

**“Can You Sing with All the Voices of the Mountains?”
– Environmental Ethics in American Animation –**

Nóra BORTHAISER
PhD Student, University of Szeged

Keywords: applied environmental ethics, animations, ideology, semiotic layering of animations

Abstract

Making young age groups conscious about environmental problems and responsibility does not only fall on the shoulders of schools and parents but also on media and film-makers. The changing methods of representations of varying environmental issues are discussed here, taking into consideration that in the past 70 years, animation-making has experienced several ideological shifts and has opened up a channel to address adults as well. This switch makes it possible to incorporate themes from the field of environment. To exemplify their representation, films from the 1990s onward are discussed from mostly the palette of American animation, with some previously produced film examples as a historical reference.

E-mail: borthaiser_nora@yahoo.com

*

The aim of the present paper is to investigate the introduction of environmental ethical problems within primarily American and in partly Hungarian animations. In order to outline a development or to define any shifts in the mode of presentation, animation from the period of the 1990s and from the first decade of 2000 are scrutinized, with some historical references, for example *Bambi* from 1941. The discussions of these environmental themes bring a lesson primarily to the child audience for whom animated films are produced. As troubles in nature and in the animal world have become more and more severe, the mode of representation and the role of human beings have also changed.

First and foremost, a short discussion is provided about the varying fields of applied environmental ethics and – as the present paper is at the cross-section of environmental ethics and film studies – how they are related to film examples, animated films and animated film

series available and well-known to the Hungarian audience. I do not assume a significant difference in interpretation depending on the nationality of the audience, unless there is a direct or indirect thematic reference to the given nation or national issues. In this respect, I consider a general audience, independently of nationality; I am using the range of available film texts in the location of this research, in Hungary, though. A presupposition of the paper is a paradigm shift around the end of the 1990s, early 2000 that is typical of the most influential American animation studios, namely that there is a given tendency of semiotic multi-layering within animated films that enables studios to find the way not only to the children but also to their parents or grandparents. Topics are deepening, more and more social issues are taken into the spotlight of animation and the forms of representations are also developing into technically better-equipped ones. Professional computer-generated imagery (CGI), 3ds MAX, LightWave and Maya are just some of the best-known and most often applied technological advancements that narrows down the representational differences between cartoons and real-life shots, making it entertaining to a wider spectrum of audience. Technology keeps on developing, yet one thing stays the same. The basic ideological mechanisms in films including animation are always on the same platform. Louis Althusser claims that there exists an imaginary relationship between individuals and their real conditions of existence and this relationship is always represented through ideological state apparatuses. These apparatuses are the realization of ideology and they appear in all walks of life: they could be religious, ethical, legal, aesthetic, etc. Their material existence is within varying institutional framework: schools, masses, churches, clubs or even cinema. Through these apparatuses, individuals are hailed at, or in Althusser's terminology, interpellated, and they recognize this interpellation and react to it. This is the mechanism of turning individuals into subjects.¹ Cinema places the subject in a position from where a particular kind of understanding seems natural and at which place identification can be carried out. Some of the representational methods that serve to subject a spectator are point-of-view editing, perspectival images² or the technology of suture. As a result, the spectators feel that they are

¹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 693–702.

² Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 136.

addressed by what is on screen, including messages and ideologies that – in the interest of the present article – happen to be related to issues of environmental ethics.

Less technological but more theory-concerned is John Fiske when he claims that “the culture industry of capitalism homogenized people into a mass [... and] the combination of economics and ideology was so powerful that any oppositional or radical movement was immediately swallowed up or incorporated into the dominant ideology.”¹ Denis McQuail discusses the presence of ideology in mass culture as a shaping and legitimating force behind media institutions, which also has a considerable influence on the expectations of the media’s own audiences. This hypothesis leads to the idea of the normative media theory.²

One of the most common and most often discussed problems of humankind is related to the recurring symptoms of a troublesome Earth. Problems leading to ecological crises and environmental disturbances are more and more frequently presented to humans in numerous channels of conveying information. Debatable environmental and ecological issues range from several aspects that build up the research area of applied environmental ethics. Ron Epstein lists the following subcategories: environmental effects of war, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, cloning, resource allocation, animals and vegetarianism, air and water pollution, radiation, ozone crisis and global warming, population and environment, ecofeminism, indigenous peoples, spirituality and the environment and teaching children about environmental ethics.³ Most of these labels sound familiar to most people from different forms of the media. Newspapers, magazines, television channels and films often address these topics and put them in the centre of debate. The multiplied appearances of these topics are not by chance: environmental problems are part of our every day even if the significant majority of people do not want to take them into consideration. For this very reason, the media tend to present these problems with increasing extremity. According to Iván Györffy, “*National Geographic*, *Spektrum* and *Discovery* always show

¹ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988), 38.

² Denis McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory* (SAGE, 2005), 15.

³ Environmental Ethics compiled by Prof. Ron Epstein, “Topics in Applied Environmental Ethics,” *San Francisco State University*, <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Environ/Enviroethics.htm>

the world in the state of the last judgment.”¹ He claims that what is presented is nothing but an extreme eco-horror.

Environmental topics however are not only broadcast on channels specialized in nature and significantly designed for adults. Television channels responsible for the entertainment and education of the younger generations also deal with the issues of environment. Teaching children about environmental ethics is an item on Epstein’s list as stated above. The assignment of this subcategory is carried out partly and strictly limited by the institutional framework of schools where classes of different subjects address the topic of environment, but no centralized curriculum deals with it. Besides schools and other institutionalized educational forms, international associations and committees have also undertaken the noble job of teaching the next generation how to live an environmentally conscious life and how to develop a balanced relationship between the environment and themselves. UNESCO, for example, not only presents the problems on its website² to children and curious teenagers but also offers strategies for teaching and learning about these problems and their solutions inside and outside the classroom. *The Environment Literacy Council*, *The North American Association of Environmental Education* and several other organizations help teachers gather material and methods to more efficiently convey the ideas of an environmentally conscious lifestyle. The school system alone, however, could not take full responsibility for teaching environmental ethics to children. There is another source of influence children can easily “expose” themselves to: television. Channels whose primary audience is the younger generation more often than not are blamed for a tendentious increasing aggressive presentation of topics and less for the remarkable, incontestable values they occasionally convey. One of these values is the balanced relationship of human beings and nature. Browsing through the television programs in Hungary, one can find several examples for cartoons that place environmental issues in focus. *Yakari*³ for example introduces different North American animals to the audience from the point of view of a Sioux Native American boy who understands the language of

¹ Iván Györffy, “Már rád tört a vég” (The End is Upon You), *Filmkultúra*, 2004/8, 12–15.

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future”, *UNESCO*, <http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/index.htm>

³ Yakari, <http://www.yakari.fr>

animals. *Fifi and the Flowertots*¹ is a stop-motion animated series in which flowers and animals around the garden experience adventures. Meanwhile, environmental issues are constantly addressed: Fifi uses no chemicals in her organic garden, the lawnmower runs on organic compost instead of petrol, etc. Some years ago, *The Magic School Bus*² presented episodes loaded with environmental information. The class led by Ms Frizzle takes magical class excursions to impossible places so that the students can be essential participants of nature and become aware of their role in this system in real life. Issues such as rain forest ecology, recycling, water erosion or the food chain are focused on.

The issue of environmental protection and other related topics are anything but recent themes in the history of animations. The relationship of man and animal is the key drive of one of the earliest cartoons, *Bambi*. This film presents the man as the supercilious hunter who takes away what he wants from nature without taking into consideration the damage he causes. A similar example is a Hungarian animation from the year 1981, *Vuk*. In both animations, the story is focusing on an animal and presenting the man as enemy, as an ignorant, aggressive and browbeating entity. This trope of the hunter shares many similarities with the one described and represented by Aldo Leopold. Leopold, an American forester and environmentalist, became one of the founding figures of modern environmental ethics although his career took a significantly different direction at the outset. He himself was a hunter in the early period of his life and he shot wolves to decrease their population so that more deer could stay alive for the sake of trophy-hunters. In his 1949 book, *Sand County Almanac*, he often refers to trophy-hunting as “nothing to apologize for” and often describes nature as useless waste for the hunter.³ Aldo himself is blinded by this egoistic, superior attitude and does not recognize it for a long time that hunting no matter how entertaining it proves to be for the hunter, tears life sequences apart. On a higher level, therefore, it is not just the life of the wolf he is taking away but he also disturbs the entity of the wild ecosystem that all living creatures and the surrounding environment are parts of. Leopold learns this lesson on one occasion when he shot an old wolf and hurt its pup. He describes the upcoming events and feelings like this:

¹ Fifi and the Flowertots, http://www.fifiandtheflowertots.com/index_us.html

² The Magic School Bus, <http://www.scholastic.com/magicschoolbus/home.htm>

³ Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 176.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither wolf nor mountain agreed with such a view.¹

János Tóth I. interprets this story as a remarkable spiritual experience, one that allows the man to feel the ecosystem of wilderness as one, whole, living entity. With a realization like this, comes the failure of a worldview that considers nature as a dead machine, useful only for humankind and yields way to a reviving idea of the expanded existence of living nature.² Leopold's conversion makes him a most prominent figure of wildlife management and wilderness preservation.

Leopold's description of the ignorant, aggressive hunter is a recurring one in animated films as well since the relationship of hunter and prey is an often-returned topic. Even though it is just one aspect of environmental issues, for quite a long period in the history of animation, this is the most popular and most often depicted theme. A practical reason for the phenomenon could be the fact that animation producers prefer applying animal representations in their storyline. According to Donald Crafton, it is due to the fact that "animals provided codified channels by which, through personal identification, the dream world on the screen could be entered."³ Animal characters are cuter, lovelier and cuddlier than human representations for the young audience (a fitting example for this phenomenon are the stories of Winnie-the-Pooh, where Christopher Robin is the only human being appearing in the animation, and he is the least merchandised figure compared to the animal characters). Once animal representations are applied in animated films, conflicts are often somewhat limited to the natural enemies of them: another animal higher in the food chain could take the enemy's role [cf.

¹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

² János Tóth I., *Fejezetek a környezetfilozófiából – szerzők és irányzatok* (Chapters from Environmental Philosophy – Authors and Trends) (Szeged: JATEPress, 2005), 128.

³ Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 348.

The Lion King (1994)], whereas it can also be acted out by a human character. The relationship of animal and human, however, is not strictly limited to the relationship of hunter and prey. The notion of hunter is widely expanded and the human figure representing this role is often hard to be associated with the typical hunter. In Disney's 2003 *Finding Nemo*, humans as hunters appear in several versions. The reappearing, profit-oriented fishermen are close to the kind of hunter Leopold describes, however similar traits can be identified in the character of the little girl who collects fish for her aquarium.

Two theoreticians could be cited here as well who have argued extensively on behalf of animals and animal rights: Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Singer follows the utilitarian practice most often associated with Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mills. This consequentialist form of argument evaluates actions on the bases of their contribution to utility. Bentham distinguishes between the two values of happiness (or pleasure) and pain (or unhappiness).¹ This distinction places emotions in the focal point of utilitarian ethics, which is not human-specific, consequently it can be applied to animals as well. Pain (the negative value) can just as well be experienced by animals as humans, therefore omitting the point of view of animals is a form of negative discrimination.²

Peter Singer starts out from the utilitarian point of view; however he does not opt for the classical utilitarian standpoint. Happiness and pain are too vague concepts, he claims, and they can yield way to similarly vague distinctions. Singer prefers another form of utilitarianism, the so-called preference-utilitarianism: "According to preference utilitarianism, an action contrary to the preference of any being is, unless this preference is outweighed by contrary preferences, wrong. Killing a person who prefers to continue living is therefore wrong, other things being equal."³

Singer's most notable contribution to the discussion is the introduction of the concept of speciesism. This idea works on the analogy of sexism or racism, in as much as all root in the prejudicial behaviour of a superior position. Thinking about women, black people or animals as underdeveloped enough to be unable to express pain as a

¹ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 1–3.

² Luc Ferry, *Új Rend: az ökológia* (A New Order: Ecology) (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1994), 96–106.

³ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 94.

mainstream white man would experience it is the basic idea against which speciesism argues.¹

Tom Regan relies on the concept of the inherent value, which are values independent of the evaluation of anybody or anything else. In this respect, inherent values do not depend on the utility and skills of the entity they belong to. Regan claims that inherent values are the basis of rights because whoever possesses them has moral rights. These values of a human lay in the mere fact that they are themselves the subjects of a life that is more or less valuable for them, that can be better or worse for them. This reasoning is used by Regan in the case of animals as well: they can, similarly to humans, be considered the subjects of their lives, which can be more or less valuable for them independently of how others evaluate them. Animals with these rights are entitled for respectful treatment which morally obliges men to deal with animals not just as means used for other aims.²

Singer and Regan's theories are often reflected in cartoons presenting animals, tendentially pointing out the ethical failures men commit against animals.

From the point of view of teaching environmental responsibility to children, there should also be mentioned an intermediate but nevertheless significant station in the history of animations that sheds different light on the role of mankind. The animation series of *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* produced between the years 1990 and 1992 was primarily designed and produced to reinforce the idea in the children audience that most ecological problems of our planet can be solved by humanity but only in co-operation, together and with a common goal. The man still appears in the series as the destroyer of the world but at the same time the key to solve the troubles is also himself: Gaia, the spirit of Earth, seeing its destruction, hands over five special rings to five average youngsters. Kwame from Africa, Wheeler from North America, Linka from the Soviet Union, Gi from Asia and Ma-Ti from South America are given a ring each, bestowed with earthly powers. They represented the four powers of earth, fire, wind and water. However, they would not be worth anything without being accompanied by the ring symbolizing the power of the heart. From the united powers of the rings, Planet Captain is born, who does not forget to remind his young helpers (and thus the children watching television) to the fact that power and force are in their

¹ Tóth, *Fejezetek a környezetfilozófiából...*, 150.

² Micheal E. Zimmermann, *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 34–47.

hands and only they can prevent our planet from being destroyed and decayed. The series only ran for two seasons, yet its popularity has not decreased – ever since the beginning of the nineties, *Captain Planet* is a recurring, reappearing animation series on Hungarian cartoon channels and in programs designed primarily for children. The American film studio, Warner Bros, has promised a film version of the series with actors by the year 2009. The constant access to the series in the past two decades has enabled a significant number of young television viewers to follow the stories of Captain Planet, who is still fighting against ecological problems that are just as – or even more – typical in these days as they were twenty years ago.

The importance of Gaia in the animation is unquestionable: without her giving the rings to the children, she herself cannot be rescued. It is of key significance that the origin and the aim or benefiter of actions is always Gaia. This concept resembles James Lovelock's Gaia-theory. Based on the primary idea of homeostasis, the theory claims that the biosphere, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the lithosphere and the cryosphere form one self-controlling global living entity. As Lovelock puts it:

“[Gaia] includes the biosphere and is a dynamic physiological system that has kept our planet fit for over three billion years. I call Gaia a physiological system because it appears to have the unconscious goal of regulating the climate and the chemistry at a comfortable state for life. Its goals are not set points but adjustable for whatever is the current environment and adaptable to whatever forms of life it carries.”¹

This tendency is very much in accordance with the basic plot of *Captain Planet* in as much as Gaia helps herself in trouble by handing over the powerful rings symbolizing the earthly powers to the five children.

Lovelock's Gaia-theory has been as criticized by several theoreticians as it has been adopted by others. Thinking about the Earth as a female entity is a long-standing tradition (Gaia is known to be the daughter of Chaos and Eros, the goddess of Earth in Greek mythology). Many a feminist theoretician has connected their argument to

¹ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 15.

environmental ethics and drawn a parallel between the exploitation and oppression of women, people of colour and those of nature in the male-dominant (androcentric) world. Karren J. Waren and Val Plumwood, among many others, have argued extensively on the structural similarities of various forms of oppression, which always rest on the concept of binary oppositions so typical to the androcentric nature of Western philosophy. Although it often proves problematic to find connection between some aspects of ecofeminism and those of environmental philosophy that are typically not feminist, it is worth keeping in mind that numerous cultural evidence presenting women similar to nature, and vice versa exists.¹

Shortly after the seasons of *Captain Planet*, Walt Disney Pictures took up the issue of ecological sensitivity in its 1995 blockbuster animation, *Pocahontas*. The movie's overwhelming success in the United States most probably comes from the fact that the story told in the cartoon is nothing else but a grand narrative of American history – there is no child in the United States who has not ever heard about the story of the Indian princess and the colonizer John Smith.² However, there is also another important aspect of the story which is strictly tied to different worldviews of the two companies, natives and colonizers – the way of thinking about nature and environment. David Whitley, with insight, claims that Disney reached this issue while Walt Disney was the head of the company and bravely touched on environmental topics, as we have seen in the case of *Bambi*. After Walt's death, however, the topic was neglected and then re-found in the 1980s and 1990s. The reason for that was a co-operation with Environmental Media Association, co-founded by Michael Eisner, who happened to be Disney's chief-executive at the same time. EMA promoted environmentally-friendly practices in Hollywood film industry, encouraging environmental topics to be put on screen.³ Whitley also points out that the approach to ecological and environmental issues needed to be altered for the mere fact that the audience itself had significantly changed in the past half century after *Bambi*. Social patterns changed and a migration started from the villages and rural areas to the cities, thus the direct connection to the countryside

¹ Tóth, *Fejezetek a környezetfilozófiából...*, 231–242.

² Peter Schweitzer and Rochelle Schweitzer, *Disney: The Mouse Betrayed: Greed, Corruption and Children at Risk* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1998), 151.

³ David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Surrey, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), 80.

and nature was also lost. What remained was a mythic, envisioned idea of what could be beyond the borders of the city without an accessible, actual experience of it and what is a nostalgic longing to the founding history.¹ In this respect, Whitley claims, the represented fresh wilderness which is connected to the lifestyle of the Native Americans evokes the untouched wild nature shown in *Bambi*. The interpretation and evaluation of natural goods and nature itself fall under different categorization to Native American and British colonizers (similarly to the distinction of prey and hunter in *Bambi*). As the storyline of the movie develops and the romantic aspect with Pocahontas and John Smith gets enhanced, the crucial differences in thinking about nature and environment get to surface. In a keynote song of the animation “Colors of the Wind” Pocahontas gives a lesson on environmental ethics to Smith:

You think you own whatever land you land on.
The Earth is just a dead thing you can claim.
But I know every rock and tree and creature
has a life, has a spirit has a name.

[...]

Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the blue corn moon?
Or asked the grinning bobcat why he grinned?
Can you sing with all the voices of the mountains?
Can you paint with all the colours of the wind?

[...]

Come round the hidden pine trails of the forest.
Come taste the sunsweet berries of the Earth.
Come roll in all the riches all around you
And for once, never wonder what they're worth.

The rainstorm and the river are my brothers,
The heron and the otter are my friends.
And we are all connected to each other
In a circle in a hoop that never ends.

How high does the sycamore grow?
If you cut it down, then you'll never know.²

¹ Ibid., 81.

² St.Lyrics.com, “Pocahontas Lyrics, Colours of the Wind,”
<http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/classicdisney/colorsofthewind.htm>

The song conveys these holistic attitudes to nature and environment with the constant addressing of the audience (within the diegesis of the narration, that of John Smith) with the second person singular case of “you.” This is one of the numerous methods of interpellation Althusser discusses in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. As previously outlined, ideology is a key concept if it comes to film analysis as cinema is one of the apparatuses through which individuals are interpellated and turned into subjects. In other words, the audience understands “you” as themselves and not primarily as John Smith, thus stepping out of the framework of the narrative. The catchy notes and melody make the song an “earbug” that often haunts the spectators after they have left the seats of the cinema.

The seriousness of the environmental topics and the tendentious semiotic multi-layering of animations open up a wider spectrum of audience; it is not just children who are addressed. Parents of young children are just as much hailed at as the children themselves. It cannot be a far-fetched idea to look for the reason of this switch starting around 2000 in the field and interest of marketing and business. At the same time, the shift should and does bring along an inevitable change in the tone and atmosphere of animations. The condescending and “elementary-school” type lessons typical to the 1990s and before would not entertain the adults or get their attention. Whatever is the message of the story, it should be merchandised in a possibly profound and at the same time humorous wrapping – taking the risk and challenge to create a movie entertaining for children and adult alike. Being on this razor’s edge, two animated films from the year 2006 serve as excellent examples to this discussion: *Happy Feet* and *Over the Hedge* are not only entertaining for several generations but also employ themes related to environmental ethics. The former, produced by Warner Bros, scrutinizes the issue of famine among the colonies of the Antarctic emperor penguins. Even though, man does not appear in the movie for quite a long time, until nearly the end, he or his existence is constantly referred to as “strangers” and “mystic beings” who take away all the fish from the penguin colony. According to the storyline of the animation, the protagonist penguin swims up from Antarctica to the coasts of the United States where it becomes a spectacle of the zoo and presents its unique step-dance to the audience of the zoo thus getting man’s attention. It is given a transceiver attached to its back and taken back to its natural habitat while being followed by a group of researchers on a helicopter who are about to locate him via the transceiver. The strange and unique dance of the

penguin colony makes the man realize that food and thus life circumstances should be provided and preserved for the emperor penguins and to achieve this, fishing in the area of the South Pole must be decreased. The film does not stop here: it also shows some scenes of the political-administrative background of the protection of environment and animals, most probably referring to the agreement, *Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources* which determines and recommends fishing limits.¹ These scenes of administration are inserted in the otherwise exclusively animated movie with real, living shots, emphasizing the necessity and seriousness of these steps. *Happy Feet* was awarded a prize by the Environmental Media Association in 2007, which “set out to celebrate and honour film and television productions and individuals that increase public awareness of environmental issues and inspire personal action on these issues.”² However, it should not be forgotten that there exists another message tightly connected to the environmental one: it is the United States alone that helps the case to be solved and there is seemingly no need to ask for or to think about a global collaboration or solidarity as was promoted in *Captain Planet* for instance. Understandably, Walt Disney Pictures is one of the most influential studios of the United States and as such it would promote American values not only to American children but also to children all over the world. At the very same time, it should also be kept in mind that the environmental issue Disney puts in focus here is one that does not significantly and crucially relate to American economic politics. Antarctic fishing is not a key profile of American economics and promoting its limitation would not seriously harm American economic interests. It is most probably not a coincidence that so far no American animation has dealt with problems due to oil trade or contamination of the air, for instance. The new presidential program and agenda of newly inaugurated US President Barack Obama promises “the end of the tyranny of the oil” and recognizes the immediate threat of climate change, which is understood as “not just an economic issue or an environmental concern – this is a national security crisis.”³ Whether these promises are turned to actions and how film industry, especially the

¹ Antarctica Economy, *CIA – The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ay.html#People>

² Adrian Parr, *Hijacking Sustainability* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 34.

³ The Democratic Party, “Environment and Climate Change,” http://www.democrats.org/a/national/american_leadership/clean_environment/

animated film industry will react to these changes or help bring them about are questions still to be answered.

The other cartoon produced in the year 2006 is a product of DreamWorks SKG: *Over the Hedge*. In opposition to *Happy Feet*, the film scrutinizes a somewhat more common and closer problem: the lifestyle of the consumerist society. The story typically taking place in the American suburbia presents the changed lifestyle of animals that are forced to live away from their original habitat because in its place a newly built residential area has been built. As RJ, the raccoon puts it: "What was once mere wilderness is now 54 acres of man-made, manicured, air-conditioned paradise."¹ The accent of the movie is less educating than *Happy Feet* but more entertaining and all in all, it tends to address children. Still, the message of environmental problems does not lose anything from its significance. The animals' problematic methods of obtaining food, the unscrupulous protection of human possessions from rodents and other damage to the environment caused by the dynamically developing consumerist society, all appear on the screen. Problems associated with the consumerist society, the issue of limitless consumption and waste-production are recurrently addressed:

RJ: [*showing the other animals around the houses*] They always got food with them. We eat to live – these guys live to eat! Let me show you what I'm talking about!

RJ: [*as he speaks he shows the other animals what humans do*] The human mouth is called a 'piehole', the human being is called a 'couch potato'.

RJ: [*signifies telephone*] That is a device to summon food.

RJ: [*signifies doorbell*] That is one of the many voices of food.

RJ: [*signifies front door*] That is the portal for the passing of food.

RJ: [*signifies delivery truck*] That is one of the many food transportation vehicles. Humans bring the food, take the food, ship the food, they drive food, they wear the food!

RJ: [*signifies microwave*] That gets the food hot!

RJ: [*signifies refrigerator*] That keeps the food cold!

[...]

RJ: [*signifies table where family prays before dinner*] That is the altar where they WORSHIP food!

¹ *Over the Hedge*, eds. Tim Johnson and Karey Kirkpatrick, (Dreamworks SKG, 2006).

RJ: [*signifies advert for Seltzer*] That's what they eat when they've eaten TOO MUCH food!

RJ: [*signifies treadmill*] That gets rid of the guilt so they can eat MORE FOOD! FOOD! FOOD! FOOD! FOOD! FOOOOOD! So, you think they have enough?

RJ: [*everybody nods*] Well, they don't. For humans, enough is never enough! And what do they do with the stuff they don't eat? They put it in gleaming silver cans, just for us!

RJ: [*opens the trash cans and knocks them over*] Dig in!¹

The humorous presentation of these everyday topics and problems draws the attention to the overwhelming and most of the time unnecessary use of cars (“That is an S.U.V; humans ride in them because they are slowly losing their ability to walk.”²) or the unnatural ingredients of food people eat (“That, my friend, is a magical combination of corn flour, dehydrated cheese solids, BHA, BHT, and good old MSG; a.k.a., the chip, nacho cheese flavor.”³) *Over the Hedge* does not only present the cruelty of people to animals, but also focuses on certain human behaviour tendencies that are responsible for all the environmental troubles mankind and Earth are suffering from. In this respect, there is an emphasis in the movie similar to that which can be found in *Happy Feet*. The ending of the story, however, significantly differs from that of *Happy Feet*. There are no eager, active politicians fighting for animal protection. Men in *Over the Hedge* stay and remain literally over, on the other side of the hedge with the role of the destroying, egoistic, overwhelming, heartless human. Solving the problem of rodents in an animal-friendly way is not an option in the movie, moreover there is no human character who would suggest anything similar to that. Eventually, the solution comes from the animals themselves if men are unsuitable and unwilling to do so; therefore the punishment on humans carried out by the animals is fairly deserved. More symbolically, men do nothing to stop the lifestyle they are living in, or to think consciously about the tendencies of consumerism and all the troubles it brings about and the life they have to live is enough punishment for them from the point of view of animals.

¹ Over the Hedge, “Memorable Quotes”, *The Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0327084/quotes>

² Idem.

³ Idem.

With the significant exception of *Captain Planet*, cartoons dealing with themes of environmental ethics overwhelmingly work with animal characters. Understandably, the sympathy and empathy of the children in the audience are awakened when the story is told from the perspective of an always nice, cute but often trapped animal protagonist. It is easier for a child to identify with these characters and with these roles, however, at the same time, s/he as a human, a human offspring understands the lesson and the role of man in the story as the evil and enemy of animals and thus environment. This sympathizing perspective is inevitable to develop a certain kind of sensitivity towards the problems of the environment and the relationship of man and nature. It is also necessary to be applied so that the child would realize how serious ecological problems are to come or are already here due to the careless, egoistic, ignorant behaviour of humans but the lesson does not stop here. The quintessential idea behind all these animations is to make the child recognize the fact that his role in the story can and should be active, in other words, that s/he can make steps to solve the problems. This is the ultimate educational effect of these animated films – it might not be as obvious as that of a school-book but it surely becomes as influential, if not more influential to the sensitivity of the child later on.

In conclusion, animated films are and have always been a channel of media to convey certain messages or ideologies to the audience. They have a special importance since they first and most uniquely address children and young people. According to Géza M. Tóth, cartoons conjure up the memory of childhood in the mind of the watchers and thus they have a special effect on emotion, which fact makes cartoons become materials of propaganda.¹ Besides M. Tóth's observation, Althusser's theory on ideology and ideological state apparatuses are also working practices in connection with the convincing effect of animations. The choice of topic and the modes of representation suggest that animation studios tend to introduce and apply various semiotic layers that enable them to address not only the age group of children but also their parents and grandparents. Technical advancements draw the attention of adults and make them forget that they are watching a cartoon commonly associated with children's entertainment. To appeal to an older audience, animation studios focus on social and global issues that are still understandable for children but not boring for adults. These

¹ Zsuzsanna Balázs, "Az agitáció trükkjei – Mit üzennek a rajzfilmek?" (The Tricks of Agitation – What Is the Message of Cartoons?), *Heti Világgazdaság* 2 (2007), 49–51.

factors provide a fortunate constellation for environmental issues that are in great need to be discussed as often and on as many forums as possible so that they would reach the most people. As was listed in the present article previously, there have already been several examples to this tendency. Around the middle of the twentieth century, environmental ethics came onto the screen with the advance of stories depicting the relationship of the hunter and the prey, and in connection with this line, the relationship of animal and nature. So for quite a long time in cartoon making, this topic was the most common and most often presented one. However, while time passed, environmental problems became urgent and crucial issues of societies all over the world and animation-making replied to this tendency. A great example is *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, which was brought to life with the clear intention to teach lessons on environmental protection and the role of people if they are willing to work in a global cooperation and collaboration. Feature animated films have also gathered under the colours of environmental issues and started dealing with environmental ethics: *Pocahontas* conveyed these ideas as wrapped in the context of Native American perspective on life and nature and their intertwined being. Clearly, straightforward presented environmental problems only come up after 2000 in animations. *Happy Feet* ties down the problem to Antarctica and the famine of emperor penguins; a topic being a noble one to be addressed but at the same time particularly harmless to the American economy. *Over the Hedge*, however, is less kind to the consumerist society: from the perspective of rodents living around a housing estate, people over the hedge seem to be stubborn, insensible and insensitive to the demands of nature. *Over the Hedge* gives nothing else but an unfortunately truly honest and clear-cut picture of how people in developed countries could not care less about an environmentally conscious life.