

# A review of chuck jones 'duck amuck'



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Chuck Jones ' *Duck Amuck.*'

Cartoons all across the Hollywood Studios at this time resembled those of Disney, with their connection of editing and using an accelerating gag structure in their narrative. But with these cartoons being considered as a comic fantasy genre, animators could experiment with the medium. Warner Bros. were a big believer in this, creating situations where their cartoon characters would talk to the audience or refer to the animator or studio executives. These cartoons compared to Disney were very different, the action was often more violent and faster paced, changing the situations regularly. Chuck Jones reached past expectation with his cartoons, extending the limits and shocking the audience. One of the greats being ' *Duck Amuck*' where he used every bone in his body to create which is now known as one of the master pieces of animation, using every element to create a 7minute film just using Daffy and the unseen animator. By using these elements he was able to manipulate Daffy in any situation, creating an expectancy with the audience that anything could happen next.

*Duck Amuck* , a cartoon subject to its own deconstruction. The cartoons conventions are constantly challenged, using the colour, costume, sound scenery and all the essential elements need to create the cartoon, often without the awareness of the audience. Daffy's first appearance as a musketeer, a cavalier waving his sword around with such confidence soon realises he has been betrayed by the animator, that the background of the scene has disappeared and he as well as the audience is left uncertain to the context we were accustomed to. Daffy rapidly drops character and addresses the camera, reacting in a rather professional way as if he were a part of any

live-action movie and enthusiastically pushes the animator to carry on. A farmyard scene is drawn, although not what Daffy was expecting, he continues on, changing to suit the scene. But once again as he's just about adjusted to the scene, an arctic layout is displayed in the background. Throughout the piece there is a constant battle between foreground and background, and above all the relationship between the character and the forever changing environmental context. All of Daffy's actions are dominated by his reaction to the area he occupies. Tensions like these help the basic structure of narrative in most cartoons. With all the changes, Daffy's main thought is for the animator to make up his mind. By using Daffy's body, each environment is shown through a number of iconic cultural illustrations - the dungarees and the straw hat in the farmyard scene, the grass skirt and banjo in the Hawaiian setting. While the white space is defined as the empty context of the cartoon, although there is unlimited space, Daffy's sense of awareness becomes isolated and helpless. To make things worse he is then erased from the page, where all that remains is his voice. Chuck Jones intentions when he created his characters were for them to be recognized in any situation, to exist as a body without a voice, or a voice without a body. Especially in this scene, a programmed perception of Daffy as a character is known, where he can be understood by any of his parts. Perhaps, the only element the animator is unable to get rid of is Daffy's personality. If this was to be taken, the cartoon would no longer be a Daffy Duck picture. Even though, the elements are frequently altering and manipulated, the audience is still able to recognise its a Daffy cartoon. Daffy is shown as eager to please and entertain, but is easily provoked and angered by any slight change, and to top it off has a rather obsessive behaviour, especially if he doesn't get his

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way. Duck Amuck shows all his traits as a character through the use of his body and actions, using the limitation of any control Daffy thought he had. As the viewer it is easy to watch an animation and forget the effort applied to design the background scenery. It's almost insignificant. All attention is continuously on the characters and their actions. *Duck Amuck* reminds us that there is more than what meets the eye, and in this case on the screen – and only by eliminating the background, can we realize and appreciate this.

Daffy is endlessly alienated, trying to keep his image and self-respect, but contradicts himself by constantly losing his temper. As soon as Daffy is repainted back on the screen as a cowboy with a guitar, we as the audience establish music will be played or Daffy will sing. Daffy modestly opens his mouth and strums the guitar, but with the shock on his face acknowledges there is no sound. He holds up a small sign saying “ Sound Please.” As the audience we are drawn to the fact that anything could happen, and Daffy would not be expecting it. He snobbishly goes to strum the guitar, to find it creates the sound of a machine gun, then a horn and a donkey. The use of mismatching image and sound, is yet another comedic element used within this film, helping create a sense of alienation towards Daffy, with every action he is restricted by the animators command. He breaks the guitar with frustration, and tries plea to the animator, to discover he has been given the voice of chicken and a few other different birds. After many attempts he slowly loses his will, so with one last try he endeavours to speak, but at an extreme volume his voice returns. Embarrassed, Daffy is once again revealed helpless to the animator. Daffy's traits are explicitly shown, especially his willingness. He stresses for a scenery and colour, but is given a

child like drawing background, and is painted in many colours and patterns. This is followed by a mini tantrum by Daffy. Daffy is constantly challenged by the world around him, but his reactions to the events increase the likelihood of the next action made by the animator. If he was not such a drama queen and self absorbed, the constant bad luck happening would most likely be lowered. But clearly, the circumstance of the cartoon remains issued to the desire of the animator. These series of occurrences only cause added anticipation from the spectators who want to further witness the amount of knockbacks the character can take. Chuck Jones gives Daffy centre stage, but at the same time controls every part of him during the animation, meanwhile breaking the fourth wall and highlighting the construction of the animations art form. With a simple idea of concept of fate, the audience are able to gather a small meaning from the piece - that no matter what life throws at you, one should adjust and accept what nature has planned for you, instead of find fault.

Throughout the whole animation, whatever Daffy's expectations are or wishes to receive, he is given the complete opposite. Several times he tries to take control of the situation, to find himself being manipulated even more, but at the same time the audience are able to witness his anger levels rising. A great example of this is when he finds himself on a small deserted island in the distance, he calls for a close up, which the audience can hardly hear. But instead of receiving the camera to come closer, the frame of the screen shrinks to frame him, Daffy's first response is quite sarcastic but soon explodes with frustration. The camera quickly zooms in to reveal just Daffy's aggravated eyes. Daffy tries to gain an understanding between himself and

the animator, but he is soon interrupted by a black material weighing him down, eventually tearing up the 'screen'. He then returns to suggesting the cartoon should begin even though it has already been running for several minutes. Throughout the piece Daffy continuously tries to regain his strength and control, but time and time again he is interrupted by some kind of gag narrative. Daffy is soon appointed as a pilot, but this is purely to launch a series of gags, including an off screen air crash, the fall, his parachute turning into a weight, the explosion of the weight which becomes a bomb. At this point Daffy is left helpless, a loss of all control, but with one finally attempt to regain some dignity, he demands to know " Who is responsible for all of this? I demand that you show yourself!" The enclosed boarder that the audience is now accustomed to is broken as the camera pulls away to reveal the animator - Bugs Bunny. The whole piece is a series of independent gags, no relevance to one another except to torment Daffy. But with such shock and surprise to the biggest gag of all, that it was his arch-enemy Bugs Bunny who was the master mind the entire time. Chuck Jones great skill was creating a comic suspense, planting a joke and letting the audience wait for the evitable outcome. By doing this, it created a build up for laughter, the fulfilment of a gag. Duck Amuck demonstrates this immensely, practically every 'rest' point in the animation is the start of a gag. While Daffy is reassuring himself possibly after a gag, he is yet unaware of the next gag about to begin.

Real life elements are incorporated throughout Duck Amuck, from film strips, to paint brushes, to erasers, used to manipulate the character's environment and appearance. But these are all cleverly used to show the interactivity

between the creation and the creator. Elements like these create another dimension to the story, that we as the audience, to an extent can believe we are with the animator as they makes their decisions. Characters like Bugs Bunny and Daffy were wise cracking cynics rather than innocent altruists like Mickey Mouse. But although the Warner Brother characters are similar this animation wouldn't have worked with anyone else except Daffy. His loss of control and humiliation is what creates the piece, his frantic ways, and his self pity of being unable to negotiate, or come to terms with the higher power destroys Daffy leaving him speechless, and in the end becomes more of a subject defined by a gaga. The animators at Warner Brothers experimented over many years trying to push to the extreme, but perhaps none were so extreme as *Duck Amuck* , although it was made within the Hollywood system, the sense of it almost feels more experimental film, with the request to the audience to be a part of the exploration of techniques in the cel animation.

*Olivia Farrar*

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