Senor Wences: The Art of Animation
Inside a Ventriloquist

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Abstract

Wenceslao Moreno, or better known as Señor Wences was a Spanish Ventriloquist. He is describe as among the famous talented ventriloquist master alongside with others such as Jeff Dunham or Alex King. Animation is pervasive in context with visual motion, illusion and culture. Today’s younger generation are lack of exposure or knowledge to world of “Ventriloquism”, cinema, video games or mobile gadgets has created a kind of group known as “Digital Natives”. This research will focus on the animation qualities or aesthetics possibilities that Senor Wences use display his visual creativity as a ventriloquist. Also, this research will look into several animation influence domains such as narrative, visual puppets and culture perspectives used by Senor Wences to portray the art of Ventriloquism.

Keywords: Senor Wences, Ventriloquist, Animation, Narrative, Puppets, Culture, Ventriloquism.
1.0 Introduction

Senor Wences, described as genius with notion of creative and passion in his era as Ventriloquist artist. Wences, a Spanish ventriloquist, most famously known for his puppets Johnny and Pedro, entranced audiences across the nation, and the world, for several decades. Born in Wenceslao Moreno, in Salamanca, Spain, he went on to become one of the most endearing figures of the TV variety show era, According to Paul(1999), It was a period that for Wences included about 50 appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show," where audiences watched as the masterful artist--with his regal bearing, dressed daintily in white tie and tails, created his own brand of ventriloquism and spun plate sometimes both at once. Senor Wences, respond so deeply to each puppet he manipulate and mesmerizing the audience with inanimate characters impossibly coming to life. Señor Wences' interest in ventriloquism was inspired by his exposure to vaudeville acts seen in silent movie theatres where his violinist father played with the orchestras. His puppet animation is fascinating, that it makes the audience feel something special which could not be found in other various entertainment media or animation techniques. Senor Wences, was brought from a small kind of family and started to his early career in bullfighting but proved unsuccessful, and began performing ventriloquism as a child and focus on becoming ventriloquism and juggling professionally Pedro and Johnny, two synonym or common puppet characters icon use by Senor Wences were visually described as tacit, metamorphosis and implicit creates a unique soul in his performance. In most animation techniques stop-motion, well recognised performers (such as Nick Park, Jiri Trinka, Tim Burton, and George Pal) are known by their involvement through passion, detailed artwork as an evident in the performance. In most scenarios the audience has no desire to know about the performer contribution in order to enjoy his work. But in Senor Wences, he is the strength, creating a pulsating performance with his own quirks or visual tricks, with his puppets are mostly inextricably linked to him. The experience of ventriloquism only works if the audience is aware of and enjoys the trick, just like removing the visual trick of the performer trying not to move his lips, and the constant placing of obstacles to make the trick harder, then ventriloquism falls to pieces rather quickly and trying not to move one’s lips (Barry,2008). Senor Wences injected the sense of humor for each performances that able to instilling life in his puppet characters, creating a unique phenomenal as a performer. Senor Wences would talk to his puppets with his face right in theirs, as if daring the audience to watch his lips, which never moved .According to Norm Nielsen (2014), Senor Wences is acknowledge as typical Spanish national art treasure icon as a Ventriloquist, with appearing 48 times in Ed Sullivan Show, and receiving Life Acviemenet Award, National Comedy Hall of Fame in America.

His style of work provides a similar expression of culture, symbolism, and fiction that are coherent with the famous Spanish novel of Miguel Cervantes” Don Quixote de la Mancha”manifests the art of fiction becomes the preferable reality, true reality itself is easily forgettable and in all likelihood unnecessary--grants the literary world a character that has pushed all the boundaries that separate fantasy from reality (Gaffney, 2009). Senor Wences, a gifted ventriloquist who was able to transform his thumb and forefinger into a convincing
dummy that endeared itself to millions of American television viewers in the era of 1950's and 60'. Even though Senor Wences is known as ventriloquist, but indirectly he indulges the similar qualities in the world called ‘animation’. The world of ‘animation’ is pervasive in contemporary moving image culture (Suzanne, 2013), but in puppet theatre such as ventriloquist, it was meant to be viewed simultaneously a microcosm and macrocosm, not the dramatic character, but its collision with what surrounds him or her was dramatized (Steve, 1997). Animation is a spatiotemporal art; at its centre is the manipulation of the spatial arrangement or shape of an object over time to create the illusion of motion (Chris, 2012). Objects can be as simple as a line drawn in the sand or on a page, or as complicated as a computer-generated virtual puppet. Regardless of the form of the objects, or the medium, animation is, necessarily, a technologically mediated art form that requires the animator to manipulate the representation of objects in space and time to communicate with an audience. The rule is to be able to communicate stories through motions of visual and sound, engaging the heart of an audience by its lingering music, exquisite sculpture, brisk color and lively performance. According to Scott McLoud(2006), there are two(2) elements that is needed from the audience when comes to storytelling, making the audience understand the whole process of narrative and engage throughout the whole length of performance. Paul Wells’s book, Understanding Animation (1998), where he claims that ‘animation as a film language and film art is a more sophisticated and flexible medium than live-action film’. Animation, as such, has a tremendously rich history of incongruous practices, forms and styles, of institutional, cultural and national diversity which has barely begun to be explored and examined in any depth. There is a great amount of differences in terms role between an animator and ventriquolist like Senor Wense, which separates between ‘live’ and behind the scene(screen) world. The role of the animator is to create motion, frame by frame, which is indicative of real life. That is, the animator’s aim is to create the illusion of an authentic, living, thinking being whose movement appears to come from an inner motivational force (Thomas & O. Johnston 1995). For instance, in traditional animation the hand of the animator withdraws for the most part, and animation’s forms and figures/visuals assume a quasi-life, an impression or expression of self-propulsion. Else, the art of Ventriloquism and Puppetry, provides a slightly different approached from other traditional/digital animation (stop motion, cel, pixilation, keyframe, motion capture) or puppetry techniques (shadow, marionette, Japanese Buranku).

Even though Senor Wences uses his puppets (relationship as intriguing), as the main visual entertainment but sometimes it creates a more scared or creepy feeling (inner voice, belly talkers, non-lip movers, multiple-personality) by bringing inanimate object coming to life. Imagination is the key to world of ventriloquism. Just like you wished that you could make your little sister’s teddy bear talk to her? Or have you ever wanted to bring a puppet to life? Senor Wences provides souls to his ordinary object/puppet, which seem to be alive by giving it a personality, movement, and speech. Even though Senor Wense ventriloquism performance remained on the fringe, relegated to the music halls and variety shows but as a ventriloquists, he is able to create empty space between the audience and himself (StrassMan, 2010). Thus, as master of ventriloquist performance, Senor Wences are the custodians of a venerable art form with unique
identity and magical. Even though Senor Wences might not be identical to Harry Houdini's grand magical illusions and daring performance, with spectacular escape acts made him one of the most famous magicians of all time. Senor Wences juxtaposition of animation and ventriloquism by utilising the entire space on theatre set, compare to animation which are shown or displayed on screens, which become part of everyday life—phones, laptops, pads, future technologies to come, it will increasingly influence our understanding and appreciation of how we see and experience the world visually. The dogma of animation, after all is as much a cinematic and digital technology as it is an art form and artistic medium. For Senor Wences, being ventriloquist, in fact even the audience might not realise that his performance has the visual qualities or aesthetics similar to animation world. Senor Wences manipulation of voice and puppet performances are more artistic value, experimental, enormous ambiguity with divergent pro-filmic materials (props, objects, drawings or puppets) can be allocated to almost all film genres. Next, we will discuss on animation influence or visual styles that Senor Wences uses throughout his performances especially from the perspective of narrative, puppets and visual culture.

2.0 Narrative:

Narrative in animation tells a story. The art of storytelling has been around since ancient times in various cultures and languages longer than we generally realize. Many traditional storytelling shows are in fact synonymous with chants, songs, epics and poetries and normally accompanied by a musical orchestra. Storytelling has been a form of entertainment (e.g puppet theatre/film) and it is used to impart morals and values to the audience in most traditional or even modern societies (Talib,2012). It uses the power of the visual image to ignite imaginations, evoke emotions and capture universal cultural truths and aspirations.

What distinguishes Narrative in animation from other genres is its ability to narrate a story across diverse cultures, preserving it for future generations. Narrative Señor Wences had a very special gift, being a ventriloquist, manipulating the timing and action of ideas---puppets, and besides having a great sense of humour and wit by acting on the spur of the moment was truly amazing.

According to Lasseteer (1987), in the art of narrative or storytelling, the timing of ideas and actions is important to the audience's understanding of the story at any point in time. Señor Wences. Furthermore, while kids and adults either found him funny or frightening; the one thing Señor Wences succeeded at was keeping viewers captive with his narrative approached. With quick and impressive back-and-forth banter between puppet and master, Señor Wences was a pro at with impeccable comedic timing. Using his innovative techniques of minimalism, Wences continued to keep the puppetry fresh with little ambivalences. He dedicated most of his performances on Ed Sullivan (delighted "Ed Sullivan Show" audiences by bantering in a comic Spanish accent with his puppet-in-a-box Pedro (“S'OK?” “S'awright!”) and his falsetto-voiced
hand puppet Johnny portraying about a man whose on-camera persona was that of a stone-faced, humourless emcee. Also, “Deefeecul for you, eassssy fo’ me!” chimed Johnny the puppet painted on ventriloquist Señor Wences’ fist were among the famous words use to enhanced the qualities of narrative in The Ed Sullivan Show. Throughout his long career he came to befriend or admire people like Spencer Tracy, Frank Sinatra, with whom he shared dressing room in New York in 1939, Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock and Walt Disney. What also set Wences apart from other ventriloquists was the fact that there were no clever lines to distract people from the deceptions he was performing. There was no need - audiences were in thrall to the feat of his not moving his lips or his Adam's apple. But there were catch phrases that devotees to the Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle shows came to recognise and love (Freedland, 1999). Example, when he lifted the lid of Pedro's boy, he asked if the dismembered Spaniard was feeling OK. 'S'awright' the bodiless one replied every time. 'Johnny' had a better share of the action, showing immense consideration for his creator. 'Deefeecult for you,' he'd say, 'easy for me.' His pronunciation of words or phrases in English, with Spanish accent is regarded as much easier to understand. These are the virtues that Senor Wences try to inculcate with his audience about wisdom, values, dignity, or imagination inside each performance with his own style of narrative that accommodate different kind of group (audience). Senor Wences claimed not to know the failure and his secret was to never be rude or say things that may disturb the public, because he felt that he would lose his professional dignity (Jorge, 2010). He also does not used or portray any epic, historical or classical folklore narratives like Ramayana, normally use in Malaysian or Indonesian shadow puppets or known as Wayang Kulit , or the famous Japanese Bunraku puppet play is probably Chushingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Kanadehon Chushingura), about narrative story of heroics, loyalty and revenge. It is quite surprising for Senoe Wences not to performed any historical stories related to the country he was born(town of Salamanca,Spain) or even America. Senor Wences preferred stories that are fun, cache, or imaginative that the younger generation will enjoyed or mesmerized with his stories and ascent, rather than historical which are mostly rely on actual facts or events.

3.0 Puppet Design

Ventriloquist puppet theatre presents us with a wholly different set of stylistic intentions: the puppeteer’s intention is generally not to be seen, or if seen, as is usually now the case in contemporary puppetry, then not perceived as the primary focus of attention (Astles, 2009).Señor Wences would talk to his puppets with his face right in theirs, as if daring the audience to watch his lips, which never moved, creating a pulsating set of aesthetic and stylistic approached in his performances. Senor Wences Puppetry and related forms of animation differ primarily from actor training in that the puppeteer usually locates their centre of expression outside the human body. His momentum and rhythm in manipulating his puppets are much more dynamic and unswerving --- moved quickly from character to character, smoking and drinking and juggling as his puppets traded meandering, unmappable patter with him, made all the more ludicrous by Wences’ deadpan, aristocratic bearing. According to Astles (2010), specific phenomenon within contemporary puppetry: the consideration of the puppet as just one of a series of interrelated
elements of animation, which include things such as matter, actors, puppets and environment as part of a dynamic continuum. Senor Wences puppets are much of puppet types demands different and very specific trifling skills which include digital dexterity, posture and stance; distance from the thing being operated; stillness and neutrality; timing and rhythm.

Figure 2.0 Senor Wences: Ventriloquist with his famous icon puppet Johnny

The puppets that Wences often use in his performances are much more of interactivity, in such a way it creates a closer enigma or paradox between the audiences, puppets and himself. According to Weiner (2013), Wences can be described as a single source of all the interactivity that is expressed in a unique way by each of the ventriloquist's puppets. With his well-known puppet Johnny (see Figure 2.0), bickering with "Johnny," a "puppet" with a high-pitched Spanish accent who came to life when Wences put lipstick on his own thumb and forefinger and drew eyes on the top of his hand. "Deefeecult for you, easy for me," Johnny would boast as the two would try to get through a song. Sometimes Wences would give Johnny (i.e. his own hand) a drag on a cigarette, and Johnny would emit perfect smoke rings (Shuler, 2006). Here, the art of animation as define earlier as illusion of life is a concrete evidence that Wences were able to animate his puppet anatomy characters frame by frame in real-time, with voice-over (lip-sync puppets), creating the similar today's modern visual styles of CG(computer graphics) film. To animate' literally means to give life to. Thus, animation (similar to an animator or Ventriloquist) adds to visuals the dimensions of time and space, which tremendously increase the potential of transmitting the desired information the audience.

3.0 Conclusion
Overall Senor Wences is no doubt the most unique all time performers or ventriloquism that will always inspires the younger generation about his passion, enthusiasm and versatility. With is his palpable Spanish accent and there were times when some found it difficult to understand him. The laughs came just the same; his timing and the gentleness of his message were such that he transcended the bounds of language were always be remembered.
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