INVESTIGACIÓN / RESEARCH

THE STORY TO FILM ANIMATION: SEMIOLOGY OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, discourses reproduced through all kinds of media are questioned by analyzing similarities & differences and to what extent they can be studied to control the stories. Stories, like cinema, games, and theater, are used to build up child identity. However, have we stopped to think about the techniques –affective excitement- which are found in current practice? Are we educating our children in a culturally responsive way or are we letting multinational companies to educate our children? The aim of this essay, therefore, is to raise questions that try to denature this type of narratives, so that, through education, participation, transgression, perverse reading and alternative and an alternative and dissident look we may be able to recover the freedom to create our stories and identities. Without any mercantilist influences.

KEY WORDS: Children's animated films – children's books – value education – digital narrative – participation – transmedia narrative.

DEL CUENTO AL CINE DE ANIMACIÓN: SEMIOLOGÍA DE UNA NARRATIVA DIGITAL

RESUMEN:

En este ensayo se ponen bajo sospecha los discursos reproducidos a través de diferentes medios, se cuestionan sus diferencias y sus semejanzas y, hasta qué punto, pueden ser analizadas para apropiarnos de los relatos. Los cuentos, igual que el cine, los juegos y el teatro, construyen la identidad infantil, pero ¿nos hemos detenido a pensar cuáles son las técnicas –de excitación afectiva– que se encuentran insertas en los discursos actuales?, ¿estamos educando para dar una respuesta cultural o serán las multinacionales quienes se encarguen de culturizar a la infancia?

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La intención de este texto, por tanto, radica en plantear cuestiones con las que desnaturalizar este tipo de ficciones para que, mediante la educación, la participación, la transgresión, la lectura perversa y la mirada alternativa y disidente recuperemos la libertad de crear nuestras historias y nuestras identidades. Sin influencias mercantilistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cine de animación infantil – cuentos infantiles – educación en valores – narrativa digital – narrativa transmedia – participación.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important cultural events of the decade of the 1950s of the last century was the emergence of various artistic movements that sought to elicit public participation. Thus the following appeared: Performance Art, the artistic happening and other multidisciplinary and provocative performances, urging the crowd to abandon their passive position before the function. This spirit of provocation is still valid today. In a world where the audiovisual is omnipresent, we move through a changing context in which narratives running through different devices converge, with different functions and levels of interaction that make us think that we are facing multiple realities, from which we can also be part of. This perception is amplified in the infant stages, when there is more exposure to the influence of this media ecosystem and where the stories have an undeniable weight. In audiovisual narrative, and referring to children's films, Pereira (2005) states: *"The cinema, due to its massive communication skills, influences, impresses and moves most people who accept exposure to its influence"* (Pereira, 2005 p. 19).

It becomes increasingly difficult to ignore the many stories that are displayed before our eyes and open a window into an imaginary universe. In addition, these images create a narrative that, depending on the device projecting them, will be a guarantor of a different reality and reproduce a particular chronicle, but can we use the media to make flagship creations that reflect our will? It seems that it is not so clear, although other doors do open to spark creativity as Henry Jenkins argues*: "when people take the reins of the media, the results can be wonderfully creative"* (Jenkins, 2008, p. 28).

In view of this duality, some issues that are the foundation of this article and are set forth below arise: Is it in our hands to interpret the narrative that we perceive?, can we create from knowledge or only is it only a "*sample*" that we will play to infinity?, will new digital narratives become the ready-to-wear mass society?, do we users have the ability to create from freedom or will we be influenced by the shadows of knowledge?

2. OBJECTIVES

Studying current digital narratives and bring about a critical reflection on our participation and the "*apparent*" freedom that these stories arouse among children. To do this, along the text are various issues that denature such fictions so that, far from mercantilist influences and through education, participation, transgression, perverse reading and an alternative and dissident look, we can recover the freedom to create our stories and our identities. Therefore, this is the analytical perspective summoned for this article.

3. METHODOLOGY

From a critical perspective and based on qualitative analysis of documents, speeches, audiovisual materials, etc. an open and interactive relationship between theory and practice is proposed. The concepts are under construction and require an active role of the subject that is close to them, as our reflections and conclusions do not tend to standardize a theory but to understanding of the individual and their depth.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The dynamic nature of digital narrative

According to Plato[2], every kind of reality corresponds to a model of knowledge and we also question whether each medium will make a different reading of reality.

> A transmedia story develops through multiple media supports and, with each new text, it distinctly and valuably contributes to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia narrative, each medium does what it does best, so that a story can be inserted into a movie, be expanded in video games, or experienced as an attraction in an amusement park (Jenkins, 2009, p. 135).

This author thus makes reference to transmedia narrative and, remembering the oral transmission of the great stories, we might think that this concept is just a fashion, since analog narrative already customized the stories depending on the persons responsible for narrating. We find a contrast in the words of Christian Salmon (2010) when *"it sheds light on a big misunderstanding: we do not build the stories or, rather, we are not the authors of their meaning: it is given and is very limited so we neither force nor change it"* (Salmon, 2010, p. 13).

However, this idea, well understood and well developed, can empower us with a new narrative with which we can create our own stories. The first distinctive point of differentiation between the media from which the narrative is reproduced (multiplatform to Jenkins), where we find the same narration spread in different

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[2] In book VII of *The Republic* of Plato, through the presentation of the Myth of the Cave, the situation in which the human being is regarding knowledge is explained

formats, media, moments, etc. and the flexibility of a story that, being created to be molded, flows in and influences the various media in which it re-occurs.

Importantly, the fictional techniques applied to these narratives show signs of identity that are summarized in the following points:

1. Obvious complicity of users that are involved to the point of becoming part of the narrative itself, mixing and fading in it.
2. A constant connection with the original and co-created works to a degree of parallelism and correspondence that agrees to appreciate them as a story on an equal footing.
3. It starts from previous narrations that include reuse, generation and appropriation of new meta-linked stories.
4. The suprafictional structure develops through a sequence of events that are not previously predesigned.
5. An unfinished end that spreads to infinity.

The dynamic nature of digital narrative is hooked to the artistic movements described above, placing both techniques in the same starting point, where the goal is easily achievable. The task is to build a counter-reality making it possible to take control of the story.

4.2. The strength of the story and the pact with reality

Folk tales have been passed down from generation to generation through the spoken language, there are several theories about their origin; eg *"... the first Arab tales are printed on papyrus scrolls being more than 4,000 years old"* (Montoya, 2003, p. 97). Most of the stories of oral tradition were adapted to reach child audiences. In some cases, to fit into their evolutionary development and, in others, to reshape some works of literature that were not written for children; since, for children's literature to be likable, it must contain the idioms and the fantasy proper to that early age.

The strength of the story is that neither the styles nor the arguments distort reality. At most, to make an interpretation based on the feelings and thoughts proper to children. The stories do not address the same issues, neither do they have the same properties, nor do they adjust to homogeneous categories; the most widespread classification distinguishes between: fairy tales, stories about customs and stories about animals (Propp, 1970). Fairy tales are mostly those used in children's narrative because they introduce children to a magical world that is closer to them than the real world around them. Christian Salmon (2010) says*: "The strength of stories has never been refuted"* (Salmon, 2010, p. 55) and this influence is used as a means of acculturation by some media companies. The main feature of these narrations is their ability to transmit values. The classical tales contain a moral that allows better assimilation of teachings. The stories and characters have such authority in their

plots that any external explanation is displaced in the mindset of creatures. Stereotyped and simple characters (good fairies and princesses against witches and evil monsters) are messengers that transcend the ideas of good and evil so that, in a first evolutionary stage, the concepts and values that will shape the adult identity are grasped.

It is known that the construction of personality in childhood is not subject to genetic factors, but it is determined by education and the influences of the social context. In this evolutionary stage, language, understanding, intelligence and thinking develop at a vertiginous rhythm This stage is also characterized by high emotional influence, where it is more difficult to tell the real from the imaginary. In this sense, we find the children's stories that commonly carry interpretive models of the world with which humans construct their own identity. The impact that children's literature can have on a naive and innocent public is surprising, it can even come to develop phenomena such as eidetism, which consists of reviving, with absolute sensorial clarity, previously received events that are curiously related to experiences and situations with an emotional background. As the narrations of the stories and movie scenes with a high emotional content. (E. J. Anthony (1959), quoted by Beltran, Peña, Perez and Andres sf).

Stories has always been instruments to reinforce idols and develop the imagination. The common subject could appear on our mind with a new look and stop being ordinary to become an utopian protagonist of a dreamy reality. The narrative is not new, but so is the digital composition which is part of today's world. A similar pattern is observed in the evolution that has undergone the children's narrative to fit into the historical and cultural context in which the stories are told, thus facilitating the internalization of external reality and causing a free and creative gear. These narratives have been enriched with visual aids that not only enhance the artistic quality of the stories but also convey the message in a format closer to the age of the audience to encourage their fantasy. In addition, for an audience that has been born and grown using the new technological means, it is usually an aid very easy to use and it only consists of moving the aesthetics of the story to create a nonlinear narrative *"Children very soon identify the structures of the story as they have internalized the narrative scheme of children's stories from an early age* "(Mendoza, 2012, p. 146).

Contemporary stories are in mobile applications, they evolve and develop in social networks and make childhood face a vague image of itself. By extolling anthropomorphism, the characters project the representation of a dogma that will haunt them throughout their lives and is further exacerbated when establishing gender categories that will impose fashion, mark the canons of beauty and perpetuate the social order and the *"dominant status"* as pointed out by Pierre Bourdieu (2010).

It is surprising that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and its outrages, its privileges and its injustices, is ultimately perpetuated[...] that the most intolerable conditions of existence can appear as often as acceptable if not natural. (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 11).

In this sense, we have found that mobile applications[3] telling ministries in the guise of small audiovisual capsules to be downloaded, shared on social networks or viewed offline. These applications typically provide audiovisual material in various formats, but for which there is no metamorphosis of the story. They are only digitized versions of the same old story. However, the scope of digital narrative is to offer the possibility of building various more or less transgressive (sub) versions linked to the original work, which may include others concerning cultural tradition.

A striking result is shown in situations in which even the transformation and integration of their own experiences arises so that they can be part of childhood *"reading"* memory and have a particular space in their creative experience. Its sealed design prevents individuality and creativity from rising, individuality and creativity that, at another moment, happenings would get by involving, at least in the interpretative details of the plot.

The fictional characters cease being so at the time they are personified in our reality. We are not just talking about the relationship of children with cinema, the current media culture encourages us to relate to the others, to recall the stories, to mix them up, to take part in them and share them on our networks; although, as noted by Correa (2011*) "If those who administer the signs also administer meanings, what plot of interpretation or understanding of a message is left?"*. This controversy is increased in childhood, where *"images are directed to the world of emotions, of what is intuitive and comprehensive it is then easier to pass the critical filters of reasoning"* (Correa, 2011, p 210.).

If, as we have seen above, the current narratives would allow us to participate directly, we would also have the choice of seeking alternative meanings in messages and, instead of feeding our passivity, transgression and questioning would be encouraged, where authoritarian discourses and ideologies would come to light. However, children's digital stories are catching the interest of an audience that feels to be a co-creator of the stories because they are conceived through various narrative strategies, leading to different creations and projecting different functions: multiple connecting categories emerge that will be identified by their audience that is faced with a challenge of interpretation and permanent hyper narrative review: the

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[3] An example is the application *Decuentos* of Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation from Salamanca, where there is a selection of video-stories narrated by people that use: analog objects, their hands, their voices, etc to tell the same old stories, but they can be viewed in current platforms. Available at: http://salamanca.fundaciongsr.com/940/DeCuentos-una-app-muy-entretenida (Consulted on June 30, 2015)

end of authorship is caused and, with the onset of the ability of hypertextual reading of postmodern aesthetics, we are witnessing the *"death of the author"* as already explained by Roland Barthes (2009), "*the need to substitute language itself for the one who was supposed to be his owner until then, to him, like to us, it is language, not the author, the one that talks"* (Barthes, 2009, p. 76).

4.3. ¿Transgressive? Animated fantasies of yesterday and today

We have seen the "*force of the story"* in the construction of children's identity but, what is our reading of the creations that, in this sense, we find today?, how is their narrative?, what are the characteristics of such narrative world?, can we structure the process of transmedia expansion?, how has the story come to other media?, and, in their narrative, is the expression gradually mutating in the expansive processes?, what happens in the phase of interpretation and construction of possible worlds (Eco, 1979) when moving onto the social networks?, are we facing a real digital narrative? To answer these questions, it is necessary to be positioned before these short stories, analyze the techniques used and perform an analysis of the interaction and transformation offered to the audience.

Through the prism of the cartoon, consecrated in the collective memory, the cinema for children conquests a new territory open to the particularities of society and the historical events of the time. In an era characterized by overabundance of speeches that continually merge and break up, there are new narrative proposals that are built on the basis of fragmentarity, hodgepodge, nomadism of genres, crossing of languages and communication models, offering symbolic elements in order to build, since childhood: a story, values and an identity.

To Ricciotto Canudo, (quoted by Morin, 2001, p. 15) *"in movies, art is to suggest emotions, not to tell facts."* This statement raises a contradiction if we understand that adventures are based on the story and, taking a further step, we find the concept of "*transmedia intertextuality"* posed by Saunders Smith, Marsha Kinder (1991) based on the original theory of Bakhtin (1986), which adds the idea of a dialogue where there is no hierarchy of importance during construction and reading of the contents. Therefore, we should start from the participation to distinguish the degree and risk that the child audience, from an imaginary position, performs *"prevents and mutilates all the practical consequences of participation: neither risk nor commitment to the public"* (Morin, 2001, p. 87). In this regard, and to provide tools to help the public awaken their critical sense, the role of education is key.

On the other hand, child animated movies, created with the characteristics that determine their transmedia nature, must be able to transform, to change and shape their speech according to the medium in which they develop. The platform will also influence reading and re-writing that evokes the original story. So, we would be before a message that, just as happens with the principle of conservation of energy,

is neither created nor destroyed, only transformed. And that critical awareness that we have demanded from the beginning would be able to unmask the hypnotic indoctrination hidden in these children's creations, which eats the child public by transmitting them a false sense of empowerment.

The happening, as we saw at the beginning, wanted to involve the public, transmedias narratives of children's stories permeate in the media and in the minds of children; although in these cases, the intention goes further to claim that the public delve into the story as the "*narrative of consumption*" are transferred to private environments (households). Surprisingly, we see the metamorphosis occurring in children's bedrooms (especially girls) to erect small media mausoleums where they take care that even the smallest detail reproduces the decoration of the palace of the princess who appeared in the film; in their closet they cannot miss the dress Cinderella wore at the ball of the prince; even in their birthday parties, we can see all this beauty moved into the rest of their home: the living room, lamps, tablecloths, etc. everything is transformed, shared and spread on social networks by adults without thinking they are promoting this mega-emotional excitement involved in the distribution policy of large media corporations. They open the doors of their homes to the power of corporations for their daughters to get lost in a pattern of submissive and naturalized women to become princesses.

Perhaps this hypernarrative dazzles us and we may be unable to establish relationships to find out where a manipulating and androcentric message is hidden. Perhaps the image of the world is the one that prevents us from seeing reality and we need a pedagogy that awakens us from the lethargy of the *"new"* or, as McLuhan (1998) put it.

> Every new technology reduces the interaction of the senses and consciousness, precisely in the new area of innovation where a kind of identification between the observer and the object occurs. This somnambulistic shaping of the observer faced with the new structure makes those more deeply immersed in a revolution much less aware of its dynamics. (McLuhan, 1998, p. 158).

In another sense, and beyond the affection or dislike one may have for Disney multinational, we can agree on the innovative capacity that company has shown to experiment and reach, with its extensions, all possible (imaginable and unimaginable) formulas and formats, even to invent its own transmedia before it existed. Without going any further, the storyboarding process was developed at Disney Studios in the early 1930s of the twentieth century. With regard to generating excitement and enthusiasm, Disney is known for awakening lost illusions, in addition to covering all types of environments and resources from which the story expands. A symbol of this lattice is the theme parks, where the animated characters become real subjects who interact with the public.

The screen has always been an imposition in which the characters were locked in a forced frame. As we have seen, in some children's productions this limitation is not so (the strategy mounted around the product is embodied as a marketing strategy, the characters escape from the screen to join other scenarios: a shopping center, a theme park, etc.) since it succeeds in getting immersed beyond the screen and highlights the social role of a hypermedia world where narrative takes turns that can awaken or drowse awareness. We must be vigilant to discover the power they wield strong oligopolies that control the world and which, through their media influence, achieve collective awareness by using provocative techniques ranging from the message in embedded still photography to the artistic happening where the animated cartoon is amalgamated with street "*participation*".

From different perspectives, teaching methodologies using these audiovisual resources in formal education are applied; however, hardly the psycho-pedagogical dimension of this issue is addressed. Even less at this time when narratives flow through areas and means being unfamiliar to teachers, where lack of instruments for critical analysis hinders the implementation of educational disciplines in the classroom. Therefore, our intention –in subsequent studies- will be to provide metafictional strategies that challenge current narratives while providing academic institutions with didactic methodologies closer to the current reality, looking those possibilities pointed by the happening when it left the door open to expression and creativity on social networks, children's films or the stories created by the users of the network.

The democratization of movies and other artistic actions have made the digital narrative have a place at school. With imagination and creativity, the act of creating meaningful stories arises to increase the experiences of students and teachers. However, the various digital narratives in which children are heroes and heroines exude an ideological intentionality that, although being invisible, leaves works with a mesmerizing message that moves childhood into past times. Its appearances and messages are not at random and unrelated because their aesthetics are studied to the last detail. Connections or links to other versions are established and are apparent transformations of the original creation, becoming a grid system that keeps them tied, like an umbilical cord, to the referring primary idea and the extra ideas that will proliferate among children's mentalities, shooting and engaging in a perfect fit to be implemented as a memory chip from which the creatures will be gradually shaped like cyborgs in a transmedia society. Our challenge is to find this imposed indoctrination and claim the freedom of human beings in this emerging mercantilist cloning.

Large multinationals such as Disney, in their business essence, put their business logic before the educational contents. However, as schools lack their own teaching materials for media literacy, they use those produced by these companies without realizing that they are using the same parameters that should be put into question to

cope with them from a critical perspective, with which we promote a Disneyization of children's culture from schools.

As a media oligopoly, the Walt Disney Company becomes the largest factory of audiovisual contents that monopolizes the whole child audience. From television, comic book publishers, etc., companies are named such as: Disney-ABC Television Group, Walt Disney Studio Entertainment, Marvel Entertainment, New Amsterdam Theatre Broadway, Disney Stores, Pixar, Time Warner Cable, Tochstone Television, ESPN.com, Miramax Films, DreamWorks, etc. Deploying a media strategy that does not involve any "commercial" risk. As there is neither competition in that industry nor media literacy, it becomes the only option for children's entertainment. Besides, they are located in an expanding sector which counteracts the current economic crisis characteristic of other business areas.

Thus we also add the mercantilist connotation as an area for the analysis of the study of digital narrative that, especially in children's animation movies, is another obstacle to its scientific focus.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The artistic happening is proposed as an alternative to voice individual creativity, but we saw that the mass quickly fell silent and fell down (in silence and oblivion). The possibility of transforming the world became mass culture and, with it, it played the oppressive voice. In the words of Paulo Freire (2005) "*But if you say the true word, which is work, which is praxis, which is to transform the world, saying it is not the privilege of a few men, but the right of all men*" (Freire, 2005, p . 71).

The dynamic nature of the transmedia narrative once again puts ourselves as authors of our history, this time a digital one, to co-create a multiple world since childhood but, like the happening, it raised some doubts, throughout the text we have presented spaces from where stories can be made closer to the public (children) and where they have not always been able to participate. We asked about the differences and similarities of the images and speeches and to what extent they could be analyzed to appropriate the stories.

Stories, like movies and games, build child identity, but have we stopped to think what techniques of affective excitement are embedded in today's speeches?, are we educating to give a cultural response or will multinationals be the ones that take care to bring culture to children?. Also, how do children interact with these narratives?, by reproducing what they know?, and is all this supported by parents and teachers who ignore that they are becoming accomplices?

This article was undertaken to question how children's stories can be appropriated, our intention is not to show a catalog of resources to study digital narrative in

childhood but to raise issues with which to denature such fictions so that, through education, participation, transgression, perverse reading and alternative and dissident look (Correa, 2011) we can get back the right to have a say in our stories, preventing us from being dazzled, once again, by these signs of freedom.

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