

Montage Meets Mickey Mouse... in China

Classical Film Form and Animation-Attractions
1930-1945

QUIZ 1

February 2.

Approximately 30-60 minutes.

Multiple choice, true or false, fill-in-the-black, short answer.

Materials covered:

Course lectures — review what is in the presentations and worksheets.

Readings — review the principal assigned readings; from the suggested readings you need only know the portions discussed in class.

Films — only general knowledge of the films shown in class.

			1895	Birth of Cinema
1895-1905	Attractions (Vaudeville, Magic Acts, Sideshows)			
			1902	<i>A Trip to the Moon</i>
1905-1915	Narrative 1 (Classical Theatre, Popular Drama)			
1915-1925	Narrative 2 (Literature, Poetry, Novel, Avant-Garde Theatre)			
			1917	Tanizaki 'Pure Film'
			1924	<i>Aelita</i>
			1924	Epstein 'Photogénie'
1925-1935	Classical Film Form & Sound	↔		Radio & Telecommunications
			1932	<i>FP1 Doesn't Answer</i>
1935-1945	Classical Film Form & Plasticity			
			1938	Imamura, 'Cartoon Film Theory'
			1940	Eisenstein, 'Notes on Disney'
			1941	<i>Princess Iron Fan</i>
			1985	Bordwell 'Mimetic Theories'
			1985	Bordwell <i>Classical Hollywood Cinema</i>
			1986	Gunning 'Cinema of Attractions'
			1992	<i>Dracula</i>
			1995	100 th Anniversary of Cinema
			1999	Hansen 'Mass Production of Senses'

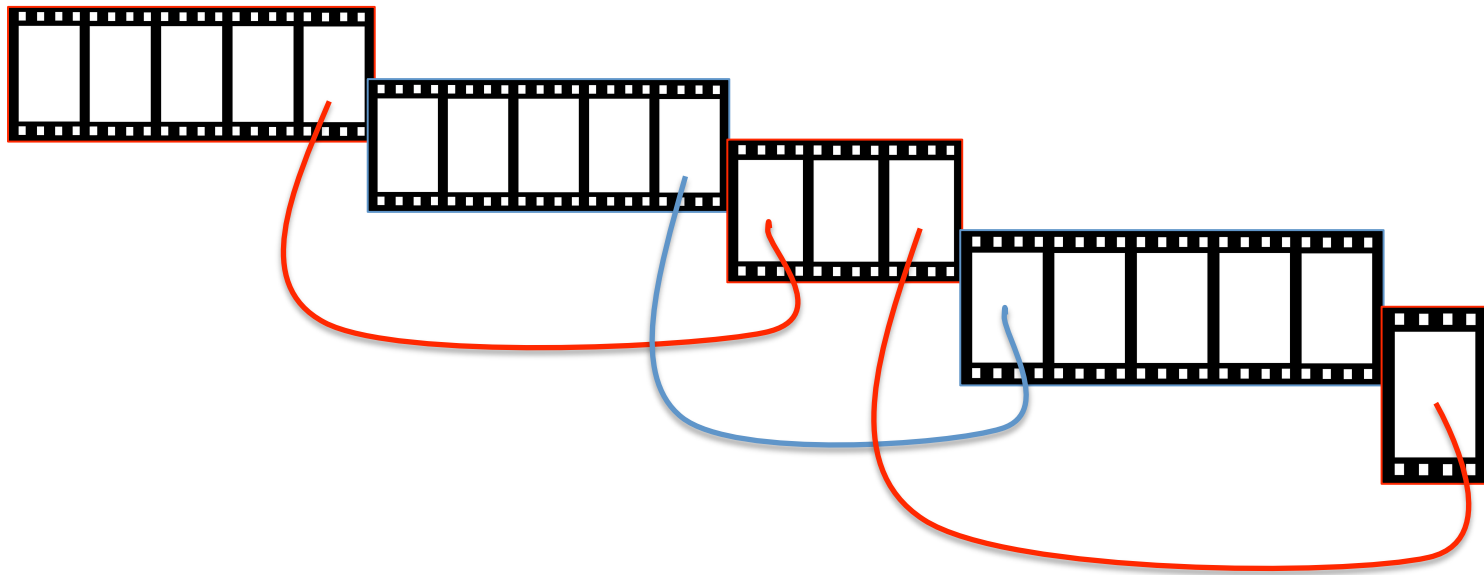
CONTINUITY EDITING



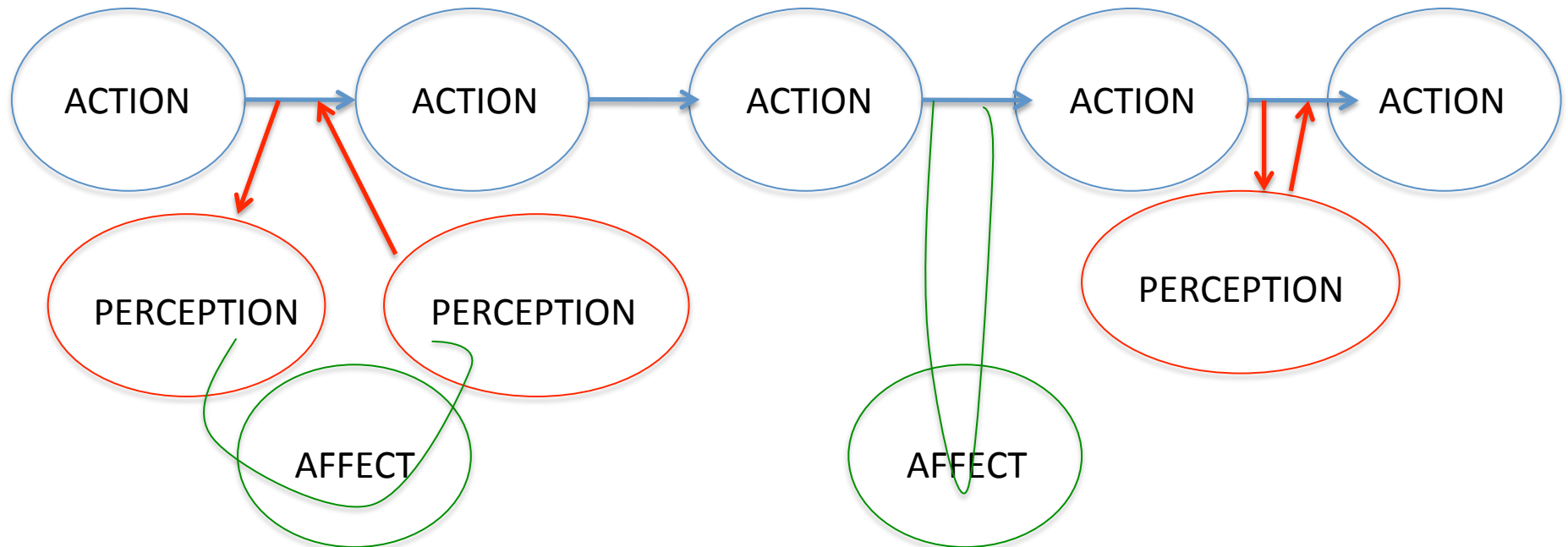
CLOSE SHOT
AFFECT
non-conscious
sensation/feeling

MEDIUM SHOT
PERCEPTION
seeing, listening, talking
intersubjective

LONG SHOT
ACTION
cause and effect
action and reaction

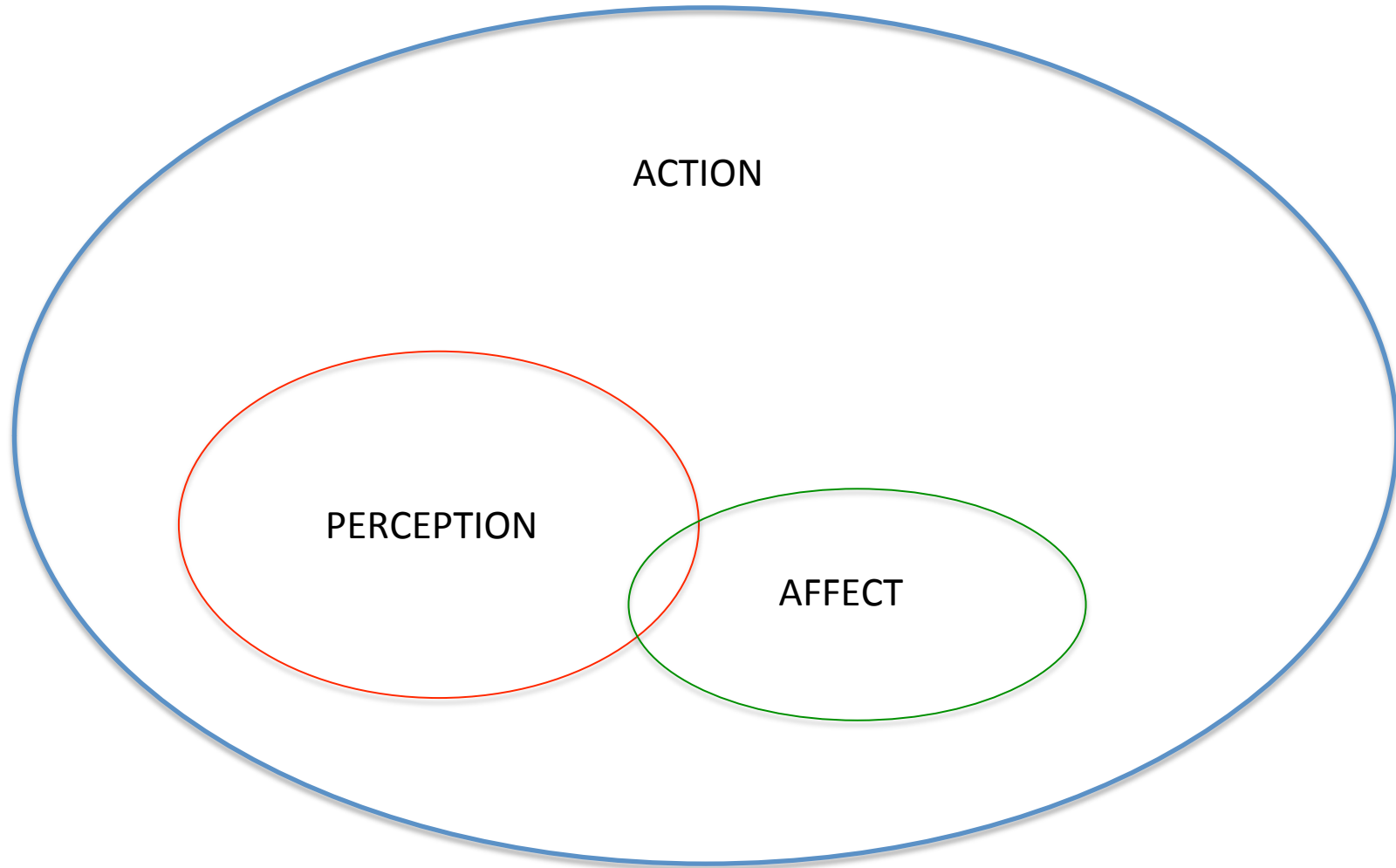


CONTINUITY EDITING



Action assures overall continuity and direction for editing the sequences of images.

CONTINUITY EDITING



Overall, perception-images and affect-images are subordinated to action to assure narrative continuity.

BORDWELL et al
CLASSICAL FILM FORM

production (industry)
one form

neoformalist poetics
continuity = unity
cognitive universals

narrative dominance
continuity = causality

characters
goal-oriented agency
goal-oriented psychology

HANSEN
VERNACULAR MODERNISM

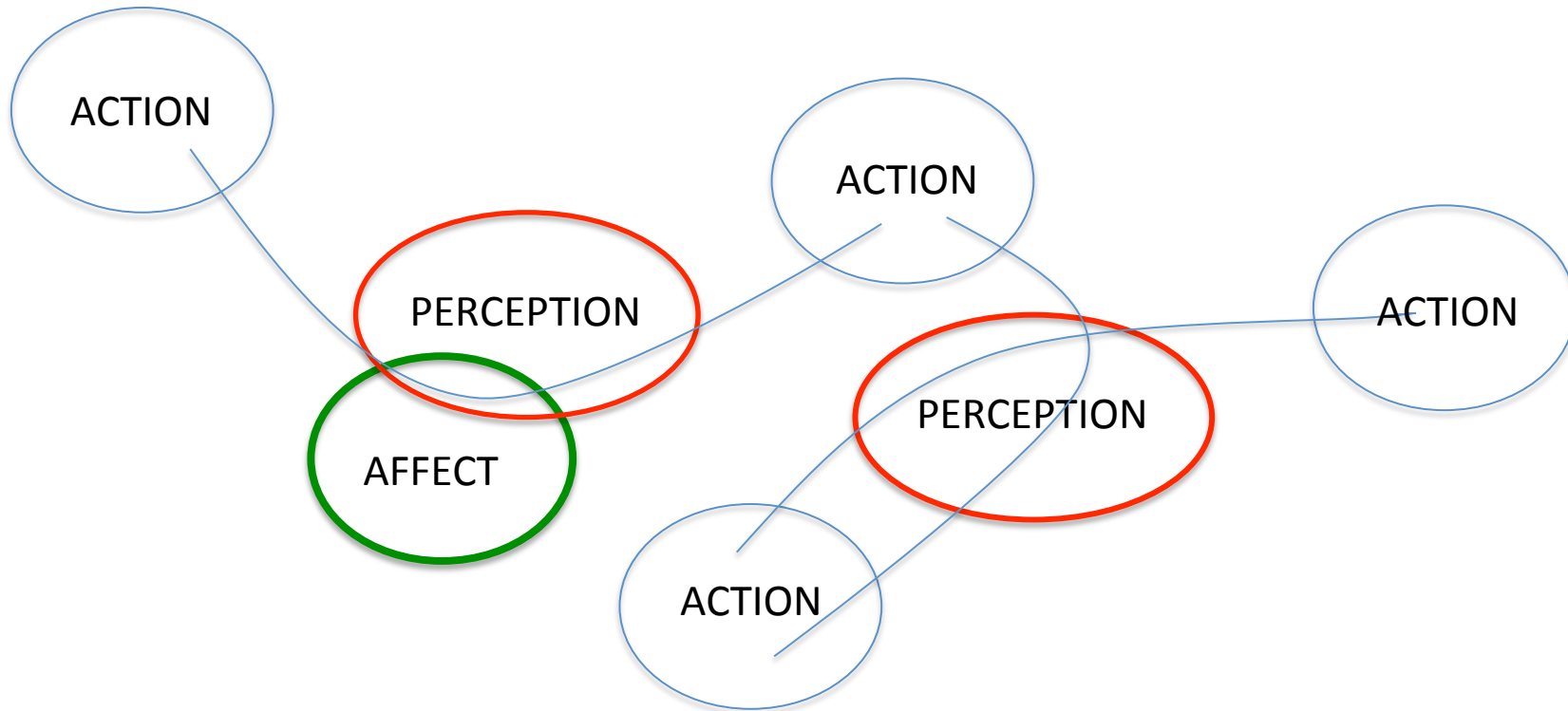
reception (audiences)
multiple genres

psychological and social
tensions & anxiety
globalized modernity

perceptual unconscious
continuity = new sensorium

characters
slapstick
unconscious / trauma

VERNACULAR MODERNISM



Action does not smoothly and evenly advance toward a goal but goes astray, backtracks, and turns in unexpected directions. Thus moving images evoke the anxieties, tensions, and contradictions implicit in the perceptual experience of modern life.

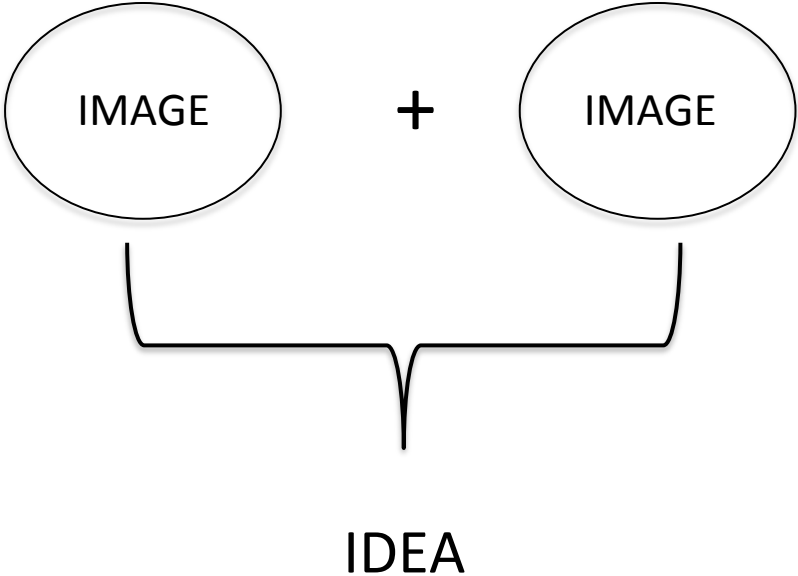
MONTAGE THEORY

A number of filmmakers and writers contributed to the montage theory of cinema, especially in the Soviet Union. Montage theory becomes associated above all with Sergei Eisenstein whose films and writings gradually dominated discussions of montage.

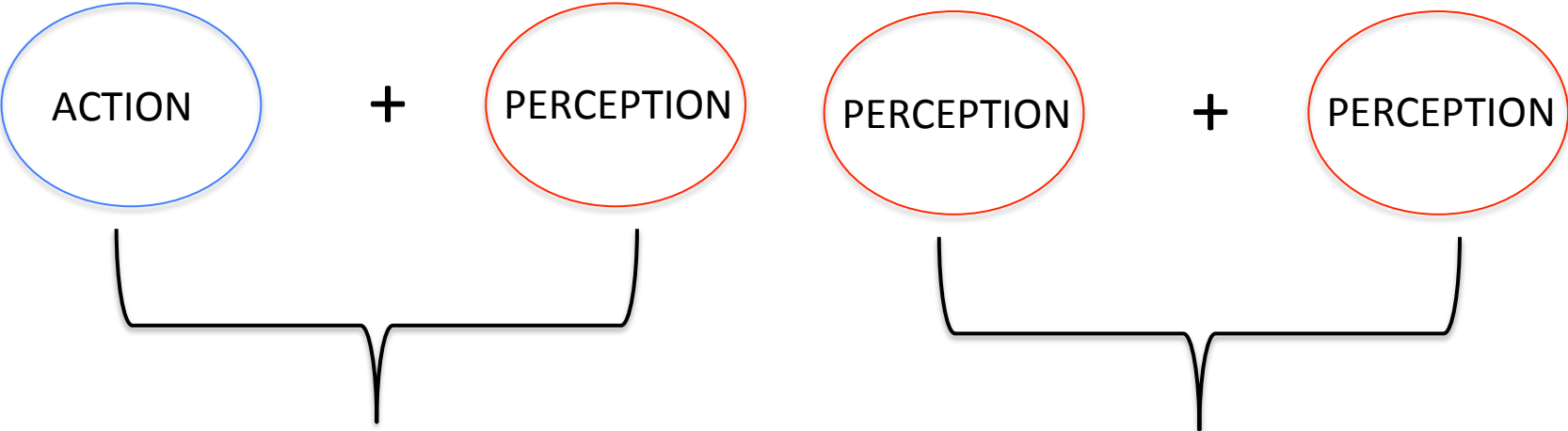
Montage, like continuity, takes editing to be the key factor in cinema. But, where continuity editing centers on story and narrative, montage — especially Eisenstein's version — is concerned with attractions, shocks, and how to stage them. Recall that Eisenstein is the source for Gunning's use of the term attractions. Indeed, in 1923 and 1924, Eisenstein began to use the term "montage of attractions" to describe both his theatrical productions and his film.

Eisenstein thought of attractions as powerful sensory stimuli operating independently of narrative to shock spectators, evoking strong emotions or sparking new concepts, which triggered an experience of ecstasy.

MONTAGE THEORY

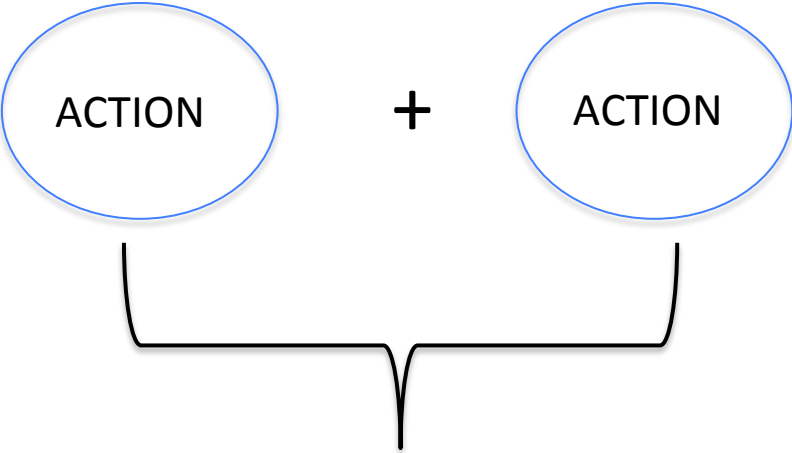


MONTAGE THEORY



IDEA

IDEA



IDEA

“1925: How Eisenstein Used Montage to Film the Unfilmable,”
from *One Hundred Years of Cinema*

Recall that David Bordwell is rather critical of Eisenstein's reliance on attractions. Bordwell characterizes Eisenstein's approach as mimetic (showing). In contrast, Bordwell insists that filmmaking and theory needs to focus on the diegetic (telling).

From David Bordwell, “Mimetic Theories of Narration.”

...we see Eisenstein’s debt to the mimetic tradition. (...) But his vastly elaborate scenography suggests that he pushed the mimetic position to an extreme.

Eisenstein’s theory is ‘expressionist’ in that it regards narration as the process of making manifest some essential emotional quality of the story.

Very soon, expressivity became the basis of the concept of the ‘attraction,’ that common denominator of theater which galvanizes the audience’s perception. The attraction is a unit of spectatorial impact, gauged by its ability to administer perception and emotional shocks. These attractions... formed an effective whole through ‘montage,’ the judicious assemblage of shocks that would lead the spectator to the proper ideological conclusion. (13)

Eisenstein has little to say about plot construction.

Editing, as the most palpable stage of montage construction, will often violate verisimilitude for the sake of impact. (14)

Eisenstein’s work, both early and late, presupposes overt narration — not the speaking voice of language or literature, but an invisible master of ceremonies who has staged this action, chosen these camera positions, and edited the images in just this way.

Eisenstein’s work, even in its late phase, does not constitute a theory of narration. Scrappy, ad hoc, and idiosyncratic, the ideas are geared toward his filmmaking practice. (15)

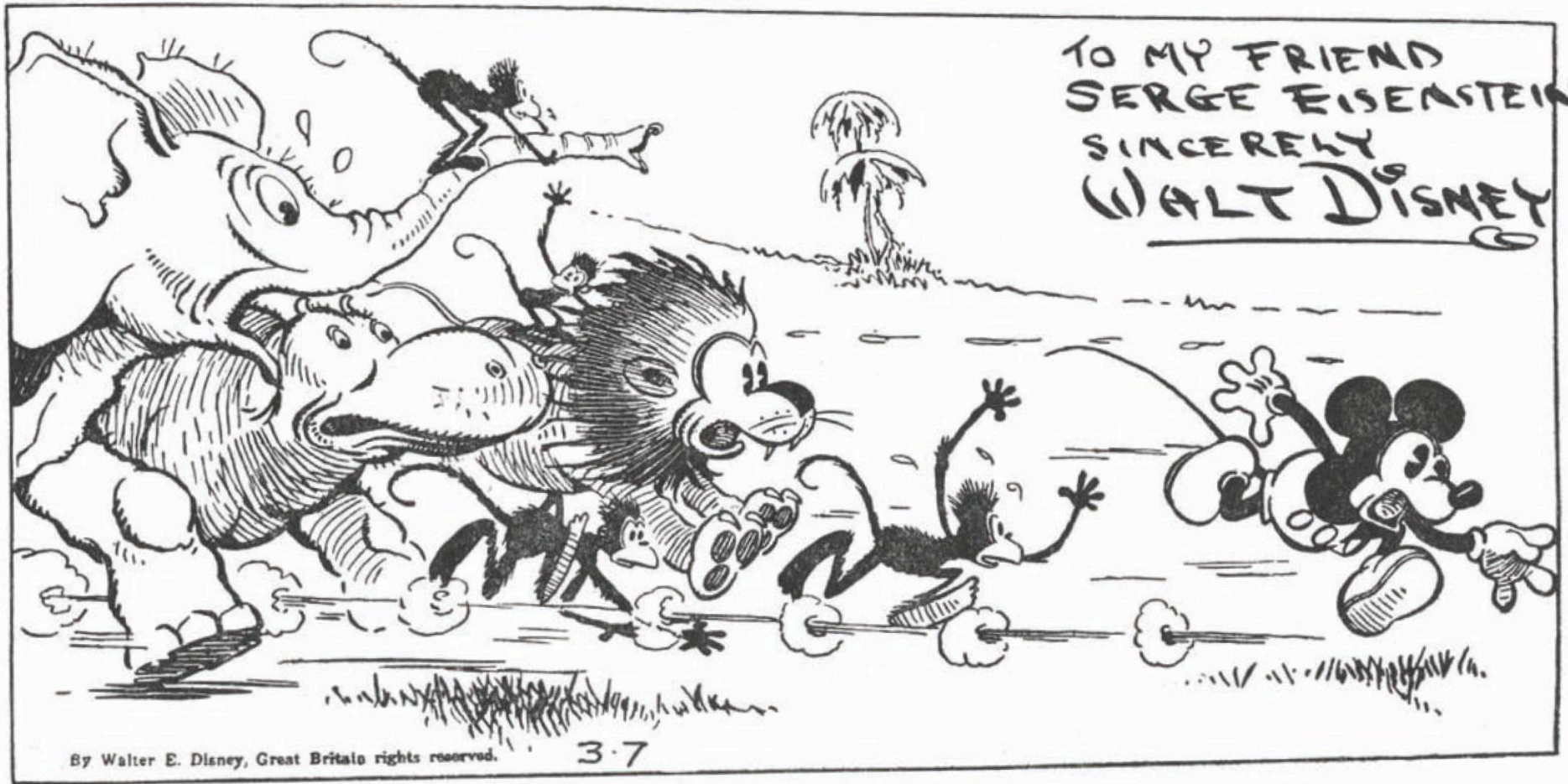
EISENSTEIN & DISNEY



Walt Disney and Sergei Eisenstein (1930)



Eisenstein at the Disney Studio. The inscription reads: "To my best friend in ussr [Pera Attasheva] together with my best friend in usa [signature], Hollywood, September 1930". (Eisenstein Cabinet)



TO MY FRIEND
SERGE EISENSTEIN
SINCERELY
WALT DISNEY

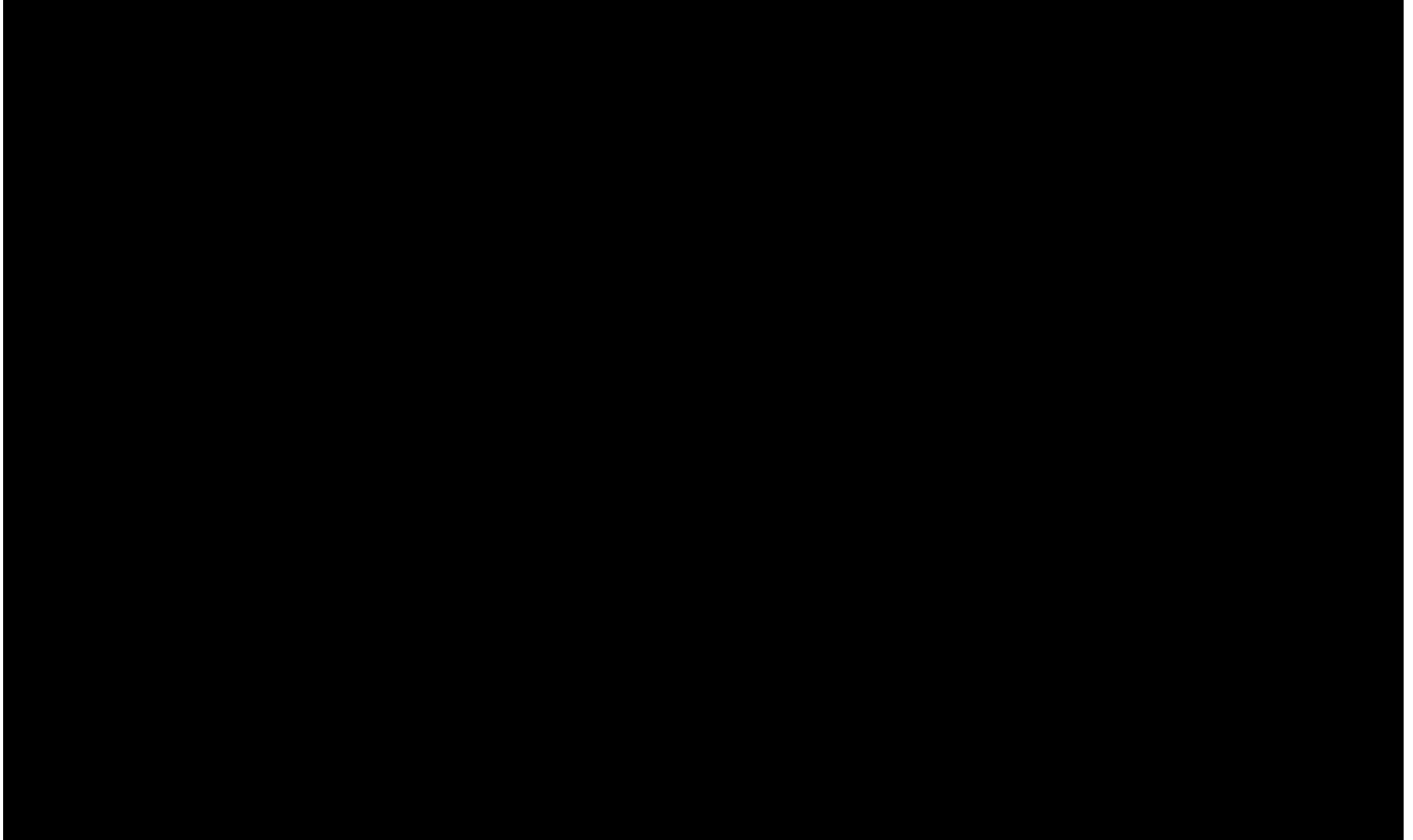
Eisenstein's passion for Disney cartoons follows from his interest in attractions.

In his notes on Disney written mostly between 1940 and 1941, for instance, he writes of his cartoons: "Ecstasy is a sensing and experiencing of the primal 'omnipotence'—the element of 'coming into being'—the 'plasmaticness' of existence from which *everything* can arise."

Although Eisenstein mentions *Snow White* and *Bambi*, he is clearly more interested in attractions and thus the animated shorts. He draws his examples primarily from two famous series of animated shorts from Disney Studios.

Silly Symphony was a series of 75 films, with fanciful events synchronized close with music, without (generally speaking) continuing characters, produced between 1929-1939. His prime examples are *Merbabies* (1938) and *The Moth and the Flame* (1938).

Mickey Mouse Sound Cartoons (produced between 1928-1953) was a series of 130 animated short films, with recurring characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald the Duck, Goofy the Dog. His prime examples are *Hawaiian Holiday* (1937) and *Lonesome Ghost* (1937).



The Moth and the Flame —*Silly Symphony* (1938; dir. Burt Gillet; Walt Disney Studios)

Eisenstein on Disney 1:

...Disney's works seem to me just such a droplet of delight, of momentary relief, a fleeting brush of lips in that hell of social burden, injustices and torments in which his American views are hopelessly trapped. (9)

Disney gives his viewer... oblivion, the very moment of utterly complete release from everything connected with suffering created by the societal conditions found in the social structure of the advanced capitalist state. (9)

In Disney's work they [animals] don't unmask or condemn anyone, and they don't preach a thing. (10)

It's not a heaping up of happy endings' — in contrast to the American 'big' screen. He does not call his viewers to battle evil, but at the same time he doesn't objectively serve this evil by cloaking himself with the hypocrite's 'I know not what I do.' (11)

Disney is simply 'beyond good and evil.' Even to a greater degree than Chaplin. (11)

Eisenstein on Disney 2:

To be in a country, in a social structure that is particularly merciless in the standardization and mechanization of its daily life—which is difficult to call a life—and then to behold such ‘omni-potentiality,’ i.e. the ability to become ‘whatever you want’ can’t but carry a measure of piercing attractiveness. This is very true of the USA. It also holds for 18th century Japan...

This lost mutability, fluidity, unexpectedness of form — this is the very thing that is brought to a viewer deprived of all this, brought as a ‘subtext,’ it would seem, by the strange features that are seeped into fairy tale, caricature, boneless circus performers, and it would seem, the unhinged flight of extremities in Disney’s drawings. (15)

Eisenstein on Disney 3:

...with the entire framework of his methods, themes and subjects, Disney is always giving us prescriptions for thinking folklorically, mythologically, pre-logically, however we want — but through all of it denying, shoving to the side, swatting off logistics, formal logic, the logical 'box.' (16)

And what can be more capable of expressing the dream of fluid diversity of forms than fire? (17)

...our initial thesis: the attraction of fire, due — more than anything else — to its limitless power to create plastic forms and appearances. (19)

...music is notable in that the images it creates flow without stopping — like flame itself, eternally changeable, like the play of its tongues, fluid and endlessly varied. (20)

Oppositions evoked in Eisenstein:

American society

American big screen

happy ending

ceaseless work

logistics

standardization

mechanization

metaphysical inertness

Disney

cartoons

beyond good and evil

respite

pre-logical, folkloric, mythological

fluid diversity of forms

plasmaticity

omnipotentiality

Interestingly enough, similar oppositions are evoked in Preston Sturges' 1941 film, *Sullivan's Travels*.

Dissatisfied with his success making shallow but popular comedies, a movie director (Sullivan) sets out on a journey to learn about the conditions of the poor and downtrodden to make a socially relevant movie. Near the end of the film, as he watches a Disney cartoon with a chain gang, he finally understands the value of comedy.

How do you think his experience of “collective laughter” jives with Eisenstein's discussion of the “release” offered by cartoons?



MOVIECLIPS.COM

Sullivan's Travels (1941; dir. Preston Sturges)

Oppositions evoked in Eisenstein:

American society

American big screen

happy ending

ceaseless work

logistics

standardization

mechanization

metaphysical inertness

[continuity editing]

[narrative unity and coherence]

[classical Hollywood form]

Disney

cartoons

beyond good and evil

respite

pre-logical, folkloric, mythological

fluid diversity of forms

plasmaticity

omnipotentiality

[montage]

[attraction]

[cinema of ideas]

HISTORY OF CEL ANIMATION

Ironically, however, at the very time when Eisenstein was writing in praise of the 'animated attraction,' the film industry was pushing cartoons toward narrative cinema.

We have seen that, by the 1930s, the "integral coherent system" of "classical cinema" was well established and was actively incorporating new technologies of sound and then of color. At the same time, another kind of moving image entertainment enjoyed an explosion of popularity: cel animation.

From the mid-1910s, animation had regularly appeared among the attractions shown before the main feature film (or between feature films), attractions such as newsreels, actualities, educational and promotional shorts, and public service films.

By the 1930s, technologies of sound, color, and 'motion capture' (rotoscoping) had begun to be used more effectively together, which made animation into a new kind of spectacle, resulting in an explosion of cartoon forms.

By 1937, cartoons had reached new heights of attraction with "3D" stereoscopic backgrounds, with incredibly fluid movement synchronized to jazz and classical tunes, and with brilliant color.

But 1937 also marked a turning point. Disney Studios had already embarked on large-scale “assembly-line” production, building to the release of its first feature-length cartoon, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. These developments pushed the cartoon into the framework associated with classical cinema or classical film form. With the birth of “classical animated film” in the late 1930s, the cartoon found itself stretched between the cinema of attractions and narrative cinema.

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 1: One layer

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 2: Two layers

1914

John Randolph Bray founds the first animation studio for producing series, Bray Studios. Earl Hurd is credited with the developing the processes for using celluloid sheets to produce cel animation.

"By placing the heads
one by one on Dud's
shoulders, he will
appear to be talking."

BRAY STUDIOS

How Animated Cartoons Are Made (1919; Wallace Carson, Bray Studios)

After all the necessary
drawings are made---

BRAY STUDIOS

How Animated Cartoons Are Made (1919; Wallace Carson, Bray Studios)

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 2: Two layers

1917

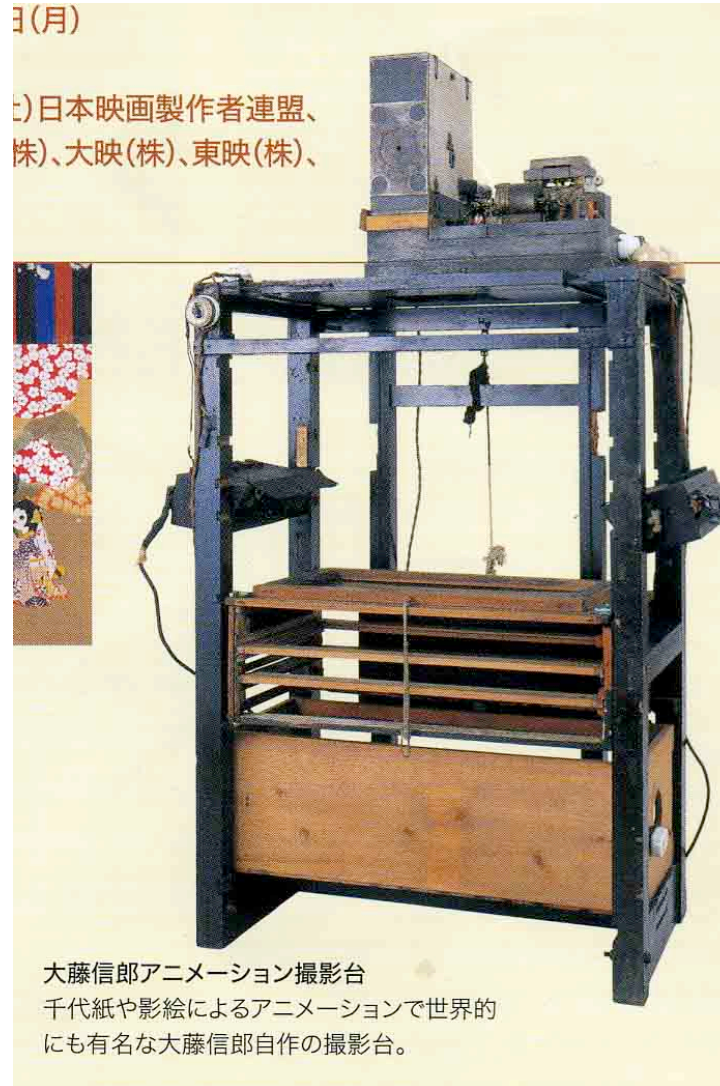
Max Fleischer patents the rotoscope method, used extensively in the Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series and later *Betty Boop* cartoons.



Fleischer Studios' *Koko's Earth Control* (1927); Leonard Maltin, *Cartoon Madness* (1992).

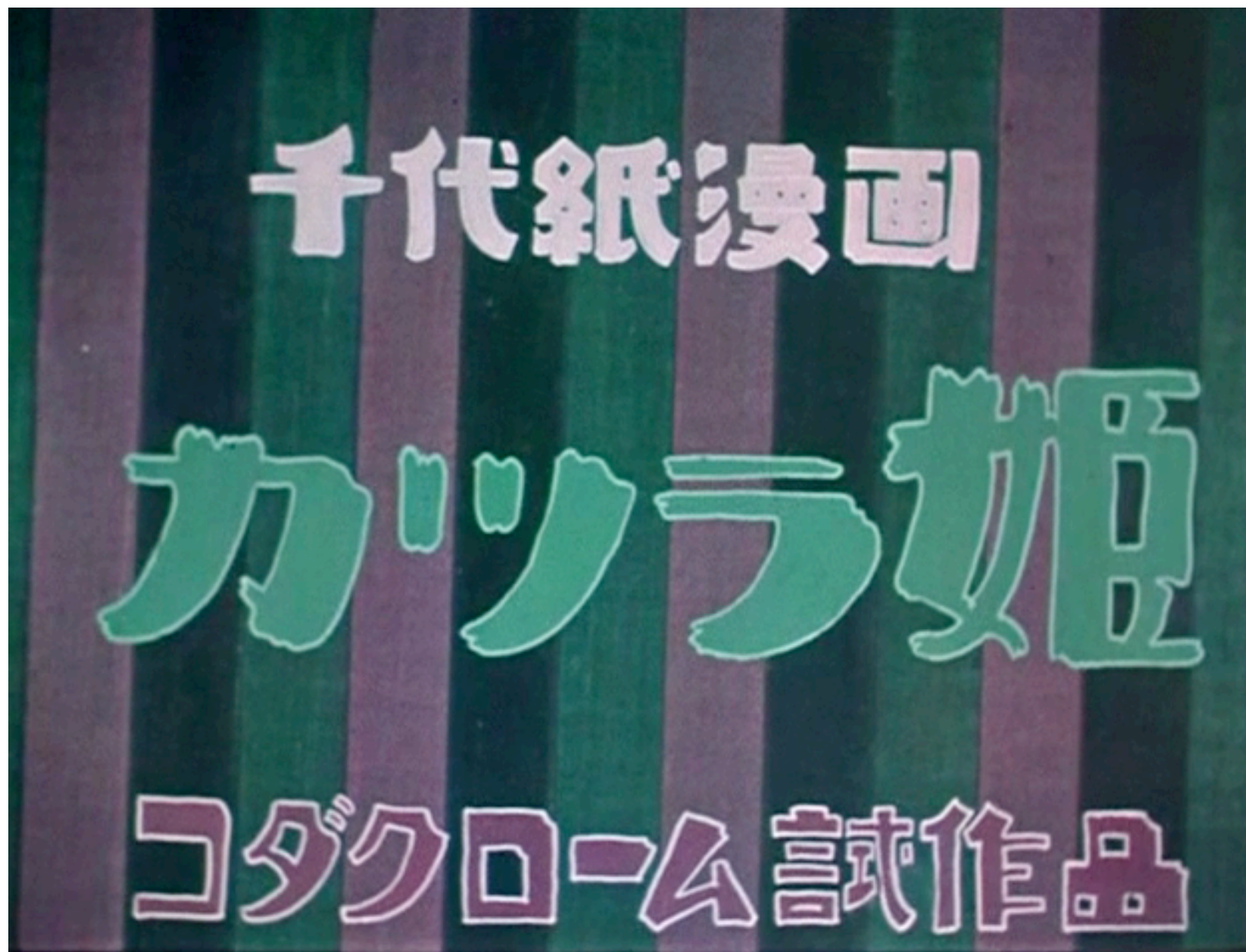
Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed (The Adventures of Prince Achmed, 1926; dir. Lotte Reininger)

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 3A: 2+ Layers (The Animation Stand)



Ōfuji Noburō
Mid-1930s

This sort of 'animation stand' becomes the basic apparatus for cut-paper and cel animation.



Katsura-hime (Princess Katsura, 1937; dir. Ōfuji Noburō)

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 3B: Multiplane Camera

1933

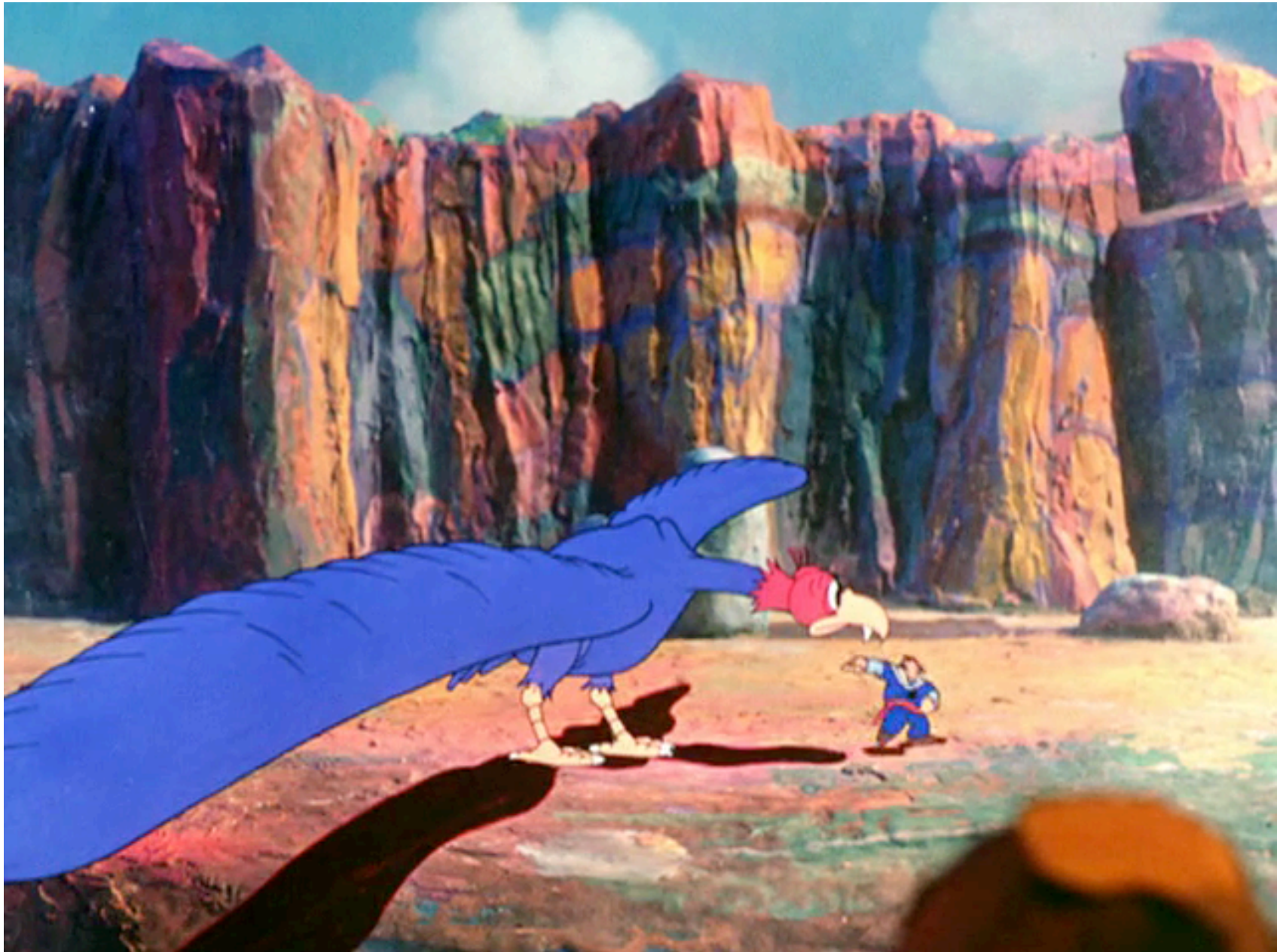
Ub Iwerks (Disney Studios) is credited with the first multiplane camera with four layers of flat artwork before a horizontal camera.

1934

Fleischer Studios created an analogous device, the stereoptical camera or setback. Cels were placed within miniature three-dimensional sets, with objects passing in front of and behind them, with a horizontal camera.



Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor (1934; dir. Max Fleischer)



Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor (1934; dir. Max Fleischer)

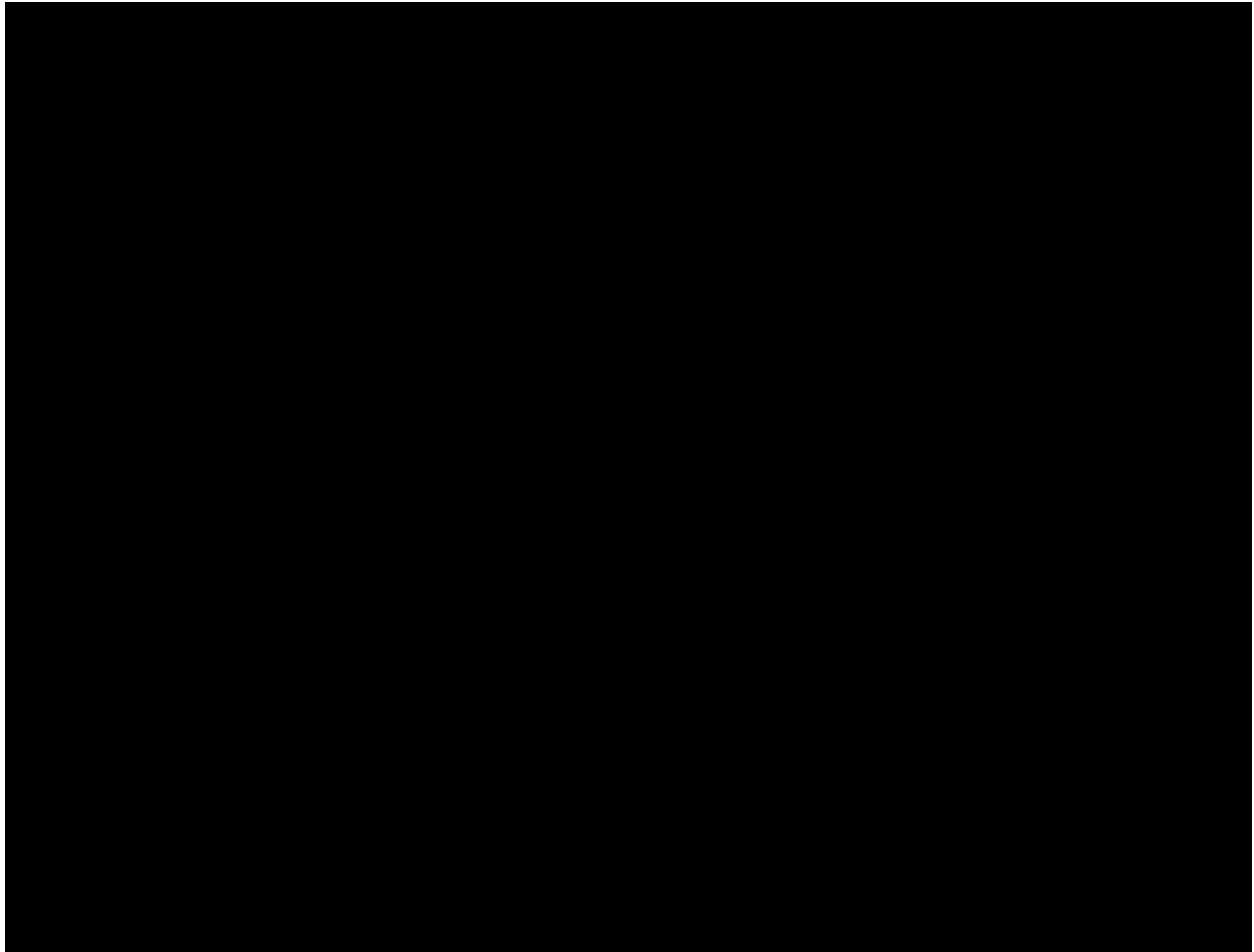


Kumo to Churippu (The spider and the tulip, 1943; dir. Masaoka Kenzō)

CEL ANIMATION PHASE 4 (or 3C?): Multiplane Camera System

1937

William Garrity (Disney) perfects the Disney multiplane camera system. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (dir. David Hand) is the first feature length cel animation to use multiplanar camera system.



“Walt Disney’s Multiplane Camera,” 1957.



“Making of *Snow White*” (1938)

As the animated attraction is pushed toward narrative cinema and classical film form, the oppositions or contradictions indicated by Eisenstein are no longer oppositions between two kinds of cinema.

They transform into tensions within the animated film.

This is precisely what Weihong Bao demonstrates in her reading of the first Chinese and “Asian” feature-length animated film, *Princess Iron Fan*, made by China’s animation pioneers, the Wan Brothers in 1941.

But first we need to introduce a couple other sources of tension, related to the reception of American cartoons in Shanghai.

Dushi fengguang (Scenes of City Life, 1935; Shanghai)

In this scene, two young men, who are in love with the same woman, sit on either side of her watching a cartoon in a movie theater in Shanghai. The one man (on the left side of her on the screen) is a poor artist, and other a wealthy heir. The cartoon shows the plight of the poor artist, who assumes a form rather like Mickey Mouse, visiting a girl who looks like Betty Boop with cat ears.

The cartoon was made by the Wan Brothers.



Dushi fengguang (Scenes of City Life, 1935; dir. Yuan Muzhi)

Imamura Taihei, in “Japanese Cartoon Films” (1938) introduces tensions that are also relevant in the context of *Princess Iron Fan*.

Imamura sings the praises of Disney cartoons. He finds the movements of Disney characters intoxicating, noting how the movements of Mickey, Donald, and Goofy appear to come from within them, like an “inner purpose.”

He admires the three-dimensional effects due to Fleischers’ stereoptical process. He also admires Disney’s large-scale production, for the social and collective energies it generates. But he warns that the fundamental problem is aesthetics, and Japanese cartoonists should not simply copy Disney.

Above all, he develops an opposition between

America	Japan
modern image technologies	traditional arts
energetic	contemplative

But he also sees a way to overcome this opposition, by turning to some of the weirder and often neglected features of traditional arts such as illustrated handscrolls, Nō drama, and maps. He proposes a sort of synthesis of that works effectively with both kinds of ‘moving image.’

PRINCESS IRON FAN

Princess Iron Fan was the first feature-length animation produced in China and achieved tremendous popularity in Shanghai and beyond. Inspired by the success of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and created by China's animation pioneers the Wan Brothers [Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, Wan Dihuan], the film took a year and a half to finish and involved more than two hundred animators and staff. (Bao, 359)

The film is based on an episode from the famous traditional vernacular novel *Journey to the West*, about Sun Wukong, the Monkey King who escorts his master, Tripitaka Tang, and two other disciples on a pilgrimage to India, facing repeated traps by demons and spirits. In the episode the film reproduces, inclusive of chapters 59 to 61 from the novel, the Monkey King and his master are blocked by the Mountain of Flames, and Sun Wukong tries three times to borrow the magical palm-leaf fan from Princess Iron Fan so as to quench the fire. (Bao, 361)

PRINCESS IRON FAN

This opening statement curiously reinterprets the novel as a fairy tale (tonghua 童话) instead of its usual association as a god-spirit novel (shenguai xiaoshuō 神怪小说). This conspicuous distancing from the god-spirit genre dissociates the film from a suspicious sibling: the martial arts god-spirit films. (Bao, 361-362)

The Wan Brothers' realignment of *Journey to the West* from god-spirit novel to fairy tale was, therefore, a continuous gesture of 'modernizing' a suspicious tradition. (Bao, 363)

In practice, however, *Princess Iron Fan* shows much affinity with the martial arts god-spirit films. Magic, violence, and risqué scenes all appear in the film's 'fairy-tale' interpretation of the novel. (Bao, 363)

Tie shan gong zhu (Princess Iron Fan, 1941; dir. Wan Brothers)

PRINCESS IRON FAN (BAO)

FAIRY TALE

[Disney's Snow White]
pedagogical and moral
fable
socializing children

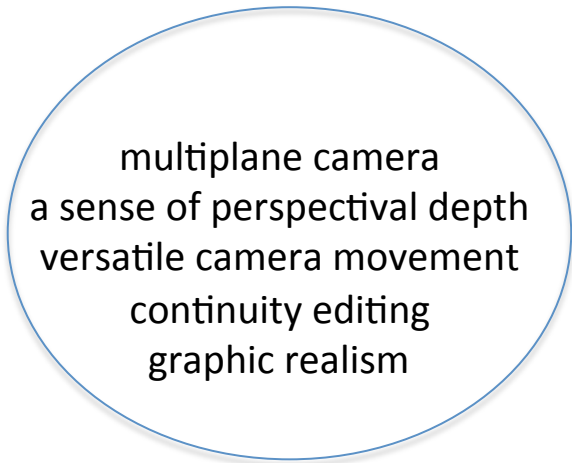
science & technology
sound and 3D techniques

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

TYRUS (GEN YEOH) WONG

In sum, with the emergence of feature-length animated film, the tension between narrative cinema and attractions is renewed and even intensified. The global circulation and reception of cinema also contributes to this intensification, making what appear to be merely technological problems into profoundly social and historical problems.

Lest we think that this problematic is limited the movement of the American 'classical animation form' to other parts of the world, I would like to end with the work of Tyrus Wong, a Chinese-American artist whose artistic vision played an integral role in Disney Studios' *Bambi* (1942).

Pamela Tom, dir. *Tyrus* (2015)

APPENDICE: IMAGES CITED IN IMAMURA



From *Kibi no Otodo nittō emaki* (吉備大臣絵巻). Late 12th or early 13th century

Imamura also evokes the maps of the Edo period, akin to this one of Nara from 1864.

