Animation is a powerful means of communication and as such strongly connected with questions of power, politics, and policies. It can be used both as a tool for propaganda and for protest. It can both reinforce and subvert ideologies. It can be a voice for the ruling class as much as for the hitherto voiceless. It can educate and it can manipulate. It can contribute to a political debate as much as it can be used to troll. Animation is shaped by politics, but animation shapes politics as well.

As an omnipresent form of media expression, animation pervades not only our private media practices but also political communication and beliefs: Addressing the broad public, CGI films are among the highest grossing cinema releases that convey specific values and representations of social order to a world-wide audience. Visible and invisible digital effects not only pervade live-action cinema and TV but have made 'deepfakes' and other manipulations of moving images possible, thereby contributing to a crisis of (media) perception. Animated infographics visualize data on the news and in various Internet formats, where they are now often being scrutinized in search for their truth value. Political parties and NGOs have realized the power of online videos and distribute their stories as socially engaged multimedia features, animated short films, and explainers. And much of the political 'social media chatter' is accompanied by animojis or GIFs that comment on and judge current events. Animation is an integral part of cultural and social discourses even if it has long been neglected by film and media studies as well as neighbouring disciplines.

The 5th bi-annual conference of the AG Animation will explore the manifold political dimensions and increasing relevance of animation and asks: What is political about animation? This question sits at the intersection of media studies, cultural studies, critical theory, art history, and political science and as such needs to be addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective. With this in mind, the conference will look at the following – and further – connections between animation and politics:

1. Animation in and as political communication

Animation is often instrumentalized in public and 'social' forms of political communication as a tool to take part in or influence political discourses and debates (e.g., animated clips (GIFs) and infographics, commercials, logos, explainer videos, etc.). How does this affect the methods of political communication as well as specific areas of media production, distribution, and reception?

2. Issues of representation

Political questions can also be addressed by other types of animation, such as fiction films, documentaries, and satirical TV shows. Moreover, all animated representations are political in as far as they show or conceal sociocultural, economic, environmental, and political realities from a certain ideological viewpoint. By what means can animation reinforce, subvert, abstract, and metaphorize issues of representation?

3. The policies of funding, producing, and distributing animation

Large-scale animation films, visual effects, and computer games are often produced and distributed by (global) companies with their own power structures and hierarchies. Independent films are widely financed with money from commissioned works or by public funds with their own regulations. Similarly, the preservation and archiving of animated artifacts is connected with issues of financing, ownership, selection, and public access. How do these economic aspects of animation influence working conditions and the specific topics and representations of the artifacts? How did they shape the predominantly white, male, Western animation canon?

4. Transnational perspectives

Animation is not only a transdisciplinary but a deeply transnational phenomenon, tied to the interplay between the global and the local. Approaches to different national animation histories, too, attest to the globalization of animated media production. Given that animation has profited enormously from the recent digitalization and globalization of production, distribution and archiving, what are transnational and global implications of animation production, aesthetics, distribution, and reception?

Submissions

We are looking for papers that deal with all kinds of political aspects of animation from the perspectives of animation studies, cinema studies, media studies, cultural studies, art history, philosophy, historical research, political science, sociology, and other related disciplines. We also welcome alternative forms of presentation, such as workshops, round-table discussions, project presentations etc. and strongly encourage arts- and practice-based researchers, artists, representatives of institutions and initiatives as wells as young researchers/artists to apply.

Presenters wishing to submit a proposal for a paper presentation of max. 20 minutes need to send an abstract (max. 200 words) as well as a short biography (max. 100 words). Paper proposals can be uploaded via easychair (Conference title "PAAP 2020") until April 30, 2020: https://tinyurl.com/qoo7fgu

Participants will be asked to contribute a small fee of 35 € (regular) or 25 € (reduced). Undergraduate students are exempt from fees. While we generally cannot reimburse travel and accommodation costs, we are currently seeking third-party funding to support presenters without institutional means to cover such costs.

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