

Panel I1

Auditorium

Cartoons and Beyond

Davide Giurlando

The Weird Age: When Unpleasant and Provocative Animated Works Became Popular and Successful



In Bill Plympton's words, as far as US animation is concerned, the 1970s and 1980s were "kind of an empty era": an embraceable assumption, since some of the masters of the past had died (Tex Avery passed away in 1980) or their artistic activities had decreased. Except for some sporadic and memorable works such as Ralph Bakshi's independent feature *Fritz the Cat* (1972), animated movies and series weren't as groundbreaking as they had been in the past decades. However, in the late 1980s MTV would give greater visibility to several independent animators and Robert Zemeckis would direct *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, one of the first examples of an animated movie which includes classic characters and adult jokes at the same time: these and even more factors successfully gave impulse to a new era of animation.

A particularly relevant episode is *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures*, a Saturday morning animated series which in 1987 succeeded in renewing Paul Terry's "Mighty Mouse" character by creating provocative stories characterized by wild, unpredictable humor. The series, whose showrunner was Ralph Bakshi, met with controversy, and included Bakshi's personal commentaries about the state of entertainment industry in the US. Even if the series was short-lived, its influence was very strong among US animators; in 1991 John Kricfalusi, who had worked on *Mighty Mouse*, created *The Ren & Stimpy Show*, and since then provocative subjects and over-the-top characterization has become more and more common in US animated TV series and movies: the legacy of *The Ren & Stimpy Show* is recognizable in popular characters like SpongeBob SquarePants, while blockbusters such as *The Lego Movie* introduce not-banal statements about the dynamics of fandom.

In this paper I will analyze the path through which US mainstream animation incorporated more and more provocative and unpleasant elements, thus adopting an approach which is reminiscent of independent works rather than classic mainstream animation: a recent example is the Netflix-produced series *BoJack Horseman*, a work which successfully implements social satire, risky subjects and rough designs, and whose narrative and visual style mirrors Mike Judge's animated series, but also indie comic books like the ones created by Kate Beaton or Daniel Clowes. The metamorphosis of tastes among the audience will be taken into account, as well as the social changes which may have encouraged such transformation; I will propose a comparison among classic Disney movies – with Mickey Mouse as the main character – and the recent slapstick Mickey shorts created by Paul Rudish, whose approach and style are very similar to Kricfalusi's.

Biography

davide.giurlando@unive.it

Davide Giurlando is a specialist in cinema and animation studies. He graduated at Ca' Foscari University (Venice, Italy) with a dissertation about intersemiotic translations. His interest for a sociological approach in cinema studies led him to complete a PhD focused on Soviet cinema as the mirror of national changes in cultural, social and political fields in Soviet Union. He subsequently specialized in animation, and since 2011 he has been one of the organizers of Ca' Foscari Short Film Festival, the first European film festival entirely managed by students under the guidance of a staff of Professors in film studies and professionals from the world of cinema; in particular, he curates the special program Anymation, entirely focused on animated movies from all over the world. He took part in the organization of special events which included the participation of world-known animators such as Bill Plympton, Barry Purves and Yusaki Fusako, and in 2015 he co-curated for Ca' Foscari University the international conference "Animation Between Arts and Thought". He is the editor of the forthcoming volume *Fantasmagoria. Un secolo (e oltre) di cinema d'animazione*, published by Marsilio, which includes the contributions of scholar in animation studies and internationally-known professionals from the world of animation. He provided the MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) "Elementi di cinema d'animazione" for Ca' Foscari University and he is part of the teaching staff of the Master of Fine Arts in Filmmaking, currently in development at Ca' Foscari.