

# Emotional value through animation



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Stephen Dupuis Emotional Value through Animation Childhood and family life can be greatly influenced by animated cartoons and feature films.

Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, animation has undergone tremendous change. Forces including technological advancement and the increasing desire for higher profits have shaped this genre and caused it to cycle through periods of dormancy and innovation.

One such resurgence occurred during the late 1980's and early 1990's, a period marked by the popularity and success of 2D animated entertainment, exemplified by Disney's blockbusters Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid and The Lion King. The shift to computer generated 3D animation that gained popularity with Pixar's 1995 feature Toy Story, has led many to question the relevance of hand-drawn animation (Sito, 1). While the evolution of animation has led away from 2D renderings, the impact of these films and series cannot be denied.

The differences between hand-drawn, 2D animation and 3D computer generated features extend from the process of creation itself to the function and method by which these films communicate with their viewers. While this shift in the art form of animation may seem as though it was sudden and abrupt, CG animation was slow to develop. Evolution away from 2D animation occurred within the general context of change surrounding the increasing development of computers and incorporation of digital technology into all aspects of life that took place during the decades of the 1980's and 1990's (Jones & Oliff, 26).

Audiences were primed for this transition by ever more realistic effects in movies. The aesthetic value, or “wow factor,” of computer created graphics created excitement, while Disney’s story lines suffered from a constant desire for larger box office revenues (Jones & Oliff, 27-29; Sito, 2). Jones and Orloff have cited three reasons that contributed to the success of CG animation, including changes in the aesthetic taste of viewers, stories that broadened the audience for animated films, and the relatively unappealing stories told in 2D animated films of the same period (Jones & Orloff, 26).

While the economic consequences of this shift had a profoundly reorganizing effect on the film industry, the most marked changes occurred in the nature of animated films themselves (Sito, 1-8). Animated characters became rounded, expressive, and were able to convey subtle emotion to the audience. As a result, many of the communicative devices used in traditional animation were lost. Songs became less important, strange voices were no longer as prominent, and the nature of the characters themselves changed, becoming somehow more human and realistic.

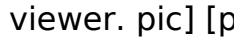
One poignant example of the change in the content of animated cartoons can be seen in the use of character names. Once computers enabled animators to imbue their characters with subtly expressive faces, the use of descriptive names was no longer necessary. The use of this device is evidenced in a variety of examples, including most famously Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and The Smurfs. In both examples, the characters were given names that described their personalities. “Grumpy” the dwarf was grumpy, and “Bashful” was shy, “Brainy Smurf” was smart, while “Lazy Smurf” was narcoleptic.

Less obvious examples include the frightening dragon “ Maleficent” in Sleeping Beauty, “ Snow White” who was beautiful, pure, and innocent, not to mention the myriad of allusions to “ beauties” and “ prince charmings. ” In the spirit of classic fairytales and parables, the names given to cartoon characters communicated traits associated with values, particularly regarding good and bad, and clearly exemplifying behaviors to be emulated or avoided. [pic] In contrast, the CG blockbuster Toy Story featured characters without such associative names.

Although bad and good characters continue to be given names that fit their role in the story, 3D animations lack the clear and strong associations frequently given in more simplistic 2D cartoons. The names “ Buzz Lightyear” and “ Woody” do communicate something about the character’s roles as a spaceman and wooden cowboy respectively, but not their personalities or emotional dispositions. [pic] A comparison of stills from Snow White and Toy Story demonstrates that the lack of information communicated through names is compensated for in the faces of the characters.

Very little distinguishes the seven dwarfs visually, other than their varying size, clothing, and hair. Their faces are flat and formulated, and visual emotional expression is limited to smiles, frowns, or furrowed brows. The same can be said of the Smurfs. A still of Buzz and Woody, however, reveals subtle emotions and qualities, ranging from determination to quizzicality or affection. Differences in form and rendering in 2D and 3D animation are extensive. A Smurf’s face is composed of three colors with no shading. The

contours of the face are drawn with bold sweeping strokes that simply outline the most prominent features.

The face of a Care Bear is equally simplistic. A comparison of two Care Bears, Grumpy Bear and Cheer Bear, clearly demonstrates the simplicity with which emotion and personality are represented. Cheer Bear and Grumpy Bear are primarily differentiated by their color and symbolism on their chests. Grumpy Bear is blue with a storm cloud symbol on his chest, while Cheer Bear is pink and sports a rainbow. Positive and negative emotion is differentiated by the position of the mouth and eyebrows, rendered in simplistic un-contoured lines. These visual devices work in combination to communicate to the viewer.  In contrast, the face of Woody from Toy Story is fully modeled and shaded. When the character speaks or emotes, the surface of his face shifts over a structure below, giving the appearance of skin and muscle movement over a skeletal structure. All of the characters featured in the movie are distinct and different. Their personalities are communicated through subtle expression, behavior and mannerisms. The ability to achieve this increased realism has greatly affected the content of animated cartoons, and is the primary underlying feature that differentiates 2D and 3D animation.

In addition to differences in character naming, story lines have also changed significantly. Traditional animated cartoons employed a variety of devices to communicate emotion, develop characters, and convey a plot. Three primary non-visual examples of this include character voice, the use of song, and sound effects. 2D animated films often employed song to communicate emotional material. The prevalence of this trend is evidenced by the fact <https://assignbuster.com/emotional-value-through-animation/>

that all of the major Disney features released in the early 1990's were musicals (Sito, 1). Aladdin and the Beast expressed their love or their heroines through song, while Simba expressed his enthusiasm for life and excitement. Sound effects also played a prominent role in cartoons. Frequently, if it was intended that a character bounce, a bouncing sound and action lines accompanied a fall, much like the onomatopoeia employed in comic books. Voices were also often highly fantastic, and in some serial cartoons rarely resembled normal human speech. These straightforward, simplistic devices culminated to create an experience of the story and characters that was fully apprehended by the viewer, and clearly relegated to the realm of fantasy (Tsakona, 1171). 2D animation, however, seeks to close the gap between fantasy and visual realism. This emphasis on realism is also evidenced in the stories selected for portrayal in animated form. The makers of feature length 2D animated films most frequently opted for stories of epic proportion and classic fairytale subject matter. Both Toy Story and The Incredibles have their base in practical, realistic subject matter centered on a nuclear family. The fantasy is clear and central in these films and extends from this reality, but it is firmly grounded in it.

Somehow an average looking family of secret superheroes, or toys with a life of their own, seem more plausible than singing lions and baboons, or fairy princesses. This grounding in reality is one element that has increased the appeal of animated features to the entire family. An elevation of the real, combined with the impressive and novel aesthetic qualities of 3D animated films and subtle adult humor, has propelled companies like Pixar to huge

success. 2D animation falls flat for many people, as did many of the production companies responsible for its creation (Sito, 4).

The family appeal of a feature like *The Incredibles* is offered at every turn. The characters are stereotypical, and reflect the condition of the average family. The husband is dissatisfied with his job, the mother is hyper-efficient, and the children are smart, snotty, or cute. The audience is satisfied when the family embraces its superpowers, casts off the restraints of mundane daily life, and is brought closer together by facing adversity. The fantasy and the form combine to reel in the entire family and, of course, the profit.

Technological advancement has enabled animators to spend more time on the visual elements of an animated film (Jones & Orloff, 29). The computer quickly renders repeat images, color and line, all previously hand-drawn by 2D animators (Sito, 2). This shift in process and materials has contributed to the shifts in the content of animated films, by enabling animators to create detailed images in three dimensions (Jones & Orloff, 28). Scenery and action can also be rendered with far more realism, adding entertainment value and excitement for the audience.