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Animation as a medium of socio-cultural critique: thematic development in Hayao Miyazaki's Spirited Away (2001)

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ABSTRACT

With the development of cinema into the digital era, animation has gradually moved into the centre of live-action films mainly due to its capacities to enhance spectacle, which is a very limited and superficial use of the medium. It is consequently necessary to explore its abilities further in order to understand how animation can add deeper layers of meaning to contemporary cinema and to its standalone form. While the focus of the dominating Western mainstream animation industry has mostly been on telling children's stories of entertaining value with the most recent technology, other countries, most prominently Japan, have further explored the narrative possibilities of animation. Through the analysis of the thematic development of animation director Hayao Miyazaki's award-winning animated feature film *Spirited Away* (2001) and with the aid of selected narrative strategies, this research report examines the potential of the medium of animation as a platform for socio-cultural critique.