Reflecting Academic Symposia as a Trend at Animation Festivals, Media Art Festivals and Conferences on Computer Animation

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ABSTRACT

At first there was practice, then festivals and theory followed. Compared to the animation production, which is older then the medium film itself, festivals and theory in this area started with a delay. While animation programs where shown in film festivals like Cannes since the mid 1940s, the first animation festival in Annecy, France was founded in 1960, followed by several short-lived events in Romania, Italy and Tokyo and finally in 1972 by the second oldest festival up to date, Animafest Zagreb. Animation theory evolved in the late 1980s in the Anglo-American area with associations like the Society for Animation Studies, following its 'big sister' film studies. Expanding ever since as a research area, European animation studies in e.g. France, German speaking countries, Poland or Croatia have been catching up in recent years by organizing theoretical conferences and publications.

A vivid synergy between practice, festivals and theory has always been a key factor for establishing a platform for the art form and culture of animation. However, in the past few years a trend could be observed towards a more intense interaction between animation festivals and theory. Animation festivals are hosting theoretical and scientific symposia or conferences, which are open for artist positions and insights into the industry.

At the beginning of the lecture a short reflection of the concept of Animafest Scanner itself is followed by an introduction of the Symposium Expanded Animation at the media festival Ars Electronica Linz. The talk will subsequently focus on the multilayered academic symposia at the Festival of Animated Film ITFS and the International Conference on Animation, Effects, VR, Games and Transmedia in Stuttgart. These case studies will reveal the blurring boundaries between art, science, theory and industry as well as the specificities of the interplay between artists, practitioners, scholars, curators and festival visitors in different formats.

Keywords: Ars Electronica Linz, animation festival, theory, case study, conference

I. Introduction

At first there was practice, then festivals and theory followed. Compared to the animation production, which is older than the medium film itself, festivals and theory in this area started with a delay. While animation programs where shown in film festivals like Cannes since the mid 1940s, the first animation festival in Annecy, France was founded in 1960, followed by several other events like the World Festival of Animated Film, Animafest Zagreb [1] in 1972, and the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film (ITFS) [2] in 1982 [3]. Animation theory evolved in the late 1980s in the Anglo-American area with associations like the Society for Animation Studies (SAS), following its "big sister" film studies. Expanding ever since as a research area, European animation studies in e.g. France, German-speaking countries. Poland or Croatia have been catching up in recent years by organizing theoretical conferences and publications [4].

A vivid synergy between practice, festivals and theory has always been a key factor for establishing a platform for the art form and culture of animation. However, in the past few years a trend could be observed towards a more intense interaction between established animation festivals and theory. Worldwide. Animation festivals are hosting theoretical and scientific symposia or conferences such as Under the Radar in Austria [5], Animator in Poland [6], Filmfest Dresden in Germany [7] and the Asia Animation Forum in South Korea [8], which are open for theorists and practitioners.

Although the boundaries between traditional and digital

animation have been blurred in the last decades, symposia and conferences on computer animation have evolved quite differently. The first conference on CGI was organized by the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques (ACM SIGGRAPH) in 1974 [9]. The focal point of interest was the current technological development in the field of computer graphics and animation. In the following years SIGGRAPH has grown rapidly and other activities on CGI evolved, like the screenings Animation and Electronic Theater, where recently created CG films are featured. At the beginning of the 1980s Ars Electronica Linz [10], the largest international new media festival, started hosting conferences, exhibitions and screenings on media arts including computer animation, graphics and music. Compared to SIGGRAPH, Ars Electronica puts a much stronger focus on artistic approaches. In the 1990s more conferences on digital media evolved like the International Conference on Animation, Effects, VR, Games and Transmedia at Stuttgart (FMX) [11]. Further computer graphics events and organizations followed like the Visual Effects Society (1997) [12], the VIEW Conference in Turin (2000) [13], Pixel in Vienna (2006) [14], SIGGRAPH Asia (2008) [15] or the World Building Institute (2008) [16]. Compared to the academic symposia at animation festivals events animation follow different these on digital definitions and stands on theoretical approaches. conferences put a stronger focus on the technological evolution of the medium. This includes research and applied science on computer graphics and animation, as well as making-of presentations and artistic positions.

The first two case studies of this paper feature a

reflection of two case studies in Europe, which have successfully established the synergy between practice and media theory. The first case study analyzes the theoretical symposium Animafest Scanner, which is part of Animafest Zagreb. Since 2014, each edition covers up to five different topics connected to the festival's program. The second case study contains the International Symposium at the ITFS Stuttgart, which interrelates the topics animation, comics and literature. The third and fourth section of the paper will subsequently focus on the Expanded Animation Symposium at Ars Electronica, and the FMX, which takes place at the same time and place as the animation festival ITFS.

II. Case study: Animafest Zagreb

The World Festival of Animated Film, Animafest Zagreb was established in 1972 and is the second oldest animation festival worldwide. Until 2004 the biannual event was taking turns with Annecy. When Annecy went annual in 2005 the first feature film edition of Animafest Zagreb was introduced, alternating every other year with short film editions, until 2015, when the Animafest committee decided to make "a long story short" and the festival combined short and feature films annually. According to former artistic director Joško Marušić the main purposes of Animafest Zagreb are the evaluation of current animation productions, to show new trends as well as historical highlights, to promote not only animation but also the hosting country Croatia and to create a meeting place for social and business purposes [17].

While theoretical approaches were not a main focus, recurring panel discussions about topics like "Marketing"

or "Sound in Animation" were already common in the 1980s. Additionally, in 1982 eight book-presentations included classics of early animation studies like Illusion of Life by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston or Graphics in Motion by John Halas [18]. A thematic focus on computer animation is visible between 1988 and 2000, with talks like "Abstract and Non-narrative Computer Animation" by Michael O'Rourke and Susan van Baerle in 1988, "Computer Animation for the 1990s" by Dan McLaughlin in 1990, or "New Computer Animation" by Steve Montal in 1998 [19]. In order to widen the scope of the festival in a scholarly direction a theory award was introduced in 2002. First labeled Award for Outstanding Contributions to Animation Theory, it was changed to Contribution to Animation Studies in 2010, because some of the recipients would refer themselves rather as historians than theorists [20].

Since 2014 the theoretical two-day symposium Animafest Scanner focuses on talks about animation and connected areas, in order to discuss these theoretical thoughts with peers from a practical background. Unlike similar events, Scanner is not defined by one overarching topic for the whole symposium, but contains up to five different thematic sections. Some of them are closely aligned to the festival topics, like "Poetics of Yuri Norstein", "Alice in Wonderland", "Zagreb School of Animation" or "Comics and Animation", some of them are loosely connected, such as the "Currents and Trends" section.

While invited guests and keynote speakers include past and current recipients of Animafest Zagreb's theory award, like Giannalberto Bendazzi, Midhat Ajanović. Olivier Cotte, Marcel Jean or Maureen Furniss, scholars from all over the world are invited to submit papers according to an annual call for papers, resulting in 66 speakers featured in the course of the last four years. Only a small percentage, like Reinhold Bidner or Tess Martin, can to be considered as a filmmaker's or artists' position, while around 45% of the presenters, like Andriana Ružić or Michał Bobrowski work as academics and curators. The hybrid category, very fluid in itself, includes almost half of the speakers like Marcin Giżycki who is a theoretician working on films as side projects, and practitioners such as Corrie Francis Parks, who teach at universities and publish books (see fig. 1). However, the organizers of Animafest Scanner are keen to establish an equal ratio between female and male speakers, resulting in close to fifty percent female presenters (2014-2017: 48,48% female speakers, see fig. 2).

Currently, a selection of presentations from first three Scanner-editions is transformed into an anthology named Global Animation Theory - International Perspectives at Animafest Zagreb.

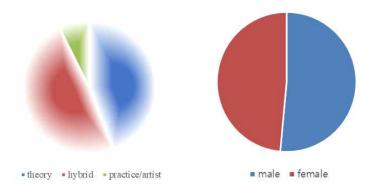


Figure 1: Animafest Scanner 2014-2017: ratio between theory, hybrid and practice/artist (number of presentations: 66)

Figure 2: Animafest Scanner 2014-2017: gender ratio (number of presentations: 66)

III. Case Study: Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film

ITFS was founded in 1982 by long-term festival director Albrecht Ade and his students from the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart. Like the World Festival of Animated Film, Animafest Zagreb, ITFS was initially a bienal event, but switched to a yearly mode in 2005. Today it is by far the largest animation festival in the German speaking countries and one of the big players in the worldwide animation festival circus. According to their website "the festival takes into its scope the whole spectrum of current productions in the animated film sector, including the intersections between games, architecture, art, design and comedy." [21]

Artistic director Ulrich Wegenast, who also has a background as art and animation historian, emphasizes the importance of theoretical in- and outputs especially within the historical programs. This includes the research and digitalization of historical films as well as introductions by the curators [22]. Further theoretical approaches connected to ITFS are visible in the separately organized congress Raumwelten, a platform for scenography, architecture and media, which is mainly intended for professionals with an economic, scientific or creative background, but also includes public events [23].

The success of the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film since the 1980s was one of the catalysts for founding the renowned Film Academy Baden-Wuerttemberg in 1991, which in

turn, initiated the concurrent International Conference on Animation, Effects, VR, Games and Transmedia (FMX) in Stuttgart in 1994. Since 2007 FMX and ITFS are co-organizing the Animation Production Day. Next to a financing market for future film and media projects, the one-day APD Conference with case studies and market trend-lectures has expanded in recent years [24].

A more traditional scholarly animation symposium, which is also connected to the Society for Animation Studies, was established in 2013 at the ITFS by Hannes Rall. Due to its cooperation with the house of literature in Stuttgart it developed and interdisciplinary approach including animation, comics, illustration and literature. Similar to Animafest Scanner in Zagreb, the first edition featured different topics like "Transformation and New Context", "Cultural Tradition" and "Modern Interpretation". In the following years each symposium had an overarching theme such as "Adaptation", "Color", "Narrative Structures and Visual Storytelling" and "Sound", always connected to the interdisciplinary areas mentioned above.

So far the one-day symposium has featured 46 presenters consisting of invited speakers as well as respondents to the annual call for papers. Additionally, theoretical an practical approaches meet in various forms, with presenters like Chris Pallant or Susanne Marschall rather representing the academic end of the spectrum, Michelle Carlos or Michaela Pawlátová featuring artist's positions, and Dallim Park and Benjamin Seide standing as hybrids between theory and practice (see fig. 3). While the distribution between practitioners, hybrids and scholars is evenly spread with one third in each category, the ratio between female and

male speakers is not as balanced (2013–2017 33% female speakers see fig. 4). Furthermore, the female speakers declined over the years to an all male symposium in 2017.

As the main initiator of the ITFS symposium, Hannes Rall, also organized the 28th annual Society for Animation Studies conference at the Nanyang University in Singapore, differences between these two events are visible. While the SAS conference was accompanied by two exhibitions as well as various screenings, the ITFS symposium goes along with the main event, the animation festival.

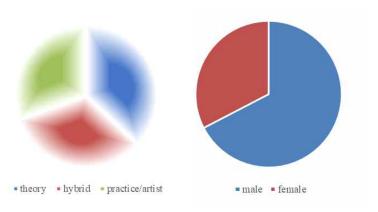


Figure 3: ITFS Symposium 2013-2017: ratio between theory, hybrid and practice/artist (number of presentations: 46)
Figure 4: ITFS Symposium 2013-2017: gender ratio (number of presentations: 46)

IV. Case study: Ars Electronica Linz

Ars Electronica started in 1979 as a small conference on new media art. The festival lineup was a short list with 20 artists and scientists. From the beginning, Ars Electronica serves as a platform for theory – from humanities to applied sciences - and practice in the field of media arts, beginning with strong roots to the classical art forms music, visual arts and film. The first academic symposia on computer animation in the context of media art have taken place at the 3th edition of Ars Electronica in 1982[10]. Otto Piene, who was Professor at MIT at that time, organized the "Sky Art Conference" [25] at Ars Electronica. Speakers were well-known media artists like Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman or experimental animator and film maker Stan Van Der Beek. At the same edition Herbert Werner Franke, science fiction author and co-founder of Ars Electronica, hosted the "Science Fiction Conference". One panel, entitled SCIENCE FICTION IN PRACTICE: Film, Video, Comics, Music, featured computer animation experts like David Di Francesco and Dr. Alvy Ray Smith (Lucasfilm/Los Angeles) [26]. following years more conferences, workshops and activities on video art and digital filmmaking followed. Electronica features practice and theory in media arts. In the beginning the central question was all about the theory of technology and the possibilities for media arts. Since the 1990s the focus was successively being shifted to exploring the impact of art, technology and society." Gerfried Stocker, artistic director states of Electronica [27].

In 1987 the festival established the Prix Ars Electronica, a yearly competition in several categories, started with the categories computer music, graphics and animation. Since then the festival featured the top prize winners in the category "Computer Animation" at the Prix Forum, including the screening Electronic Theater. Since 1986, the festival has been held annually and is dedicated

to a specific theme, like "Free Sound" in 1987 or "Artificial Intelligence – The other I" in 2017.

Computer animation became less important in the 1990s and was pushed to the margins of the Festival. With the Ars Electronica Animation Festival, established in 2005, and the symposium Expanded Animation [28], started in 2013, computer animation gained in importance again. The first edition of the symposium Expanded Animation was entitled "Expanded Digital Animation: Mapping an Unlimited Landscape". Since then, the symposium investigated the collapsing boundaries in digital animation and explored positions and future trends in the expanded field of animation. In the last five years, the symposium has featured more than 50 experts from various fields, from animation, art, games and science: Media artists like John Gerrad or Alex Verhaest, scholars like Lev Manovich or Susanne Buchan, curators like Ulrich Wegenast or Abigail Addison, animators and filmmakers like Eric Oh or Boris Labbé and media design- and animation studios such as ManysMachine or Aixsponsa. Like the first conferences at Ars Electronica in the 1980s practice and theory are equally important (see fig. 5). The symposium is open for experts in theory and practice including the Prix Forum, featuring the top prize winners in the category "Computer Animation". Although the line between practice and theory is always fluid, most of the speakers are active in both areas. However, what is striking is the fact that only about one quarter of the speakers at Expanded Animation are female (see fig. 6). In the last editions a slight upward trend is recognizable.

Also the ratio between male and female contributors at Ars Electronica and Prix Ars Electronica was not balanced at all. According to a data analysis of Prix Ars Electronica 1987-2016 only 33% are female (54% male, 13% group or organization, consisting of male and female contributors) [29]. Altogether, the gender balance is getting better in the last years significantly. For example, in 2017 the ratio between female and male jury members was equal the first time. Regarding the gender balance in media arts Ars Electronica has started the initiative Women in Media Arts [30] in 2016 and established a symposium on the topic in 2017, also including a talk about Women in Animation.

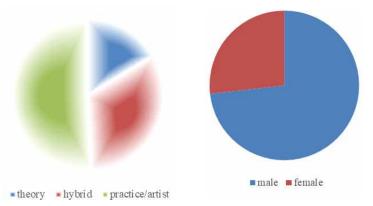


Figure 5: Expanded Animation 2013-2017: ratio between theory, hybrid and practice/artist (number of presentations: 54)
Figure 6: Expanded Animation 2013-2017: gender ratio (number of speakers: 56)

V. Case Study: FMX Stuttgart

FMX, labeled "Film & Media Exchange", was initiated as an event for students from the Film Academy Baden-Wuerttemberg in 1994. Today the FMX, entitled as "International Conference on Animation, Effects, VR, Games

and Transmedia", is a 4-day conference and according to the website the conference "is the most influential event for the Art, Technology and Business of Digital Media Entertainment in Europe" [11]. In the last 10 years FMX has evolved to an international event with new topics. Since 2007 FMX features tech talks and panels about real-time graphics, animation, visual effects, virtual production. Over the following years, the topics games (2008), transmedia (2013) and virtual and augmented reality (2015) were added to the title.

Most of the panels are located in the field of practice like making-of presentations from various studios, soft- and hardware demonstrations, tech demos and panel discussions. Some panels can be considered as hybrids between practice and theory. Prime examples at FMX 2017 are the panels "Digital Human Workshop" and "Games: Cinematic and Mocap", both featuring researchers and experts from the industry.

The ratio between theory and practice is difficult to establish because there are so many diverse forms of presentations and the panels and programs changed over the years. FMX 2017 consisted of 4 parts: Conference (32 panels), VR/ARMR/360° (6 panels), Forum (workshops, exhibitions, etc.) and Screenings/Events. Only some panels were dedicated to research. For example, in the panels entitled "Tech Talk" (since 2007) researchers presented findings and papers in computer graphics and animation. Compared to applied sciences in computer graphics and animation media studies played a minor role. In 2011 Barbara Flueckiger hosted a panel "Aesthetic of S3D Cinema". The University of Tuebingen, Institute of Media Studies curated

two panels in 2014 (Body, Face and Emotions) and 2015 (Animation as Fine Art). Since 2015 the Film Academy Baden-Wuerttemberg features the panel discussion Women in Visual Arts.

Because of the diverse forms of the panels and events at FMX the ratio between theory and practice speakers is very difficult to evaluate. Just as the symposium Expanded Animation and the SAS Conference at ITFS the gender ratio is not balanced. Only about 12 % speakers at 2017 were female (number of speakers at FMX 2017: 293) (see fig. 7) and since 2007 the ratio at the Program/Advisory board & Associates is almost constant at about 16 % (see fig. 8).

According to Prof. Andreas Hvkade. (Director Animationsinstitute Film Academy Baden-Wuerttemberg, FMX Conference Chair) the balance between the main topics has changed over the years and the focus shifted to technology. Since Hykade is professor at the Animationsinstitute and in charge of the FMX the artistic side is getting more important again. In 2010 he established the panel "Wild & Strange" with a focus on non-mainstream productions: " [...] since 2015 I am head of FMX and I would like to come back to a balanced relationship between Art, Technology and Business" [31]. Hykade underlines the blurring boundaries between practice and theory at FMX and emphasizes the importance of the theoretical reflection for the practice. Theory has to serve practice, and vice versa.

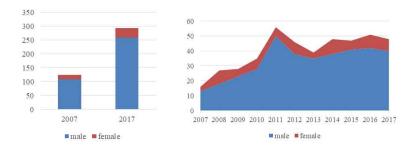


Figure 7: Number of FMX Speakers (2007: 13% female, 2017: 12%). Figure 8: FMX 2007-2017: Advisory/Programm Board and Associates (average: 16% female).

VI. Conclusion

By comparing academic symposia at animation festivals, the case studies Scanner at the World Festival of Animated Film, Animafest Zagreb and the Symposium at the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film offer many similarities. Both events started independently of one another within the same time frame and as additional programs to established animation festivals. This highlights the contrast to events like the annual SAS conference, where film programs and exhibitions are side venues of scholarly presentations. Both include invited speakers and call for papers. Furthermore, practical and theoretical approaches are visible, although the two case studies have a slightly different weighting on theory and practice. While the Scanner symposium in Zagreb puts a focus on scholarly or hybrid presenters, which are engaging in discussion with festival guests and film makers, the ITFS symposium tries to find a balance between theory and practice within the venue.

In other regards, the symposia vary in some details.

While as a two-day event the Scanner symposium is slightly bigger than the ITFS symposium, also the positions within the respective festivals are different. Animafest Scanner is accompanied by additional book presentations and practical lectures, but has gained a more or less central position during the festival over the years. This is also supported by the fact, that each year the recipient of the Award for Outstanding Contributions to Animation Studies, who is awarded during the opening ceremony, functions as keynote speaker for the symposium. In Stuttgart the competition between various conferences during the festival is tougher, as the audience can choose between the conference at the Animation Production Day, FMX and ITFS. However, presenters from both symposia highlight the synergetic bonus of attending a recognized scholarly event and at the same time getting new inputs from the various programs of the festivals.

Similar to animation festivals there is a broad range on symposia and conferences on computer animation ranging from theory to practice. Contrary to the trend at traditional animation festivals, theory on computer animation started as part of independent new events like the conferences SIGGRAPH and FMX and the new media festival Ars Electronica, including symposia, conferences and screenings. The case studies Expanded Animation and FMX have different roots and approaches. Whereas the symposium Expanded Animation focuses on media art, and respectively on artistic computer animation, the main topics at the conference FMX are digital visual arts, technologies, and business.

Consequently, these two case studies have a slightly different approach on theory and practice. In a narrow sense

both events are not hosting academic conferences, but are rather more or less hybrids between practice and theory. Both cover panels in media, animation and film theory and computer science, but weighted differently. FMX focuses more on applied sciences whereas Ars Electronica shifted the focus to media and art studies over the year. Both events are open for a broad range of science, from humanities to applied sciences. Compared to academic conferences these case studies are open for a big and broad community, from expert audience to newcomers in the field (visitor numbers 2017: FMX: 3.000 per day, Ars Electronica: 35,000 annual visitors).

Through these two examples it has been shown, that the boundaries between art, science, theory and industry are blurring and these symposia on computer animation explicitly support the interplay between artists, practitioners, scholars, curators and festival visitors in different formats. The result is a vivid interaction between theory and practice.

However, it is remarkable that in the case studies Ars Electronica, FMX and ITFS the gender ratio is not balanced. Compared to the Animafest Scanner the ratio of female contributors is significantly low. There is a slightly positive trend to a better balance in the last years at Ars Electronica and FMX and the initiatives Women in Media Arts and Women in Visual Arts are very gratifying and promising. Over the next few years, it will be very interesting to observe the evolution of academic symposia in general and in particular regarding the gender.

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국문초록

학술회 반영 경향의 애니메이션 페스티벌과 미디어 아트 페스티벌 그리고 컴퓨터 애니메이션 학회

욜건 하글러, 프란지스카 부르크너

우선 실습이 있고 난 다음, 페스티벌과 이론이 뒤따른다. 매체 필름 자체보다 오래된 애니메이션 제작과 비교해서 이 영역의 페 스티벌과 이론은 늦게 시작되었다. 애니메이션 1940년대 중반부 터 시작된 프랑스 칸느와 같은 영화 페스티벌에서 1960년에 애니 메이션 프로그램에 선보였고, 몇몇 단편적 이벤트들이 루마니아, 이탈리아 그리고 도쿄에서 이어졌다. 그리고 마침내 1972년 두 번 째로 오래된 페스티벌인 자그레브 아니마페스트가 있다. 애니메이션 이론은 1980년대말 '큰누나'격인 필름 학회에 이어 애니메이션 학회(the Society for Animation Studies) 같은 백인-미국인 사회 와 연관되어 발전했다. 학술영역에 확장이 있어왔다. 프랑스와 독 어권 나라들을 위시한 유럽권 애니메이션 연구와, 폴란드 혹은 크 로아티아는 최근 이론학회와 출판을 하면서 뒤를 이어오고 있다.

실습과 페스티벌 그리고 이론 사이의 선명한 시너지는 언제나 애니메이션 아트 형식과 문화에 교두보를 정립하는 주요요소였다. 그러나 지난 몇 년 동안 경향은 애니메이션과 이론 사이의 보다 압착된 관계로 나아가고 있는 듯하다. 애니메이션 페스티벌은 이론적이고 과학적인 심포지움이나 컨퍼런스를 주최한다. 이런 컨퍼런스는 작가나 산업종사자들에게 열려있다.

강연 시작에 아니마페스트 스캐너 자체 개념의 짧은 반영은 린츠 에이알에스 일렉트로니카의 확장된 애니메이션 심포지움의 소개를 따른다. 토론은 나중에 ITFS 애니메이티드 필름 페스티벌 과 슈투트가르트의 국제 애니메이션, 특수효과, VR, 게임과 트랜 스 미디어의 다중 아카데미 심포지움에 초점을 맞춘다. 이러한 상 황에 대한 연구는 예술과 과학, 이론과 산업의 허물어진 경계를 아티스트와 실무자, 학자, 큐레이터와 페스티벌 참가자들에게 다른 형식으로 드러낸다.

주제어: 린츠 에이알에스 일렉트로니카, 애니메이션 페스티벌, 이론, 케이스 스터디, 학회

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