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AN ANALYSIS OF "THE SIMPSONS" THROUGH VISUAL INDICATORS

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Abstract

In this paper, The Simpsons (1989-) is analyzed based on the critics of capitalism by visual indicators which are categorized as character, light and color. Content analysis method is used and 1st, 18th and 24th seasons of "The Simpsons". In general, The Simpsons is an example of typical American family with five family members: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie. Springfield is the town where The Simpsons live in. Homer as the figure of father is characterized as liar, clumsy, incompetent, and lazy with lack of communication ability with his son, Bart. The communication problem of each other is noticeable. Homer is working in a nuclear power central and his boss is defined as the symbol of savage capitalism with his attitude and manner towards the labor. Bart is an American teenager willing to do crazy things and trying to be cool and popular in his school. He is not interested in lessons and an unsuccessful student. Despite the men in the family, women members are characterized as hard-working, ingenious and practical. As a mother Marge holds the family together and trying to solve the conflict and the problems of the family in a rational way. Marge is insightful, intelligent and self-confident. Lisa is also a smart girl having good habits such as music and she is keen on environmental issues. The Simpsons reflect sample of a post-modern family of twentieth century with common anxieties of today's modern living conditions.

Keywords: The Simpsons, animation, visual indicators, communication arts.

Introduction

1. Definition of Animation

The term animation is used to describe the process of sequencing drawings, computer-generated artwork, or photographs of models to create the illusion of a moving image. Animation encompasses several categories, including hand-drawn animation, computer-generated animation, and model animation. Each of these can also be broken down into further categories—for example, hand-drawn animation can be divided into cartoon animation and abstract animation. Computer-generated animation can be split into 2D and 3D animation.

Visual effects are the process of applying effects to film, video, or animated footage. Most people think of visual effects in terms of creating amazing 3D creatures, environments, and other CGI elements (computer-generated imagery), but the visual effects umbrella covers several other areas, too. Compositing is the process of combining images and footage together in layers. Keying is the process of removing backgrounds from shots so they can be composited with new ones. Color correction is the process of fixing the color of footage to achieve consistency; it can also be used to apply color treatments to style shots. Within each of these subsets of visual effects it's often necessary to animate values, so animation rules apply here as much as they do in pure animation.

It's hard to determine exactly when animation began, but the idea of making still drawings come to life has been developed over centuries. This gradual development really gained momentum during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early moving image technology included the magic lantern, which projected sequences of slides upon which an artist would paint or draw. This magical device relied on a phenomenon known as "persistence of vision," where the human eye looks at an image and remembers it for slightly longer than it's actually visible.

1.1. Traditional Animation

Traditional stop-frame animation started in the early 1900s. It was created by photographing a series of drawn images that were then transferred to film and played back to give the optical

illusion of a moving image. Originally, it was consider only a novelty for entertaining children and adults until Walt Disney, in the 1930s, developed it into the magical art form it is today. Since then, traditional stop-frame animators have (collectively) developed their skills and techniques over one hundred years. As with most forms of art and design, this has resulted in a well-respected set of rules that should be understood in order to produce successful and compelling animation (Taylor, 2011).

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1.2. Computer Animation

The development of animation techniques, a process that can be traced back to the 18th century brought with it a thematic variety in animation genres. Today, animation techniques based on cartoons, puppets, stop-motion, shadow, cut-out and time lapse can be applied both manually and based on digital technology. Furthermore the use of 3D computer graphics in the 1976-dated film "Futureworld" opened the way for this technology to be in high demand in a variety of industries. 3D animations occupy a central role today in cinema, TV, education and video games alike, and their creative processes in both realistic and surreal terms seem to know no limits. This new medium that with its magical powers makes the impossible possible and defies the laws of physic (Gökçearslan, 2008: 1) open a door for designers and artists to an unlimited imagination. "In particular in the movies of the 80s, computer-aided animated effects turned out to be life-savers, and the feature film Terminator 2 (1991) in which 3D animation technology was used for the first time received praise from both audience and film critics" (Kaba, 1992: 19). Toy Story (Walt Disney Pictures, 1995), a film that became very popular among audiences of all ages due to its script, characters, settings and animation technique, was the first fully 3D animated feature film in history, and was followed by two sequels. By help of the support coming from the homeland, and its form oriented realistic format, Disney characters have been amongst the top animated characters. In order to achieve a realistic production, Disney even kept animals such as horses, deer, and rabbits in the studios, while the artists studied their form, movements and behaviour.

As for human characters, famous movie stars of the period were hired as a reference point for human form and behaviour. (Gökçearslan, 2009:80). Another American movie "Shrek" (2001) created by William Steig, whose book Shrek (1990) formed basis for the DreamWorks Pictures full length 3D animation film, attracted millions of people. The movie is a great example of a clever and aesthetically pleasing combination of powerful imagination and realistic design. Also, by means of certain dialogues and jokes, the theme of "value judgement" is simplified in a way that it is also understood by children.

These are amongst two undeniable factors which are thought to have contributed to the worldwide success of the movie. Most successful 3D animation movies are of American make. The importance of budget, historical and political factors, as well as contextual and stylistic factors which bring in simplicity and clarity to the movies is incontrovertible. “The era of the post-photographic film has arrived, and it is clear that for the animator, the computer is essentially "another pencil". Arguably, this has already reached its zenith in PIXAR's Monsters Inc. Consequently, it remains important to note that while Europe has retained a tradition of auteurist film making, also echoed elsewhere in Russia, China, and Japan, the United States has often immersed its animation within a Special Effects tradition, and as an adjunct to live action cinema.” (Wells, 2002:2; Şekeroğlu, 2012).

1.3. History of Animation

Centuries ago, ancient people not only expressed themselves by painting still images on cave surfaces, but they also attempted to convey motion regarding moments and events by painting images, which later helped establish the natural course of events in history. Such concern contributed greatly to the animation and cinema history.

First examples of animation, which dates back approximately four centuries ago, represents milestones in history of cinema. Eadweard J. Muybridge took several photographs with multiple cameras and assembled the individual images into a motion picture and invented the movie projector called Zoopraxiscope and with the projection he held in 1887 he was also regarded as the inventor of an early movie projector. In that aspect, Frenchmen Louis and Auguste Lumière brothers are often credited as inventing the first motion picture and the creator of cinematography (1895). J. Stuart Blackton clearly recognised that the animated film could be a viable aesthetic and economic vehicle outside the context of orthodox live action cinema.

In particular, his movie titled The Haunted Hotel (1907) included impressive supernatural sequences, and convinced audiences and financiers alike that the animated film had unlimited potential. (Wells, 1998:14) “Praxinoscope” - invented by Frenchman Charles-Émile Reynaud - is one of the motion picture related tools which was developed and improved in time, and the invention is considered to be the beginning of the history of animated films, in the modern sense of the world.

At the beginning of the 20th century, animated films produced through hand-drawn animation technique proved very popular, and the world history was marked by the most recognizable cartoon characters in the world that were produced through these animations, such as Little Nemo (1911), Gertie the Dinosaur (1914), The Sinking of the Lusitania (1918), Little Red Riding Hood (1922), The Four Musicians of

Bremen (1922) Mickey Mouse (1928), Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). Nazi regime in Germany leads to several important animation film productions. When Goebbels could no longer import Disney movies, he commissioned all animation studios to develop theatrical cartoons. Upon this, Hans Fischerkoesen began to produce animation films and by end of the war, he produced over a thousand cartoons (Moritz, 2003:320).

In due course, animated films became increasingly popular, resulting in new and sizable sectors, and the advances in technology made expansion possible. From then on, the computer-generated productions, which thrived in the 1980's, snowballed into the indispensable part of the modern day television and cinema. The American animated movie Aladdin grossed over 495 million dollars worldwide, and represented the success of the American animation industry, which then led to an expansion into animated movies which targeted adults (Aydın, 2010:110).

Japan is possibly just as assertive in the animation films as America. Following the success of the first Japanese animation (anime) called The White Snake Enchantress 1958 which resulted in awards in Venice, Mexico and Berlin film festivals, Japanese animes became ever so popular, which led to continuous international success (Şekeroğlu, 2012).

For example, the movie titled Spirited Away won an Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film, and became the winner of the top prize at this year's Berlin film festival. Following their ever-increasing success in anime production, Japan became one of the most sought after hubs of animation industry by European and American companies interested in collaboration.

2. The Simpsons

The Simpsons is an American animated sitcom created by Matt Groening for the Fox Broadcasting Company. The series is a satirical parody of a middle class American lifestyle epitomized by its family of the same name, which consists of Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie. The show is set in the fictional town of Springfield and parodies American culture, society, television and many aspects of the human condition. The family was conceived by Groening shortly before a solicitation for a series of animated shorts with the producer James L. Brooks. Groening created a dysfunctional family and named the characters after members of his own family, substituting Bart for his own name. The shorts became a part of The Tracey Ullman Show on April 19, 1987.

After a three-season run, the sketch was developed into a half-hour prime time show and was an early hit for Fox, becoming the network's first series to land in the Top 30 ratings in a season (1989–1990). Since its debut on December 17, 1989, the show has broadcast 530 episodes and the twenty-fourth season ended on May 19, 2013. The Simpsons is the longest-running American sitcom, the longest-running American animated program, and in 2009 it surpassed Gunsmoke as the longest-running American primetime, scripted television series. The Simpsons Movie, a feature-length film, was released in theaters worldwide on July 26 and July 27, 2007, and grossed over $527 million. The Simpsons is widely considered to be one of the greatest television series of all time. Time magazine's December 31, 1999, issue named it the 20th century's best television series, and on January 14, 2000, the Simpson family was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. It has won dozens of awards since it debuted as a series, including 27 Primetime Emmy Awards, 30 Annie Awards and a Peabody Award. Homer's exclamatory catchphrase "D'oh!" has been adopted into the English language, while The Simpsons has influenced many adult-oriented animated sitcoms (“The Simpsons”, 28.11.2017).

The succes of The Simpsons is not only related with original drawing style, it is mainly the scenerio behind. Its rich scenerio content is being updated to actual facts of the world for each episode, therefore it still stays as “new”. Moreover, character fictions are based on family concept, thus spectators may have some resemblance and connection with each figure. This connection is even more clear with roles of basic characters as Homer (the father), Marge (the mother), Bart (the son), Lisa (the daughter) and Maggie (little daugher).

2.1. Visual Indicators: Character, Light And Color

Visual indicators are one of the arguments on contextual analysis of animation products. In this section, visual indicators of 1st, 18th and 24th seasons of the Simpsons are examined on tables and related data are obtained.

2.1.1. Character

Character in a game, story or animation film is a human being, an animal or an object that is personalized. Character is the most noticeable unit within in a story. It is a unit that can make decisions, react to other characters, get in relationship with others as an important visual indicator. Character is to

describe the image of a human being's behaviour and attitude towards the life with his/her own perspective (Chatman, 1978: 107).

Character in an animation film can be drawn as caricaturistic or in real forms. In addition, human-like depiction of an object or animal is also possible as in Disney products. Animation, in terms of the useage of characters, the most creative type of cinema. As a result of the imagination and visualization opportunities in animation, various characters may be created.

Table 1: Basic characters and related information in "The Simpsons"

Character	**Information**
Homer	Homer is the father of the Simpsons family. He works at a nuclear power plant and has a moderate income. Homer is incompetent, reflected in a tendency to lie. Unlike the male individual in the family, women are intelligent, intelligent and robust.
Bart	Bart is as an energetic and cheerful teenager. He is described as a cheat-prone, lazy and unsuccessful at school.
Marge	Marge is the mother of the family. She is intelligent, resilient, considerably charming and a housewife.
Lisa	Lisa is a smart, hard-working girl. She is described as a successful, sensitive and skilled person in her lessons but has problems in communication, socially.
Maggie	She is the smallest member of the family. There are some scenes that she reveals her intelligence.
Ned Flander	He is a citizen and neighbour of The Simpson, known as a religious man symbolizing the conservative Americans.
Mr. Burns	He is a rich and cruel boss, symbolizing capitalism.
The Scientist	Mr.Burns' most trusted staff, he can be thought of as the main helper of him. It is an indication that science is at service of capitalism.
Krusty	Spriengfield's "famous" comedian. He also has a hamburger shop and he is not well-mannered, symbolizing today's popular artists.
Fat Tony	He is the mafia leader of his gang.
Micheal	Tony's son and Lisa's friend. Lisa has interest on him.
Indian	He is working in a market, appears in some episodes.
Eugen	Homer's friend.
The Cat	Cat is part of The Simpson's family, friend of children. There are some scenes on The Simpsons, criticizing "Tom and Jerry", therefore cat is described as "humiliated".
The Dog	Dog is the second pet of The Simpsons.
Selma & Patty	Twin sisters of Marge.
Figurant Bob	Bob is the figurant of films, etc. and having troubles on his life as never being treated as a respected man.
Moe	Moe has a bar in Springfield, Homer's friend and a typical Barman.
Police officers	Two police officers are seen in some parts of The Simpsons, characterized as their laziness.
Spriengfield town citizens	Figuransts of The Simpsons, having small roles in some parts.

The movie player of animations is the drawing or the type created by the animator. The important point is the compatibility between the drawn type and the type in the scenario. Characters make animation films interesting and attractive mainly. In an animation film, characters can be listed as *animals, people, imaginary people* and divided into three groups. *Objects* may also be added in this list. There are samples in animations that cars, furnitures, toys, etc.become the characters.

In addition, the importance level of characters in the scenario is considerable. The main character is named as *hero*. There are characters that asist to hero named as *understudies*. The realtionship between the characters are highlighted as "bad-good, authoriterian, strong-weak,etc. (Hünerli, 2000)".

2.1.2. Light

The light or lightning is a tool used to realize the images of charactes, objects visually in the animation film. Light can be divided into two groups: *Natural Light* and *Dramatic Light.*

Natural light is an essential tool for the objects to be appeared due to the law of physics. Light is necessary for filming. Drawings used in animation are lightened with light sources on the drawing board to be filmed (Laybourne, 1998).

Light that will have dramatic effects in the animation is created by the animator. The distribution of light and shadow to make it appear three-dimensional according to the movements of characters or objects,

performed by an animator. (A.Şerif Onaran). Dramatic effects of light may be classified as objective and subjective The objective size of the light is the ability to be changed with modifying angle of incidence effecting the appearance of the object on. The subjective effect is the feeling of the spectator with the ratio of lightning.

As an example, sunny and bright weather creates a sense of joy and happiness where raining may cause grief and recession. Thus, light becomes an accepted useful method as introducing and defining the nature and the scene compsitonal, organical and emotional to spectator with visual continuity related with the time and space.

Light as a general may also divide into two categories as hard and soft light. In hard lightening, tone seperations,shadows and the images of objects, characters are noticeable. In soft lightening, light is scattered everywhere that causes very slight shadows. This smooth-shifting shadows are useful in terms of making the depth of the objects or the characters (Kılıç, 2003).

2.1.3. Color

Animation film is occured with drawings and the colors that are composed by the animators' imagination. They are actually colorful imaginary illusions effecting millions of fans and spectators. Therefore, animation art is one of the most important art discipline instead of installing aesthetically meaning to color. The colors have been used since time immemorial as global or local symbols. These icons can be manipulated with different perspectives of artists and had various meanings (Çeviker, 1998). Symbolic meanings of colors are as follows:

Yellow: Yellow has become a basic color used in the description of the Simpsons and everyone in the town. All the characters have humanistic attitudes, but they are actually imaginary characters and they are depicted in yellow in Springfield. Although it reflects positive qualities such as knowledge and logic, it is also a negative color; symbolizing untruthful, vulgarity and vindictiveness. Since Homer and Bart may become unreliable, lying-prone personalities are taken into consideration with the expression of yellow.

Blue: Blue associates the imaginary, intangible and the eternity. Blue is relaxing and soothing. It has positive meanings such as beauty, sophistication and responsibility. Blue is another color often used in The Simpsons. Homer's trousers, Marge's hair, Maggie's garment, Bart's shoes, some equipments at the nuclear power plant, tattooing machine, clinics, etc. painted in blue tones.

Orange: Orange, which symbolizes health, trust, courage, joy, sincerity, vitality, creativity, communication, movement, initiative and happiness, also causes negativity such as unhappiness, despair, destruction. Orange appears in characters' clothes, in Bart's shirt, in Marge's suit, etc. Bart's energetic structure is described by orange. Lisa's outfit is in orange shades as well.

Red: Signs, danger, forbidden love, eroticism, passion, dynamism, creativity, intimacy, happiness, childhood, joy, luxury, festivities and ceremonies are symbolized with red. It is the color of blood, war, and it also carries the meanings of taboo. Besides, red is the color of materialism.

White: Purity, cleanliness, health, virginity, innocence, innocent are characterized with white. Popes wear white in ceremonies. White carries other meanings such as peace and intimacy, impartiality, wisdom, old age, nobility and monarchy. Colorlessness and death are also described with white.

Black: Black carries the opposite meanings of white such as mourning, unhappiness, darkness, the devil, deception, crime and sin. Death, hate, anarchy, oppression, punishment, prison, loneliness and fear also can be represented with black. Conservatism, seriousness, authority, elegance and modernity are the connotation meanings of black.

Brown: As the color of soil brown represents the endurance, strength and autumn.

Gray: It carries the meanings of boredom, sadness and uniformity and the connotation meaning of gray is modernity and industry.

Pink: Pink is frequently used in spatial descriptions such as The Simpsons' house's walls and interior details, shopping mall, etc. Pink means love, harmony and passion.

Green: Since it is the color of the plants, green reflects freedom, harmony, equality, activity, seriousness and thoughts. In addition, hyper-cautiousness, doubt, stinginess, indifference, even insecurity, jealousy, selfishness, prejudice and betrayal are also other symbols of green.

Purple: Purple is the color of compability. It symbolizes both sedative and sexuality, therefore purple has provocative meanings as well. It also reflects features such as mystery, self-esteem, nobility, sadness and melancholy, forgetfulness, impatience, disrespect, irresponsibility and rudeness. In the Simpsons, purple is used in certain spatial narrativesi also the boles are depicted in purple.

Conclusion

"The Simpsons" is described as a typical, modern American family. The conflict between Lisa and Bart, Homer's angry and predominantly fatherhood and all with tensed atmosphere, The Simpsons are plotting a family profile that is problematic. The tense of family can increase to top levels, there in an episode, Homer imagines his family members as hellhounds, driving through flames and volcanoes during their journey. Even though the problems in an American (or any "modern") family unit is criticized, it is always ended with happiness as family members hug each other with love and peace.

In The Simpsons, scenarios can vary and critics do not only focus on family. As in Season 1, Episode 4, capitalism and employee-employer relation is undertaken. Mr. Burns, the boss of nuclear power plant operations invites his employees to his picnic in his own villa. It is emphasized that-as in the potato sack race which Burns wins the first prize every year-people aren't equally represented, and there is no tolerance or justice in hierarchy.

There are many other issues in The Simpsons to be discussed. As in Season 1, Episode 10, the role of women in a society is determined. The sexualization of women in pavilion-like spaces, the ignorance of their role in the family structure has been expressed directly in the episode. Homer Simpson addressed the men in disorderly houses and emphasized the unhealthy approach to woman and expressed her place in society as a mother, sister or spouse. Men who come together for entertainment and enjoy prostitutes are started to think about their wifes and mothers with Homer's speech, and Homer's discourse has enabled men to become aware. The fetishist approach make such women as consumption materials for the needs of men. The critics based on the role of women in society are continued in other episodes as well.

In Season 18, Episode 7, Marge is tired of working as a housewife. She is highly impressed by a TV programme which is presented by a woman professor on other women's success and achievements on their careers. With the influence of the programme, she begins to think that she is more than someone who cleans house, washes clothes, deals with childcare till her death. There, the traditional role of woman is evaluated through Marge.

In another episode, Bart crashes a large portion of the corn crust he consumes for breakfast, beginning to eat only the portion of his favorite tastes. When he is criticized by his mother for making expropriation, Bart doesn't care. Even an expensive product such as a lobster is eaten by Bart hilariously. This attitude of Bart represents children who are constantly asking for "new" , and who are not happy what they have and they desire more. The nature of wild capitalism that constitutes the "consumption society" is underlined. In the final stages of the episode, Marge decides that the meaning of his life is related with being the wife and part of the family. Marge makes a giant sculpture of Homer's ice cream bars, and the individuals reunite under the family roof, repeating frequently in the Simpsons.

Another expression in the episode is about the situation of Bart Simpson's father after his photograph. Bart's photography of even the most special moments of people is an indication of paparazzi and magazine media overlook in modern society. The fact that people are constantly being recorded with photographs and cameras is a sign that the community is being controlled at all times by a certain power. The spread of photographs shared by a friend of Bart with the help of communication tools throughout the town can be interpreted as one of the results of the digital age. Considering that the department is attracted in the 1990s, when the digital era and the cult began, the results of the obscure surveillance and communication tools even in the 90s, where social media is not yet discovered, are surprising.

If the episode had been taken in a similar way in the 2000s, Bart would shoot with his digital camera or mobile phone, and there would be no need to reproduce it by printing to reach the masses. When the "share" or "like" buttons are clicked, they will be able to reach the visuals instantly. In this sense, it can be said that communication is more valuable nowadays, and that the surveillance is carried on to more dimensions, and every cell phone owner becomes a "paparazzi".

To conclude, The Simpsons becomes an important example for the influence of animation on societies as it makes great success world-wide. The influence of The Simpsons basically based on their liveable scenarios that vary through today's conditions and improvements. Morevoer, The Simpsons describes a simulated world which spectators are highly familiar with it. Spectators may put themselves directly into characters and enjoy the series more than any specified films as the life of a theatre artist or a viking, etc. And despite other animations for children, The Simpsons is based on criticism which makes it accepted by almost every ages. The critics of The Simpsons vary as well but commonly comes from modern

life issues, capitalism, modern family and life habbits and working conditions where people have to overcome during their own lifes.

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