CREATIVE RESURGENCE: THE POPULARITY OF 2D ANIMATION AFTER THE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The animation industry, like many other sectors, experienced significant shifts during the pandemic. While 3D and CGI animation have dominated previous decades, the post-pandemic era has renewed interest in 2D animation. This thesis talks about the origin and evolution of animation from the 1920s, the rise of Disney, and the origin of feature-length animated movies. With this study, we can have a closer look at the production process of both 2D and 3D animation, by going through the traditional medium of animation with the use of hand-drawn images over celluloid to modern age 3D animated rendering. With the rise of 3D animation in the late 90s and its dominance in the industry for over two decades. The main focus of this study is to show the decline in the popularity of 3D animated movies and shows among wider audiences and the rise of 2d animation in more recent years.

Animation is a medium used in many industries, but eventually, it has become one of the most important pillars of the entertainment industry. Animation has evolved and changed its form over time.

Keywords: Animation, 2D Animation, 2D Classical Animation, 3D Animation

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s, animation emerged as an exciting entertainment medium. During this period, artists such as Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter, and Viking Eggeling created abstract animations. In 1923, Disney Brothers Cartoon Studios was founded by Walt Disney and Roy O. Disney in Los Angeles. At that time, there were very few studios working on feature-length animated movies. Disney and Iwerks developed the iconic character Mickey Mouse in 1928. Although their first film, Plane Crazy, received a negative response from test audiences and because of it they did not find any distributors, Disney persevered. With the advent of synchronized sound in animation, Disney launched Steamboat Willie (1928), which became an instant hit. Mickey Mouse remains one of the most popular cartoon characters in history.
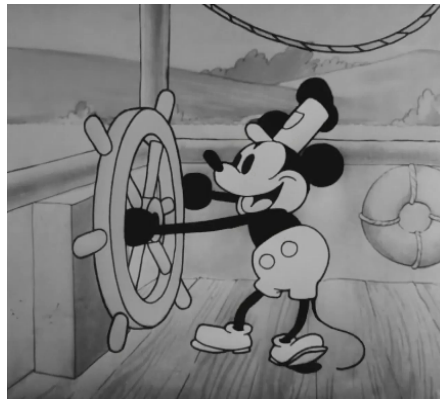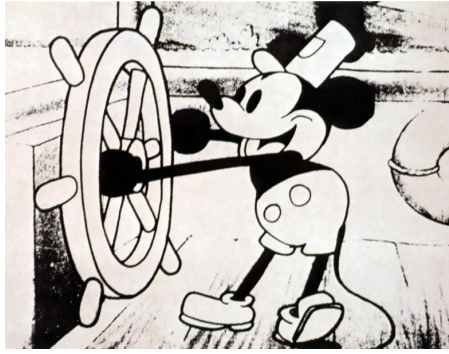
Figure 1

Figure 2 Mickey in Steamboat Willie

As time progressed new technologies and techniques developed to improve animation and coloured animation was one of them. In early European animation days, there was a technique called the multi-coloured-lithograph technique. Before the 1930s majority of animated movies were in black and white. In around 1930s Multiplane camera was introduced and it helped to create an impression of depth. With this new approach to camera animation different layers of background and foreground were created and these layers were moved at different speeds to create an illusion of perspective. William Garity a Disney employee developed a multiplane camera that could have up to seven layers of artwork. After the introduction of sound and color in animation every studio was producing movies with beautiful visuals and to complement them, they started focusing on songs. By the end of the 1930s, almost all the theoretical cartoons were produced in color. Studios such as warner bros have a huge library of music that can be used in animation.
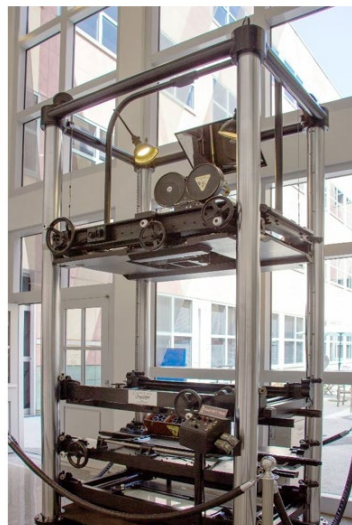

Figure 3 Multi plane Camera

1.2. ARTISTIC DIMENSION OF 2D ANIMATION

Many techniques like Silhouette, Cutouts, and Stop-motion were used by animators in feature-length animated movies. The silhouette technique was inspired by the European shadow play technique using black cutouts of cardboard and using light to distinguish between characters. Cutouts include various materials like cardboard, fabric, etc, in the animation process.

As the decade was near its end animation was making its presence felt on TV by introducing a low-budget short animation developed by ex-Disney staff, it was mostly cutouts and very little celluloid animation. There was a rumor that Disney was working on a feature-length animated movie. A feature-length movie has to be longer than 40 minutes, making a feature-length animated movie was unheard of at that time, which is why many critics call it a "Disney folly". Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs premiered on 21 December 1937 and became an instant hit making 418 million dollars on its original release and several reissues.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs proves that animated feature-length film has potential. After its success, many studios followed in the footsteps of Disney and started making feature-length animated movies.

Figure 4 Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

During World War II animation was mostly used as war propaganda. The United States was pushing its studios to create more and more propaganda-based animation. Just like the U.S., there were many countries using animation as propaganda, Japan was one of those countries. In 1945 Momotaro: Sacred Sailors was released it was produced by the Ministry of the Navy of Japan.

1.3. DIFFERENT TYPE OF TECHNIQUE

In 1949 animation made its proper debut on TV with, Adventures of Pow Wow. It had a total of 43 episodes with each episode running for five minutes. As time passed many studios started producing animation for T.V., and by the end of the 1950s, the focus of studios shifted from quality to quantity, by producing animation faster and cheaper. On the other side of the globe, Japan was also developing in animation production. Their focus was more on stylish art style rather than smooth animation, in comparison to U.S animation. Things like dynamic camera movement with techniques like panning, zooming, and focus on intense action scenes make Japanese animation different from U.S. animation.

Figure 5 Adventures of Pow Wow

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To document the traditional process and techniques of 2D Classical Animation
2) To examine the significance of Animation Industry
3) To assess the contemporary relevance and adaptation of classical animation in modern practices.
4) To analyse the socio-economic factors contributing to the decline of 2D Classical Animation and identify potential strategies for its impact in modern animation Industry.
5) To explore the role of 2D Animation in contemporary animation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1980s was one of the most remarkable years for American animation. This decade is also called the Renaissance of American animation. The era of Disney Renaissance started at the end of the 1980s with the release of The Little Mermaid and ended in 1999 after the release of Tarzan. With The Little Mermaid Disney put more emphasis on princesses and the movie was littered with songs, so it became an instant hit at the box office. With the success of The Little Mermaid Disney found its formula of success. Since then, it has become a trend in Disney movies to this date. CGI started showing its presence in the Renaissance age. It was used mostly in background and crowd animation. For movies like Mulan, Tarzan, and The Lion King, they invented a new technology for animating a large number of characters. By the end of the 20th century, Pixar and DreamWorks started producing computer-animated movies. In 1998 DreamWorks released The Prince of Egypt and it failed to live up to its potential at the box office. On the other hand, Pixar was becoming more and more successful with its fully computer-animated movies.

In the early 2000s, the top-grossing animated movies were all computer-generated. The major studios that produced these movies were Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks. Behind the success of the box office, there was another kind of animation flushing behind the scenes.

In Japan, anime has long been ingrained in their culture, but gradually, it spread across the West, finding a cult following among teenage audiences. Series like Dragon Ball became hits among Western teenage boys, who had grown up watching Disney animated movies. Japanese animation stood out from American animation with its dynamic camera work and more restrained animation. The emergence of the home video market led to the rise of original video animation (OVA), which often boasted higher production values than TV counterparts. However, OVAs also became associated with erotic and pornographic content, leading to a proliferation of such releases in the 1980s. Movies like Akira received limited releases in the U.S., marking the first significant exposure of a large audience to Japanese animation. Audiences were captivated by the visual style and intense storytelling, experiencing gore and violence in animation for the first time. By the late 1980s, there was a steady stream of anime movies being released in the U.S. Directors like Hayao Miyazaki and Iso Takahata formed Studio Ghibli, creating several acclaimed movies. Disney played a role in overseeing anime releases in the West.

The late 1980s also witnessed the debut of successful sports anime like Captain Tsubasa, followed by an increase in high-budget and experimental films. Theatrical releases became more ambitious, with each film striving to surpass its predecessors. This era culminated in the production of one of the most expensive anime films ever, "Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise" (1987). Studio Ghibli's "Kiki's Delivery Service" (1989) topped the box office that year, grossing over $40 million.

Over time, anime garnered a cult following among diverse viewers, aided by TV channels like Toonami, which aired anime in its adult swim section, making it increasingly accessible.
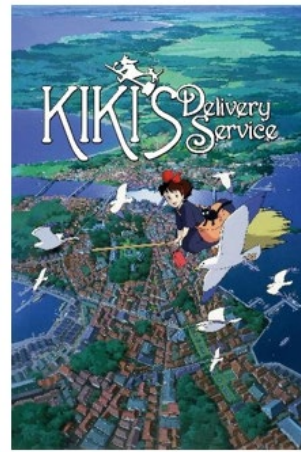
Figure 6 Saint Seiya

Figure 7 Kiki's Delivery Service

The late 20th century saw the rise of CGI, but the 21st century took it further. As the new century arose digital animation took over the box office with blockbusters like Toy Story, Cars, Kung Fu Panda, etc. Studios were investing their resources in 3D technology. By 2001 Pixar released Toy Story, A Bug's Life, Toy Story 2, and Monster Inc. All of these movies were commercial hits. DreamWorks also started animating with computers and in 2001 released Shrek, which grossed almost $500 million with a $60 million budget. Meanwhile, movies like Emperor's New Groove and The Lost City of Atlantis were not putting up the numbers by Disney standards. So Michael Eisner closed down the 2D animation department and put his complete focus on CGI animation. In 2006 Disney owned Pixar for approximately $7.4 billion. Films like "Shrek," "Frozen," and "The Incredibles" captivated audiences with stunning visuals and engaging stories. Technological advancements allowed for greater realism and attention to detail.

Pixar played a pivotal role, with "Toy Story" (1995) being the first feature-length film entirely created using computer-generated imagery (CGI). The marriage of creativity and technology set a new standard.
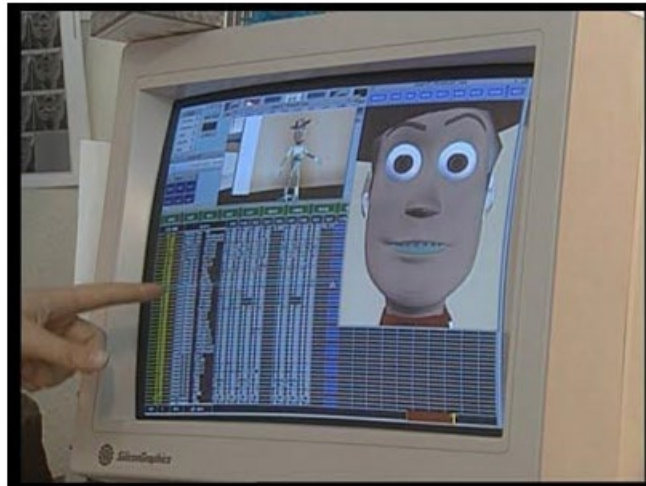

Figure 8 Toy Story behind the scene

Television animation, although initially overshadowed by the massive success of Western feature-length animated films, gradually gained acknowledgment. Japanese animation, commonly known as Anime, thrived silently, amassing a devoted fan base during the 1990s. Productions like Dragon Ball, Neon Genesis Evangelion, and Cowboy Bebop gained fame among teenagers for their mature themes and gripping action sequences. However, Japanese animated features encountered hurdles in Western markets, often undergoing edits for PG-13 ratings by distributors like Disney. Akira, for example, saw only a limited release in North America due to its unconventional nature. In recent years, anime has become more accessible to broader demographics, with anime feature films receiving increased attention and distribution. This surge in anime's popularity has significantly influenced the Western animation industry, prompting many studios to

undertake traditional animation projects and collaborate with major Eastern studios. Additionally, the emergence of streaming services such as Netflix has played a crucial role in revitalizing traditional animation.

By 2023, Netflix boasts a library exceeding 200 anime titles, a substantial increase from the 40 anime titles announced to be in production in 2022. The pandemic era witnessed a surge in anime's popularity, attributed to a scarcity of feature films. This surge introduced many newcomers to the expansive world of anime, with platforms like Crunchyroll expanding their influence by offering dubbed anime in multiple regional languages. This trend notably impacted viewership in countries such as India, where the anime audience experienced rapid growth. Western animation studios, acknowledging this shift, are embracing traditional animation styles. Powerhouse Animation Studio, for example, has initiated the creation of original content under Netflix's banner. Additionally, shows like Love Death and Robots on Netflix allow studios to explore animation across various mediums. Examples such as Arcane and Invincible demonstrate a blend of traditional animation techniques with CGI, highlighting the evolving landscape of animated storytelling.

During the challenging year of 2020, amidst global difficulties, a Japanese animated film titled "Demon Slayer – The Movie: Mugen Train" emerged as the highest-grossing movie, surpassing even Christopher Nolan's "Tenet." As the film industry grappled with unprecedented obstacles due to the pandemic, including theatre closures and indefinite delays of major releases, "Demon Slayer: Mugen Train" unexpectedly soared to extraordinary success at the box office. This essay explores the impact of "Demon Slayer: Mugen Train" on the box office during the pandemic, delving into its unprecedented achievements and the factors contributing to its monumental success. The film shattered box office records globally, defying expectations and attaining cultural phenomenon status. Despite the pandemic challenges, it grossed over $500 million worldwide, making it the highest-grossing anime film ever and one of 2020's top-grossing films. Its remarkable triumph not only breathed new life into the anime industry but also underscored the enduring ability of cinema to enthral audiences, even amidst adversity.

The success of "Demon Slayer: Mugen Train" extended beyond its box office earnings, making a lasting impact on popular culture. Its compelling story, breathtaking animation, and emotionally resonant themes resonated globally, sparking interest in the franchise and boosting manga and merchandise sales. The film also introduced many to anime, expanding its reach. During the pandemic, anime's popularity surged as people sought escapism. Its diverse genres and captivating storytelling provided comfort during lockdowns, offering solace through immersive experiences in alternate realities.

2.2. RESEARCH GAP

The rise of streaming platforms significantly increased the accessibility of anime. Services like Netflix, Crunchyroll, and Hulu offered vast libraries of anime titles, allowing viewers to discover new series and genres effortlessly. On-demand streaming enabled fans to binge-watch their favourite shows and find hidden gems, fostering a sense of community among enthusiasts. Anime's popularity transcended borders, promoting cultural exchange and connecting people from diverse backgrounds. Subtitles and dubbing in multiple languages made anime more accessible internationally, leading to a surge in global fandoms. Social media platforms served as virtual hubs for fans to discuss and share anime, further boosting its popularity and cultural influence.

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned earlier, the research methodology of this study is based on conducting research using qualitative method of traditional Animation in various places, In India where traditional Animation practice is still not active. We required such methods for best fitted into this study due to their success in exploring entertainment and cultural practices, perceptions of the society towards various practices and how individuals make sense of their everyday practices.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is collected from participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

- **Participant Observation:** The researcher physically visited the studio of operation in India with a view of having a first-hand experience on the people as well as on how the 2D Traditional Animation was made. That way, it provides an understanding of the technical process of 2D Animation, "Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise" (1987).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pandemic-driven surge in anime's popularity underscores its enduring appeal as entertainment and cultural expression. From providing escapism to fostering global connections, anime has become a cultural phenomenon with significant impact. As we navigate the post-pandemic world, anime reflects the resilience of human creativity and the power of storytelling to unite audiences worldwide. This thesis examines how anime has dominated the global market in recent years.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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