The First Steps of Brazilian Advertising Animation

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As a forerunner to the animated cartoon and a parallel development to early cinema, animation borrowed its language from the already popular comics and caricatures, establishing them as a national graphic reference.

Brazilian advertising cinema, as in most countries, emerged concurrently with cinema itself. From the moment the Lumière brothers presented their first films to the public, advertisers sought to participate in the cinematic spectacle and see their brands projected on the big screen. It is no coincidence that for years they had used performance spaces as an advertising medium. In 19th-century theaters, it was common to find displays, advertising posters, and projections of

commercial magic lantern slides. Introducing these brands and products into film screenings was, therefore, a natural progression for both advertisers and filmmakers. The former were able to showcase their products to a large audience, while the latter found in this practice a significant additional source of income.

Fortunately, many short films exist that can be unquestionably cataloged as advertising content. Take, for example, director Ramón de Baños, a pioneer of Catalan cinema, who recounts in his autobiography how merchants in Belém do Pará—the city where he worked during his time in Brazil (1911-1914)—approached him to film their businesses in exchange for a pre-arranged fee (BAÑOS, 1991). No less common was the practice of creating documentary-style films and political propaganda, in addition to standard advertisements (ROCHA, 2007).

In the Northern Hemisphere, numerous animated cartoons were released at the dawn of the 20th century, drawing inspiration from illustrated stories and using comics as a model to ensure their success. Among many others, two major hits emerged, both in 1916: *Krazy Kat* and *Mutt and Jeff*, which became some of the highest-grossing commercial animations of their era.

However, it was only with the mysterious story of a character created for silent film that the big screen gained its greatest animated protagonist. The charismatic Felix the Cat came to occupy a unique and distinct space in animated cinema as a standalone format, no longer serving merely to promote comic strips. According to Crafton (apud LUCENA JÚNIOR, 2002), Felix the Cat transcended social and generational barriers, rivaling the success of Charles Chaplin's live-action films. The famous cat was perfectly aware of the irrational world he inhabited.

The first records of animation being used in Brazilian advertising date back to the 1920s, with a few short animated pieces inserted into documentaries screened in cinemas. Some notable advertisements include “Sapataria Pé de Anjo” (Angel Foot Shoe Store), shown at the Cine Central in Rio de Janeiro, and “Cigarros Sudan” (Sudan Cigarettes), an animation by Pasquale Michelle Faletti (OLIVEIRA, 2013).

In Brazil, ever since Álvaro Martins (Seth) released “O Kaiser”—the first Brazilian animated cartoon—in 1917, animated cinema has continuously produced commercial and advertising films. In the film, a caricature of Wilhelm II, the German emperor during World War I, is devoured by the globe. In another sequence, President Nilo Peçanha also appears as a caricature, breaking into an outrageously wide smile. Its theatrical run lasted only three days, but all indications suggest it was well-received by the public, given the novelty of the “animated caricature in cinematography” (A NOITE apud MORENO, 1978, p. 51), according to the terminology and spelling of the time.

All indications are that after his experience with independent filmmaking, Seth began to dedicate his work as an animator to advertising. According to Antônio Moreno, “Seth dedicated himself to advertising cartoons, where he obtained bad profits [sic] and the certainty of exhibition, announcing, for example, the new automatic telephone system” (1978, p. 66, our emphasis). Evidently, this new activity linked to advertising would provide him with a better means of subsistence.

At first glance, one might get the impression that our 'Third World' reality always leaves us behind. While there is some truth to this sentiment—after all, our country of continental

dimensions remains a linguistic island on its continent—in the field of animated cinema, we did not begin our adventure so late. Indeed, first-world England did not make significant strides until its first feature-length production conquered important territory in the cinematic field: the animated adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, created in 1954 by Joy Batchelor and John Halas. The introduction of animation in England was much slower and later than in the United States due to the limited presence of a comics industry and no established tradition of animated film. The animator duo, since founding their company in 1940, monopolized most of English animation, extending their domain to advertising and scientific films. Moreno (1978, p. 56) highlights the studio's importance, noting that after that film, "there was a total transformation in English animation: the old 'Disney-esque' standards were abandoned, and a new style was born."

In an era of Disney's complete dominance, both commercially and aesthetically, the herculean effort of Brazilian Anélio Lattini stands out. Over six years, he single-handedly produced his award-winning feature film, *Sinfonia Amazônica* (Amazon Symphony), first screened in Brazil in 1953. Lattini was one of the thousands captivated by the Disney style, and from it, he created his own fantasy world adapted to national themes, specifically Amazonian folklore. The film was a success, but after some financial setbacks, Moreno reports that "Lattini then retreated to advertising animation" (1978, p. 86).

Another milestone in Brazilian animation from that same period (1952) were films focused on disease prevention and personal hygiene, precursors to the 1970s television spots featuring characters like Sujismundo and Dr. Prevenildo, created by Rui Perotti. At that time, the films, broadcast by the Special Health Service, were awareness and educational campaigns to prevent contagion or promote the elimination of disease breeding grounds.

In the mid-1980s, Fusari (1985) noted that the national experience with animated cinema resulted primarily from isolated attempts fraught with production and distribution difficulties. The exception was Maurício de Sousa Produções, which has since conquered a broad national and international market for commercial and advertising animation.

The television era no longer reflected the golden age of the Disney style, a hegemony that had lasted throughout the 1930s and 40s. Opposing Disney's mannerist aesthetic, a more streamlined approach, particularly concerning the production process, gained significant ground and won hearts and minds in the years that followed. The Zagreb School style, adopted and disseminated by UPA (United Productions of America), would influence an entire generation of animators, including the Brazilian pioneers of advertising animation, a field still in its infancy in the 1950s.

Brazilian advertising animation quickly and enduringly absorbed the public's enchantment with anthropomorphized animals, both as protagonists and as charming, spontaneous characters. Unintentionally, the Disney industry, along with its competitors and imitators, benefited advertising animation through cartoons adapted from tales, myths, legends, novels, and narratives that incorporated musical elements, with songs and choreography interspersed throughout their feature films. It was a perfect fit—like the large glove on Mickey's anthropomorphic hand in an increasingly consumerist society.

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