


# THE UNTIMELY POWERS OF GENRES

Hong Kong Cinema and Postcolonialism,  
1978-1994

				-----1895-----	Birth of Cinema
1900s	Attractions				
				-----1902-----	<i>A Trip to the Moon</i>
1910s	Narrative 1: Continuity Editing				
1920s	Narrative 2: Classical Film Forms / Montage Theories				
				-----1917-----	Tanizaki 'Pure Film'
				-----1924-----	<i>Aelita</i>
				-----1924-----	Epstein 'Photogénie'
1930s	Sound	↔	Radio & Telecommunications		
				-----1932-----	<i>FP1 Doesn't Answer</i>
1940s	Color & Plasticity				
				-----1938-----	Imamura, 'Cartoon Film Theory'
				-----1940-----	Eisenstein, 'Notes on Disney'
				-----1941-----	<i>Princess Iron Fan</i>
1955-65	Expanded Film Form & Genre	↔	Television		
				-----1958-----	<i>Invention for Destruction</i>
				-----1960-----	<i>Silent Star</i>
				-----1965-----	Sontag 'Imagination of Disaster'
1965-1975	New Waves				
				-----1972-----	<i>Solaris</i>
1980s	Global Waves 1				
				-----1986-----	<i>Peking Opera Blues</i>

THE MOVEMENT-IMAGE  THE TIME-IMAGE  
(1955-1975)



Since we transmitted  
your encephalogram,

Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solyaris* (Solaris, 1972; Soviet Union)



Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solyaris* (Solaris, 1972; Soviet Union)



SOLARIS: THE PEOPLE ARE MISSING



## GLOBAL WAVES: THE EXPLOSION OF 'CLASSICAL FILM FORMS'

THE MOVEMENT-IMAGE



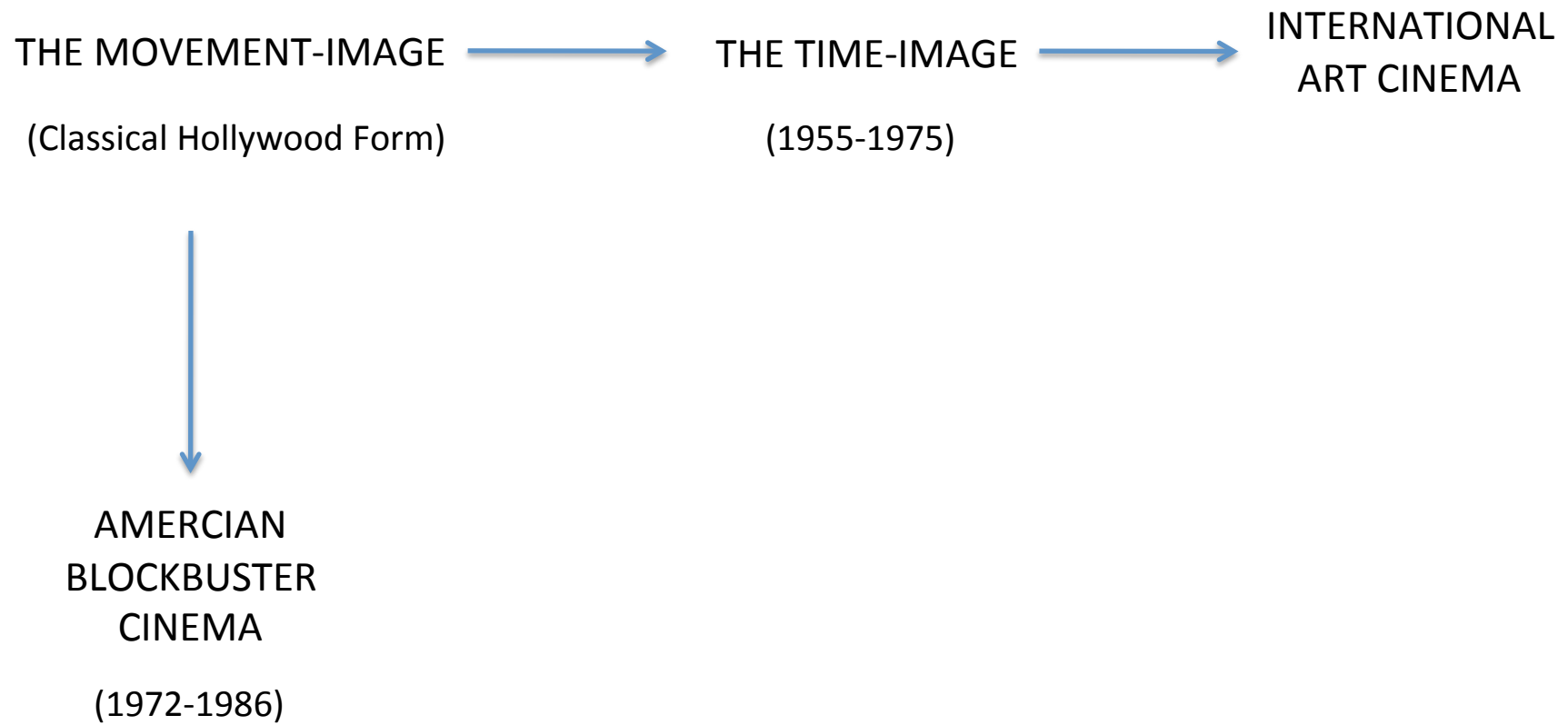
THE TIME-IMAGE

(1955-1975)



INTERNATIONAL  
ART CINEMA





1983

Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*

1985

Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*

Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*

Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*

1986

Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions"

Gunning:

*“The Great Train Robbery (1903) does point in both directions, toward a direct assault on the spectator (the spectacularly enlarged outlaw unloading his pistol in our faces), and toward a linear narrative continuity. This is early film’s ambiguous legacy. Clearly in some sense recent spectacle cinema has reaffirmed its roots in stimulus and carnival rides, in what might be called the Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects.”* (387)

# GUNNING REDUX

NARRATIVE



ATTRACTIONS



# HANSEN REDUX

CLASSICAL FILM  
FORM



SHOCKS, GAGS, ETC.



SLAPSTICK COMEDY



## HANSEN REDUX



contradictions generate reflexivity

Hansen:

“The reflexive potential of slapstick comedy can be, and has been, argued on a number of counts, at the levels of plot, performance, and mise-en-scène, and depending on the particular inflection of the genre. In addition to articulating and playing games with the violence of technological regimes, mechanization and clock time, slapstick films also specialized in deflating the terror of consumption, of a new culture of status and distinction. Likewise, the genre was a vital site for engaging the conflicts and pressures of a multiethnic society... And, not least, slapstick comedy allowed for a playful and physical expression of anxieties over changed gender roles and new forms of sexuality and intimacy.”



## OTHER GLOBAL WAVES

# GLOBAL WAVES



AMERICAN  
BLOCKBUSTER  
CINEMA  
(1972-1986)

HONG KONG  
ACTION CINEMA  
(1978-1994)

# Peking Opera Blues



Lin Ching Hsia

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MARK CHENG

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS  
V. N. CARLSON

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DAVID WAI

Cherie Chung

PRODUCED BY

**TSUI HARK**

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# **‘Peking Opera Blues’ (NR)**

**By Hal Hinson**

**Washington Post Staff Writer**

**October 14, 1988**

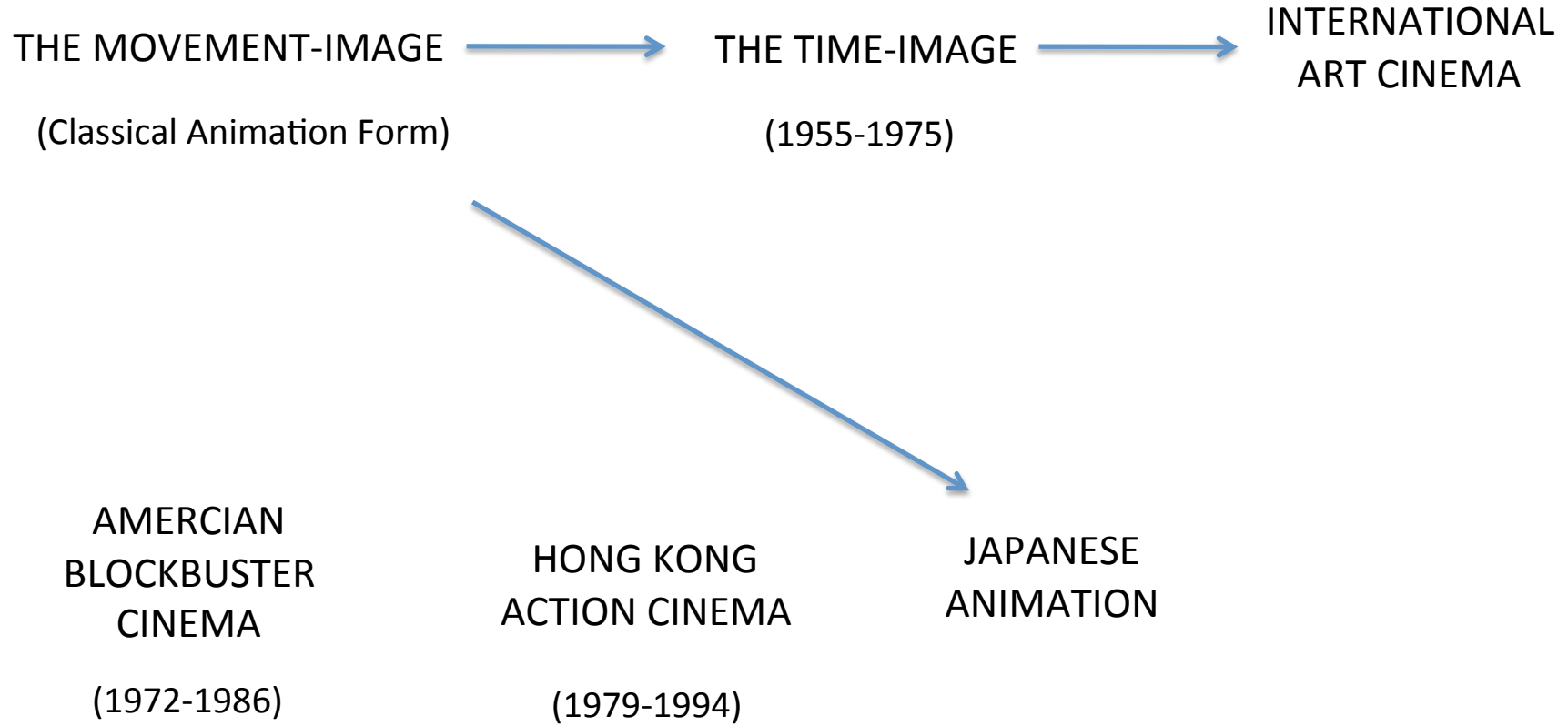
Watching "Peking Opera Blues" is like flipping through the most explosive, most exhilarating comic book ever made. Directed by Hong Kong-based filmmaker Tsui Hark, it's an action adventure picture that plays like a Marx Brothers comedy.

There's a daredevil audacity in this mix of flamboyant pageantry and kung fu acrobatics. "Peking Opera Blues" makes you feel as if you're seated on the nose of a bullet. The whole film is like the opening dance-hall sequence of "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom." Except that it out-Spielbergs Spielberg.



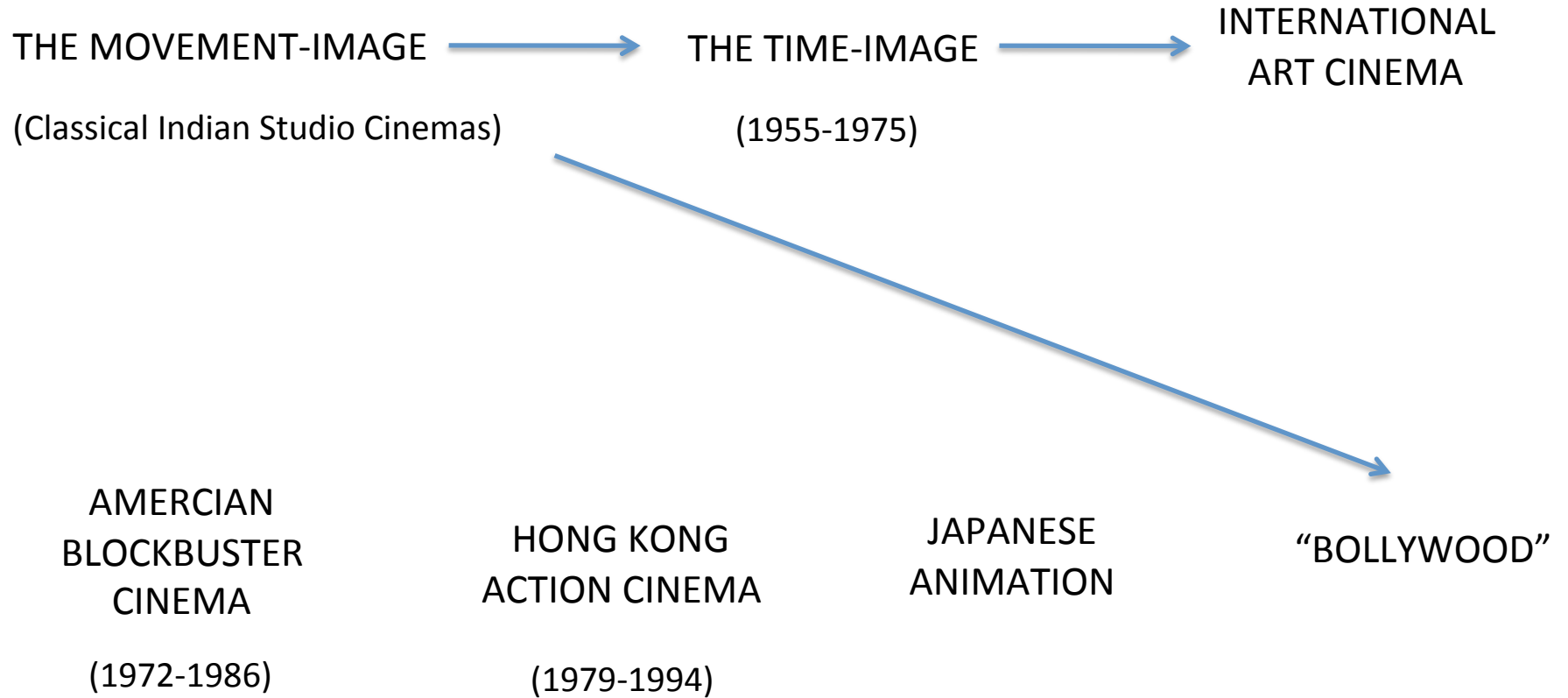
**F** FANDANGO  
MOVIECLIPS

# GLOBAL WAVES

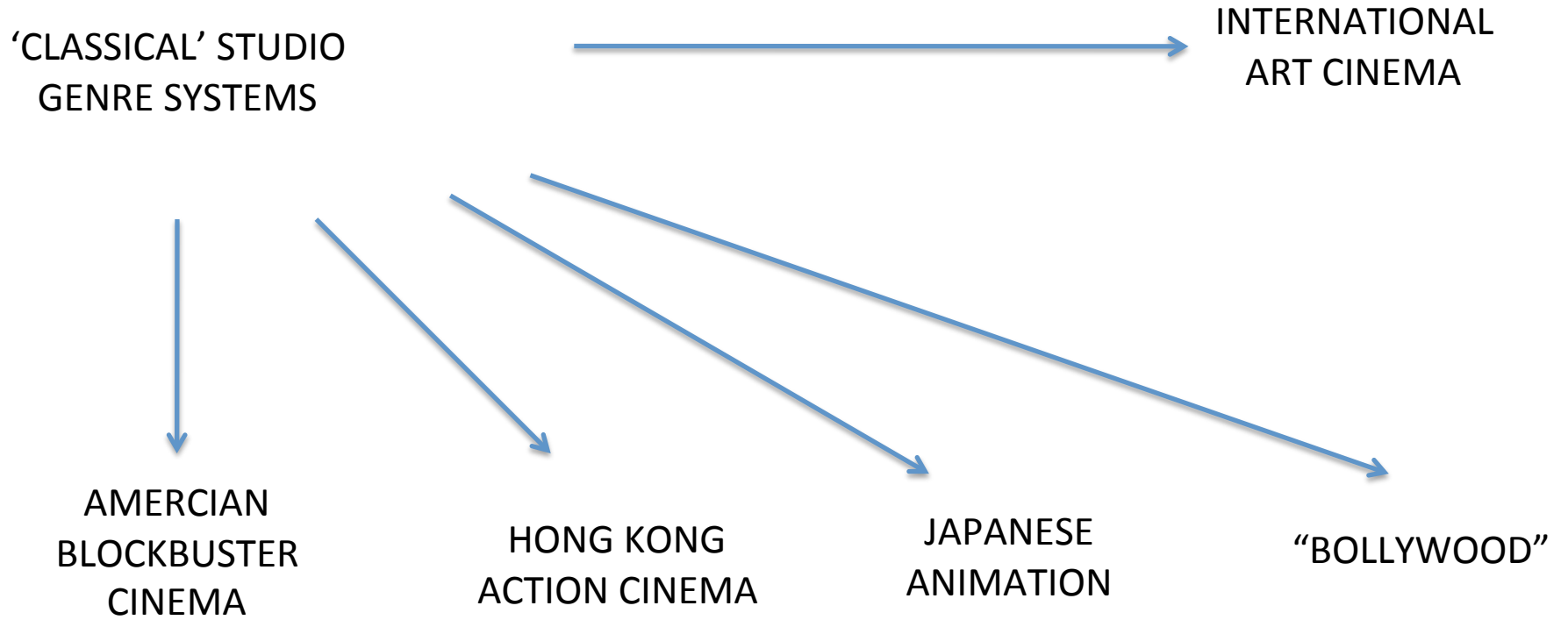




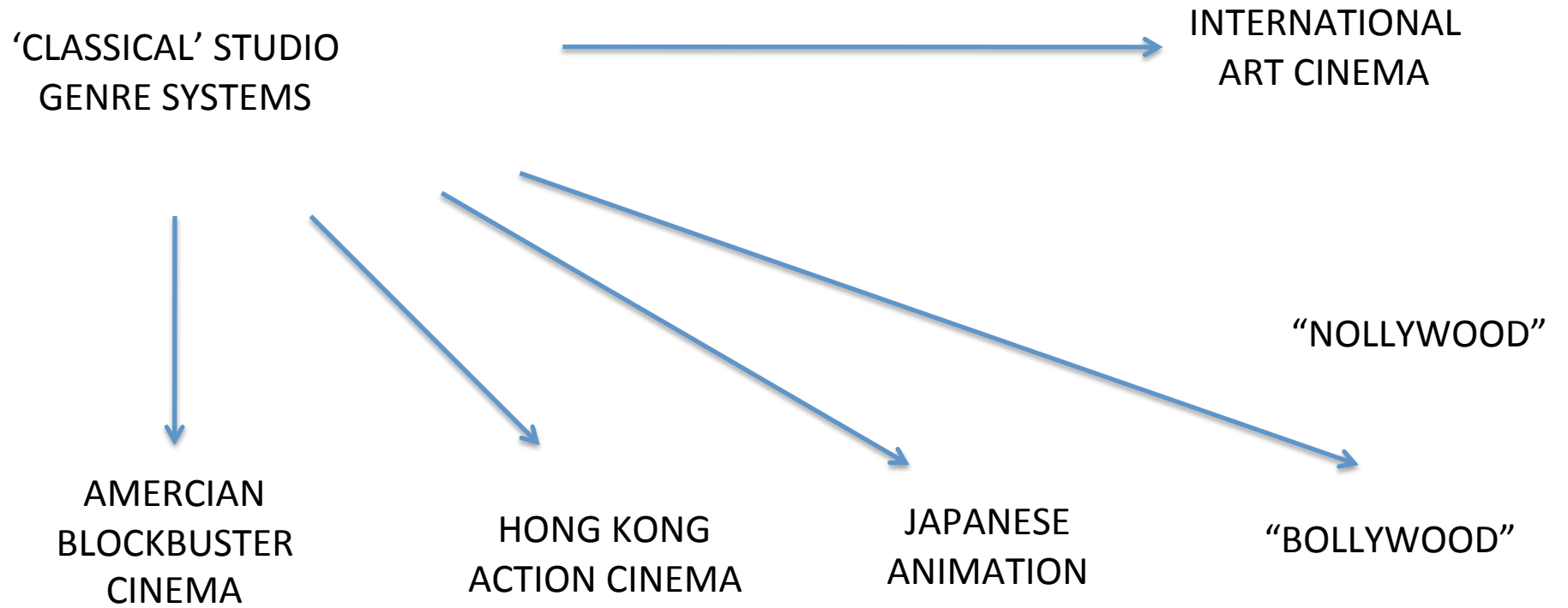
# GLOBAL WAVES



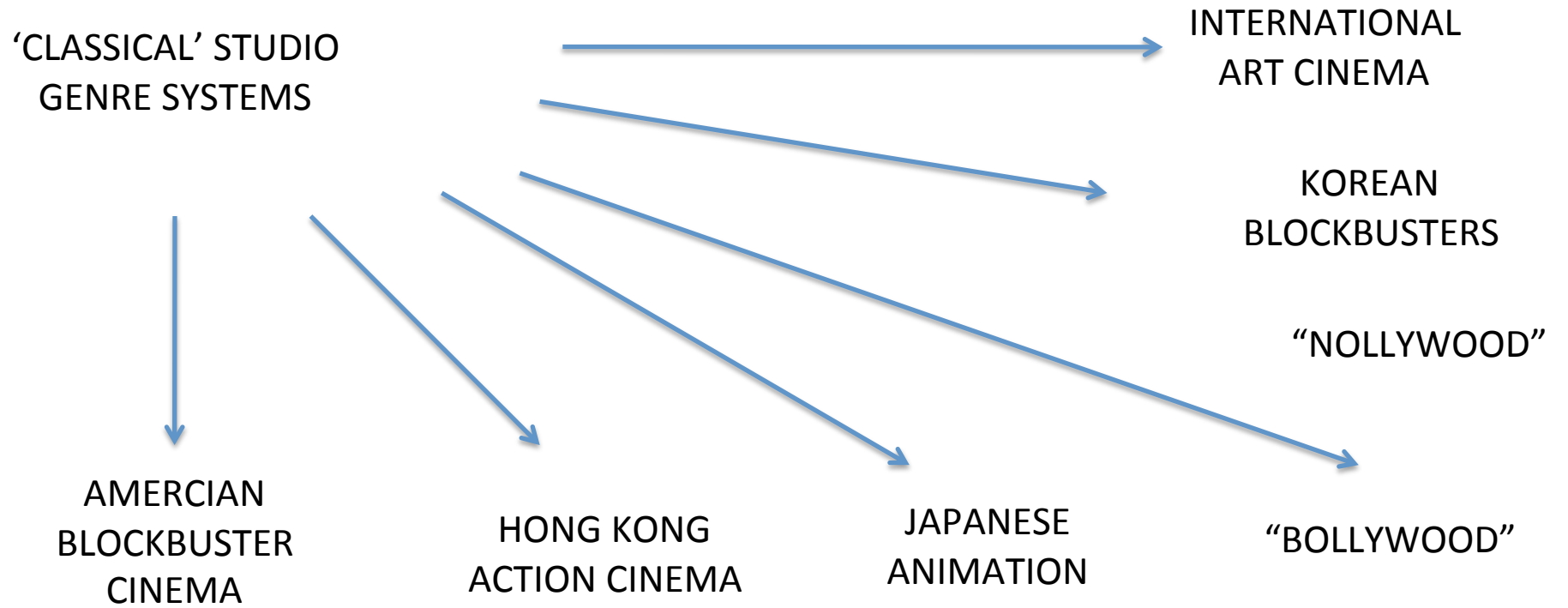
# GLOBAL WAVES



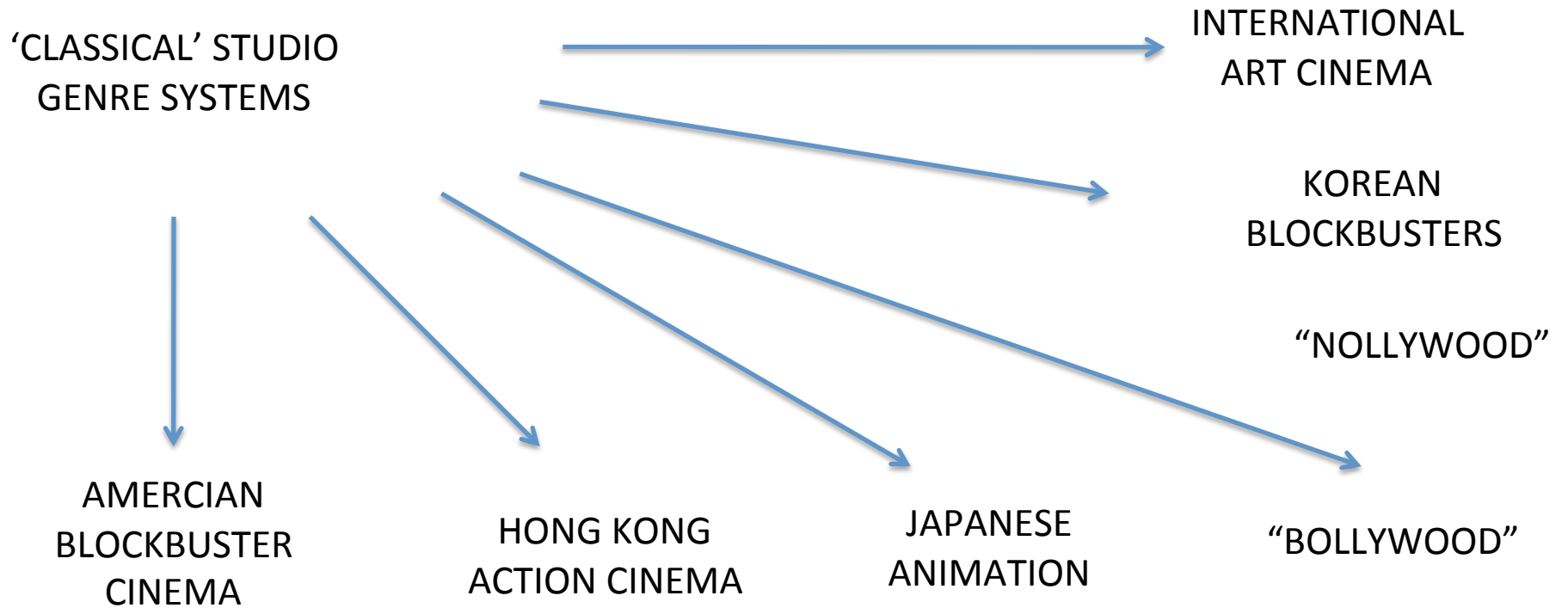
# GLOBAL WAVES



# GLOBAL WAVES



# GLOBAL WAVES



Note that this presentation is somewhat misleading if we forget that the so-called classical forms and genre systems emerged in diverse locations through complex interactions. There is not one but many 'movement-images.'

## EXPLOSION AND REINTEGRATION OF THE MOVEMENT-IMAGE: SOME MEDIA FACTORS

How did television affect cinema?



## EXPLOSION AND REINTEGRATION OF THE MOVEMENT-IMAGE: SOME MEDIA FACTORS

How did video formats affect cinema and television?

SHANGHAI – HONG KONG CINEMAS



HONG KONG  
ACTION CINEMA

(1978-1994)

## CLASSICAL FILM FORM / MOVEMENT-IMAGE

PRINCESS IRON FAN, 1941 (From Weihong BAO)

### FAIRY TALE

[Disney's *Snow White*]

pedagogical and moral  
fable

socializing children

science & technology

sound and 3D techniques

### GOD-SPIRIT NOVEL

martial arts film

entertainment

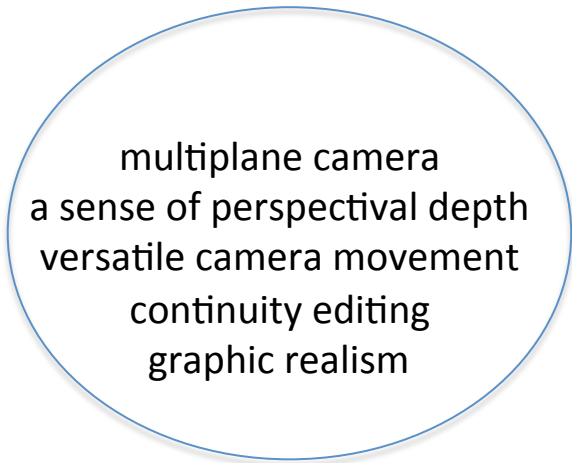
magic

thrilling adults

supernatural & superstition

'tricks'

PRINCESS IRON FAN (BAO)



NARRATIVE COHESION



“transparency”  
totalistic, contemplative, voyeuristic



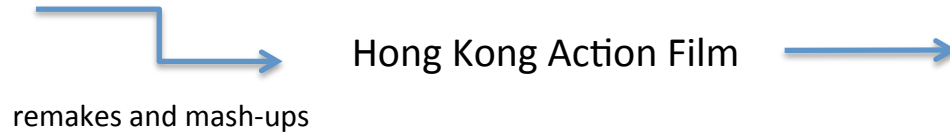
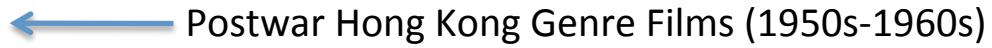
ATTRACTION



“immersion”  
disorienting, tactile, overwhelming

NARRATIVE

ATTRACTION





Havoc in Heaven  
(aka Uproar in Heaven)  
1964  
Wan Brothers





Peking Opera:

**Peking opera**, or **Beijing opera** is a form of Chinese opera which combines music, vocal performance, mime, dance and acrobatics. It arose in the late 18th century and became fully developed and recognized by the mid-19th century.

Peking opera features four main types of performers. Performing troupes often have several of each variety, as well as numerous secondary and tertiary performers. With their elaborate and colorful costumes, performers are the only focal points on Peking opera's characteristically sparse stage. They use the skills of speech, song, dance and combat in movements that are symbolic and suggestive, rather than realistic. Above all else, the skill of performers is evaluated according to the beauty of their movements. Performers also adhere to a variety of stylistic conventions that help audiences navigate the plot of the production. The layers of meaning within each movement must be expressed in time with music. (Wikipedia)

# Peking Opera Blues



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ALL PRODUCTIONS A LOGO BY

**TSUI HARK**

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# PEKING OPERA BLUES: 5 APPROACHES TO THE NEW HONG KONG CINEMA

AUTEUR & NEW WAVE APPROACH

MEDIA

GENRES

GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION

FILM FORM



## PEKING OPERA BLUES

AUTEUR: TSUI HARK

Note that the understanding of Hong Kong cinema based on auteur theory and thus on the 'new wave' model emphasizes radical formal experimentation of individual creators who buck the studio system.

But this is in tension with the idea of Tsui Hark as the "Spielberg of Hong Kong Cinema," which evokes big-budget, high-production-value cinema.

Maybe the distinction between art cinema and popular studio genres is breaking down?



PEKING OPERA BLUES

MEDIA

How did television affect cinema?

How did video formats affect television and cinema?

## PEKING OPERA BLUES

### GENRES:

ACTION

(MARTIAL ARTS)

COMEDY

(SISTERHOOD COMEDY)

OPERA

(PEKING OPERA)

MUSICAL

(CLASSICAL AMERICAN MUSICAL)

HISTORICAL OR PERIOD DRAMA

(BEIJING, 1913)

FANTASTIC

Mise en scène

## High Key Lighting

- lighting scheme in which fill light is raised to almost the same level as key light - produces images that are usually very bright, few shadows on principal subjects. This bright image is characteristic of entertainment genres such as musicals (eg classic MGM style)



*Peking Opera Blues / Do Ma Daan*, Tsui Hark (Honk Kong, 1986)



Tsui Hark, *Do ma daan* (Peking Opera Blues, 1986)

PEKING OPERA BLUES

GEOPOLITICAL SPACE OF HONG KONG, 1984-1994

## DÉJÀ DISPARU

In his 1994 essay, Ackbar Abbas considers how the 1984 Joint Declaration Returning Hong Kong affected the experience of Hong Kong. He stresses its weird temporality in two registers.

1. For the first time, people experienced Hong Kong as something special, precisely because they felt it was going to vanish. This is the sense of déjà disparu or ‘already vanished’ — ‘the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone.’ ‘...a reality that is always outpacing our awareness of it.’ ‘Things move too fast.’

2. It is situation in which ‘postcolonialism that precedes decolonization.’ Consequently, it becomes difficult to situate Hong Kong geopolitically, to give its experience a name:

‘The opposition between tradition and modernity is already too stable and predictable. [And we find] emotions that do not belong to anybody or to any situation — affective intensities with no name.’ Hong Kong has to be constantly reinvented: ‘The new Hong Kong cinema and the new Hong Kong subjectivity have one important aspect in common: both pose the question of the postcolonial subject as a problem of self-invention. Such a subject does not yet have a name: it is not Chinese, or overseas Chinese, or internationalist.’

## DÉJÀ DISPARU

### 1. Film Form:

What does this 'outpacing' and sense of 'always already gone' do to the movement image?

How does this 'pressure of time' differ from that of the time-image?

Suggestion:

In the time-image, the rational cut gives way to the irrational cut and pressure of time within the frame.

In the Hong Kong action film, the tendency to subordinate the Peking Opera film to a kind of 'rational rhythm' gives way to 'irrational rhythm' — the pressure of time within (and across) series of actions.

## DÉJÀ DISPARU

### Irrational Rhythm (Wikipedia)

In music, a tuplet (also irrational rhythm or groupings, artificial division or groupings, abnormal divisions, irregular rhythm, gruppetto, extra-metric groupings, or, rarely, contrametric rhythm) is "any rhythm that involves dividing the beat into a different number of equal subdivisions from that usually permitted by the time-signature (e.g., triplets, duplets, etc.)" (Humphries 2002, 266). This is indicated by a number (or sometimes two), indicating the fraction involved. The notes involved are also often grouped with a bracket or (in older notation) a slur. The most common type is the "triplet".

## DÉJÀ DISPARU

### 2. Geopolitical Situation:

How does the 'pressure of time' in Hong Kong cinema relate to the geopolitical situation?

Abbas suggests, like Deleuze, that the people are missing. There is not a stable geopolitical or historical subject.

How does the 'people are missing' affect the movement of Hong Kong cinema through the world?

## PEKING OPERA BLUES

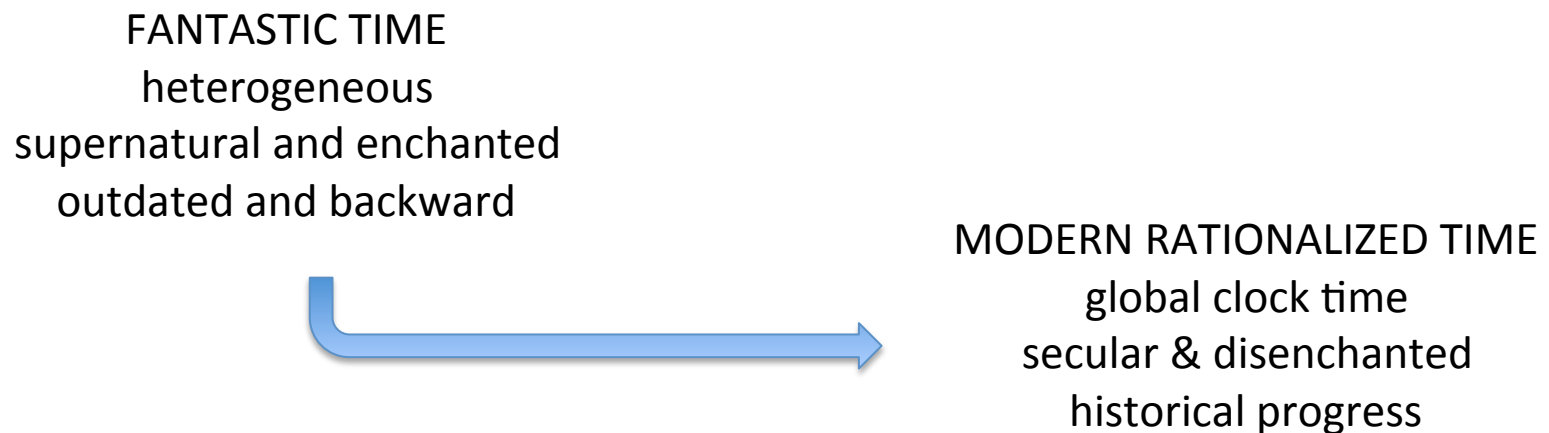
### GENRES 2

In “Clocks for Seeing,” Bliss Cua Lim looks at how the genre of fantastic cinema presents a critique of modern time, rationalized time.

## IMMISCIBLE TEMPORALITY

She first characterizes modern rationalized time as empty and homogeneous, as secular and disenchanted, as global clock time, implying a calculable time of historical progress. In contrast, the temporality of the fantastic is mysterious and heterogeneous, supernatural and enchanted, with gods, spirits, and ghosts. From the perspective of rationalized time, the fantastic appears local and archaic, outdated and backward. Lim suggests that fantastic cinema tries to translate fantastic time into rationalized time.

But the translation is always incomplete, because the supernatural refuses to go away, to be fully contained. Consequently, Lim sees a 'propensity for temporal critique' in fantastic films, in their *immiscible temporality*.





## IMMISCIBLE TEMPORALITY

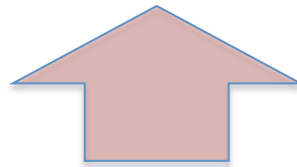
Lim also calls on Todorov's famous structural analysis of the fantastic.

Todorov identifies three conventions:

- (1) an apparently supernatural event;
- (2) an affective response to it: hesitation; and
- (3) temporality of affect (the duration of this uncertainty and hesitation).

The fantastic makes us hesitate and then oscillate between two possibilities: either laws of nature are inadequate (marvelous), or the event is an illusion to be explained and dispelled (uncanny). We oscillate between grudging acceptance of the supernatural and hesitant dismissal of it.

uncanny | fantastic-uncanny | fantastic-marvelous | marvelous



FANTASTIC

It is this sort of fantastic time that Lim sees as critically resistant to modern rationalized time.