

Panel G2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Narration and Voice in Animation

Richard Leskosky

The Portmanteau Film – An Animated Genre



Portmanteau animated films include two or more distinct narratives which are internally identified as distinct narratives. This differs from the notions of plot and subplot or of a primary and a secondary storyline, which has become a template in television cartoon series such as *The Simpsons*. In the Portmanteau Film, the component narratives do not evince that sort of narrative continuity; instead, there is an explicit disjunction between components. And although some Portmanteau Films, such as various Popeye cartoons from the Fleischer Studio, include footage from a character's previous adventures, these episodes do not operate in the same manner as a flashback – that is, they do not have a significant narrative connection with the cartoon's present. Indeed, the Portmanteau Popeyes in particular serve merely to recycle older footage into a new cartoon to fill out a tight production schedule. The classic example of the Portmanteau Film remains Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, however, and several other Disney features of the 1940s fall into this category as well. These films at first glance may seem to be merely anthologies of episodes, but they are more complex than that. Portmanteau Films are intrinsically self-referential, calling attention to themselves as narratives by explicitly and separately identifying each narrative segment. But then they once again immerse the viewer in a narrative albeit a different narrative from the preceding. And, as in *Fantasia*, the material is further organized for the viewer by means of a voice of authority, whose speaker may either appear on screen or remain an unseen, anonymous authority. Although it might seem that this sort of multiplication of narratives within a single film would require feature length to manifest itself, there are in fact numerous examples of portmanteau shorts, dating back to the second decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is among short films (both Hollywood theatrical releases and independent productions) that one finds more variety and more subtlety in this genre than among feature films. This presentation argues for this construct comprising a genre in itself, delineates the variations practiced by different studios and/or animators, and explores its relationship to other genres which similarly rely on voices of authority to address the viewer and organize the material presented visually.

Biography

Richard J. Leskosky is an Associate Professor retired from the Department of Media and Cinema Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a former president of the Society for Animation Studies. He continues to study pre-cinematic animation devices, animation patents, Japanese animation, and animated film genres and has presented papers in all these areas at previous SAS conferences. He is currently working on a volume on animated film genres.

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