflexive and appropriately intertextual comedy. There is a great deal for adults to enjoy along with the children with parodies and spoofs of films and TV, as well as of their own franchise and toy sales. This paper will examine the extent of the representation in the series in terms of the diversity of gender, race and sexuality within the series.

The paper will adopt a production studies approach using interview material, combined with textual analysis, to develop a discussion of the casting within the series, arguing that this has helped to create one of the most positive and diverse shows for this age group (and frankly for adults). With a plethora of toy tie in series available in a multi-channel, multi platform televisual landscape, *Rescue Bots* stands out as one of the best examples of representation available. The paper will also argue that in recent promotional material, the series makes visible the production and performance of the characters in a way that many series don't and thus foregrounds much of the diversity promoted. In this way the paper will develop the discourse around voice performance in animation.

Biography

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Dr Nichola Dobson is a teaching fellow in design and screen cultures at Edinburgh College of Art. Founding editor of *Animation Studies* (2006 - 2011) and *Animation Studies 2.0* (2012- present), she has published on animation, television genre and fan fiction, including *Historical Dictionary of Animation and Cartoons* (2009) for Scarecrow Press. She is currently working on a book on TV animation with Paul Ward for Edinburgh University Press and a book on Scottish animator Norman McLaren for Bloomsbury. She is currently President of the Society for Animation Studies.