CREATED WORLDS

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IMAGINATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE VIEWER IN MOTION PICTURE

ILDIKÓ ENYEDI

ABSTRACT

Lottie Davies / from the People *series*

"The new ceased to exist long since."
Miklós Erdély

This work wishes to react upon that - in the past twenty years intensified – cultural process, which has brought a never seen abundance of artificial creatures and worlds into the audio-visual culture. The phenomenon is a mere side-effect of the complex, socio-cultural transformation taking form within the digital revolution; but for filmmakers, it is especially important to constantly re-define their intellectual and practical approach according to the changing technical environment. Our point-of-view, therefore, is that of a creative filmmaker, who wish to fully develop his/her imagination within the possibilities and limitations of the new technical options and changing consumer habits.

Artificial worlds and their inhabitants are defined by complex, and mutually complementary sets of consideration. Furthermore, during transitional times – as our present is – perspectives of various validity-ranges can be easily intermingled. The fuzziness, the incoherent logic is rarely exposed explicitly, but deep down it harms the consistency of a work.

The main aim of our research was to find and offer a solid base in this constantly changing field. We delved into the depths of reception mechanisms in order to find and analyze the basic driving forces of viewer reception and involvement. In our opinion, a conscious relation with these mechanisms could help filmmakers to express themselves in a more effective way.

A world and it's hero are both products of our culture, bearing all of its current characteristics. Still, according to our investigations, the convincing power of characters or environments basically depends of their relationship to certain human *evolutionary, genetic, and neurological characteristics*, independent of the present culture. Therefore, instead of taking into consideration the entire range of creative devices, this dissertation concentrates on the main decisive element – with regards to both the hero and his world – which defines our positive or negative instinct-responses. At the start of our work we put three fundamental questions and led our research along them.

1.   In what conditions are we ready to accept an artificial world's inner rules and to experience its environment as reality?

According to our research, the success of artificial world-construction is basically determined by how inventively the creators lean on certain specifics of human (audio-visual) perception. These specifics are grasped and explained the most essentially by Gestalt Theory. We conducted our work in the spirit of Rudolf Arnheim, even in those fields where there is no explicit reference to his person. In addition, the viewpoints of a few Trans-media theoreticians – especially those of Henry Jenkins – proved to be inspiring when applying them to the field of classical feature films and some new, narrative forms.

Our analysis of the visible and invisible elements of a created world showed at what extent the viewer is our active partner in the creation. Their completing work defines the final form and structure of our world, their imagination brings to life what we build. A virtual world is in fact the fine-tuned interference of physically and mentally existing elements. Such space disposes of all the attributes of the spaces of our physical world therefore it should be considered as such: we can approach an artificial world as an independent, *per se* existing reality, and interpret it by the categories valid to our "real" spaces, as both are the cultural results of the interference of the physical world and our imagination.

2.   Why and how are we able to develop intense emotional relationship with a being that is clearly artificial and does not possess personal feelings? What factors aid or hinder the establishment of such relation?

According to the results of our research, the viability of an artificial character – overriding its countless characteristics – is finally determined by the extent to which the creators can play intelligently and flexibly with a unique type of our human evolutionary instinct-inclinations. The so-called "Unheimlich" feeling, defined originally by Jensch, is placed in the center of our investigation; this special type of disgust was applied by Masahiro Mori in robotics to describe the repulsion and aversion produced by the sight of something artificial trying

to overly-imitate the human; based on his ideas, we applied this approach to the heroes of visual media.

We focused our analysis on the two extremes of anthropomorphic creatures. On one hand: creatures, aiming to approach the human look as perfectly as possible. On the other: creatures that barely reveal any humanoid characteristics.

Mori's and his followers' detailed analysis of the appearance of the complex feeling we define as "uncanny" shows, that acceptance of highly human-looking creatures can abruptly turn into aversion and repulsion. Real works of art provoke this uncanny feeling rarely. When it happens, it is generally the very scope of the creation to arouse this feeling, consciously. The personal touch, the synthetizing gesture of an artist signals clearly to the viewer that what he/she sees doesn't intend to dupe – the evolutionary instincts of self-defense are not activated.

The inverse phenomena can be observed on the other extremity: at barely human characters. Instead of the expected gradualness, the audience's sympathy and identification can soar suddenly and dramatically when a lifeless object shows *any* elemental anthropomorphic qualities. When an artificial being demands active, complementary work from the audience's imagination, the emotional involvement of the viewers reaches an exceptionally high degree on account of the invested work of the imagination.

3.   ***What is the role of imagination in this seemingly technology-centered environment of the digital revolution? Where is the position of an autonom author in this transforming cultural field?***

The aim of our work was the methodological support of the creative process, all our observations touch the practical decision-making mechanisms of an actual work. In our opinion, the two examined aspects (the viewer/consumer relationship to artificial environments and artificial characters) should be consciously taken in consideration at the start of a creative process. Their proper application can elevate, their inconsistent consideration can spoil the creative work's

effectiveness, and in extreme cases, can cause the failure of an entire, complex working process.

We assess, that - in contrast to common belief - it is exactly the advancement of technology that devalues the importance of technology, it is exactly the globalized, "impersonal" image-consuming that gradually elevates the importance of personality again. Today, when one can play around with various devices creating worlds in one's own image, the importance of *who* is doing it becomes all the more significant. It is the format of personality and the span of a person's imagination that becomes - once again - crucial.

In motion picture creation, the construction and production of artificial worlds has come into the foreground in connection with the digital revolution, while genetic advancements have given artificial beings heightened roles in our lives and in motion picture. Hence, the filmmakers of the present and the future must develop a conscious and mature relationship with those unconscious, albeit vital fundamentals of human nature discussed here and placed in the focal point of this work; these must then be made to serve the expressive power of their work in a playful and liberated, but also perceptive and well-informed manner.

While the dissertation presents examples primarily from feature films, it considers the entire narrative visual media, including computer games (as the par excellence medium that generates artificial heroes and worlds), as a whole. In this way, it basically makes statements that can be interpreted in the frames of Trans-media. The disproportionately feature-film-centric choice of examples is attributed to the maturity of film as a genre, since in many ways the field of "new" media is still struggling with growing pains.

The last chapter of the dissertation is a case study. It presents an artificial, alien character through the experiences of a film of the author, analyzing the special, practical angles of creature-design and placing them in the wider context of the dissertation's whole.