WOODEN BONES:
PERCEIVED REALITIES WITHIN THE MEDIA

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"Don't miss the point now; don't shut your eyes dear. Our time is soon up; Our days are numbered here…" –Pilot Speed

Introduction

Wooden Bones is an animation that illustrates a dark and gritty community, filled with misery, poverty, and depression. The animation follows the stories of various community members as they make their way through a society on the brink of destruction. Wooden Bones examines the relationship of the media's ability to change peoples' perception of reality. Through the main male character's outlook on society in Wooden Bones, and from the effects of his own television, we see that the animated world of Wooden Bones has become a perceived reality, directly affected by the media.

Crime, poverty, violence, war, climate change, natural disasters, and other themes of destruction are littered throughout the popular media. With the aid of technology, we have been ushered into an age of immediacy and liveness, effectively rendering news media instantaneous. News media has become a source of popular entertainment. In this sense it should be noted that the bombardment of destructive content points to the notion that our mainstream media sources are obsessively determined to construct and portray our news, and society in general, as a dystopia, something that is visually conceptualized in the animation Wooden Bones. This concept has been integrated so meticulously within our society that it makes it very difficult to deconstruct this notion. How do we appropriately deconstruct what is so seamlessly portrayed as the norm? If the news media is framing our society as a dystopia, then perhaps it is necessary to begin framing the news as a major source of dystopia. Through an analysis of Wooden Bones, this study looks at several key factors that contribute to the media's portrayal of society as a dystopia, including framing, risk, and moral panic. The

animation <u>Wooden Bones</u> is intended to engage with these theories in order to demonstrate that, through the specific use of animation as a form of social activism, it is possible to exploit many of these concepts and to bring many social issues to light that would often be considered taboo. The animation works towards applying these theories in a manner that will help to engage the viewer with the notion of a perceived reality created by the media. Through the use of 2D animation <u>Wooden Bones</u> exemplifies the distinction between fantasy and reality, a concept that is so often blurred by the media when portraying our society.

<u>Framing Our Society</u>

As seen within the news media, every representation requires a certain degree of framing. Framing allows one to skew certain elements of a perceived reality, constructing a narrative that promotes a particular, if not biased, interpretation. Framing becomes essential in order to convey an interpretation or perspective of an event. However, to the untrained eye it can become quite simple to gloss over the notion that the news is itself a representation of the truth, potentially embellished, exaggerated, or biased. It should not be overlooked that the news media does report on very important and critical issues, and whether we like it or not these events are often less than pleasant. To blame the media for the coverage of destructive events would be faulty, and is not the intent of this study. Rather, the intent is to deconstruct how the media often sensationalizes the state of the world and what lasting effects this may have on our own perception of reality. In doing so, the news media demonstrates a high degree of selection, specifically choosing what is and is not included. Salience is another method often used to specify which are given more importance, which are placed in the forefront, and which aspects of a story are deemed less crucial, being pushed to the background. Essentially, framing is used to package meaning. In the article, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm",

Robert Entman notes that "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 52). As suggested, the framing process is essential in the power of a communicating text such as the news media. Through framing, the media is able to direct attention to certain aspects of an event, often creating what appears to be a more captivating and entertaining story.

The 'Risk' Factor

Beyond the initial use of framing, it is necessary to examine how and why the news media goes about constructing society as a dystopia, characterized by misery, and destructive themes, and what the lasting implications of such representations entail. Risk has become a defining characteristic of our society. Put simply, risk is an estimation of the likelihood of danger in any given situation. Risk is one initial aspect applied not only by the news media but the media in general, which essentially has the power to individualize threats and convert even seemingly neutral events into issues. In David Garland's study, "The Rise of Risk", Garland explains that the notion of risk unlocks some of the simplistic characteristics of the world in which we live (Garland 49). Garland essentially characterizes risk as a commodity, a source of insecurity. He also claims that, "Risk is a pleasure, a thrill, a source of profit and freedom. Risk is the means whereby we colonize and control the future. 'Risk society' is our late modern world spinning out of control" (Garland 49). To summarize, risk serves many purposes, but notably serves as an efficient form of profit and even entertainment. As we have heard many times before, 'no news is good news', and indeed it seems that within the news media, positive news does not sell. This concept, for example, can be seen within Katherine McComas' study,

"Defining Moments in Risk Communication Research: 1996-2005". McComas comments on

the Leiserowitz 2004 study of the film <u>The Day After Tomorrow,</u> which reveals that

apocalyptic and destructive themed films may have had a short-term impact on viewers' risk

perception (McComas 79). This illustrates that through the viewing of television and film, it is

very possible to directly impact an individual's risk perception. Yet, McComas suggests that

studies still show that media coverage often generates societal level, rather than a personal

level, judgments of risk. Garland makes an interesting point claiming that people are no longer

stuck in a specific class system, in one career path, one organized religion, or even a single

relationship. Garland theorizes that this 'world of choice' has created a much more uncertain

world; where identities are no longer set and the self is no longer stable (Garland 77).

Essentially, this results in an increasing sense of insecurity and people begin to focus on risks

that mirror their own anxieties and fears. This also brings us to Anders Wahlberg and Lennart

Sjoberg's study, "Risk perception and the media", which claims that "...knowledge about risks

is an important part of the cultural heritage that we transfer to the next generation. But times

have changed, and we no longer get the main part of our knowledge from traditional sources

(people) in traditional ways (orally). Today we receive a lot of information about various things

from the media" (Wahlberg 31). We begin to see the shift of reliance on the media, and its

importance on our perception of reality. Yet Wahlberg and Sjoberg's article also admits that

"Not even the widely accepted 'fact' that the media are responsible for a great deal of people's

risk perception is really well researched, not to speak of the many other, less central, questions"

(Wahlberg 45). Yet at the same time, both Wahlberg/Sjoberg and McComas' articles suggest

that it is much more widely accepted that the rest of society is perceived to be in danger,

whereas most individual people tend to believe they are less likely to become victims of risk

(Wahlberg 41; McComas 79). This notion allows us to individually distance ourselves from

such destructive imagery; however as pointed out our general depiction of society has still been

warped, even if it is not believed to directly affect ourselves individually.

Moral Panic

If risk has the capability to change one's perspective of society, what would an *extreme*

example of risk entail? Chas Critcher's article, "Moral Panic Analysis: Past, Present and

Future", specifically suggests moral panics as an *extreme* example of risk society (Critcher

1139). Critcher's article reflects and expands heavily upon Stan Cohen's 1972 study, "Folk

Devils and Moral Panics". Compartively, in the study, "Moral panic: From sociological

concept to public discourse" by David Altheide, Altheide asserts that, "…MP [moral panic] is

used frequently in news reports because it fits well with news formats, which refer to the ways

of selecting, organizing and presenting information, and shape audience assumptions and

preferences for certain kinds of information" (Altheide 81). In this sense, moral panics have

become an everyday focus of the media and the entertainment industry. Proof of this can be

seen in the volume of coverage stressing issues of youth deviance, drugs, and street crime, to

name a few. Although risk and moral panics are constructed quite differently (risk pertaining

more to an individual's often faulty concerns of harm or danger, and moral panic as a societal

issue deliberately blown out of proportion), the constant bombardment and dramatization of

moral panics is often attributed to the underlying purpose of restoring social order and moral

behaviour. The evening news, for example, is excellent at sensationalizing what is deemed to

be "wrong with the world", in general most people are not interested in casual stories of

success and good luck; it simply does not sell. Instead the viewer is left with dramatic

entertainment news, awaiting the next big and often 'horrific' coverage of an event. Moral

panics are often examined as a very manipulative means of ensuring consumption of popular

news media and building a consensus amongst the public. And although risk is not as directly

linked to the news media, moral panic is, and is theorized to be an extreme example of risk

society. This very notion brings us back to the concept of framing.

The framing of moral panic stories is very crucial to the success of the moral panic;

these stories often heavily dramatize events through the use of language and visuals to provoke

specific emotional responses from the audience, notably grief and fear. Yet the tactic of moral

panic is greatly intended to exaggerate and sensationalize particular events in order to build a

general consensus, often persuading the viewer/general public into believing they are in the

midst of a social crisis, once again drawing on the very tactics used to exploit this practice in

the Wooden Bones animation. It is important to note that topics of destruction are quite

universal in societies and generally effect societies as a whole, making them quite familiar and

easy to relate to. Expectedly, the life span and effectiveness of moral panic heavily relies on

reaction of the general public and the amount of exposure they have to the coverage of the

moral panic.

Working Towards a Solution

As we have seen throughout the duration of this study, and as Elihu Katz and Tamara

Liebes point out in their article, "'No More Peace!': How Disaster , Terror and War Have

Upstaged Media Event", incidents involving crime, violence, and destruction are becoming

more prevalent in the media when depicting our society. Thus it seems worthy to explore how

we can use these very concepts to deconstruct what the media has so seamlessly portrayed as

the norm. In doing so, the dystopian portrayal of society within Wooden Bones will be

examined in order to exploit these concepts of the news media. Through the role of technology

in the media our society has been socialized to 'action' (disaster, terror, war, etc.) rather than

ceremony (commemorations, public debates, funerals, etc.), where interruption has become the

norm rather than scheduled, planned events (Katz 159). Inevitably, due to the 'liveness' of

technology, the media industry has put a direct priority and value on action over ceremony,

glamorizing disruptive content, which then influences our intake of disruptive media as

perception of reality and even as a form of entertainment. This concept leads to what Katz and

Liebes refer to as "disaster marathons". This can become very problematic in the sense that due

to the instantaneous and liveness of the media, it seems as though there is never enough time to

fully deconstruct and thoroughly research and understand the content that is being delivered;

which often leads to information based on judgment rather than understanding. It also becomes

very tempting for journalists and media sources to apply quick generalizations and often-

exaggerated interpretations and portrayals within our news, making the news far more dramatic

and entertaining for the audience. As pointed out in the Katz article, shocking news events are

indeed disruptive and not integrative, they claim that such news media, unlike ceremonial

events, are unexpected and mostly unwelcomed (Katz 158). However, if this is the case, how is

it that such disruptive content captures an audience so effectively. This seems almost

contradictory. Yet as Moira Peelo asserts in her article, "Framing homicide narratives in

newspapers: Mediated witness and the construction of virtual victimhood", shocking news

events are not completely unwelcomed by the audience. Instead Peelo notes that, "One of the

chief emotional distinctions between virtual and actual victimhood is that virtual experience

allows us still to be entertained by crime, which must seem grotesque to those bereaved by

homicide" (Peelo 169). Peelo then claims that this allows people to separate themselves from

the bereaved, and instead focus on claims as to how society 'should be run'. Essentially, we are

able to distance ourselves from such destructive content, however our perception of society is still brought into question whether or not we are being directly affected. Peelo then mentions that, "Major crime touches us all as members of the community yet provides us, as individuals, with a source of entertainment, thrills and fear. Whatever moral high ground is claimed, one must never forget that newspapers need readers and violent crime has long since helped to sell papers" (Peelo 169). This remark becomes very important as we must not neglect to remember that often times, the news media we take in is not simply what is going on, but rather it is the way that the news is presented that sells and entertains.

Animation as a Strategy

With so much of the news media centralized on destructive and dreary themes, it is no wonder that society is often perceived to be a dystopia. If the news is framing our society as a dystopia, perhaps we need to begin framing the news as a major source of dystopic media, not solely through academia, but also through a more accessible and public form of social activism. Perhaps we need to begin considering what Katz and Liebes question within their study, "Are major disasters really more frequent? It is difficult to say. Is paranoia more prevalent? That is probably the case. Are governments building on such events to legitimate their trigger-happy interventionism? Are the mainstream media trying to show off their newly mobile technologies in order to recapture their unfaithful audiences? Maybe" (Katz 160). Through the use of animation, there is a certain degree of captivation and freedom which allows one to more effectively address such political and social issues that would normally be considered off limits in the mainstream news media. In a sense, this could be considered battling entertainment with entertainment. In retrospect, the role of activism and participatory culture should not be overlooked. In comparison to major news outlets, these alternatives may seem powerless.

Never-the-less, if handled in a tasteful and engaging manner, then there is still potential in

media such as animation to deconstruct and exploit the underlying ideologies of the news

media and its negative depiction of our society. Animation also has the potential to reach a

much wider range of audience in comparison to the news media, which is much more directed

towards an older audience, whereas animation has been seen to captivate all ages. Admittedly,

the same can be said for live-action films, 3D animation, or even literature. Thus, the question

remains: why use 2D animation as a basis to deconstruct the news media, entailing concepts

such as framing, risk, and moral panic?

To begin, we must first recognize the advantages of animation as a medium. Distinctly,

there is something quite innocent in the viewing of animation. People are able to suspend their

disbelief, engaging with unimaginable characters and situations that could not necessarily be

portrayed as effectively in real life. In Paul Wells book, *The Animated Bestiary: Animals,*

Cartoons, and Culture, which examines the use of animals and anthropomorphic (human

characteristics applied to non-human entities or objects) cartoon characters, Wells mentions

that the use of such characters and themes within cartoons

> … occurs in a way that privileges crosspieces engagement, cross-dressing, gender-
> shifting, and the performance of identity as a method by which unreal settings and
> impossible situations may be used as a vehicle to play with contemporary issues.
> These include interrogations of sex and sexuality, social status, notions of difference,
> and in the revelation of a more primal index of animality shared by humankind and
> animals
> (Wells 66).

Essentially, watching Bugs Bunny dress up as a woman, as he has many times, is portrayed in a

much more accessible and advantageous manner than the act of literal cross-dressing.

Similarly, Wooden Bones is able to incorporate the suicide of the female character or the death

of three children (the Robot's son, and the two starving children) in a more appropriate manner.

After all, the death of any child is a very weighty situation, something that is taken very

seriously, yet through animation this can be pulled off appropriately, in an engaging and

entertaining format. This becomes a very important factor in the choice to use traditional 2D

animation in deconstructing the news media.

It should also be noted that the media is able to construct certain perceived realities

because they so seamlessly blur the line between what is real and what has been

sensationalized, just as live-action film, and the acceleration and success of 3D animation has

long since blurred the line between fantasy and reality. Although 3D animation is still very

effective at producing cartoon inspired entertainment, at the same time it is also used to achieve

effects that are made to look as close to reality as possibly. Essentially, the more we gear

towards achieving realism within 3D animation, the more we lose the distinction between

animation and reality. In the study, "Bones of Contention: Thoughts on the Study of

Animation," Andrew Darley, states that "The representations produced by traditional animation

and the emergent hybrid digital medium are not indexical. In the case of traditional animation,

this did not matter much because no matter how realistic it was, ultimately, its imagery always

pointed to itself as fabricated, hand-made or constructed" (Darley 69). This becomes a very

important theme within Wooden Bones, for unlike the real life news media, the audience is

intended to directly distinguish the Wooden Bones community as a perceived 2D reality not a

seamless reality, something that is even suggested by the title. It should be noted that most

people are more than capable in distinguishing between live-action films, 3D animation, and

reality. Never-the-less, it is much easier to unmistakably separate oneself from what is real and

the paper thin world of Wooden Bones. This is crucial to the implication of 2D animation in

deconstructing themes such as risk and moral panic within the news media. The news media is intended to create a perception of reality that is entirely seamless; Wooden Bones draws upon these exact same notions, yet because of the animation's overall 2D construction and over-exemplified flatness, the audience is forced to view this animation as cartoon reality, not an actual reality. This process alone creates and intensifies the distinct separation of fantasy and reality, working against what the media so willfully works towards achieving. It is this notion that allows the audience to contemplate the media's effect on society, directly attributed to the use of traditional 2D animation.

Welcome to Wooden Bones

The animation Wooden Bones is set to the song "Wooden Bones" by the Canadian band *Pilot Speed*. Aside from media influences discussed within this study, the animation is also inspired by *Pilot Speed's* album, which touches on a variety of themes relating to the fragile state of our world. The specific song, "Wooden Bones", was chosen for its unique sound, starting off slow and gradually building up to a heavy and dramatic climax. It was this effect that truly helped to achieve the underlying tension of the animation that is eventually released after the suicide of the main female figure. As mentioned by Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, in her critique of David Whitley's study, "The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation", the pressing "...need: to address the impact of old and recent animated features on shaping ideas about nature for the youth culture of today, a generation whose contact with nature is more likely to be through its mediation by films, television and the internet, than through direct sensorial experience" (Willoquet-Maricondi 204). In this sense, Wooden Bones works to achieve very similar results. Although Wooden Bones is not focused on nature, it parallels this concept by pertaining to a generation whose depiction of society is arguably becoming far more informed

through the media, rather than through their own life experiences. The being said, Wooden

Bones works quite similarly to the news media and what has already been discussed within this

paper, by essentially mimicing the sensationalism of the media, but for the purposes of drawing

attention to the media as a powerful conductor of society's perception of reality. I have merely

attempted to situate and visualize the already exaggerated depiction of our dystopic world seen

through the eyes of the news media.

The audience is immersed into the Wooden Bones community at the beginning of the

animation as the camera pans from the top of the outside surrounding buildings through the

heart of the community. This is intended to introduce the audience to the overall hopeless

setting in which the animation takes place. The community is constructed out of 2D objects

within a 3D tangible space for two specific reasons. First, the choice of constructing a 3D space

out of 2D objects is meant to heighten the illusion of a perceived reality. In doing so the

audience is able to more effectively visualize a tangible society in which the animation takes

place, enticing the audience to invest more emotion and belief into this fictional community.

Secondly, this particular style was used to exemplify the flat, one-sidedness of this world,

evoking the notion of a paper-thin world, highlighted as fragile, and delicate. The choice to

work with 2D animation has also been specifically framed to reflect the dying medium, which

is slowly being phased out by 3D animation, a subtle nod to the overall destructive themes

explored within the animation. The objects themselves have also been shaded and texturized

with their corresponding object. For example, real life textures of gravestones have been

applied to the gravestones seen within the Wooden Bones park; just as textures of bark have

been applied to the warped and lifeless trees scattered throughout the community. In doing so

the intended effect is once again to create a very warped sense of reality. Although objects

appear more realistic through the use of texturing, there is still a fine line drawn between the realism and the cartoon, making it easier for the audience to identify with real life objects but deliberately experience them in a 2D manner, highlighting the animation as a cartoon.

The general tone and imagery of the animation is also intended to be quite uninviting, hence the incorporation of garbage, lifeless trees, gravestones, unwelcoming characters, such as the Wealthy Fat Man who steals the food from the starving children, along with the church goers who are unable to accept the presence of the Robot and his dead son; these images along with boarded up buildings are intended to scream 'stay out,' as this is not a society that the average person would want to be a part of.

The Wooden Frame

Another interesting aspect about <u>Wooden Bones</u> is the framing of the story and the characters within the animation. In comparison to the news media, the framing of <u>Wooden Bones</u> differs in the sense that news stories have background conditions, past, present, and future ties, whereas <u>Wooden Bones</u> is purely fictitious, allowing me to frame precisely what I want the audience to experience. Essentially, there is nothing that comes before or after this story. In doing so I am able to illustrate a society on the brink of social destruction. As Entman remarks, "...the frame determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it. The notion of framing thus implies that the frame has a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all" (Entman 54). The animation intentionally replicates such framing to captivate the audience in an attempt to provoke an emotional response in order to contemplate the role of the media within our society. Through the use of the flash back of the once happy couple dancing within their apartment, the audience

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is enticed to assume that things were once not so grim. Thus, far more emotion can be placed

within the couple's relationship knowing that what was once positive has become negative.

Hypothetically, by situating the Robot in the bus stop, holding his son's hand, the audience is

again led to believe that the relationship between these two characters is a healthy and caring

one, although in truth the audience has no idea what came before in this perceived reality. In

Leslie Bishko's study, "The Uses and Abuses of Cartoon Style Animation", Bishko states that,

> Viewers have come to expect that animated character performances portray the illusion of a living being. As a determining factor for believability in animation, authenticity functions on two levels. First, we suspend our disbelief and engage with the character; there is no question of the character's aliveness. Second, through characterization, we experience an authentic being whose inner intent is communicated outwardly, and made unmistakably clear (Bishko 24).

Inherently, the construction of an animated character or cartoon differs little from how the

media conducts their own framing. Just as the media uses framing to create more dramatized

versions of events, intentionally altering the audience's perception of reality, animation works

through visuals to ensure the audience invests emotion into a character or perceived reality that

is no more alive than the paper from which it came. It is through framing that an audience will

place credence in the media's depiction of their own reality, just as the audience of an

animation looks past thousands of individual drawings and key frames, accepting that the

illusion they are seeing is in fact motion. In this sense the framing is without a doubt crucial to

seamlessly depict the society of Wooden Bones at its breaking point, as if the animation itself

has a past, present, and future. Yet, the couple's relationship will fail, the Robot's son will

unexpectedly die, the starving children will succumb to starvation as the Wealthy Fat man gets

fatter, and in reference to the lyrics, "Our suicide was waiting in the door…" (Pilot Speed), the

female's last stand and eventual hanging will trigger the suicide of this society. Just as Peelo

discusses in relation to a homicide in the media, "The response of newspapers, in expressing

social emotion about society and its values, expresses, reflects and reinforces the public turmoil

resulting from this horror…Hence, the tragedy of one person's brutal killing becomes strangely

depersonalized and held to represent a mass of social discontent" (Peelo 166). This coincides

with the female's representation of the mass discontent of the Wooden Bones society at its

breaking point. However, as pointed out by Critcher, "Identity is created and sustained by daily

encounters, especially with 'significant others'. The individual whose behaviour has been

labeled deviant may adopt this deviant identity and behave in ways which confirm the label"

(Critcher 1128). This process becomes very critical, insinuating that the coverage of moral

panic, can lead directly to the disruptive behaviour that it is initially attempting to solve. This

concept becomes very important to the construction of the Wooden Bones community, which is

completely immersed in the perceived realities of the media, essentially destined to fail. It also

relates to the female character, who after being exposed to a society perceived as being beyond

hope, eventually takes her own life as she can no longer recognize the difference in the

perception of reality and reality itself.

Other characters, such as the Robots and the strange starving children take on more of a

literal role, representing issues that are not only commonly depicted within the media, but

important issues that continue to exist within society. The Robots, for instance, represent

humanity's often-cold nature to dehumanize those that are different from them. This can be

seen through the depiction of the death of the Robot's son. While the Robot seeks refuge and

comfort in the church, it is made clear that his presence is not accepted by the bleak and grim

churchgoers, who purposely crowed the opposite side of the church in order to separate

themselves from the Robots, who they stare at disapprovingly. Even the imagery of the starving

child, painstakingly dragging a piece of meat throughout the community in an attempt to feed

the other children, with whom he lives in the dumpster of an alley, coincides with the notion of

poverty in relation to consumer societies, which have more than enough, yet the hungry are left

hungry. They coincide with innocence that has been let down by the world around them. The

Wealthy Fat man, who pleasurably takes away the starving children's piece of meat, represents

such issues, consuming the products and food that so many have no access to. Inevitably, as the

Wealthy Fat man gets fatter, the starving children eventually die off as their hope and

innocence has been robbed from them. As mentioned, this incorporation of imagery represents

many very realistic problems within our own world, contributing to the believability of this

cartoon society.

This also relates back to the framing of these situations, for it is the Robots and the

strange starving children that are intentionally portrayed as more civilized than the

dehumanizing humans, a notion that Paul Wells examines in relation to Patrick Murpy's study,

of denatured Disney, by stating,

> In One Hundred and One Dalmations, for example, "the human female antagonist
> (Cruella Deville), with no interest in animals except for their fur, is identified more
> strongly with nonhuman nature—apparently predatory and rapacious—than the
> couple who care for the dogs. In contrast, the Dalmatians are depicted
> anthropomorphically, more in line with the civilized cultural norms that Cruella
> flouts. The animals are most noble when most nearly 'human,' while the human is
> most ignoble when most nearly 'inhuman' (Murphy 1995,128). (Wells 48).

This is mirrored in the framing of the Robots and strange starving children. It is possible to

depict these characters as much more human, allowing the audience to sympathize with their

struggle, while the actual churchgoers and the Wealthy Fat man, although physically human,

become the most unwelcoming and 'ignoble' characters within Wooden Bones. By using

framing, I am also able to depict the churchgoers and Wealthy Fat man more distinctly to the

dystopic concepts of the news media, by which the characters are able to distance themselves from such issues while maintaining the outlook that these events are society's problems to deal with and not their own.

Man and his TV

The main male figure of this animation, the husband of the wife that commits suicide, becomes a central part of the animation. This man becomes the prime example of the lasting effects of the media. Our first introduction with this character shows the man sidetracked with watching television as his wife talks to him. The man is depicted as having slightly unkempt hair, and darks bags under his eyes, in essence this is a worried and perplexed individual, at a loss of what to do and under the influence of the 'risk' that the media has embellished. The man is also shown staring out his living room window at the community below, this scenario represents the man's depiction of reality through his own eyes; a perceived reality constructed by the content of his own television. To this degree the television represents the very essence and cause of moral panic within this cartoon community. Just as Wahlberg and Sjoberg outline, "The prevailing notion (not only among risk researchers) is that the media exaggerate some risks and ignore others, sacrificing objectivity for sensationalism, or as Johnson and Covelloe (1987) put it: 'Considerable evidence exists that the media engage in selective and biased reporting that emphasizes drama, wrongdoing, and conflict...'(p. 179)" (Wahlberg 33). Their study goes on to theorize that it has become very probable that a highly dramatic news story could have stronger effects on risk perception. This is because it appeals to a more emotional response, which would not translate as well through a positive or 'low-key' story (Wahlberg 39).

This concept points towards the choice of animation as an effective medium, allowing

Wooden Bones to provoke more of an emotional response to several darker taboos. This can be seen within the gritty and desolate surroundings, the death of an unaccepted Robot's son, the starvation and demise of two of the strange starving children, and finally the suicide of the man's wife, things that are not always so easily portrayed and readily accepted within other mediums, such as live action. Yet this all unfolds throughout the animation right before the man's own eyes as he watches from his apartment window. Similar to Critcher's observations, the man represents the notion that, "Individually and collectively populations worry more about risks: to themselves, their families and communities, or the planet and humanity as a whole. Moral panics, then, may reflect and reinforce this risk consciousness, of which they are an extreme but symptomatic example" (Critcher 1140). In essence, the man's sense of risk is heightened by the events of his own community and the moral panic and disaster seen within his own television. At the height of these events, triggered by the suicide of his own wife, the man is revealed to be the voice behind the music, bursting out: "Don't miss the point now; don't shut your eyes dear. Our time is soon up; our days are numbered here. We'd rape our own world, and we'd rip the gods down. Then leave the child with the hell we'd found" (Pilot Speed). Through these lyrics the story becomes connected under the perception of the man, who believes his world is being destroyed, he's seen the Robot shunned from the church, and witnessed the raping of his own world through the metaphor of the Wealthy Fat man eating what should rightfully have belonged to the starving children, leaving the dead robot son and the last remaining starving child with the simulated 'hell' that they were brought up in. Refusing to be a part of this perceived world, the man begins to destroy his own apartment, finally collapsing in front of his television which bombards him with images of war, pollution, natural disaster, and relentless mass consumption, represented by a commercial depicting an

endless supply of pigs falling off a conveyer belt directly into the mouth of the happy awaiting

fat man below, representing over consumption and capitalism. As Critcher outlines in regards

to moral panic, "...whatever arguments there may be about the complexity of their messages or

their effects on their audiences, the media remain instrumental in creating moral panics, with

all the exaggeration, distortion and overreaction this entails" (Critcher 1141). The television is

used to represent the media playing a central role in creating moral panic. Thus, the media

constantly frames their stories in relation to a risk society, littered with dangers and harms

around every corner. As the camera pans out, we see that the apartment is now empty and that

the man, for the first time, has left his apartment to join the remaining victims of this dystopic

community. The Robot, the starving child, the man, and the spirit of the man's wife, the ghost

of what was once good, remain together, in their own perceived reality.

"Our Time is Soon Up"

The news media play a very important and also critical role in our society, a role that

requires its own degree of examination. Although the media reports on many legitimate issues,

such stories may be interpreted and presented with specific intentions in mind, specifically

through the use of framing. As we have seen through risk and moral panic, the news media has

the power to communicate such texts as perceived realities, often playing off themes of misery

and destruction to gain and maintain audiences, and quite often to simply entertain. Although it

would also be useful to conduct statistical studies as a means of deconstructing the media's

effect on our society as a dystopic reality (rate of crime, violence, drugs abuse, etc. in

comparison to its decline over time), yet the use of animation applies a more engaging means

of deconstruction, implicating a more accessible form of activism that can work within or

outside of the academic setting. As Wells mentions,

> While no art form can significantly change the world and its seemingly relentless pursuit of its own end, the animated animal film has sought to rethink and re-create humanity and the animal, our view of nature, and our institutions. It suggests that humankind is properly facilitated by understanding the animal as an embedded part of itself, and a key element in the very recognition of life itself. In many senses, this has become one of animated film's roles in preserving animus in the seemingly alienatory conditions of late modernity (Wells 198).

Although Wells specifically references cartoon animals, I believe this comment applies directly to many different forms of animation and animated characters, whether they be a duck, dog, mourning robot, or a starving strange child. In such an instance animation is capable of constructing dystopic realities influenced by the media, yet exemplifying the direct line between a seamless reality created by the media and that of a cartoon depiction of what our reality has come to represent within the media. Destructive stories and overall dystopian marathons in the news media play a big role on our perception of society and the way in which we view our news. We live in a time that is constantly bombarded with messages that are fed to us through our televisions and computer screens to the point that we often lose sight of what is real, influencing our expectations and limiting our understandings of what appears to be the norm. This concept is heavily based on how we put our technology and skills to use and how stories are framed; to a degree that our news media has been able to shift our very perception of reality. Perhaps it is through forms of social activism, such as the animated Wooden Bones, that we can begin to exploit and better understand the long term effects of the news media, provoking audiences to contemplate the themes discussed within this study, raising awareness while maintaining a certain degree of entertainment.

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