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ANIMATING SPACE: TOWARD A POETICS OF CHINESE ANIMATION

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BY
PANPAN YANG

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses the notion of intermediality as a lens through which to re-envision the history of Chinese animation from the 1920s to the present, investigating how animation reanimates a set of critical issues in film and media theories, especially as regards the relations of space and time. I argue that animation *thinks*—not “thinks about” or “thinks through”—time and space to a degree unimaginable in live-action cinema. What emerges in my investigation is a distinct understanding of space that is neither completely geographical nor entirely graphic, and of time as heterogeneous, disruptive, and surprising. While attending to Chinese animated film’s visual, material, and technological aspects, this dissertation also serves as a reminder of the need for a model of formal description of animation, one that borrows vocabulary from both cinema studies and art history.

Each of the four chapters is organized according to Chinese animation’s encounters with other art forms, including photography, painting, and calligraphy. Using untapped archival materials, the first chapter, “Enchanted Space,” explores the use of stop-motion tricks in 1920s Chinese silent films, demonstrating that in the Chinese historical context, stop-motion animation was understood as part and parcel of trick photography. The second chapter, “Contact Zone,” continues the discussion of the affinities between animation and photography in the context of the Chinese reception of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), especially how it made possible the production *Princess Iron Fan* (*Tieshan gongzhu*, dir. Wan Brothers, 1941), the first feature-length cel animation in Asia. The third chapter, “Animated Landscape,” discusses Chinese ink animation (*shuimo donghua*) as a remediation of ink painting, a cultural heritage reinvented, and a restless genre that constantly moves in and out of the sphere of contemporary Chinese art. The last chapter, “Spatial Montage,” offers a fresh look at the relations between

calligraphy and animation through a close analysis of contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing's 2012 animation video, *The Character of Characters* (*Hanzi de xing'ge*).

Through these case studies, this dissertation not only presents Chinese animation as a missing part of Chinese film history and a missing part of global animation history but also points to a rethinking of animation through theories and a rethinking of theories through animation. Experimenting with a method of animation analysis built at the intersection of the axes and fusion of space and time, materiality and imagination, I active a movement from Chinese animation as products to the production of Chinese animation then to the production of space in Chinese animation. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to develop a paradigm with which to make sense of the interactions of animation and space, where animation is understood as a form of material imagination and where space is understood as an image of time.

To restless souls,
this world and the other world
who return to me,
through animation.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has two main goals. The first is to reanimate the largely marginalized, if not completely overlooked, history of Chinese animation from the 1920s to the present. Instead of following a strict chronology in writing this history, I present a set of case studies, some of which could be grouped and viewed as companions, followers, or, for my purposes, interlocutors when animation encounters other art forms (photography, Chinese painting, and Chinese calligraphy). Such encounters punctuate the history of Chinese animation from the 1920s to the present, marking poetic moments when the duality of so-called old and new media is, to borrow Bachelard's words from a different context, "iridescent, shimmering, and increasingly active in its inversions."¹ I see this history as a layered one, an animation stand of time and materiality, wherein the unlikely connections between different media might be discovered anew, and the spatial unfolding of historical dynamics constantly surprises us.² Putting parts of the history of Chinese animation in *space*, as if they were movable, translucent celluloid sheets or layers stacked together, allows me to see them in their wholeness, to analyze their inter-connections, to read one layer through another, and to unveil history's continuity and discontinuity, patterns and disruptions that are often less evident when compiling chronicles. In this way, the animation stand—an object in my study—lends itself to my historiography.

A second and interrelated goal of this study is to experiment with a mode of animation analysis built at the intersection of the axes and fusion of space and time, materiality and

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), 4.

² To some extent, my vision of the history as layered is informed by the theories and methods of media archaeology. Most pertinent are Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012) and Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

imagination. I call it *temporal-spatial analysis*. My central question is how animation *thinks*—not “thinks about” or “thinks through”—time and space to a degree unimaginable in live-action cinema. To put this differently, I am concerned with epiphanies that only animation could lend to us, epiphanies that lead to an understanding of space that is neither completely geographical nor entirely graphic, and an understanding of time as nonlinear, convoluted, disruptive, and surprising. Space, if it ought not to be considered an empty abstraction in isolation, equally entails a discussion of time. In fact, throughout this dissertation, time thickens, takes on flesh, and gets as much attention as space. I would, however, privilege space as the master term (as the title of my dissertation makes clear: “Animating Space” rather than “Animating Time”) for two primary reasons. First, compared with time, which “possesses no sensory medium of its own” and has to “anchor itself to any suitable perceptual embodiment,” space is more directly embodied and grounded in the visual world: even in the time-dominant film sequence called the last-minute rescue, audiences see the character straining toward his or her goal spatially, not temporally.³ The mode of temporal-spatial analysis that I advocate in this project therefore starts with iconology rather than with ontology, striving to make the mysteriousness of time and space accessible, legible, and at times visible. Second, “animating space” is not just creating movement across space with animation techniques but also temporalizing space; “animating time” is therefore redundant. In the project, I activate a movement from Chinese animation as *products* to the *production* of Chinese animation then to *the production of space in Chinese animation*. The production or construction of space in animation is *both* material and imaginative. I consider, on the one hand, intrinsic space in animation, including enchanted space, feminine space, empty

³ Rudolf Arnheim, “A Stricture on Space and Time.,” *Critical Inquiry*, 4, no. 4 (1978): 653. I have modified the example here. Arnheim’s claim might meet its counterargument that a clock is perhaps a sensory medium of time. However, I am inclined to say that what a clock signals is a representation of time, but not time *per se*.

space, and pre-diegetic space and, on the other, extrinsic space in relation to animation, such as contact space and exhibition space. Ultimately, my dissertation seeks to develop a paradigm with which to make sense of the interactions of animation and space, where animation is understood as a form of material imagination and where space is understood as an image of time.⁴

WHAT IS ANIMATION?

To begin, a definition. What is animation?

In my usage, the concept of animation produces at least a double take: as the production of motion, be it mechanical or not, and as the bringing of the inanimate to life.⁵ Situated in the history of Chinese art, I am interested in art works coming to life, which I am inclined to call animation before animation (so as not to confuse them with cinematic animation). Among Chinese tales of this type, none is more lovely than this:

A young man saw a beautiful picture of lovely maidens disporting themselves in a meadow full of flowers. One of the maidens caught his eye and he fell in love with her. He entered the picture and took the maiden for his wife. A year later a little child appeared in the picture.⁶

⁴ A curious reader might ask me why I use the word “image” here. In particular, I want to convey our experience of time as both there and not there. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes, “We experience the image as a double moment of appearing and recognition, the simultaneous noticing of a material object and an apparition, a form or a deformation. An image is always both there and not there, appearing *in* or *on* or *as* a material object yet also ghostly, spectral, and evanescent.” See W. J. T. Mitchell, “Image,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 39.

⁵ My formulation of the two meanings of animation is indebted to Tom Gunning, “Animation and Alienation: Bergson’s Critique of the Cinématographe and the Paradox of Mechanical Motion,” *The Moving Image* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 1–9.

⁶ Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd, 2012), 50.

It is, however, not my purpose to mystify the Chinese attitude towards art works. Rather, in this account, I use the Chinese tale as an entry point to take up a set of questions that have so far remained tangential to the study of Chinese animation or the study of traditional Chinese art: What is the relation between art, animation, and life? If our mediating experience of a Chinese landscape painting or a work of calligraphy inevitably involves the production of motion and carries a temporal awareness, could we describe the experience as a form of animation? What does it mean to study proto-animation in the Chinese context? Can animation avail itself as a way of seeing?

Most often, this dissertation uses the word “animation” to refer to cinematic animation; animation on TV, the Internet, social media, and elsewhere is mentioned only occasionally. Here, I deliberately avoid the term “animated film” because, as Thompson reminds us, in the first decade of film history, “animated film” was frequently used to mean any motion picture film; yet, roughly between 1912 and 1920, animation came to be recognized as a distinct mode of filmmaking.⁷ It is precisely because animation is a historical concept that any definition of it soon meets challenges from new technologies and becomes partial or incomplete. As Suzanne Buchan puts it, “animation is an imprecise, fuzzy catchall that heaps an enormous and historically far-reaching, artistically diverse body of work into one pot.”⁸ Among the myriad and inconsistent voices contesting the definition of animation, however, one thing is clear: animation is better defined by its *making process* than by its look. Edward Small and Eugene Levinson’s thought experiment is illuminating in this regard:

⁷ Kristin Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 106–20.

⁸ Suzanne Buchan, “Animation, in Theory,” in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Redrobe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 113.

Imagine that we construct a small clay model of a cat. We place the model before a stationary motion-picture camera equipped with an animation motor. We photograph the cat-model one frame at a time; before each exposure we modify the model, working the clay so that it less and less resembles a cat, but rather approaches an amorphous lump (such as might result if we were to melt the model). The melting cat is a crude metamorphosis; the procedure we have just described is a conventional mode of animation, and the finished film created this way will, upon projection at twenty-four frames per second, show the image of a melting clay cat. Now let's repeat the production, beginning with a new version of our original clay cat, but this time running the camera continuously, at twenty-four frames per second. We also direct a powerful flow of heat toward our cat-model, so that it actually does melt. Our processed film will in this instance record the actual melting of the clay cat; if we have accurately adjusted the rate of melting, this second strip of film should be virtually identical to the animated strip and the projected images should look almost alike. In short, we will have created identical films, each showing a cartoonlike clay model undergoing metamorphosis; one film will have been generated during a continuous run of the camera, the other by single-frame cinematography.⁹

For Small and Levinson, it is the making process that makes animation distinct from live-action production. The emphasis on the creating process of animation also explains why I use the word “poetics” in the title of the dissertation: the word comes from the Greek “ποιεῖν (poiein),” which means “to make.”¹⁰ In this spirit, Norman McLaren offers probably the best-known definition of animation: “animation is the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames.”¹¹ Ralph Stephenson, for another, says that “the following is a definition

⁹ Edward Small and Eugene Levinson, “Toward a Theory of Animation,” *A Critical Journal of Film and Television* (Fall 1989): 69.

¹⁰ The poetics (of animation) that I am setting out is a relatively narrowly defined concept. It is different from David Bordwell’s influential description of poetics (of cinema). For Bordwell, “poetics is characterized by the phenomena it studies (film’s constructional principles and effects) and the questions it asks about those phenomena—their constitution, functions, purposes, and historical manifestations.” The question of the narrative is an important part of Bordwell’s program of poetics. See David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 23.

¹¹ Georges Sifianos, “The Definition of Animation: A Letter from Norman McLaren,” *Animation Journal* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 62–66. It should be pointed out that Georges Sifianos is satisfied with defining animation through production technique; for him, “the *quality* of animation is not inherent in an object but rather attributed to it.” It

which has been accepted by animators themselves: *an animated film is one that is created frame-by-frame.*” (emphasis original)¹² But again, we have to pause. Flash vector animation, for instance, involves the building of key frames, yet without frame-by-frame manipulation. One relatively simple solution is to revamp the definition: an animated film is one that is created by frame-by-frame manipulation or by other techniques that do not directly employ a continuous run of the motion picture camera. Yet the revised definition that I am proposing here is tongue-twisting, and a definition through a negation is, after all, not truly satisfactory. Alternatively, this study experiments with the possibility of thinking—and potentially defining animation—in this way: cinematic animation is a mode of filmmaking in which a certain *space* is created first. In the so-called live-action film production, the moment the motion picture camera starts running, a temporal-spatial configuration is produced. This is, however, not the case in animation production. In stop-motion animation production, objects or puppets must be arranged in space, that is a set, before the continual running of a succession of frames in time; in cel animation production, celluloid sheets need to be prepared first; in Maya 3D animation, world-building is often the first step. In short, animation is a distinct mode of filmmaking where spatial construction is privileged.

HISTORIES, METHODS, INTERVENTIONS

should also be noted that Norman McLaren later revises his own definition to the following: “Animation is the art of manipulating the *differences* between successive frames, or the image on each frame.”

¹² Ralph Stephenson, *The Animated Film* (Swindon: WHSmith, 1973), 14–15.

While dealing with the history of Chinese animation, I also need to work with the general history of animation studies and the specific history of Chinese animation studies. At the intersection of the three histories lies my project.

Within the field of cinema and media studies, attitudes towards animation seem to wander between two extremes. On one side, animation was once thought to be unworthy of scholarly attention as it was considered to be a minor genre, a childish fantasy, or a bite-sized appetizer that preceded the feature film. On the other side, at least since Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (2002), attitudes toward animation have changed dramatically, seemingly turning it into a super genre. Posing the question "what is digital cinema?" Manovich makes a polemical claim: "digital cinema is a particular case of animation that uses live-action footage as one of its many elements."¹³ Provocative as it might be, Manovich's claim soon meets its counterargument, which states that, if animation can be defined as a series of frames in motion, so-called live-action cinema was always a sub-set of animation, even before the digital turn. As Tom Gunning points out, "simply reversing the values and placing animation in a position of dominance over the photographic cinema can be as limiting as the previous prejudice."¹⁴ In this light, I present my study as a missing part of the history of global animation and as a missing part of the history of Chinese cinema. This study is not intended to forge a history of Chinese animation completely parallel to the history of Chinese photographic cinema but to show how the history of Chinese animation interacts with the convention of photographic cinema, providing a potent revisiting of Chinese film history. Furthermore, the second half of my

¹³ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 302.

¹⁴ Tom Gunning, "The Transforming Image: The Roots of Animation in Metamorphosis and Motion," in *Pervasive Animation*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (New York and London: Routledge, 2013): 54.

dissertation probes Chinese animation in the digital age without fully embracing Manovich's utopian claim. Instead, I conceive of the digital era as another playground in which the carefully formulated arguments from my early cinema chapters could be retested. In so doing, I hope to foreground the shifts and overlaps of research paradigms across historical periods.

The history of Chinese animation studies has also gone through a dramatic shift, at least from my perspective. In 2014, I published a literature review on the topic of Chinese animation studies up to that date.¹⁵ To put it simply, publications on Chinese animation before 2014 exist either as articles in a discrete fashion or as book-length collections of Chinese animated films and relevant materials. Informative as they might be, the majority of Chinese-language books on Chinese animation are intended to be exhaustive in scope, yet falling prey to a linear historical narrative and a preoccupation with the national style (*minzu fengge*).¹⁶ We are left with narratives that tend to center around the “pure” Chinese identity of Chinese animation, which is often imagined to be a result of Shanghai Animation Studio's use of “authentic” Chinese ink painting, papercutting, opera, and music. This project is intended as a corrective to such approaches, showing that to subsume Chinese animation's encounter with the highly heterogeneous elements of different art forms under the single headline of “*mingzu fengge*” is at best hyper-anachronistic and overly nationalistic. The question of remediation in the context of Chinese animation studies sometimes engages the question of the nation, but often does not. Unbinding Chinese animation

¹⁵ Yang Panpan, “Zhongsheng xuanhua yu jiannan qibu: Zhongguo donghua yanjiu de xianzhuang yu zhanwang” (眾聲喧嘩與艱難起步：中國動畫研究的現狀與展望 Existing Scholarship and Prospects of Chinese Animation Studies), *Dianying yishu* (電影藝術 *Film Art*), 359, no. 6 (2014): 39–42. I will not provide detailed literature review in this introduction again.

¹⁶ One exception is Cao Di 曹迪, *Miaoshou ou de: Zhongguo dingge donghua* (妙手“偶”得：中國定格動畫 *Stop-Motion Animation in China*) (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2013). Cao analyzes the technological and material aspects of Chinese stop-motion animated films in admirable detail.

from the “national style” scaffolding, I foreground the notion of intermediality as another virtual thread that knits together many parts of the dissertation. Intermediality is not just a question of how an existing medium finds its second life in the seemingly newer medium called animation but also one of how animation infuses the exciting transformative power into an existing one. They invigorate, rework, and re-mediate each other. For my purpose, Chinese animation is seen as a bridge, a fruitful site of overlap, or even a collision of different media.

The very recent surge of scholarship on Chinese animation in Anglophone academia has compelled me to rethink and reshape my dissertation project. In addition to Rolf Giesen’s *Chinese Animation: A History and Filmography, 1922–2012* (2015),¹⁷ a list and introduction of key Chinese animated films largely intended for non-scholarly readers, three academic monographs on this topic were published during my years working toward the completion of the dissertation: namely, Sean Macdonald’s *Animation in China* (2016); Wu Weihua’s *Chinese Animation, Creative Industries, and the Digital Culture* (2018); and, most recently, Daisy Yan Du’s *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s–1970s* (2019).¹⁸ My initial aspiration of fulfilling a huge gap in Anglophone scholarship by producing a work on Chinese animation was transformed into a question that I ask myself again and again: why write another work on Chinese animation?

Wu Weihua’s work offers a timely survey of the broadly defined creative industry in post-socialist China (and as such forms a background to my own work which does not deal much

¹⁷ Rolf Giesen, *Chinese Animation: A History and Filmography, 1922-2012* (McFarland: McFarland Press, 2015).

¹⁸ Sean Macdonald, *Animation in China: History, Aesthetics, Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Wu Weihua, *Chinese Animation, Creative Industries, and Digital Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); Daisy Yan Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s–1970s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019). In addition to these monographs, an ethnographic study of animation in contemporary Taiwan is recently published. See Teri Silvio, *Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019).

with economic factors). But I am more interested in animation practices that are not strictly part of the mainstream industry, yet constitute a vista that is neither completely within nor entirely outside contemporary Chinese art. Part of the aim of my dissertation, therefore, is to advocate a form of *trans-spatial* thinking of Chinese animation: to trace, document, and explain how the meaning of a work of animation changes subtly when it moves in and out of the sphere of contemporary art, the world of the film industry, and spaces of other kinds.

Sean Macdonald's book was based on a course of the same title that he offered three times at the University of Florida. This (text)book introduces four celebrated animated features in the history of Chinese animation, including, perhaps most importantly, the two-part *Uproar in Heaven* (*Danao tiangong*, dir. Wan Laiming and Tang Cheng, 1961; 1964). Macdonald's analysis primarily focuses on narratives of the animated features, at times reading them as political allegories. In addition, the second chapter of his book singles out a discussion of Chinese animation within the field of Chinese studies. If Macdonald's history of Chinese animation has been written under the hegemony of the narrative features, my project primarily deals with short animated films in the Chinese context, with the feature-length *Princess Iron Fan* (*Tieshan gongzhu*, dir. Wan Brothers, 1941) as the only exception.

Most pertinent to my research is Daisy Yan Du's *Animated Encounters*. With diligently conducted archival research, Du traces the journey of *Princess Iron Fan* from Shanghai to Tokyo. Based on reviews and advertisements collected in Japanese magazines, Du argues that, when *Princess Iron Fan* was released in Japan on September 10, 1942, mainstream Japanese film magazines deliberately watered down the film's Chinese identity. The Japanese premiere of *Princess Iron Fan*, however, had a great impact on Tezuka Osamu, the so-called godfather of manga. The story of when and how Disney's 1937 *Snow White* came to China—the subject of

the second chapter of my dissertation—and Du’s account of when and how *Princess Iron Fan* travelled to Japan can thus be read as two halves of a tale. Another example of transnational encounters in Du’s monograph concerns Mochinaga Tadahito, a wartime Japanese animator who migrated to Manchuria in 1945 and became one of the leaders of the Chinese socialist animation industry in the early 1950s. According to Du, cross-cultural exchanges often trigger the “animation” of cultures on both sides of the border. Perhaps a supplemental side project, Du’s article, “Suspended Animation,” which was published in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*’ special double issue on Chinese animation, continues the Wan Brothers’ story in 1950s Hong Kong. Du shows that, when the Wan Brothers were not given opportunities to work on feature animation projects, they turned to set design, comics, and commercial graphic arts.¹⁹ My project is aligned with Du’s in employing a transnational framework, yet presenting points of international connections that have so far remained unaddressed: Africa, Canada, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. It is important to note that the three monographs mentioned above all regard the 1941 animated feature, *Princess Iron Fan*, as a starting point in writing the history of Chinese animation, leaving earlier years out of focus. Macdonald’s chapter title, “It All Started with a Monkey,” a play on Walt Disney’s famous statement, “It all started with a mouse,” best exemplifies this. My study thus employs a different temporal frame by asking what happened “before Monkey (King),” a play on Donald Crafton’s book title “Before Mickey.”²⁰ I answer this question by bringing into view the ways in which animation intertwines with what we now call special effects in 1920s Chinese silent cinema—a story that remains untold.

¹⁹ Daisy Yan Du, “Suspended Animation: The Wan Brothers and the (In)Animated Mainland-Hong Kong Encounter, 1947–1956,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 11, no. 2 (2017): 140–58.

²⁰ Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

So far, I hope I have clarified how my work differs from existing scholarship in terms of object of study, geographical contour, and temporal frame; more needs to be said about approaches. According to W. Eugene Kleinbauer, various approaches to the visual field can be said to fall under two rubrics: intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives.²¹ I find this classification, albeit somewhat arbitrary, especially helpful for further clarifying the approaches of this dissertation. When employing intrinsic perspectives, that is, describing and analyzing the inherent qualities of a work of animation, Macdonald and Du are primarily concerned with narratives, characters, and motifs, while I care more about the visual, technological, and material aspects of animated film. I thus offer myself a word of caution: do not work with the plot schema of an animated film without providing a careful look at the film itself. Indeed, this dissertation attends to the close analysis of film form, a seemingly easy task that is surprisingly missing from all the book-length studies on Chinese animation reviewed above. The close-up view also necessitates a reduction in the number of Chinese animated films treated in my project.

The formal analysis of animation includes the visuals, sound, and various forms of movement, requiring a vocabulary, if not necessarily a terminology, in its own right. Indeed, the dissertation's emphasis on formal analysis of animation is in part a response to my hunch that we have a much more ready vocabulary for describing live-action cinema than for describing animation. In film studies classrooms, *Film Art: An Introduction*²² continues to be used as the textbook to help students become familiar with the vocabulary of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound, sometimes in conjunction with Yale Film Analysis Website

²¹ W. Eugene Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 67–68.

²² David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2016).

2.0. But I often feel that the vocabulary we gain from these resources is not enough when it comes to animation. For instance, we will not be able to learn how to describe the ink strokes in *Feeling from Mountain and Water (Shan shui qing, Shanghai Animation Studio, 1988)* by consulting the abovementioned resources. Describing a work of animation as such may send us toward the art history classroom. One motive for writing this dissertation, then, is to explore, and hopefully model, a form of formal description of animation, one that borrows vocabulary from both cinema studies and art history.

My study waltzes between intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives. In extrinsic approaches, a work of animation is investigated in relation to a variety of conditions surrounding and influencing it. Artistic biography is certainly part of external data, and Macdonald, Du, and others have offered important biographical information about key directors in the history of Chinese animation. As I shift the focus of study from the narrative to the visual, the question of “who draws the pictures?” naturally comes to the fore. My project therefore takes into consideration designers, animators, and calligraphy artists who put their hands into animation production. The second chapter of the dissertation, in particular, zooms in on the anonymous inkers and painters working on the precision-driven assembly line for *Princess Iron Fan*, striving for a reading that links traces of their hands, the formal features of animated films, and what are largely if not purely social domains. In such a reading, intrinsic and extrinsic approaches are intertwined.

When approaching a work of Chinese animation from extrinsic perspectives, Macdonald and Du primarily engage it with political, social, and cultural determinants. It is not my intention to produce or reproduce that kind of scholarship completely immersed in area studies: treating Chinese animation as a viewfinder through which to take snapshots of China, especially at a time

of political and historical turbulence, and ending up studying Chinese animation less for what it tells us about animation than for what it tells us about China. But this does not mean that political, social, and cultural determinants are not important. What can Chinese animation offer animation studies? What can Chinese animation offer film and media theories today? In order to approach these questions, this study employs an alternative extrinsic approach: that is, it primarily engages Chinese animation with film and media theories and histories of film and media theories. Once again, I offer myself a word of caution: never start with theory, forcing it into a work of animation. Instead, I begin by examining a work of Chinese animation from intrinsic perspectives; in the process, the animated film performs the inquiry and throws questions to me. Only when some of these questions the animated film *expresses* cannot be solved using intrinsic approaches shall I resort to extrinsic ones, relating theories that might be helpful in delivering a potential answer. In this case, we begin to see the surprising productivity that occurs when a marginalized part of history enters theoretical discourses.

CHINESE ANIMATION, IN THEORY

At its most ambitious, this project seeks to rethink Chinese animation through theories and rethink theories through Chinese animation. Thinking of our “field” in spatial terms, Karen Redrobe vividly describes animation as “the land that film theory forgot, or rejected.”²³ If animation was film theory’s forgotten land (and we may say, Chinese animation *is* film theory’s forgotten land), this has something to do with the understanding of animation as drawing pictures and classical film theory’s preoccupation with the photographic. For some classical film

²³ Karen Redrobe, “Film Theory’s Animated Map,” *Framework* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 472.

theorists, in order to define “what is cinema?”, we need to first define “what is photography?”. Some of classical film theory’s key writings (André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, etc.), most of which derived the nature of cinema from the ontology of the photographic image, have cast animation as an almost isolated, seemingly irrelevant island. If, as Tom Gunning once described, the marginalization of animation was “one of the greatest scandals of film theory,”²⁴ my study of Chinese animation responds productively to this scandal from a transnational, transcultural, transmedial perspective.

To be more specific, my response goes down two seemingly contradictory paths. The first path is to refute the understanding that animation is merely drawing pictures. I ask: are there any types of animation that are apparently not drawing pictures? Under what historical circumstances and what cultural contexts was animation understood *as* photography? If it is the hand-drawn cartoons, the dominant form of animation, that have colonized our consciousness of animation as drawing pictures, can the animation stand, the rotoscope machine, and the multiplane camera tell us how much this form of animation production actually depends on photography? In short, a reconfigured understanding that animation, in its plural forms, is photographic helps claim a position for it in the landscape of film and media theories. The second path is to take seriously—indeed, make good use of—the understanding of animation as drawing pictures. If animation is drawing pictures, can theories of the visual arts be seen as candidates for theorizing animation, enriching the way we think about film and media theories and stretching the contours of the field? Put differently, how is the space of film and media

²⁴ Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,” *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 38.

theories transformed by one of its newer habitants, Chinese animation? I will discuss this later in the introduction.

Central to my theoretical inquiry, as I have indicated, is how animation *thinks* time and space. In the field of animation studies, Donald Crafton, Esther Leslie, Suzanne Buchan, J. P. Telotte, Aylish Wood, and others have opened up a new direction which I pursue in this study: there is something baffling about space in animation, which occasions a significant rethinking of cinematic space.²⁵ As for what is the something baffling, scholars seem to offer different answers: is it a resistance to gravity, an ostentatiously constructed artificiality, a conflicted attitude toward spatial representation, or a growing awareness of getting lost? This study builds on these insights developed largely, if not entirely, through studying American animation, yet digging into a different cultural context. If each culture has a unique spatial sensibility, which might be recognized or interpreted as the inner agenda of a culture,²⁶ can my study of space in Chinese animation bring about a less Americentric understanding of it? This approach opens up a broader question: if, in Chinese culture, space is never treated as a container of some sort but as a spatiotemporal process of becoming, can this study shed light on the interdependence of space and time as an incitement to new theories and discussions?

It should also be noted that it is not my purpose to propose a unitary, single theory of space and time. The multiplicity of animation forms and techniques, I believe, may actually

²⁵ See Donald Crafton, *Shadow of A Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (New York: Verso, 2004); Suzanne Buchan, “Experiencing Animation,” in *Watch Me Move: The Animation Show*, ed. Greg Hilty (London and New York: Merrell Publishers, 2013), 28–39; J. P. Telotte, *Animating Space: From Mickey to Wall-E* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Aylish Wood, “Reanimating Space,” in *The Animation Studies Reader*, eds. Nichola Dobson, Annabelle Honess Roe, Amy Ratelle, and Caroline Ruddell (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 27–46.

²⁶ For a discussion of different senses of space in different cultures, see Kern Stephen, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 138–40.

resist such a form of generalization or theorization. Instead, in this project, my theorization takes on, to borrow Noël Carroll's words, a "piecemeal" fashion:²⁷ breaking down, for instance, the concept of space into more manageable ones, including but not limited to enchanted space, feminine space, empty space, pre-diegetic space, contact space, and exhibition space. Each animated film specifies the givenness of space and time, comprising the very condition for our viewing, analyzing, and theorizing experience.²⁸ Each case is treated as a small-scale lab for thought experiments, wherein ideas from different cultures and different levels of abstraction coexist. The pas de deux of close film analysis and piecemeal theorizing is perhaps characteristic of my approach in this project.

The form of theorization is necessarily interdisciplinary as the field of animation studies is itself imbricated with many other fields. Specifically, and once again, I am talking about the potential of this project as a bridge between the studies of cinema and the studies of the visual arts, yet in a different, theoretical register. Of course, we all know that space and time are interrelated, but each discipline seems to have its own preference for discussing either space or time. In cinema studies, there is an apparent tendency to privilege the dimension of time, a prioritization that can not only be traced back to Plato who considered time as the habitation of the soul but also be understood as a response to how the discipline of cinema studies took shape in relation to photography.²⁹ There are self-conscious, methodology-oriented studies on cinematic time, of which Bliss Cua Lim's *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and*

²⁷ Noël Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory," in *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 357–400.

²⁸ I owe W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen a great debt for their illumination of media as configurations of space, time, and embodiment. See W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Time and Space," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 101–116.

²⁹ To some extent, the discipline of cinema studies also took shape in relation to literature.

Temporal Critique is an example.³⁰ In art history, by contrast, the concept of space is more frequently used. The recent decades, especially, have witnessed the dissemination of space and space-related concepts (like site and landscape) in art-historical descriptions and discussions of painting, photography, garden, and tomb. Wu Hung, in his recent book, *Space in Art History*, accentuates “a *space-centered* descriptive and interpretive framework” and shores it up with concrete case studies in Chinese art.³¹ This book gives me the courage to think more broadly, about a spatial framework not only as the conceptual stimulus for my analysis of Chinese animated films but also as a kind of “pollen” that is capable of cross-fertilizing a multiplicity of adjacent fields. Most methodically inspiring, nonetheless, is another article by Wu Hung, one that seems to have nothing to do with Chinese animation: studying East Asian tombs. In the article, Wu proposes and puts into practices a research framework composed of three aspects: spatiality, temporality, and materiality.³² Apart from exceptions as such, time, for most of the time, hides itself in traditional art history research. Throughout my study, animation, which is thought of as cinema and pictorial art at once, sustains dialogues and collisions between scholarship about time, largely produced by film and media scholars, and discussions of space, largely generated by art historians and theorists. The multiple identities of animation, indeed, resist any singular disciplinary gaze. In this process, my research paradigm is in itself transformed: it is no longer space and time, but space × time.

³⁰ To my mind, some of the finest book-length studies of cinematic time are Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), and D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³¹ Wu Hung, “*Kongjian*” *de meishushi* (“空間”的美術史 *Space in Art History*) (Shanghai: Shiji wenjing/Shanghai renming chubanshe, 2018), 232. The Chinese and English texts are published in the same volume.

³² Wu Hung, “Rethinking East Asian Tombs: A Methodological Proposal,” in *On Chinese Art: Cases and Concepts* (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2016), 24–67.

Last but not least, my borrowing of concepts and ideas from traditional Chinese art and aesthetics is tied to a possibility, one that we may call “Chinese film theory” (more radical thinkers might argue that the word “film” here should be dropped). In recent scholarship, non-Western film theories, as a neglected and contested territory of knowledge, have started to garner scholarly attention. Instead of arguing for an essential Chineseness, Victor Fan claims, “what we may call ‘Chinese film theory’ is in itself a comparative space, and we can only fully reappraise its position in the history of film theories by adjudicating on its connective points with its Euro-American counterparts.”³³ If such a space ever exists, I hope that not only meetings but also missed encounters between film theories from different national and cultural contexts will be addressed. Similar to Fan, yet avoiding using Euro-American theories as the unquestioned measure, Bao Weihong suggests, “Chinese film theory, in its strong version, does not exist unless we articulate it in recognition of and in relation to other film theories... the consciousness of alternative film theory can only be possible through strategies of selections, comparisons, and differentiations.”³⁴

This dissertation argues that, more than the question of what Chinese film theory is, the query as to where Chinese film theory may come from matters. A meditation on the poetics of Chinese animation, this study attempts to “discover” a certain aspect of Chinese film theories in conversation with so-called Chinese tradition aesthetics but also question what the epistemological pitfalls associated with this approach are. As I transplant concepts and ideas from Chinese painting and calligraphy into Chinese animation, and, eventually, into film and

³³ Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.

³⁴ Bao Weihong, “The Trouble with Theater: Cinema and the Geopolitics of Medium Specificity,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 364.

media theories, the following set of questions, weighted with risk, is inescapable: is what we call “tradition” something that existed in the past or just a later construction? Is the manifestation of Chinese traditional aesthetics in Chinese animation a natural cultural expression or a self-conscious filmmaking strategy? Is there a living tradition? How can I deal with the huge temporal gap when applying aesthetic concepts that might be thousands of years old to, say, contemporary Chinese animation? Must I trace the vicissitudes of one concept through the long history of Chinese aesthetics before transplanting it into the field of cinema studies? Does locating Chinese film theory merely mean historicizing it? By pursuing some of these questions—and, hopefully, raising others—this study, to use animation terms, squashes and stretches our thinking about the spatial locatedness of theories and theorization.

DISTRIBUTION OF CHAPTERS

This dissertation is structured in two parts, each of which includes two chapters.

This first chapter explores the early history of Chinese animation through an investigation of the use of stop-motion tricks in 1920s Chinese live-action films. I concentrate on the ways in which everyday objects—such as a pair of boots or a string of pearls—get animated on a photographic basis. In my endeavor, the ghost serves as a powerful metaphor for what we now call object animation, the subgenre of stop-motion animation that literally enlivens lifeless objects. Key exemplary films are *An Empty Dream* (*Qing xu meng*, dir. Ren Pengnian, 1922, nonextant), *The Pearl Necklace* (*Yichuang zhenzhu*, dir. Li Zeyuan, 1926, extant), and *The Knight* (*Daxia ganfengchi*, dir. Yang Xiaozhong, 1928, partially extant). While troubling the conventional historical narrative that treats *An Empty Dream*—adapted from the story entitled “The Taoist Priest of Laoshan” from Pu Songling’s (1640–1715) *Strange Tales from a Chinese*

Studio—as the first trick film in Chinese film history, I show that the notion of the trick becomes a site of encounter between the Chinese classical tale and the modern medium of film, as it takes shape in the confrontation between the world that Pu conjures up—one thick with ghosts, fox-spirits, and fairy maidens—and the ghosts in the machine. By examining an account of how to make stop-motion animation published in *Photography Pictorial* (*Sheying huabao*) in 1931, I demonstrate that in the Chinese historical context, this species of animation was indeed understood as part and parcel of trick photography, thus overturning the dominant attitude in classical film theories in the Western tradition that conceptualizes animation as something irrelevant to photography (hence irrelevant to photography-based theories of cinema). Paving the way for animation to enter the land of film and media theories, I coin the concept of “the enchanted space”—which denotes a dynamic spatial and perceptual network composed of objects, selected elements of the set, lighting, special effects, “impossible” motion, “derailed” time, and audiences—to further explore the moments in which the animated/photographic trick affects its audiences.

The second chapter continues the discussion of the affinities between animation and photography in the context of the Chinese reception of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Disney’s *Snow White* premiered in Shanghai in 1938, where it set a box office record. Using visual and textual evidence from the *Shenbao* newspaper and a variety of fan magazines, I show how *Snow White* was translated, reconfigured, and creatively appropriated in local and translocal reception contexts. Rather than imagining two cultures on both sides of a border and seeing the (trans)local reception as an experience of border-crossing, I propose a different way of understanding it: the border is always a contact zone (though perhaps very thin); it is a space as well. Translation and appropriation, as well as interdictions and bans, shape such

a zone. What emerges in the context of global reception, most notably, is the production of *Princess Iron Fan* (*Tieshan gongzhu*, dir. Wan Brothers, 1941), the first feature-length animated film in Asia. Working with a photograph, published in *Zhonghua* magazine in 1940, of a young woman carefully applying ink pigment exactly within the ink lines on a translucent celluloid sheet prepared for *Princess Iron Fan*, I bring into view the gendered labor that runs from the world we call reality into the cartoon universe, while modeling how a frame-by-frame viewing of a work of cel animation might enable us to decipher it layer by layer. The remainder of the chapter concerns how the use of multiplane camera and live-action reference footage—in both *Snow White* and *Princess Iron Fan*—further complicates the vexed relations between animation and photography. The multiplane camera—thought of as “new” media at that time—functioned as a key asset in establishing a more believable screen space in the two animated films yet required further complexity in the Chinese context. Tracing the pattern of “tracking shot + borrowed views (*jie jing*) + moving through an entrance” in *Princess Iron Fan*, I present the mobile space that the multiplane camera creates as a site of intersection of the depth cues of the visual arts and the depth cue of motion, traditional Chinese aesthetics with origins in garden art and travelling technologies that do not merely belong to the West. While Marge Belcher—the so-called secret dancer for *Snow White*—was asked not to talk about her role in the film’s production, *Snow White*’s publicity in 1930s and 1940s Chinese newspapers and magazines celebrated her and introduced the hidden technique to Chinese readers. In *Princess Iron Fan*’s semi-erotic dancing and singing sequence, live-action reference footage was used, with Bai Hong, a songstress in 1940s Shanghai, acting as the dancer and singing the song. Combining theoretical inquiry with social discourse, I detail how the animated body oscillates between the visible and the invisible, between the automatized and the plasmatic, while making itself

available for a highly paradoxical form of temporal analysis, one that points its spearhead toward the deception, contrivance, and tyranny of the homogeneous time of our modern society yet is ineluctably enmeshed in it.

The third chapter excavates methodological possibilities opened up by the concept of the animated landscape—understood as a kind of space encountered as “sight” and a dynamic medium—by tracing the history of ink animation (*shuimo donghua*) from the 1960s to the present. In its two golden eras, roughly 1954–1966 and 1976–1989, Shanghai Animation Studio produced a handful of stunningly exquisite, time-consuming, and labor-intensive ink animated films, including *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (*Xiaokedou zhao mama*, 1960), *The Herdboy and the Flute* (*Mu di*, 1963), *The Deer’s Bell* (*Lu ling*, 1982), and *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (*Shan shui qing*, 1988). As I show, for the staff at Shanghai Animation Studio, the tradition of ink painting was a cultural heritage that simultaneously inspired pride and imposed technical difficulties. While examining how animation remediates ink painting, I also attend to a variety of other media—seals, woodblock printing, and photography—which were also borrowed, involved, and transformed in the production of *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*. By analyzing how “empty space” (*liubai*) works in the swimming buffalo scene in *The Herdboy and the Flute*, I activate a move from understanding “empty space” as water toward understanding water as an image of coming into being, revealed in a process. Based on my observations of the emergence of autonomous landscape in ink animation, I pose a counter-historical question: has animation, as a way of seeing, always been with us, even before animation was invented? The rest of the chapter segues into the recent surge of experimental ink animation. I situate the still evolving trend, including two case studies—Qiu Anxiong’s three-part *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* (*Xin shanhaijing*, 2006, 2009, 2017) and Ruan

Yunting's *White Snake* (*Baishhe*, 2007)—within the historical lineage and broader spectrum of experimental ink (*shiyán shuimo*), addressing how animation, in all its mobility, moves in and out of the sphere of contemporary Chinese art.

The last chapter zooms in on the unexamined affinities between calligraphy and animation. Beginning with a single horizontal brushstroke, Xu Bing's 2012 animation video, *The Character of Characters* (*Hanzi de xingge*), mediates the history of Chinese calligraphy and its intimate relationships with nature and painting. To appreciate the work fully, I approach it by delineating a genealogy of words on screen. As the written characters in *The Character of Characters* are not minor roles but true protagonists, the video calls into question whether the deeply entrenched distinction between diegetic writing and nondiegetic writing is still helpful and pertinent. Pairing *The Character of Characters* with *36 Characters* (*Sanshiliu ge zi*, dir. A Da, 1984), an educational animated short out of Shanghai Animation Studio, I underscore how the transformative and performative qualities of archaic Chinese hieroglyphics come into play in the medium of animation, a process through which and because of which the pictograph myth is simultaneously mystified and demystified. Placing *The Character of Characters* in the context of Xu's oeuvre and writings, I show that a variety of artworks by Xu, albeit highly diverse in terms of medium, form, and style, are interconnected through the idea and practice of spatial montage, reactivating, triggering, and stimulating each other. The chapter ends with a close reading of one scene from *The Character of Characters*, in which trees and stones fly into a book—a calligraphic manual—and become the “heartfelt” Chinese characters so dependent on nature. I argue that to think about pictographic characters on the animated screen is to see the screen as a space crosshatched with multiple temporal rhythms, one in which the ancient story of “images-becoming-words” coexists with the present tendency of “words-becoming-images.”

The dissertation has a coda. In it, I examine a less-than-ten-minute-long demo of *The Wind* (*Zhui feng*), Taiwanese New Wave director Edward Yang's unfinished animation project. While bringing to the fore the productive possibilities that an unfinished film opens up for us, I discuss in detail how the fragment reads back yet pulls in new directions some of the key arguments of the dissertation as a whole: namely, the vexed notion of authorship in animation production, the potential of layer-by-layer analysis in the age of Photoshop, the staging of a singing picture, the remediation of a handscroll, the spatial and temporal construction of an animated long take, and, most and least surprisingly, animation's secret affinities with water. Water is not only a thematic strand that runs through almost all the film examples in this dissertation but also a metaphor for time, a space for materialist reverie, and a locus of theoretical stakes throughout the study. The motif of water thus brings us to a fitting and poetic endpoint for this dissertation.

(A note on transliteration: in this dissertation, I use the *pinyin* system of romanization for most Chinese words. For East Asian names, the original order is retained: surname is followed by given name. Exceptions have been made when a different preference or formatting requirement exists.)

PART I

ANIMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

CHAPTER ONE

ENCHANTED SPACE:

STOP-MOTION TRICKS IN CHINESE SILENT CINEMA

If any technical predecessor of animation need be identified, it would certainly be the stop-motion substitution technique.

—Donald Crafton¹

The dream of animation here is equally the terror caused by animation... for such movement would only cause the obliteration of the subject—the inhuman spectacle of a dream no longer in need of its dreamer.

—Susan Stewart²

When “animation” as a category in motion pictures did not yet exist, its technical predecessors largely coincided with a history of the supernatural in silent cinema, weaving in and out of it. In tracing the early days—if not the origin myth—of American animation, for instance, one cannot eschew *The Haunted Hotel* (dir. James Stuart Blackton, 1907), which was a huge success in the United States and Europe alike. In this 500-foot Vitagraph picture, a traveler spends a night at a mysterious inn. After being served food and drink, he looks at what is on the table, astonished. In the following close-up, presumably from his point of view, a bottle of wine moves by itself, as does a loaf of bread. A knife slices the bread. Tea pours itself out. Sugar tongs drop two lumps of sugar into the teacup. A spoon stirs the tea. In this sequence, all these inanimate objects move seemingly automatically, as if manipulated by an invisible ghost.

¹ Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 9.

² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 172.

For audiences that more or less know how this trick sequence is made, the ghost or spirit here is not the goblin hiding itself in the kettle (as the film later shows us), but the technique that we now call stop-motion animation: objects are physically moved or manipulated in very small increments between individually photographed frames so that they will appear to be moving on their own when the series of frames is played rapidly. If our understanding of a ghost can be “taken both literally and metaphorically as the animation of something dead and lifeless,”³ what, if not a ghost, can serve as a more powerful metaphor for object animation, the subgenre of stop-motion animation that literally enlivens inanimate objects? What if the ghost appears or reappears in a different cultural context? The aim of this chapter is to trace the “apparitions” of stop-motion tricks in so-called live-action Chinese films in the silent era, paying particular attention to the ways in which everyday objects are animated on a photographic basis.⁴ In doing so, my hope is not simply to offer an alternative route to understanding the early history of Chinese animation (which is not all about animated cartoons), but also to open up a space of a meditation on the intricate relations between animation and photography.

AN EMPTY DREAM

If there is a counterpoint to Blackton’s *The Haunted Hotel* in the history of Chinese cinema, it is probably *An Empty Dream* (*Qing xu meng*, 1922), directed by Ren Pengnian and photographed by Liao Enshou. This three-reel trick picture was adapted from “The Taoist of

³ Judith Zeitlin, “The Ghosts of Things,” in *Fantômes Dans l’Extrême-Orient d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses de l’Inalco, 2017), 205–221.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of stop-motion tricks in Japanese cinema in the 1910s, see Laura Lee, *Japanese Cinema Between Frames* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Mount Lao” (*Laoshan daoshi*) in Pu Songling’s (1640—1715) *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*):⁵ a fervent admirer of Daoism heads to Mount Lao with the hope of learning Daoist tricks, but ends up returning home because he could not bear the hardship of life as a disciple. No print of the film survives. But the interplay between Daoist tricks in the diegesis and camera tricks in the film production seems to contribute to the film’s success. A June 27, 1922 advertisement in *Shenbao* newspaper claimed *An Empty Dream* as “an unprecedented trick picture (*huanshu yingpian*)” and praised it for “exhausting what cinematography could do.”⁶ This advertisement even included a list of the most astonishing tricks in the film: “A Daoist master suddenly appears in the sky. A broken jar restores its shape. A paper-cut moon gives out a bright light. Wine and meat come into sight on an empty plate. A magic trick summons the fairy maiden Chang E. A mantra allows you to walk through the wall.”⁷ Here, the notion of the trick becomes a site of encounter between the Chinese classical tale and the modern medium of film, as it takes shape in the confrontation between the world that Pu Songling conjures up—one thick with ghosts, fox-spirits, and fairy maidens⁸—and the ghosts in the machine. The confrontation itself was a novelty at that time and therefore newsworthy. Another interesting aspect of this *Shenbao* advertisement is its announcement that *An Empty Dream* “will be published in a few

⁵ Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640—1715), *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異. Facsimile reprint of the author’s manuscript. Beijing, 1955. For English translation, see Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, trans. John Minford (London: Penguin, 2006).

⁶ *Shenbao* 申報, June 27, 1922.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ As Judith Zeitlin points out, although ghosts, fox-spirits, gods, and immortals are indeed the trademark of Pu Songling’s *Liaozhai zhiyi*, there are also a number of *Liaozhai* tales entirely free of supernatural elements. See Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 7.

days.”⁹ The unusual choice of the word “publish[ed]” (*chuban*), rather than “release[d]” is perhaps associated with the fact that *An Empty Dream* was a product of the Commercial Press (*shangwu yinshu guan*), which had been publishing books since 1897 but also produced films as one of its sideline careers between 1917 and 1927. In fact, on the same page, this very advertisement for *An Empty Dream* appeared along with many other Commercial Press advertisements for textbooks, business handbooks, children’s magazines, and women’s magazines.

In a 1957 article, “My Memory of the Film Department of The Commercial Press,” Yang Xiaozhong, who worked there as scriptwriter and director during the first half of the 1920s, recalls that “there were some special effects in *The Empty Dream*, such as a broken jar that restores its shape, a person walking through the wall, and objects walking by themselves. That was quite popular at that time.”¹⁰ Yang, however, does not offer a word about technological details. A similar yet not identical account can be found in Zhong Dafeng’s highly influential article “On Shadow Play”: citing Yang’s memoir, Zhong notes: “*An Empty Dream* was shot in 1922. It employed special effects cinematography, such as a broken jar that restores its shape (reverse motion), a person walking through the wall (stop trick or double exposure), and objects walking by themselves (stop-motion technique).”¹¹ This description sounds reasonable, but the words in parentheses are likely Zhong’s own speculations. If there is indeed a trick scene in which objects appears to walk automatically in *An Empty Dream*, whether this can be said to be

⁹ *Shenbao*, June 27, 1922.

¹⁰ Yang Xiaozhong 楊小仲, “Yi shangwu yinshuguan dianyingbu” (憶商務印書館電影部 My Memory of The Film Department of The Commercial Press), *Zhongguo dianying* (中國電影 *Chinese Film*), no. 1 (1957): 80.

¹¹ Zhong Dafeng 鍾大豐, “Lun ying xi” (論影戲 On Shadow Play), *Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao* (北京電影學院學報 *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*), no. 2 (1985): 65.

an early example of stop-motion animation remains uncertain. Think, for instance, of the table scene in *The Haunted Hotel*: while the animation of the wine bottle, the loaf of bread, the knife, the sugar tongs, and the spoon were indeed achieved via the technique of stop-motion substitution, wires—the old technique of the stage magician—were used to create the effect of tea pouring itself out. As audiences watched the scene, “the sharpest, most attentive eye was unable to detect any wire,”¹² but the filmmakers had to use wires because liquids could not be manipulated frame by frame. Is it possible that wires were employed in the production of *An Empty Dream* to create the special effect of “objects walking by themselves”? Is it possible that something might have been “tricked” before shooting? Or is it possible that, like *The Haunted Hotel*, *An Empty Dream* might have combined cinematography experiments with the magic theater methods of behind-the-scenes manipulation? All these possibilities resist the simplified “solution” as such: there was *An Empty Dream*, and then the history of Chinese stop-motion animation could begin. Rather, the “trick” beginning, if not to say its mystery, is exactly part of the charm of the maze of history. It should also be noted that neither “stop-motion animation” (*dingge donghua*) nor “special effects” (*texiao*) existed in Chinese-language discourse in the 1920s. Here the thicket of problems becomes tangled, involving not only the affinities between animation, special effects, and the ephemeral “trick picture” genre but also the instability of industry labels and critical vocabularies.

SHADOW PLAY OR THE TRICK’S ON US

¹² Crafton, *Before Mickey*, 16.

A closer examination of what was then referred to as “trick pictures” is in order. A bilingual article with “trick pictures” in its title, published in *English Magazine* (*Yingwen zazhi*), attracted my attention (Figure 1.1). Yet it turned out to be about how to cast strong shadows of a goat, a swan, a pipe, and a priest by manipulating one’s hands between a lamp and a sheet of white paper—what is often called *shou yingxi* (literally “hand shadow play”) or *deng yingxi* (literally “lamp shadow play”). This brings to mind, again, Zhong Dafeng’s essay “On Shadow Play,” in which he reminds us that “shadow play” (*yingxi*)—from its miniature form of hand shadow play to shadow puppet theater—had long existed as a popular form of entertainment when cinema came to China. According to Zhong, from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, “shadow play” (*yingxi*) was the most common appellation for cinema in Chinese.¹³

Revisiting the notion of shadow play with a mind toward animation studies, Paola Voci, among others, has noticed the striking similarities between the antiquated tradition of shadow play performance and Lotte Reiniger’s silhouette animated films, most well-known of which is *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (*The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, 1926).¹⁴ Voci, however, does not move one more step toward articulating the question that might twist our understanding of the early Chinese name for cinema: isn’t it more proper, or at least more intuitive, to consider “(hand) shadow play” as proto-animation than as proto-cinema? The hand (*shou*) is of course crucial to *shou yingxi*, yet shadow play can be conducted behind the sheet or screen so that the hands of the image-maker are not invisible. Crystallized in the reinvented concept of “shadow play” as proto-animation is a mode of image-making that simultaneously privileges and conceals

¹³ Zhong Dafeng, “Lun yingxi,” 54.

¹⁴ Paola Voci, “Electric Shadows Reloaded: The Post-Digital Animator, Shadow Play and Handmade Cinema,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1, no. 3 (2017): 119–203.

the presence of the hand, a mode of production situated at the intersection of a highly restricted space, like a sheet of white paper on a wall or a table, and the temporality of the cinema of attractions: now you see it, now you don't;¹⁵ this was here, now it's gone.

Even more unsettling is the concept of “play” in “shadow play”: in English and Chinese alike, “play” (*xi*) can mean (1) drama; or (2) to perform or put into effect, especially as a jest or deception, that is, a trick. Writing in the mid-1980s, Zhong Dafeng and Chen Xihe retroactively salvaged a statement from Hou Yao's 1926 *A Method of Shadow Play Scriptwriting* (*Yingxi juben zuofa*)—“shadow play is one kind of play [drama]”—to theorize about what could be potentially claimed as a distinct Chinese ontology of cinema, one that emphasized narratives, actions, and structures.¹⁶ What they conveniently (and perhaps intentionally) left out was the second meaning of “play” (*xi*), with which this dissertation is more concerned: tricks, attractions, and sensations, all embedded in the semantic transformation of “shadow play—cinema—animation—trick pictures.”

¹⁵ Tom Gunning, “Now You See It, Now You Don't: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions,” *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 32 (Fall 1993): 3–12.

¹⁶ See Hou Yao 侯曜, *Yingxi juben zuofa* (影戲劇本作法 *A Method of Shadow Play Scriptwriting*) (Shanghai: taidong shuju, 1926); Zhong Dafeng, “Lun yingxi,” *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, no. 2 (1985): 54–92; Zhong Dafeng, “‘Yingxi’ lilun suyuan” (影戲理論溯源 Tracing the History of ‘Shadow Play’ Theory), *Dangdai dianying* (當代電影 *Contemporary Cinema*), no. 3 (1986): 75–80. Chen Xihe 陳犀禾, “Zhongguo dianying meixue de zairenshi” (中國電影美學的再認識 Rethinking Chinese Film Aesthetic), *Dangdai dianying* (當代電影 *Contemporary Cinema*), no. 1 (1986): 82–90. For a provocative revisiting of “shadow play theory,” see Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 17–42.

Trick Pictures with Fingers

With the simple aid of a sheet of white paper or napkin, hung at a convenient height for the entertainer, and a lamp or gas jet, so placed that the hands can be manipulated between the light and the sheet, thus throwing strong shadows on the latter, it is an easy matter to entertain the youngsters with some comic pictures.



Here are three fairly simple ones—a goat, a swan, and a pipe, which explain themselves. A priest, in his pulpit, however, is a little more elaborate. To reproduce this picture cut a square piece of cardboard, and attach it to the arm, which is then bent sharply at the elbow, and place the fingers in the position



indicated. Be sure to keep the lower part of the other hand, which throws the shadow of the priest, free from the bottom of the cardboard. Another small piece of cardboard cut in the shape of a priest's hat, and held between the second joint of the fingers, finishes the picture. The priest can be made to bow and move his arms by moving the hand.

用白紙一張，或白巾一方，懸掛於適當之高度，並用煤油燈或煤氣燈一盞，而使兩手能操作於燈光及紙張之間，由此可現明顯之影於紙上；並即能造成若干引人發笑之圖形以供幼孩之娛樂也。

此處為三個清楚而簡單之圖形——一山羊，一天鵝，及一烟斗，見圖自明。然而一僧侶之在其講臺上，演時略為費事。欲描摹其圖，法用紙板一方，附於臂上，而彎曲其肘，並置其手指如圖之所示。且須保持其他一手之下部，不著紙板之處。再用紙板一小塊，割成僧帽之形，而持於手指第二節之間，於是全圖乃成。若動此手，則僧形亦隨其臂而成鞠躬之態矣。

Figure 1. 1 Trick pictures with fingers, *Yingwen zazhi*, vol. 9, issue 2 (1923)



Figure 1. 2 The juxtaposition of an early account of stop-motion animation and a Movex camera advertisement, *Shaying huabao*, vol. 7, issue 306 (1931)

The trick of “stopping the camera” (*tingpai*) provides a conceptual playing field in this regard. A 1931 article, titled “Common Knowledge of Making Trick Films,” unlocked the secret of “making one object suddenly (dis)appear” or “having a lifeless object walking or flying itself.”¹⁷ In a Méliès-like, almost simplified fashion, the writer emphasized “stopping the camera” (*tingpai*) as *the* trick for the two cases; the difference between the two was said to be one of degree and not of kind: stopping the camera once or many times. If there is something special about the trick of “having a lifeless object walking or flying itself,” which we now call stop-motion technique, it has to do with the dimension of time: the trick on us is not that

¹⁷ Chen Mingche 陳明澈, “Shezhi huanshu yingpian zhi changshi” (攝製幻術影片之常識 Common Knowledge of Making Trick), *Shaying huabao* (攝影畫報 *Photography Pictorial*), vol. 7, issue 306 (1931): 7.

something happens in one moment, in the twinkling of an eye, but that lifeless objects are moving *in time*. It affects duration. Also, if we consider the process of moving the object in miniaturized and incremental steps, which takes time, any stop-motion animation sequence, even a short one, can be said to be a cellar storing a great amount of time. In addition, it is extremely telling that this early account of how to make stop-motion animation was published in *Photography Pictorial* (*Sheying huabao*), a publication of the China Photography Association founded by Lin Zecang in 1925. Entailed here is the possibility of overturning a majority of classical film theorists' habitual understanding that sees animation as "drawing pictures," as something irrelevant to photography (hence irrelevant to photography-based theories of cinema). It is not just that animation could wrap itself in the coat of photography discourse, but that, in 1920s China, a species of animation was indeed recognized as photography, as a genre of photography that is not realistic photography. The early history of animation in a different cultural context forcefully challenges the habitual yet one-sided understanding that resulted in animation's marginalization in film theory, an understanding that was formulated in a mostly Euro-American tradition of film history. In other words, a historically contextualized theoretical inquiry gestures toward a convincing argument in favor of animation being a complement to photography, rather than its limit case or an irrelevant exception. In a sense, the intimate relation between animation and photography is made visible by the juxtaposition of this very account of stop-motion animation and the illustrated advertisement of the Agfa family travel cine-camera on the same page (Figure 1.2).

A 1937 article, titled "Cinematography Tricks," offered a rather different description of what it called "stopping the camera" (*tingpai*): "First, shoot two persons fighting with each other on a cliff. Show the face of one person who is about to fall off the cliff. Stop the camera. Then, in a

long shot, shoot a dummy in the same cloth falling off the cliff. Stop the camera again. Finally, shoot a close-up of the pretended dead person under the cliff.”¹⁸ What is described here is the combination of pro-filmic substitution (a dummy) and matching on action. The author went on to note that this was a solution applicable to difficult dangerous situations. The use of a dummy aims to be an imperceptible trick: if the trick work is well done (that is, the dummy is well made, and the camera is careful to film it at a certain distance and from certain angles), the viewer will not be able to notice that there has been a dummy.¹⁹ For audiences today, the commonly used editing technique of matching on action would not be considered a trick. This leads us to think about the historical dimension of a trick: every trick, device, or technology might experience a process of becoming part of nearly invisible habit and routine. In a sense, a trick proves itself to be a significant one by being forgotten. To examine a trick as it once was, therefore, is to create a counter-experience; we must reimagine the excitement that it once stirred up, or in Tom Gunning’s words, “try to recapture a quality it has lost.”²⁰

Reexamining the once-new editing technique, the trick lies less in stopping the camera than in splicing the shots, that is, juxtaposing any two points in space so as to suggest some kind of relationship between them. Even if the component shots were filmed in different locations, audiences would still assume a spatial whole. If the trick is exploited to its limit, cinema can construct an imaginary space, one that cannot be labeled as “here” or “there” in the world that we

¹⁸ Shuyan 舒湮, “Sheying qiaoshu” (攝影巧術 Cinematography Tricks), *Wanying* 萬影, vol. 6 (1937): 29–30.

¹⁹ For Christian Metz’s seminal discussion of imperceptible *trucage*, see Christian Metz, “‘Trucage’ and the Film,” trans Françoise Meltzer, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1977): 663–664.

²⁰ Tom Gunning, “Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the-Century,” in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, eds. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 39.

inhabit and phenomenally access through our senses. The question of splicing also allows us to think afresh about the trick of stopping the camera from *Photography Pictorial*. In contrast to the term used here, the trick of *tingpai* actually lies less in stopping the camera than in splicing the frames in a way that is almost literally “seamless” (in contrast to matching-on-action editing, or more broadly put, continuity editing, which can be referred to as “seamless editing” only metaphorically).²¹ The trick of splicing the frames (or stop-motion) aims to be invisible yet perceptible: it is something hidden inside, something that showcases cinema’s capacity of astonishing the senses, something that audiences could not see but nonetheless sense, recognize, and delight in.²² Shall we say that editing can happen within one shot or that, for stop-motion animation, a frame qualifies as a shot? The most basic terminologies we use to talk about film are less stable than we think, and throughout this dissertation, animation constantly throws the most basic terminologies into question.

A PAIR OF BOOTS WALKING ITSELF: STOP-MOTION TRICKS IN MARTIAL ARTS FILMS

An example of a stop-motion trick beckons from *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* (*Daxia ganfengchi*, 1928), the partially extant martial arts film directed by Yang Xiaozhong. Having left the film department of the Commercial Press in 1926 and having run the short-lived Guoguang Film Company for less than one year, Yang joined the Great Wall Film Company (*Changcheng huapian gongsi*) in 1927 and directed *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* in his second year there.

²¹ As is often the case, my inspiration here comes from Tom Gunning, “‘Primitive’ Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick’s on US,” *Cinema Journal* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 3–12.

²² For Metz’s distinction of visible trucage, invisible trucage, and imperceptible trucage, see Metz, “‘Trucage’ and the Film,” *Critical Inquiry*: 665.

In one extant fragment of the film, which I was fortunate to have watched in the China Film Archive, a bodyguard with a sword sneaks into the house of an evil medicine dealer. Exquisitely designed sandalwood furniture and a corner of a window with “auspicious” (*jixiang*) coin patterns in the background frame the room. Equally exquisite are his unique martial arts costume, exaggerated cap, and white boots with black stripes. Framed at the hip, he bends over to look at his own boots, at the moment off-screen, as if coming up with an idea. In the twinkling of an eye, his body becomes invisible. In the next shot, the audience sees only his boots, still framed by the furniture, from a slightly higher angle. The not-so-well-matched cut between the two shots creates a jarring effect or a sense of artificiality. We see the boots walking toward us, step by step, until off-screen. The jerky quality of the movement enhances its strangeness. Then, we are shown a close-up of the shocked expression of Little Tiger Kan, the son of Kan the Great Knight-Errant, who is about to put food into his own mouth, but now can no longer move his chopsticks. The subsequent shot cuts back to the pair of boots marching without human feet inside, in a closer view (Figure 1.3 a-d). The use of vignetting and the restricted field of view of the last shot forcefully holds the audience’s attention at center of the image: the boots “tattling” on their absent owner. The extant fragment ends here.

The lack of a complete print poses a challenge to understanding the position of the segment in the film’s narrative. The film was loosely based on *Kan the Great Knight-Errant in Jiangnan*, a bestseller during the huge boom of “martial arts” fiction in the early 1920s.²³ The extant part of *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*, approximately 23 minutes, is not so much about the hero in the film’s title, but about his two children: Little Tiger Kan and Little Butterfly Kan. In

²³ Book exhibition and sales information about *Kan the Great Knight-Errant in Jiangnan* could be found in *Shenbao*, June 16, 1921; October 18, 1921. There is a female assassin figure playing an important role in the novel. But she does not appear in the extant segment of the film, either.

fact, Kan the Great Knight-Errant, “whose self-imposed function was to fight the unkind rich and help the poor,”²⁴ never appears in the extant segment.

Yet, the fact that only part of the film survived does not prevent from providing a close reading of the trick scene. I do not have substantial evidence to prove that the jump cut, between the medium shot of the bodyguard who becomes invisible and the next shot of the walking boots, was not an amateurish mistake, but it seems significant that in the first shot, the pair of boots is off-screen. Because of this, audiences are held in suspension between incompatible explanatory options: Did the bodyguard use the magic of the invisible body (*yinshen shu*)? Or maybe the pair of boots is taking on a life of its own? Because only a fragment of the trick scene survives, the fantastic lingers instead of being settled psychologically in the end.

Here, I am evoking the notion of the fantastic as it was outlined by Tzvetan Todorov: “In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.”²⁵ Fantasy is by no means the antonym of reality; rather, the two are entangled. Along this line, we can explain why it is important for the sandalwood furniture and the corner of the window with the “auspicious” coin patterns to be included in the frame: They have to be there to demonstrate that it is the same familiar world.

²⁴ “Daxia ganfengchi: Changcheng chupian” (大俠甘鳳池: 長城出片 Kan the Great Knight-Errant: A Great Wall Production), *Xin yinxing* (新銀星 *New Silver Star*), issue 1 (1928): 43.

²⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 25.



Figure 1. 3 a-d A pair of boots walking itself, *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* (1928)



Figure 1. 4 a-b Flying swords in white light, *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* (1928)

As Judith Zeitlin reminds us, “special effects, including multiple exposure and stop-motion tricks, were a hallmark of the martial-arts magic-spirit craze of 1928–32.”²⁶ One might add here the special effect of the “flying swords in white light” (*feijian baiguang*), which could be found in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant, The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (*Huoshao honglianshi*, 1928), and a large corpus of other films of the craze—or as Lu Hongshi puts it, in “almost every film” of the craze.²⁷ This stunt is achieved using a combination of drawn animation and live-action footage (Figure 1.4 a-b). My interest here rests not so much in providing a list of special effects in martial-arts films, but in thinking about how the term *special effects*, albeit born later, creates a useful paradigm for studying stop-motion tricks. My train of thought runs in two directions. First, with regard to *special*, if stop-motion animation possesses a complex, special power that makes it distinct from cartoon as well as live-action animation, what is that? This special power must go beyond surprising audiences because it does not fade after multiple viewings; it persists, so to speak, as described in the article “Common Knowledge of Making Trick Films” from *Photography Pictorial*. The experience of watching a pair of boots walking by itself, again and again, is almost a delightful craziness, one that also stings, pricks, and touches me—perhaps I shall call it the *punctum* of stop-motion tricks.²⁸ Second, about *effects*: stop-motion tricks as “(special) effects” implies an audience, without which any “effects”

²⁶ Judith Zeitlin, “Operatic Ghosts on Screen: *The Case of a Test of Love* (1958),” *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2–3 (Summer 2010): 230. See also Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 199–243.

²⁷ Lu Hongshi 陸弘石, *Zhongguo dianying: Miaoshu yu chanshi* (中國電影：描述與闡釋 *Chinese Cinema: Description and Interpretation*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002), 111. Multiple exposure and “flying swords in white light” are two examples of visible trucage, according to Metz’s categories. See Metz, “‘Trucage’ and the Film,” *Critical Inquiry*: 665.

²⁸ For Barthes’s reflection on a (still) photograph’s *punctum*, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 25–27.

are only floating, empty words. This line of thought is therefore bound up with the question of reception. According to *Shenbao* reports, when *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* premiered in Shanghai Big Theater on May 24, 1928, the upper and lower floors were crowded with nearly one thousand audience members.²⁹ In September 1928, *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* was shown in New Allan Big Theater on Hai'ning Road in Shanghai, and audiences rushed to the movie house in spite of the heavy rain. The three-day run was extended to a six-day run.³⁰ Film distributors and theater owners from New York, Chicago, and Singapore soon booked prints of *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*.³¹ The brilliant use of special effects contributed to the film's effectiveness, or its affective density, as demonstrated by these newspaper reports. At the intersection of the two lines of inquiry, the problem of "special effects" becomes that of "special affects."

A VIEW OF A/THE WORLD: BETWEEN ANIMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

The starting point for my theoretical adventure in search of the stop-motion trick's *punctum* is a hypothesis: its special affect on audiences might have to do with its precarious position between animation and live-action cinema. Some of classical film theory's key writings (Bazin, Kracauer, Panofsky, etc.), most of which derived the nature of cinema from the ontology of the photographic image, have made animation seemingly irrelevant. In this regard, Stanley Cavell perhaps offered the most famous (or infamous) statement: defining movies "as successions of

²⁹ *Shenbao*, May 24, 1928; May 28, 1928.

³⁰ *Shenbao*, September 18, 1928.

³¹ *Shenbao*, Oct 27, 1928; March 1, 1929.

automatic world projections,” he once declared, “cartoons are *not* movies.”³² Cavell’s distinction between painting and still photography, between a presentation and a transcription, could be transplanted to make an unequivocal argument about the ontological divide between cartoon and movie. Like a painting, a cartoon is a representation that “emphasizes the identity of its subject, hence it may be called a likeness”; like a photograph, a movie “emphasizes the existence of its subject, recording it, hence it may be called a transcription.”³³ Interpreting Cavell’s highly succinct conclusion “a painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* the world,”³⁴ we might say, in an equally succinct fashion: a cartoon *is* a world;³⁵ a movie is *of* the world.

This distinction, however, is rather shaky, given the diversity of photographic and pictorial practices. Suzanne Buchan, for one, has invoked it to question it. Writing about puppet animation, she has noticed that this region of animation “represents a different ‘world’ for the spectator...something between ‘a world’ ...and ‘the world’ ...”³⁶ For Buchan, the crucial point is that, watching puppet animation, audiences can understand that the *space* does exist “outside the

³² Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 168. Ryan Pierson has argued that Cavell’s relation to cartoons is “considerably more nuanced.” See Ryan Pierson, “On Styles of Theorizing Animation Styles: Stanley Cavell at the Cartoon’s Demise,” *Velvet Light Trap*, 69 (2012): 17–26.

³³ Cavell, “What Photography Calls Thinking,” in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 118.

³⁴ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

³⁵ By examining hundreds of American animated cartoons frame by frame, Hannah Frank argues for what is exactly denied by Cavell: the mistakes or imperfections on individual frames of cel animation, for instance, dust, dirt particles, and even the fingerprints of anonymous laborers, testify to cartoon’s photographic origins. In this sense, every frame of the animated cartoon is “a document of its own production,” a view *of* the world. I will elaborate this method in the second chapter. See Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

³⁶ Suzanne Buchan, “The Animated Spectator: Watching the Quay Brothers’ ‘Worlds’,” in *Animated Worlds* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 15–38.

cinematic experience, albeit in miniature”³⁷—to put it more broadly, space provides a conceptual framework through which we understand *the* world. This is a persuasive claim worth probing further. First, the trick sequence in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*, for instance, does not deal with puppets. Rather, the “hero” here is a pair of boots, one that is of the same scale of boots we encounter in everyday life. The space the audience can infer beyond the frame is not a miniature set, but the same set in which its adjacent live-action shots were filmed. If puppet animation partly satisfies the spectator’s “spatial hunger”³⁸ (to borrow animator Art Clokey’s term), the stop-motion trick sequence in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* satisfies it completely: it is the same sense of moving through space, in the same world that does not have to reduce its scale. Second, to avoid equivocalty in stating “something between ‘a world’ and ‘the world,’” we need to think about a stop-motion trick’s relation to the world in two steps: (1) the liminal spatial unit of a frame and (2) the sequence (or shot) as a whole.³⁹

Each frame of the stop-motion sequence⁴⁰ is a photograph, a view of the world. We have no doubt about this. In a film like *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*, which contains both live-action and stop-motion sequences, a frame from the live-action sequence and a frame from the stop-motion sequence might share a view of the same world. Yet, for Cavell, photography’s relation to the world is also a conviction. Movies, like still photography, might help us regain our conviction of the world by removing our subjectivity in the task of transcription and presenting to us a world

³⁷ Buchan, “The Animated Spectator: Watching the Quay Brothers’ ‘Worlds’,” 15–38.

³⁸ Art Clokey, “Trimensional Animation,” unpublished typescript (1977).

³⁹ Earlier I have posed the question whether, for stop-motion tricks, a frame is qualified as a shot. If the answer is yes, we may call a succession of frames “a sequence;” otherwise a succession of frames is “a shot.” While I want to maintain the ambiguity of these very basic terms, I also need to choose one to use in the dissertation. In what follows, when discussing stop-motion animation, I will call a succession of frames “a sequence.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

past.⁴¹ Stop-motion animation fits well into Cavell's definition of movies as "successions of automatic world projections,"⁴² but it (the sequence as a whole) cannot declare or convince us of a past existence. To explain this paradox, a scrutiny of the intricate relations between stop-motion animation, movement, and time is needed.

If cinema far surpasses photography in its potential for producing a strong impression of reality, at least some credit should be given to cinematic movement. For Metz, the strong impression of reality that motion enhances is, first of all, a sense of immediacy, presence, and evocation.⁴³ Movement created by animation, however, has a tendency to substitute physical laws with imagination. It can, as Tom Gunning writes, "endow otherwise 'impossible' motion and transformations with the immediacy of perception that Metz claims movement entails."⁴⁴ In the realm of stop-motion animation, where a knife slices bread by itself and a pair of boots walks on its own, it is movement that injects the impression of the fantastic, the ghostly, or the impossible into the individual frames that could have spoken for the real. Viewing a live-action movie, audiences find themselves simultaneously experiencing a past tense ("That was happening," or as Cavell might call it, a world *past*) and a present tense that movement entails ("This is happening"). In stop-motion animation, the vividness of movement might still evoke a sense of presence, a feeling that all the strange things are happening, but audiences would not

⁴¹ Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking," 124.

⁴² Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 72.

⁴³ Christian Metz, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York, 1974), 315.

⁴⁴ Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 46.

perceive such a stop-motion animation sequence in a past tense. It is not an event *past*, not a duration *past*.

Another way to explain why stop-motion animation fails to declare a past existence is to say that time is manipulated in its production. The work of the camera operator in live-action film production, in a certain sense, is to record or transfigure an existence, one that is becoming past while being filmed. It is a task toward the past. On the contrary, the work of the animator (or, in the production context of *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*, still the camera operator)—putting frames into motion—is by no means a form of reproduction, but more or less an invention, one that might be even out of the animator/camera operator’s control. It is a task toward the future.

Considering the job of animator as a game with time underlines a sense of contingency in stop-animation production: contingency ineluctably emerges in the production mode of manipulation and control. Between frames, the animator might move the object to the left or right on a whim. A frame—a photograph—can be duplicated and thus become two or three frames when the animator is a bit lazy. The resulting appearance of a stop-motion animation might even surprise its animator. If that happens, it is partly because another naughty animator called Time has played a role in the creation. For Barthes, a photograph’s *punctum* is, ultimately, an understanding of time: the “lacerating emphasis” of “that-has-been.”⁴⁵ For me, the stop-motion trick’s *punctum* has to do with its temporal vertigo: between a frame and a sequence, among “that-has-been,” “that-will-be,” and “that is happening now.”

It might be striking that in *Haunted Hotel* and *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* alike, the stop-motion animation sequence does not exist in the same space-time continuum with its adjacent live-action sequences. As is evident in both examples, the act of looking, signaled by a point-of-

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 77; 96.

view structure, might be employed to weave these animation sequences into the photographic-based, life-like universe, making the *special* (of “special effect”) simultaneously *acceptable*.⁴⁶ The device of point of view, as we understand it today, is a competent assistant in creating the illusion of spatial continuity.⁴⁷ This also amounts to saying that the animation sequence is sutured into the diegetic time through editing. However, a stop-motion sequence in live-action cinema still foregrounds an “immiscible”⁴⁸ zone where time derails: it is simultaneously in and out of the flow of diegetic time. The enchanted temporality of the animation sequence cannot be entirely translated into the diegetic flow. Instead, it anticipates a moment when time diverts itself from its intended course.

ENCHANTED SPACE AND ITS ARTICULATION

A sequence created using the stop-motion technique offers a good example for defining *enchanted space*, a concept that helps tie together many threads weaved through this chapter.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Writing on *The “Teddy” Bears* (dir. Wallace McCutcheon, Edwin S. Porter, 1907), Dana Polan shows how a point-of-view structure—the little girl looking in through the keyhole of a locked door at the dancing teddy bear dolls—turns strangeness into a desire for possession. See Dana Polan, *The LEGO Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 80–81. *The “Teddy” Bears* falls into the category of the “peeping tom” films in early cinema: a character looks through some viewing device, such as a telescope, a microscope, or simply a keyhole. What follows may be what the characters sees, often framed with an appropriately shaped matte. For a definition of the “peeping tom” genre, see Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), 73. It should also be noted that while all the major film examples in the chapter share a point-of-view structure, no viewing device is used in them.

⁴⁷ While a point-of-view structure is commonly understood today as a narrative code expressing someone looking at something, the early use of this device might be once understood as some sort of a trick. Again, I want to emphasize on the historicity of a trick. For instance, a 1908 *Variety* review describes a point-of-view sequence in *The Redman and the Child* (dir. D. W. Griffith, 1908)—the Indian looking through the telescope—as “a clever bit of trick work... introduced to bring about an intensely dramatic situation.” See *Variety*, August 1, 1908: 13. For a revealing analysis of the sequence, see Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*, 71–75.

⁴⁸ I borrow the word “immiscible” from Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 32.

⁴⁹ In formulating the concept of “enchanted space,” I am indebted to Wu Hung, especially his writings on “feminine

The concept of an “enchanted space” does not simply mean the backdrop of a stop-motion shot, nor does it refer to the set design. Rather, it denotes a dynamic spatial and perceptual network comprised of objects, selected elements of the set, lighting, special effects, “impossible” motion, “derailed” time, and audiences. Compared with time, which “possesses no sensory medium of its own” and has to “anchor itself to any suitable perceptual embodiment,” space is more privileged in visual studies as it “is directly embodied in the visual world”⁵⁰: even when I say “time derails,” as if there were forking paths of time, a spatial metaphor is inevitably employed. With audiences as a crucial component of an “enchanted space,” I seek to acknowledge that, “the world of film,” is “a mode of experience,” a “mechanism by which anything reaches the screen and, on reaching it, affect us,”⁵¹ without making “the/a world” the site and vortex of multiple and irreconcilable meanings.

To better account for the impacts of special effects (stop-motion tricks, multiple exposure, “flying swords in white light,” etc.) on audiences in the historical context of the martial-arts magic-spirit craze (1928–32), a dialectic of enchantment and disenchantment has to be brought into the limelight. For audiences at that time, the viewing experience (of a film of this genre) was the process of being drawn into an enchanted space, one that often promised sensual and spiritual fulfillment. We are not unfamiliar with highly suspicious anecdotes as such: audiences burned incense to worship the gods in martial-arts magic-spirit films or, after watching the films, found

space” and “exhibition space.” See, for example, Wu Hung, “Beyond Stereotypes: The Twelve Beauties in Qing Court Art and the *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, eds. Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 306–65; Wu Hung, “Spatial Narratives: Curating Three ‘Temporal’ Exhibition,” in *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (HK: Timezone 8, 2008), 199–218.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Arnheim, “A Stricture on Space and Time.” *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 4 (1978): 653.

⁵¹ Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 40.

their way to Mount Emei in search of immortals. Even filmmakers were enchanted by what they created; they placed a niche in the film set, displaying the statue of a god.⁵² It might not be coincidence that the article “Common Knowledge of Making Trick Films,” from *Photography Pictorial*, was published in 1931, the year that marked the official ban on many films of the craze as part of the Nationalist government’s anti-superstition campaign.⁵³ To some extent, articles unlocking secrets of film tricks function as the breaking of enchantment. If we do not adopt the assumption of a naïve audience who took whatever appeared on the screen as real, it could even be argued that at work in the film viewing experience was a paradox: disenchantment through enchantment.⁵⁴ In other words, it was films of this genre that largely demystified “magic” and “spirit” by showing them to audiences as cinematic tricks; the lesson of disenchantment could only be taught in the space of enchantment.

A STRING OF PEARLS OR THE EFFORTFULNESS OF BEING

⁵² See, for instance, Lu Hongshi, *Zhongguo dianying: miaoshu yu chanshi (Chinese Cinema: Description and Interpretation)*, 112.

⁵³ For a historical contextualization of the ban, see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 235.

⁵⁴ Speaking of “disenchantment through enchantment,” I have in mind the Goddess of Disenchantment from *Dream of the Red Chamber (Hong kou meng 紅樓夢 a.k.a. Shitou ji 石頭記)*, the eighteenth-century novel generally acknowledged to be the pinnacle of Chinese vernacular fiction. For an edition of the novel with an almost full collection of Rouge Inkstone commentaries, see Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, *Shi Tou Ji 石頭記* (Nanjing: yilin chubanshe, 2017). In a dream in chapter five that the hero, Baoyu, has, Goddess of Disenchantment tells him that the purpose of his dream visit is “disenchantment through enchantment,” or “enlightenment through love.” For a nuanced reading of “disenchantment through enchantment” in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see Li Wai-Yee. *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

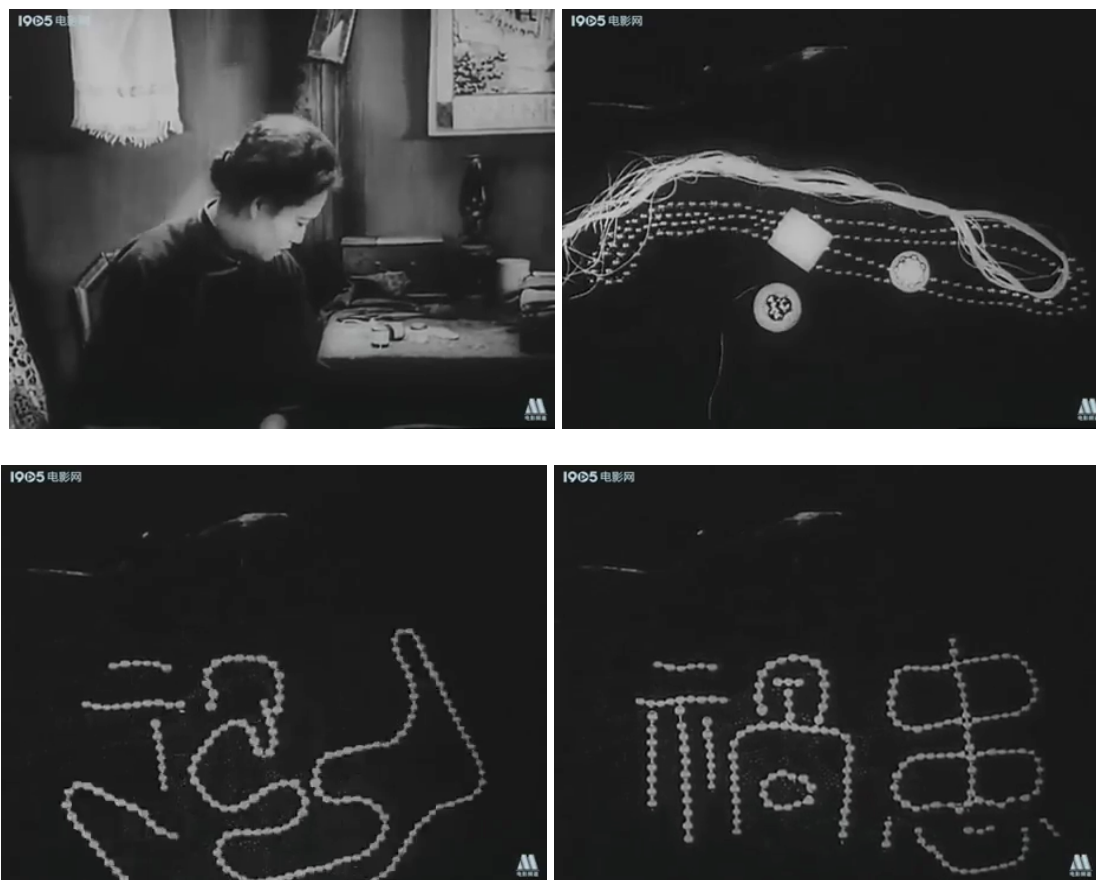


Figure 1.5 a-d The stop-motion trick sequence, *The Pearl Necklace* (1926)

In Barthes's formulation, the *punctum* of intensity is Time, whereas the *punctum* of form is often a detail, an object, which makes the viewer pensive. Barthes's example is the pearl necklace, which he had seen worn by someone in his own family, in Ver der Zee's photograph.⁵⁵ This brings me to the last filmic example in this chapter: the stop-motion trick sequence from *The Pearl Necklace* (*Yichuang zhenzhu*, Great Wall Film Company, 1926), directed by Li Zeyuan. My analysis of this film is built mainly on Zhang Zhen's fascinating reading of it,⁵⁶ but also pushes some of her insights into a different direction.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 53, 96.

⁵⁶ See Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of

The script of *The Pearl Necklace* was not only a twin of *A Method of Shadow Play Scriptwriting* (both written by Hou Yao at around the same time) but also a transplantation of Maupassant's 1884 short story "La Parure" to the setting of urban Shanghai. One week before the film's premiere at the Central Big Theater on January 21, 1926, an article in the *Shenbao* newspaper deliberately introduced Maupassant's work so as to prepare audiences for the film.⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, Hou Yao's script replaced the diamond necklace in Maupassant's story with a string of pearls, a motif crosshatched with a wealth of allusions in Chinese classical poetry and vernacular tales. Fittingly, the first bilingual title card right after the film's credits addressed its audiences with "Don't you know? Don't you know? A string of pearls is equal to a million rings of sorrow." Almost a "flash-forward," this title card prefigures the sentimental melodrama: "If a woman drags herself down the road of vanity, her husband will be her victim surely."

As prefigured here, after the borrowed pearl necklace has been lost and her husband has gone to jail, Xiuzhen (the equivalent to the Madame Mathilde Loisel character in this film) has to mend clothes for a living. The long, lonely night of sewing in her shabby bedroom is intercut with shots of her husband in prison as well as graphically adorned, bilingual title cards. The haunting and return of memory—her one night of radiance at the fancy Lantern Festival party that reoccurs in a flashback—pain her. In her point-of-view shot, the threads and buttons on the table dissolve into the pearl necklace, which has cost her and her husband any chance for future happiness. The dissolve here functions as a liminal device that throws the audiences into what I call an "enchanted space." The pearl necklace dances in circles, metamorphosing into the shape of the two gigantic Chinese ideographs *huo huan* (accompanied with an English translation in the

Chicago Press, 2005), 151–198.

⁵⁷ *Shenbao*, January 14, 1926; January 21, 1926.

form of the non-diegetic intertitle: “Misfortune”). The “impossible” movement here expresses the intention of communicating the message of misfortune to the viewer; the pearl necklace comes to life and even assumes the role of a narrative commentator (Figure 1.5 a-d). The necklace eventually dissolves back into the shape of threads and buttons.⁵⁸ To some extent, the two dissolves can perhaps be said to be two revolving doors that are an entrance to and exit from the enchanted space.

Zhang Zhen has pointed out “the round shape of pearls (and the string, or *chuan*) and their literary association with tears” and has commented on how the lyrical title card preceding the flashback—“My Tears must stop, for every drop/ Hinders needles and thread”—summons Xiuzhen’s memory of the fateful pearl necklace.⁵⁹ My argument, however, does not end with a cinematic revivification of literary allusions linking pearls and teardrops. I believe something more interesting is at work in the stop-motion trick sequence: the string of pearls here is a stunt performer that is employed to take the teardrops’ place in doing what teardrops are not capable of—that is, being moved and manipulated between frames. Similar to the boots in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* which I have referred to as a “hero,” the string of pearls as a stunt performer here gains a kind of anti-anthropocentric life.

The jerky quality of the pearl necklace’s stop-motion dance makes the interstices between frames tangible. The core of the apparatus of live-action movement and stop-motion movement is in fact similar: what we tend to recognize as a single, continuous movement is achieved through a process based on intermittent, discontinuous motion. The difference is that whereas

⁵⁸ There is a minor inaccuracy in Zhang Zhen’s description of the scene: “the pearl necklace eventually ‘dances’ back into the shape of the threads and buttons.” See Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 176. This seems to have been corrected in the Chinese translation of the book (enlarged edition, 2019), 269.

⁵⁹ Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 172; 175.

live-action movement, with the aid of the persistence of our vision, always pretends to be *effortless*, stop-motion movement willingly acknowledges the paradox, and more importantly, acknowledges the production process as *effortful*. In other words, stop-motion animation provides an intensified form of the apparatus of cinematic movement. It is in this sense that Jennifer Barker calls stop-motion animation “cinema *par excellence*.”⁶⁰ The poetics of stop-motion animation, to borrow Vivian Sobchack’s expression, is ultimately about “the incredible effortfulness of being.”⁶¹ Think back, in the meshes of your memory, to the midnight hours when you suddenly wake up, hear your own intermittent heartbeats, literally out of joint, and come to realize how effortful life is. To some extent, the intermittent, jerky, imperfect stop-motion movement spells out “our lived-body’s ‘comprehension’ of effortfulness, of fatigue, of being ‘worn out’ or ‘used up,’ of being physically marked (if not scarred) by life.”⁶² In doing so, it animates us. In this regard, one graphically adorned title card (Figure 1.6) earlier in the nightly sewing is extremely telling:

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
Stitch, Stitch, Stitch,
In poverty, hunger, and dirt.

The bilingual title card was again a product of cross-cultural conjunction: translating selected lines from “The Song of the Shirt,” a poem written by Thomas Hood in 1843, into the classical Chinese poetic fashion. With calligraphy by Li Rudi and drawing by Zhang Tiren, the

⁶⁰ Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 136.

⁶¹ Vivian Sobchack, “Animation and Automation, or, the Incredible Effortfulness of Being,” *Screen* 50, no. 4 (winter 2009): 375–91.

⁶² Vivian Sobchack, “Stop + Motion: On Animation, Inertia, and Innervation,” unpublished article.

title cards in *The Pearl Necklace* were carefully and beautifully done, in a manner unmatched in most Chinese silent films.⁶³ The graphic elements of some of these “art titles” are not related to the diegetic world of the film, but some others, including the one that I have mentioned here, are obviously visual interpretations of the diegesis. A little drawing of a woman mending clothes—a cartoon version of Xiuzhen—appears in the upper-right corner of the frame. The drawing soon comes into life in the next (live-action) shot, transcending the boundary between stillness and motion as well as the divide of cartoon and live-action cinema. The narrative gist of this sequence—life is effortful, or even painful—coincides with the feeling that the intermittent, jerky, imperfect stop-motion movement evokes in us, not only affectively but also corporeally.⁶⁴ The stop-motion sequence serves the narrative when it is simultaneously a resistance: because of the effortfulness of life, we, similar to Xiuzhen, are in need of a reverie, a hallucination, or an interruption of the repetitive, homogenous, disenchanted hours of work.

The word “fingers” in the intertitle is key to our understanding of stop-motion animation’s *punctum*. Jennifer Barker, among others, has elaborated on stop-motion animation as “a haptic art form, one that address itself first and foremost to the fingertips, provoking our desire to touch, caress, squeeze, and scrape the images before us.”⁶⁵ I would add that very often it is literally more *touching* when what gets animated are body-related objects, which serve to be part of our extended body and constantly touch our skin, like a pair of boots or a pearl necklace. Indeed, the

⁶³ Among Chinese silent films that I have seen, *The Stormy Night* (*Fengyu zhiye*, 1925) is one example comparable to *The Pearl Necklace* in terms of its complexity of intertitle graphic design. According to *Shenbao* newspaper of January 27, 1926, *The Pearl Necklace* and *The Stormy Night* were shown at Gonghe Shadow Play Theater in the same week.

⁶⁴ While we are struck by the primitive charm of the sequence now, it remains questionable whether audiences in the 1920s would have experienced this sequence as “jerky” and “imperfect” in the same way that we do now.

⁶⁵ Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 137.

“moving” image of the pearl necklace is beckoning to our fingertips. Its texture and materiality, as well as the personal, intimate, bodily, and even painful memory that it carries, make it even more so. Not surprising at all, ending the nightly sewing sequence is a reaction shot of Xiuzhen, who does exactly what audiences are seduced to do, *want* to do, but could not actually accomplish: she grasps the objects on the table with her fingers.



Figure 1. 6 A graphically adorned title card, *The Pearl Necklace* (1926)

PHOTOGRAPHY AND CARTOON DEPARTMENTS AT GREAT WALL

Given that *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* and *The Pearl Necklace* were both produced by the Great Wall Film Company, a brief account of the company’s achievements in photography, animation, and their related fields provide a fitting endpoint for this chapter. In May 1921, Li Zeyuan, Chen Peilin, Mei Xuechou and others founded the Great Wall Film Company in Brooklyn, New York. Around the same time, Mei studied cartoon techniques at the Fleischer Studios.⁶⁶ After shooting two (live-action) short films in Brooklyn, the company relocated to

⁶⁶ *Shenbao*, September 30, 1927.

Xujiahui District, Shanghai, in the summer of 1923. The company's photography department was well known for its wealth of photography talent and imported equipment. The photography achievement of the Great Wall, according to a *Shenbao* newspaper article on December 12, 1928, "could be demonstrated by the diffused natural light in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*."⁶⁷ In addition, the use of the most up-to-dated Bell and Howell camera, combined with Wohl lamps, made it possible to shoot all the night scenes in *The Pearl Necklace*. An enthusiastic reviewer praised Chen Peilin's cinematography: "All the tricks are really magical, especially the scene in which a string of pearls morphs into 'Misfortune'."⁶⁸ Again, it demonstrates that what we now see as stop-motion animation was then considered part of the camera operator's toolbox.



Figure 1. 7 The New invention of the Great Wall Film Company, *Yinxing*, issue 10 (1927)

⁶⁷ *Shenbao*, December 12, 1928.

⁶⁸ *Shenbao*, January 21, 1926.



Figure 1. 8 a-b The spectacular set of *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*, designed by Wan Guchan

The Great Wall Company also had a cartoon department. In 1927, an article from *Silver Star* (*Yinxing*) declared: “The Great Wall Company has recently invented animated funny picture (*huodong huaji yingpian*).”⁶⁹ With a drawn frame, a group photo of main contributors—Yang Aili,⁷⁰ Zhang Tiren, Wan Guchan, and Mei Xuechou—together with one cartoon figure (Figure 1.7) appeared on the same page. The “invention” soon led to *Uproar in the Studio* (*Danao huashi*), co-produced by Wan and Mei. Modeling Fleischer’s “out of the inkwell” formula, this two-reel short film placed an animated figure in a live-action world. It was shown in movie theaters as an appetizer that preceded some of the Great Wall’s feature films between 1927 and 1929. *Uproar in the Studio* has no extant prints. Wan and Mei’s plans of collaborating on at least two more animated shorts were soon abolished due to the company’s financial situation. At a time when the dream of animation had to be suspended, members of the cartoon department devoted their creative energy to animation’s adjacent fields, such as graphic, set, and costume design. For instance, Zhang Tiren, as previously mentioned, drew “cartoonish” title cards for *The Pearl Necklace*. Wan Guchan, who was later hailed as the forefather of Chinese animation, worked for a significant period of his time at the Great Wall as a set and costume designer for *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* and two other feature films. The spectacular set of *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*—which included a gigantic lion sculpture, a rippling pond, and an ancient time machine that cost a great deal to build—was indeed a selling point of the film (Figure 1.8 a-b).⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Yinxing* 銀星, 10 (1927): 7.

⁷⁰ Yang Aili was also the female star in *Kan the Great Knight-Errant*. Far less known, however, was her contribution to the film industry that went beyond acting.

⁷¹ See *Liangyou* 良友, issue 27 (1928): 26. See also *Zhongguo dianying zazhi* (中國電影雜誌 *Chinese Film Magazine*), vol. 1, issue 13 (1928): 14.

The fluidity of the nascent cartoon field and the mobility of artistic talent—moving in and out of different departments, different studios, and different fields—often went beyond expectation.

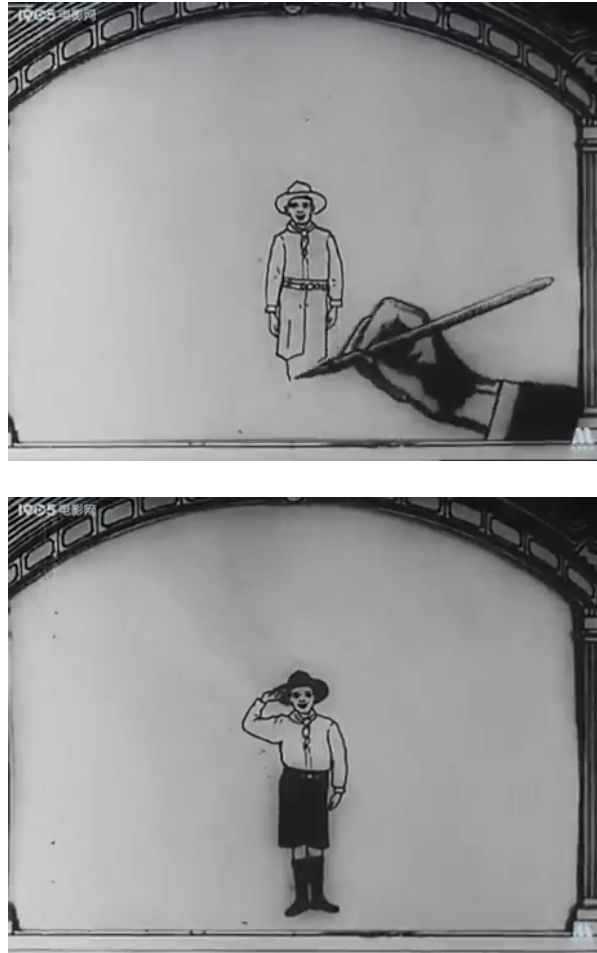


Figure 1.9 a-b The Great Wall's animated credits by Mei Xuechou

The Great Wall Film Company's animated credits at the beginning of *The Pearl Necklace* are arguably the only surviving cartoon work by Mei Xuechou. On a drawn stage, a hand with a pen pounces into view. It takes us through the drawing process of a cartoon figure—wearing a campaign hat and a neckerchief—stroke by stroke. Once the cartoon figure raises his arms in a triumphant salute, the drawing hand vanishes. The flying discs that the cartoon figure throws out

are transfigured into the company's icon, then into a crowd of pearl-like dots, and finally into the bricks of the Great Wall. The self-reflexivity that the drawing gesture embodies is quite a good fit for a credit sequence of a film company with a cartoon department. If the coming-into-life of the drawn figure is possibly a form of liberation, this form of liberation comes precisely at the expense of the drawing hand.⁷² It must be noted that the drawing hand is drawn, too. In a way striking similar to yet less explicit than the famous example of *Duck Amuck* (dir. Chuck Jones, 1953), in which Daffy Duck undergoes victimization at the hand of the diegetic animator, who turns out to be none other than Bugs Bunny, the Great Wall's credit sequence opens up *a* world in which a drawn hand draws a drawn figure, a world in which "fiction leads to and springs from fiction," a world that "closes in on itself."⁷³ The animated credit sequence seems to deny the human labor put into it, or simply put, Mei Xuechou as its creator in the real world. Instead, it showcases the drawn hand, "whose power is tautological in origin."⁷⁴ This also amounts to say that the credit sequence becomes *a loop*, which turns its back on *the* world we call reality. But is

⁷² I am writing with a reference to Scott Bukatman's insightful remarks on the moment the human hand disappears in Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo* (1911). The hand in Bukatman's discussion, however, is a live-action one. As Bukatman describes: "Once the projection begins, McCay only figures as a drawing hand, and once the animated sequence begins, he vanishes completely. It is as though the animator has brought about his own demise, as though the animatedness of the images, and the liberation it represents, comes quite literally at the expense of the human creator. The drawings are produced by the hand, but the mechanism of their animation is hidden, so their passage into movement transcends the hand's operation. MyCay's 'deactivation' even precedes his literal disappearance from the film." See Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 106–34.

⁷³ Dana Polan offers a seminal reading of *Duck Amuck* (1953) as what he calls "a loop": "The source of Daffy Duck's *angst* reveals itself to be none of the agents of social domination in the real world, but merely Bugs Bunny — another fictive character, whose power is tautological in origin. The film opens up a formal space and not a political one in viewer consciousness. DUCK AMUCK closes in on itself, fiction leads to and springs from fiction, the text becomes a loop which effaces social analysis." See Dana Polan, "Daffy Duck and Bertolt Brecht: Toward a Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinema?," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 345–56. For an earlier version of the article, see Dana Polan, "Brecht and the Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinema," *Jump Cut*, 17 (1974): 29–32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

it possible to open the loop? If so, under what historical circumstance does the loop have to be knocked open? This is a question to be taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTACT ZONE:

WHEN SNOW WHITE CAME TO CHINA

Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom—the joys of the contact zone.

—Mary Louise Pratt¹

In the analysis of animation, priority should fall on compositing (the space *within* images that becomes spread across frames) over character animation (movement across frames).

—Thomas Lamarre²

The point of departure of this chapter is Disney’s 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which premiered in Shanghai in 1938. Disney’s *Snow White* is no doubt one of the most discussed films in animation studies, and its glittering premiere at Carthay Circle Theater in Los Angeles on December 21, 1937, is one of the most significant historical moments that has frequently been retold. Yet the special scene of the global reception of the world’s first animated feature—of when and how *Snow White* (or Snow White) travelled to China—has largely been out of focus in previous studies. The time is ripe for a zoom shot.

Zooming in on the story, I deliberately avoid the sort of history that takes the geopolitical divide between China and the West as the very ground for analysis, which sets up another

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 39.

² Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxiv-xxv.

account of border crossing. Yet this is not to deny the arcs and dynamics of influence and reaction involved. Rather, this chapter zooms into the contact zone, the socially and historically defined space where cultures encounter, grapple with, and try to come to terms with each other and where the cultural identities of China and the West may no longer be distinguishable. What emerges in the context of creative reception or re-appropriation, most notably, is the production of *Princess Iron Fan* (*Tieshan gongzhu*, dir. Wan Brothers, 1941), the first feature-length animated film in Asia. Pairing *Princess Iron Fan* with *Snow White*, this chapter continues the discussion of affinities between animation and photography in the context of cel animation, which gets its name from the transparent celluloid sheets (“cels”) on which images are drawn and painted.³ If the first chapter shows that animation depends on photography by singling out one particular species called stop-motion animation, the current chapter initiates a move toward taking cel animation—which is believed to be the dominant form of silver-screen animated cartoons—seriously as a succession of photographic documents. The use of the multiplane camera and live-action reference footage in the two animated features further complicates the disputed relations between animation and photography. Now moribund technologies that only independent practitioners are keeping alive, the two technical aspects suggest a few lines of possibilities for shifting the valence of critical concepts in contemporary film and media theories, especially with regard to animation’s construction of space and time.

ORPHAN ISLAND, OVERSEAS PRINCESS

³ To put it more precisely, they are transparent sheets of cellulose nitrate or acetate.

From November 12, 1937, to December 8, 1941—the so-called Orphan Island Era (*gudao shiqi*) in Chinese film history and historiography—the city of Shanghai was divided into three areas with different governments: the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese Municipality. The Japanese controlled the Chinese Municipality during this period, but the International Settlement and the French Concession remained exempt from Japanese rule and were paradoxically—or we may say “ironically”—called “the free zone.” Circled by the Japanese army, the free zone looked just like an “orphan island” in a sea of Japanese-occupied territory. The appellation “Orphan Island Era” therefore offers a topographical and political account of Shanghai at a time that was characterized by highly asymmetrical relations of power.

During the Orphan Island Era, Hollywood films continued to be openly screened in “the free zone,” and the film industry enjoyed relatively unchecked prosperity. The Hollywood products that flooded Shanghai theaters included cartoon shorts from Disney and the Fleischer studio (which would have been no less popular than Disney in China at that time). Cartoon stars that were familiar to Shanghai audiences included Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Clarabelle Cow, Koko the Clown, Popeye the Sailor, and Betty Boop. One-reel or two-reel animated cartoons were typically shown as a bite-sized appetizer preceding a (live-action) feature film; occasionally, a group of animated shorts were shown together as a program for a cartoon night. If Hollywood cartoons were made to make audiences laugh, Hollywood’s cartoon fantasies seemed to be among the most effective ways for Shanghai moviegoers to temporarily forget about pain, struggle, shame, and even despair in the war-torn city. They constituted an escapist, desirable distraction.

Against this historical background, Disney’s Princess Snow White came to China. In Shanghai, as elsewhere in the world, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was a bona fide

sensation. Its simultaneous opening at Nanking Theater and Metropol (Da Shanghai) Theater on June 2, 1938, was a rare occasion, and considered a special honor. In fact, apart from Chaplin's classics, *Snow White* was the first picture to achieve this.⁴ The astonishing popularity of Snow White was also evident in an advertisement for Hollywood star photos. Among the film stars, Snow White and the seven dwarfs occupied three slots (Figure 2.1), with each of the 4-inch photos being sold for six cents.⁵ The audiences that the advertisement targeted knew, of course, that Snow White and the seven dwarfs were actually drawings here (or a rapid succession of drawings in the animated film), not real-life people who lived among them. But, at the same time, the audiences sensed that the eight of them were alive, as *stars*, as if existing and offering performances subject to the scrutiny of the camera. In her characterization of Richard Dyer's "sociosemiotic approach," Christine Gledhill notes that the study of stars is "an issue in the social production and circulation of meaning, linking industry and text, films and society."⁶ It is because of the potential of the star as a text, or as an object of study, that I prefer not to italicize "Snow White" in the title of this chapter. Treating Snow White as an animated star, a cultural icon in the Chinese context, allows us to trace her footsteps across a wide range of media, commodities, and discourses; combine close film analysis and sociocultural perspectives; and reflect on the formulation and self-renewal of the *star text* without losing the peculiarities of cartoon stardom.

⁴ See "Princess Snow White," *Nanhai yinxing* (南海銀星 *South Sea Silver Star*), vol. 1, 7 (1938): 2.

⁵ "Hollywood Star Photos," *Yin hua ji* (銀花集 *A Collection of Silver Flowers*), vol. 12 (1939): 1.

⁶ Christine Gledhill, "Introduction," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), xiv. For Richard Dyer's seminal approach, see Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 2008).

第七期

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| 241 Snow White & Seven Dwarfs.
白雪公主與七矮人 | 242-243 Snow White 白雪公主 | 244-245 Sonja Henie 宋雅海妮 | 246-249 Deanna Durbin 狄安娜德賓 | 250 Claudette Colbert 克勞黛考爾白 | 251-252 Shirley Temple 秀麗派波兒 | 253 Merle Oberon 莫兒奧白郎 | 254 Janet Gaynor 珍雅嘉諾 | 255 Bobby Breen 寶貝白嗎 | 256 Ronald Colman 考爾門 | 257 Errol Flynn 埃洛弗林 | 258 Paulette Goddard 潘露脫果達 | 259 Dorothy Lamour 多蘿西拉摩 | 260 Fredric March 佛瑞德馬區 | 261 Tyrone Power 泰隆鮑華 | 262 Fred MacMurray 弗雷德麥莫瑞 | 263-264 Loretta Young 洛麗亞楊 | 265 Cary Cooper 加柯古柏 | 266 Robert Taylor 羅伯特泰勒 | 267 Priscilla Lane 派西拉蘭 | 268 Constance Bennett 康絲登波納 | 269 Errol Flynn & Bette Davis
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Figure 2. 1 Hollywood star photo, Yin hua ji vol. 12 (1939)



Figure 2. 2 Double-page comics, *Dianxing*, vol 1, issue 15 (1939)

Within a two-year span, the Disney princess had met Shanghai audiences in at least ten movie theaters, including Lidu, Guanglu, Paris, Empire, Willy, Ping’an, Lafei, and Zhejiang.⁷ On November 27, 1938, Lidu Theater’s and Paris Theater’s separate advertisements for *Snow White* appeared on the same *Shenbao* newspaper page.⁸ On December 1, 1938, Lidu Theater and Guanglu Theater even shared the same advertisement space in *Shenbao*.⁹ *Snow White* was, indeed, Disney’s “diamond mine”: according to a 1939 report, over five hundred thousand

⁷ “Baixue gongzhu zai zhongguo” (白雪公主在中國 Princess Snow White in China), *Dian sheng* (電聲 *The Voice of Film*), vol 8, 29 (1939): 1204.

⁸ *Shenbao*, November 27, 1938.

⁹ *Shenbao*, December 1, 1938.

Chinese citizens had already seen the film,¹⁰ though the number varied in different reports published on different dates. To be clear, this included *Snow White*'s box office records in other Sinophone cities, for instance, Tianjin, Chongqing, and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, it was released under the title *Xuegu qiyou*, literally “Snow Maiden and Seven Friends.”

More can be said regarding the question of translation. Riding on the popularity of the animated feature, a Chinese-and-English version of the *Snow White* storybook appeared in 1939. The storybook was printed on high-end Dowling paper with “five-color” book covers. Reading the bilingual story was claimed to be a good way of learning English.¹¹ More curiously, in *Shenbao*, the most influential Shanghai-based newspaper, *Snow White* was advertised as “the first feature-length five-color cartoon with Chinese subtitles.”¹² The availability of Chinese subtitles was certainly marked as a selling point in the abovementioned advertisement that Lidu Theater and Guanglu Theater shared.¹³ It remains unclear, however, whether Disney added the subtitles with its overseas Chinese audiences in mind or the local companies did it. Most curiously, a 1939 article reported Disney's plan of dubbing *Snow White* into Chinese in collaboration with a film studio in either Shanghai or Hong Kong. In a decisive tone, the author of the report wrote that Disney had decided that Mandarin Chinese, rather than Cantonese, would be the ideal dubbing language and expected to complete it by Christmas. While most parts of the job could be done in a local film studio, the new print needed to be sent back to Hollywood in

¹⁰ “Di Naisi faxian jinkuang” (狄耐斯發現新金礦 Disney Discovered New Gold Mine), *Yin ying* 銀星, vol. 1 (1939): 15.

¹¹ *Shenbao*, April 15, 1939.

¹² *Shenbao*, November 27, 1938.

¹³ *Shenbao*, December 1, 1938.

order to have the songs in the film rendered in Chinese, too.¹⁴ But this plan did not come to fruition. A 1947 article commented on the theatrical return of *Snow White* with the end of World War II and reported that, following the Chinese dubbing of *Tarzan's New York Adventure*, Disney had a new plan: having *Snow White* and *Bambi* dubbed into Chinese and rescored for Chinese music by the following spring. Its collaboration with Lianhua Film Studio (now named Kunlun Film Company) would make this possible.¹⁵ “How dangerous!,” the anonymous author wrote, “This would be another blow for China’s local film industry!” The whole article was a reprint of a hand-written text. Accompanying the text was a doodle of Dopey (one of the seven dwarfs in *Snow White*) and the Big Bad Wolf (from Disney’s 1933 cartoon short, *Three Little Pigs*). In the author’s view, the Big Bad Wolf, which was about to blow away the last hope of the post-war Shanghai film industry, seemed to be a metaphor for Hollywood’s big appetite. The Big Bad Wolf of Hollywood was behind every corner across the globe. Translation, after all, comes from *traduire*, or treachery and betrayal. Underlying the exchanges of words is often a set of power relations or asymmetries that is more complicated than commonly assumed. Once again, this plan was aborted.

This sort of word-for-word translation is a special, relatively simple version of cultural translation that fuses different senses, including the visual, which often plays a vital role. This sort of cultural translation, as W. J. T. Mitchell reminds us, should be understood as “a special, relatively peaceful version of a more general process of transaction, including not only the exchange of words and goods and gifts but also the trading of insults, threats, blows, and

¹⁴ “Baixue gongzhu pei huayu kaobei” (白雪公主配華語拷貝 Snow White Print with Chinese), *Dianying* (電影 *Film*), vol. 51 (1939): 16.

¹⁵ “Weixian ya! Baixue gongzhu jiang pei zhongguo yinyue duibai”(危險呀!“白雪公主”將配中國音樂對白 Dangerous! Snow White Will Have Chinese Music and Dialogues!), *Xing huo* (星火 *Star Fire*), Issue 10 (1947): 53.

bombs.”¹⁶ In what follows, I primarily focus on the visual translation of *Snow White* in the Chinese context, paying particular attention to the interplay between image and text. As I show, at a turbulent time, visual translation often took on the form of capricious concoctions. Along with its dark side, there were, still, what I call moments of “animation,” full of life, vigor, energy, and wonder.



Figure 2. 3 Snow White: the eight immortals crossing the sea

¹⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Border Wars: Translation and Convergence in Politics and Media,” in *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 171.

A comic illustration (Figure 2.3)¹⁷ comes to mind: on a wooden boat marked with the initials “S.W.,” Snow White is holding a huge lotus. To Chinese readers, this gesture is immediately reminiscent of the Fairy Maiden He (*He Xiangju*) in Chinese folktales. Among the seven dwarfs sitting on the boat (we can certainly name each of them from left to right: Grumpy, Sleepy, Doc, Bashful, Happy, Dopey, and Sneezey), Grumpy is the only one paddling. The oar that he is using seems the signature crutch of Li Tieguai, another immortal in Chinese folktales. The lamp in Dopey’s hand seems to suggest that the group is traveling at night. The little-known artist, Ni Changming, did not forget about the importance of music for *Snow White* as a flute, a harmonica, a violin, and a stone chime are evident in the image, bringing a sound dimension to the medium of comics. Doc does not have anything in his hand as he is, as always, the self-appointed leader of the group. Together, they are reminiscent of “the eight immortals crossing the sea (*baxian guohai*).” In the well-known Chinese folktale, the eight immortals decide to discover all the wonders of the undersea realm that do not exist at home in Heaven. The illustration was published in *Shenbao* on December 25, 1938.

On the same page was an article titled “Snow White’s Shanghai Fans”: “since Snow White came to Shanghai, everyone has wanted to see her.” The author, whose pen name is Xinliang, went on to elaborate on how toys and dolls of Snow White and the seven dwarfs attained unprecedented popularity in Shanghai’s department stores. As if to explain why the Prince was missing in the illustration, by the end of the article, the author wrote, “Because the Shanghainese are famous for jealousy, the happy Prince did not come with Snow White.” The implication here is that the article and the comic illustration should not be treated in isolation. If searching keywords in online newspapers databases has made it much easier for researchers to locate

¹⁷ *Shenbao*, December 25, 1938.

related materials, a downside of data mining as such is, very often, the fragmentation or even isolation of materials found. Instead, what we need is what I call an inter-space reading of the newspaper page, a reading that sees the newspaper page as a whole, a reading that helps make visible the image-and-text play or interplay.

Merging the foreign with the indigenous, this comic illustration and the accompanying article serve as testaments to how the icon of Snow White was translated, reconfigured, and creatively appropriated in local and translocal contexts of reception. Rather than imagining two cultures on both sides of a border and seeing the (trans)local reception as an experience of border-crossing, I propose a different way of understanding this historical impetus: the border is always a zone (that may be very thin); it is a *space* as well. Translation and appropriation, as well as interdictions and bans, shape such a zone. This line of thought is explicitly indebted to what Mary Louise Pratt terms “contact zones”—areas in which two or more cultures communicate and negotiate shared histories and power relations, spaces of hybridity that affords multiple openings and close examinations.¹⁸ If, at least in the case of this discussion, the building of the contact space is primarily based on multidirectional flows of objects, visual imagery, and concepts, it is the notion of mobility that makes “space” different from “place,” constituting a platform of spatial imagination that is capable of understanding geographically disparate cultural contexts as an inter-connected space.¹⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell is also a source of inspiration. While it is commonly believed that the question of the border is related to the spatial conceptions that create duality, an inside and an outside, Mitchell leads us to see the third, far less evident aspect of the border, the

¹⁸ Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 39.

¹⁹ Craig Clunas’ lectures “Three Transnational Moments in Chinese Art History” at OCAT Institute and the seminar that he led, “From Public Space to Cosmopolitan Space”—both organized by OCAT Institute in September 2019—were very helpful in my formulation of some thoughts here.

line itself, which “may widen to become a district, zone, or region, or contract to become a mere abstraction on a map, an ephemeral line in the sand.”²⁰ This chapter considers questions concerning how cinema and technology can work in relation to the formulation of such a contact space, and the specificity of historical time, and how media can articulate history, practice, and theory via a fruitful mash-up. The contact zone, I propose, is a space of cultural metamorphosis in which the ideology of Snow White is utilized to dynamically take on various aesthetic forms and even ambiguous cultural identities. Prolific flows of commodities, icons, and media publications make the contact space increasingly visible.



Figure 2. 4 Advertisement for Snow White face powder, *Shenbao*, October 10, 1938

²⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Border Wars,” 167.

In this regard, the popular Snow White icon that appeared on a variety of “Chinese” commodities is extremely telling: Snow White face powder (“Skin White as snow”,²¹ Figure 2.4), Snow White ice-cream (“xuegao,” literally “snow cream,” is the Chinese word for ice-cream), Snow White blankets (expressing her gentle and warm personality), Snow White towels, Snow White toothpaste, Snow White thermos bottles, Snow White candies, Snow White cigarettes, and so on and so forth.²² Snow White could be used as a name or an image. More often, it was both. The proliferation of the Snow White image outside the animated screen and its material ubiquity in the lived space contributed to the formation of a multidimensional image-object network.

As Disney’s princess entered the vocabulary of daily affairs in Shanghai, the film became a multimedia cultural event. Preceding the first Disneyland, which opened in Anaheim, California in 1955, the year 1938 witnessed the opening of “Children’s World” in Shanghai. It was an entertainment space where kids could meet Snow White and the seven dwarfs, engage with countless dolls and toys, and experience the feeling of “jumping into the silver screen.”²³ The Snow White phenomenon demonstrated not only cinema’s centrality to the mass culture of fashion, entertainment, and commerce, but also how Western commodity culture was circulated and retranslated in the context of China, specially China’s encounter with, and response to modernization. It is very likely that all these Snow White products were made without Disney’s knowledge. If Snow White enabled in the Chinese context a powerful example of *character merchandising*, that is, “the licensing, production, marketing, and consumption of goods and

²¹ Snow White is doubly white. It seems to me that Snow White face powder also carries with it a color prejudice.

²² See, for instance, *Shenbao*, December 20, 1938; July 20, 1940; September 22, 1940; June 11, 1946.

²³ *Shenbao*, December 10, 1938; December 11, 1938.

media based around the image of a character,”²⁴ it must be noted that it was a case of character merchandising that was *not* a copyright business. In other words, the proliferation of Snow White tie-ins in China did not depend on the recognition and enforcement of intellectual property laws. Surprisingly, some of these articles—like Snow White big-size dolls and Snow White blankets—were even advertised as (China’s) *guohuo*, literally meaning “national products”; in short, Snow White became “Chinese.”

An issue worth emphasizing here is how the products and urban entertainment activities signified a space of indiscernibility: China and the West were no longer two entities in imagined opposition to each other. This space of indiscernibility, likewise, resists an automatic progressive or utopian narrative in the name of highly desirable “intercultural exchanges” or a dystopian vision of how Chinese people were engulfed by Western commodity culture. What the above historical discussion needs instead is a more nuanced analysis concerning its relevant stylistic heterogeneity, and how this heterogeneity eventually took on historical and ideological value.

The period from December 8, 1941, to August 15, 1945, when the Japanese controlled all of Shanghai, is often referred as the “Fallen City Era” (*lunxian shiqi*). Japanese colonial rule banned Hollywood films in Shanghai from the second half of 1942 to the end of the Japanese occupation. A search of the *Shenbao* newspaper database and Chinese Periodicals Database for the Republican Period, recorded no screenings of *Snow White* during the ban. However, the wide range of Snow White products continued to be found and loved in the Chinese market. Here, the relation between presence and absence was inadvertently put into play: Shanghai audiences’

²⁴ Marc Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 41. Steinberg offers an excellent discussion of the Meiji-Atomu Marketing campaign as a case of character merchandising and sees the beginning of the Atomu TV anime series as a turning point after which copyrights for anime characters were more strictly enforced than they had been previously.

Hollywood imagination persisted despite the absence of Hollywood films; the very form of imagination often took root in the presence of Snow White products.

REMAKING SNOW WHITE FOR THE CHINESE CONTEXT



Figure 2. 5 Chinese Princess Snow White, *New China Pictorial* (1940), vol. 5, issue 11

The sweeping success of Disney's *Snow White* also gave rise to Chinese remakes in different forms. In 1940, Wu Yonggang began shooting the live-action film, *Chinese Princess Snow White* (*Zhongguo baixue gongzhu*, China New Film Company), starring Lu Luming as the stepmother and Chen Juanjuan as Snow White (Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6).²⁵ Additionally, the eleven-year-old, Chen Juanjuan was acclaimed as China's Shirley Temple and was recognized as the goddaughter of wartime film tycoon Zhang Shankun, who founded the China New Film Company (Huaxin yingye). At around the same time, the Southern Canton Film Company announced the shooting plan of a Cantonese remake of *Snow White*, tentatively titled "Snow Maiden and the Seven Knights (*Xuegu qixia zhuan*)," with Mei Qi (Snow White) and Lin Meimei (the queen) as the leading stars.²⁶ The two film remakes—one in Mandarin, the other in Cantonese—became a case of competing "twin-films" (*shuangbao an*), resulting in a race between the China New Film Company and the Southern Canton Film Company to distribute the films to audiences. The race—which drew widespread attention from the press—was an essential component of the twin-film investment, a commercial strategy that was not uncommon at the time. On September 2, 1941, a *Shenbao* report on Wu Yonggang's *Chinese Princess Snow White* and an advertisement of Disney's *Snow White* were published on the same page.²⁷ The layout of a newspaper, including the arrangements and rearrangements of different elements in space, often carries implications. Here, the message was rather clear: Disney had its Princess Snow

²⁵ "Baixue gongzhu zhengshi kaipai" (白雪公主正式開拍 Snow White: Shooting Begins), *Zhongguo yingxun* (中國影訊 *China Film Report*), vol 1, issue 27 (1940): 210.

²⁶ "Duida yuyanyulie yueyupian baixuegongzhu tugao kaipai" (對打愈演愈烈粵語片白雪公主突告開拍 More and More Fierce! Cantonese *Snow White* Suddenly Announced Shooting), *Dianying ribao* (電影日報 *Film Daily*), November 19, 1940: 1. In addition, there was a 1957 Cantonese remake titled *Xuegu qiyou*, co-directed by Zhou Shilu and Lu Yuqi.

²⁷ *Shenbao*, September 2, 1941.

White, and so did China. Disney's *Snow White* also inspired live theatrical remakes. In 1941, Jiannan Drama Troupe put on a performance of *Snow White* with an all-children cast in celebration of Children's Day.²⁸ In addition, in 1947, another live version theatrical remake of *Snow White*, also with an all-child cast, was performed in the China's National Theater College in Nanking.²⁹ These new media versions of *Snow White* demonstrate the inseparable relationship between theater and film, which was prevalent in the culture and art practices during that time.



Figure 2. 6 Wu Yonggang and Chen Juanjuan, *Damei zhoubao*, vol. 79 (1940)

²⁸ *Zhonguo yitan ribao* (中國藝壇日報 *China Art Forum Daily*), issue 30 (1941): 1.

²⁹ *Xin guomin huabao* (新國民畫報 *New Citizen Pictorial*), issue 16 (1947): 0.



Figure 2. 7 The dream in Chinese Princess Snow White, *Damei zhoubao*, vol.78 (1940)

My focus here is Wu Yonggang's *Chinese Princess Snow White*, a rare film print which I was fortunate to watch in the China Film Archive. In this film, the seven workers (the counterparts of the Disney version's seven dwarfs) are young or middle-aged men, all taller than Snow White. Therefore, when the dumb worker—played by renowned comedian Han Langen—begs for Snow White's second kiss (just as Dopey does in the Disney version), it marks an obviously adult moment with sexual overtones, inappropriate for a film supposedly made for children.³⁰ Only in a dream sequence, Snow White dresses up as a little princess and the seven

³⁰ One might notice, in a number of animated films, including Disney's *Snow White*, a creeping up of more adult moments. Think about, for instance, the scene in which the seven dwarfs take turns dancing with Snow White. A

workers appear as seven dwarfs (Figure 2.7). Also, there is no prince in *Chinese Princess Snow White* (although there is a working-class boy who serves a similar narrative function). The classic Hollywood ending, “the prince and the princess get married and live happily ever after”, only exists in the bedtime story that Snow White narrates to the seven workers (and thereby to the audiences). It is very bold, if not post-modern, to have the film’s source materials embedded in the film itself and to make the audiences conscious of this. In this sense, the bedtime story in *Chinese Princess Snow White* is, to paraphrase Mitchell, a metastory, a story within a story, a story that refers to itself or another story.³¹ This self-referential structure resorts to both verbal and pictorial means: Snow White first tells the bedtime story then we see a fragment of it rendered visually in the subsequent dream sequence. Suffice it to say that the structure evokes both metastories and metapictures (a “talking metapicture”³² as we might call it), reflecting the relation or gap between illustration and demonstration. More specifically, it propels us to think of *Chinese Princess Snow White* as not an imitation but an original “remake,” capable of providing a second-order discourse that forcefully challenges our understanding of remakes.³³

In two more ways, *Chinese Princess Snow White* stages a “conscious awareness” that its key source material is a work of animation. First, although *Chinese Princess Snow White* is a live-action film, the live-action (human) bodies exist in a screen space, sometimes complicit with

little more than halfway through the music, Dopey climbs onto poor Sneezy’s shoulders while wearing a long cloak so that he seems like a tall enough dance partner for her. Dana Polan comments on “more adult moments” in recent works of animation and other superhero narratives. Dana Polan, *The LEGO Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 48.

³¹ See W. J. T. Mitchell, “Metapictures,” in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35–82.

³² Ibid.

³³ Elsewhere I touch on the issue of original remakes in the context of Chinese remakes of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Waterloo Bridge* (1940). See Yang Panpan, “Repositioning Excess: Romantic Melodrama’s Journey from Hollywood to China,” in *Melodrama Unbound*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 219–36.

what Scott Bukatman terms “cartoon physics.” For example, pepper *always* makes one sneeze, and a sneeze *always* blows open all the doors and windows.³⁴ In reference to *Chinese Princess Snow White*, director Wu Yonggang mentioned this detail as an example of how he used cartoons’ exaggeration techniques.³⁵ Second, in the scene in *Chinese Princess Snow White*, where the dumb worker (Dopey) swallows the soap by accident and spits out a large number of soap bubbles, the bubbles are hand-drawn and vary in size: this is all achieved through cartoon techniques. The brief cartoon scene in the live-action film parleys the impossible in live-action film production by providing aspects that are only possible in the cartoon medium; for example, it is difficult to have an actor constantly spitting out soap bubbles. In this way, the live-action film pays fitting tribute to the Disney version.

THE MAKING OF PRINCESS IRON FAN

Disney’s *Snow White* transformed the history of Chinese animation. As the popularity of *Snow White* soared in Shanghai, an idea became clear in Wan Laiming’s mind: to make the first feature-length animated film in China. As Wan Laiming, the eldest among the Wan Brothers, recalls, “at that time, I was thinking that Americans could do *Snow White* with their national characteristics and we could, of course, do *Princess Iron Fan* with our national characteristics. I wondered, if *Princess Iron Fan* was to be successful, domestic and overseas Chinese audiences, as well as some foreigners, could have a good look at two beautiful ‘princesses (Figure 2.8)’, even making a comprehensive comparison from ideological content to art style...How could we

³⁴ See Scott Bukatman, “Some Observations Pertaining to Cartoon Physics; or The Cartoon Cat in the Machine,” in *Animating Film Theory*, eds. Karen Redrobe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 301–16.

³⁵ “Wu Yonggang tan Zhongguo baixue gongzhu” (吳永剛談中國白雪公主 Wu Yonggang on *Chinese Princess Snow White*), *Shehui ribao* (社會日報 *Society Daily*), May 1, 1940: 4.

say that it was our destiny for a Chinese cartoon not to be as good as an American one?”³⁶ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Wan Brothers, Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, and Wan Dihuan,³⁷ had been experimenting with animation since the 1920s, while working as set designers and newspaper cartoonists. At the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, and Wan Chaochen—also known as “three Wan brothers” in the history of Chinese animation—left for Wuhan, where they produced two episodes of “Anti-Japanese Poster Collection” and four of “Anti-Japanese War Song Collection.” Simultaneously, Wan Dihuan stayed in Shanghai, where he maintained a photography studio. During the autumn of 1938, when Japan occupied Wuhan, Wan Chaochen moved alone to Chongqing, where he made puppet animation.³⁸ In the fall of 1939, upon returning to Shanghai, Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan received an invitation from Zhang Shankun to establish a cartoon department for the New China Film Company (xinhua yingye), which, at that point, registered as an American company called United China (Zhongguo lianhe yingye). Zhang saw commercial potential in the animated feature of Disney’s *Snow White* and hired the Wan brothers to start working on *Princess Iron Fan*. According to a 1940 article published in *Qingqing dianying*, at the time, the Wan Brothers put out an announcement seeking to hire apprentices, men and women, for the six divisions of the newly founded department, including cartoon design, drawing, movement, background, inking, and painting.³⁹ The production timeline was

³⁶ Wan Laiming 萬籟鳴 and Wan Guohun 萬國魂, *Wo yu Sun Wukong* (我與孫悟空 Beiyue wenyi, 1989), 88. Translation mine.

³⁷ There were 10 brothers in the Wan family. Six died at an early age.

³⁸ See John Lent and Xu Ying, “China’s Animation Beginnings: The Roles of the Wan Brothers and Others,” *Asian Cinema*, 14.1 (March 2003): 56-69.

³⁹ “The Wan Brothers are Hiring Cartoon Talents.” *Qingqing dianying* 5, 11 (1940)

longer than expected. As their endeavor marked the first attempt to create a feature-length cartoon film in China, it was extremely difficult to predict its budget. Consequently, the production of *Princess Iron Fan* soon faced a serious financial setback. However, despite this, the Wan Brothers persisted, and eventually managed to complete the project under wartime conditions with money from Sheng Pihua, the head of Shangyuanyin Company in Shanghai.⁴⁰ In November 1941, *Princess Iron Fan* premiered at Metropol (Da Shanghai), Xinguang, and Huguang, the three movie theaters controlled by Sheng's company.



Figure 2. 8 Character design of Princess Iron Fan, *Xinhua Pictorial*, vol. 5, issue 6 (1940)

⁴⁰ Sheng Pihua offered the brothers funding under certain conditions. See Wan Laiming and Wan Guohun, *Wo yu Sun Wukong*, 89.



Figure 2. 9 Princess Iron Fan as a nüxia figure, *Far Eastern Illustrated News*, vol. 2, issue 5 (1941)

A number of connections can be drawn between Disney's *Snow White* and the Wan Brothers' *Princess Iron Fan*: from the "princess" in the title to the motif of fire: from typical cartoon gags⁴¹ to the narrative drive of jealousy, and from the use of live-action reference footage to the multiplane camera. My goal here is not to provide "a comprehensive comparison" of these two animated features but to carefully examine their technical aspects and materialist underpinnings and to demonstrate how the process of making *Princess Iron Fan* shaped its formal features in dialogue with *Snow White*.

Our investigation concerning the parallels between *Princess Iron Fan* and *Snow White* does not imply that Disney was the only source of inspiration for the Wan Brothers' film.⁴² In fact, *Princess Iron Fan* seems to draw from a combination of Disney and Fleischer styles, and the origins of its diverse references can be traced back to indigenous sources as well, including a 1927 predecessor under the same title, with a martial arts theme, starring Hu Die.⁴³ As Bao Weihong has observed, in the feature-length animated film, *Princess Iron Fan* appears with her armor, swords, and physical prowess as a *nüxia* (female warrior) figure (Figure 2.9), which is one of the primary attractions of the martial arts magic-spirit genre.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Cartoon gags and jokes are not my primary concern here, but I want to give one example: In *Princess Iron Fan*, when the mountain with flames (*huoyan shan*) blocks the monk Tang Sanzang and his three disciples (Monkey, Pigsy, and Sandy), Pigsy detaches one of his ears and turns it into a makeshift fan—what Eric Smoodin calls "a typically cute Disney joke." Just like the bright-blue bird with a yellow beak that uses its tail feathers to put out a candle flame in *Snow White*, Pigsy puts one part of his body to functional use. For a comprehensive fine analysis of *Snow White*, see Eric Smoodin, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (London: British Film Institute, 2012).

⁴² In fact, the Wans were often hailed as "China's Walt Disney." See "Zhongguo de Huadedisinai: katong changpian Tieshangongshu jijiang wenshi," (中國的華德狄斯耐卡通長片鐵扇公主 即將問世 China's Walt Disney: Feature-length cartoon *Prince Iron Fan* is forthcoming), *Yuandong huabao* (遠東畫報 *Far Eastern Illustrated News*), vol. 2, 5 (1941): 4-6.

⁴³ See *Shenbao*, August 4, 1927; August 13, 1927.

⁴⁴ Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 363.

A 1940 article, published in *Zhonghua*, describes the step-by-step production process of *Princess Iron Fan*,⁴⁵ pointing to more general understandings of cel animation production. For unknown reasons, some parts of the article are cut out (Figure 2.10a), yet the missing details can be located in another 1941 article on a similar topic from *Wanxiang*.⁴⁶ Roughly, the steps are described as follows: (1) designing the main characters and background scenes; (2) sketching key frames of character movement and calculating the exact time and number of images needed for specific movement, often with reference to the animator's own facial expressions in the mirror (if live-action reference footage is not used); (3) filling out the intermediary frames between key frames, with each image numbered; (4) inking: copying sketches from paper onto celluloid sheets, or "cels"; (5) filling inside the linked lines with ink pigment; (6) meeting the animation stand: the multiple celluloid sheets of the same frame, for instance, the background, foreground, and middle-ground layers, are stacked together under the camera shooting in a downward direction. Piles of celluloid sheets are photographed frame by frame. In addition to the above documented steps, a sound cartoon also involves a sound production process.

Here, I wish to foreground the thesis that the sandwich-like animation stand calls for a kind of space-centered analysis. Different cartoon characters, different background layers, or different body parts of the same character are often drawn on different cels for economic reasons. This allows animators to redraw a certain part of the cartoon character's body without redrawing the whole character. Thus, as Kristin Thompson notes, because the cel system allows the overlaying of highly disparate graphics and contradictory perspectives, the very separation of graphic

⁴⁵ "Zhongguo di yi bu changpian katong yingpian Tieshan gongzhu," (中國第一部長片卡通影片鐵扇公主 China's first feature-length cartoon: *Princess Iron Fan*), *Zhonghua* 中華, 93 (1940): 24.

⁴⁶ "Zhongguo di yi bu changpian katong yingpian Tieshan gongzhu," (中國第一部長片卡通影片鐵扇公主 China's first feature-length cartoon: *Princess Iron Fan*), *Wanxiang* 萬象, vol. 1, 1 (1941): 64.

components into individual cels bestows animated cartoons with a type of *spatial disruption*, leaving space for great reflection in the viewer.⁴⁷ When cels are sandwiched together (and photographed as a whole), the result is, as Thomas Lamarre terms it, a *multiplanar image*, an image composed of multiple layers or planes.⁴⁸ The multiplanar image exists before the successive, frame-to-frame animation movement is invoked. For this reason, Lamarre argues for a form of animation analysis that is centered on compositing (the space within images that becomes spread across frames), rather than on character animation (movement across frames). The analysis of compositing refers to the examination of layers, or spatial relations, the gaps or interstices in particular between layers. We can consider this a *layer-by-layer analysis*. Using film editing as a reference point, we might say that, with scissors and glue (in the pre-digital days), film editing discovers *temporal montage*, a time-based mosaic of different shots that gives birth to new meanings; with cels and stands, cel animation achieves *spatial montage*, the juxtaposition of disparate elements within one frame that also establishes new implications.⁴⁹ I discuss this further later.

Let us return to the illustrated article from *Zhonghua*. The most eye-catching aspect of this article is a photo of a young woman (Figure 2.10b). With her slender fingers holding a brush, this young woman is shown carefully and skillfully applying ink pigment exactly within the ink lines on a translucent celluloid sheet prepared for *Princess Iron Fan*. The image shows her

⁴⁷ Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation Technique," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 106–20.

⁴⁸ Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, xxiii.

⁴⁹ According to Manovich, temporal montage was discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century; however, it was not until the end of the century that editing programs such as Photoshop and Premiere discovered spatial montage. I believe that spatial montage was discovered much earlier as, by the 1930s, the cel system had become dominant form of animation production in the United States. See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 155–158.

working quickly to make sure the pigment does not leave streaks. She has tied her hair up so that it will not block her sight and/or easily fall onto the celluloid sheet. She rests the other hand on her chest, relatively far from the celluloid sheet on the desk, to avoid smearing the cel with the grease on her hand. Only the thinnest nib touches the cel. The same photo was reprinted in the abovementioned article from *Wanxiang*.⁵⁰

This image brings into the analytic spotlight the intensive labor that went into the animated feature's production. The workers on the precision-driven assembly line for *Princess Iron Fan* (some of whom were not even credited) were, in a sense, the first generation of inkers and painters in China. Significantly varying numbers of workers in the Cartoon department were reported in various amounts, ranging from 50, 60, 100, 200, 250, to 300, perhaps because the Wan Brothers had to hire more inkers, painters, and staff over time. If, as Eisenstein sees it, cartoon characters with their "plasmatic" bodies that bypass the physical limitations of bodies of human beings speak for a spirit of freedom unhinged from ossification⁵¹ (the scene in *Princess Iron Fan* in which Monkey stretches and shrinks his super-long neck best exemplifies this), the very form of "freedom" is paradoxically rendered possible by the extremely tedious, rigorously controlled, almost ossified form of production ("repeat, repeat, and repeat"), a form of labor that is everything animation is not. In fact, some workers, having spent much more time on some of their inking and coloring assignments than they first expected and having suffered the high demands of productivity imposed on them by Zhang Shankun, went on strike during the production process of *Princess Iron Fan*. And in a manner that was eerily reminiscent of Disney

⁵⁰"Zhonguo di yi bu changpian katong yingpian Tieshan gongzhu," (China's first feature-length cartoon: *Princess Iron Fan*), *Wanxiang*, vol. 1, 1 (1941): 64.

⁵¹ Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda and trans. Alan Upchurch (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986. Reprint, London: Methuen, 1988), 21.

animators' strike in May 1941, the United China Studio workers, too, demanded their unpaid salaries.⁵²

LINE OF APPROACH, SHAPE OF INQUIRY

What if, at times, the young woman (and hundreds of “her”) could not hold the brush steadily? To answer this question, I adopt here an approach indebted to Hannah Frank: *frame-by-frame analysis*.⁵³ Let me introduce the method: import the digital file of a movie, animated film or not, into Quick Time Player (or another software program) and closely examine each image or frame in front of your eyes as you keep pressing the “→” (or “↓”) button on your keyboard. In this way, we can spend a whole day “watching” a feature-length film. But this is not to say that this mode of viewing arrives at the age of the digital. In fact, anime fans began to do something similar from the late 1970s in Japan: using the pause function on the VCR to look at the images frame by frame, which lead them to discover the work of multiple creators, often ignored.⁵⁴

This mode of analysis is actually appropriate for studying cel animation; cel animated cartoons are made frame by frame, so they should be examined in this way. This form of analysis

⁵² “Zhang Shankun yu Tieshan gongzhu” (張善琨與鐵扇公主 Zhang Shankun and Princess Iron Fan), *Haiyan* 海燕, 7 (1946): 4.

⁵³ See Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). See also Hannah Frank, “Traces of the World: Cel Animation and Photography,” *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 23–39.

⁵⁴ Okada Toshio, in his official text for the “seminar on otaku culture” at Tokyo University, draws attention to the role of the VCR in transforming a mode of viewing. Thomas Lamarre offers an insightful discussion on this. See Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 144–154.

is indeed a way of looking that implies a viewing subject. By reversing the cartoon process, the mode of analysis actually restores the original context and the original wonder of animation.⁵⁵



Figure 2. 11 a-c A patch on three successive frames, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)

⁵⁵ Despite writing for a very different context, Wu Hung's proposal on restoring the original context of tombs in academic research is very helpful for formulating some of my thoughts here. See Wu Hung, "Rethinking East Asian Tombs: A Methodological Proposal," in *On Chinese Art: Cases and Concepts* (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2016), 24–67.

The mode of frame-by-frame analysis leads to surprising discoveries. Take, for example, Disney's *Snow White*. As our princess charming tends to the wishing well, a patch on her skirt changes from light blue to purple (Figure 2.11 a-b). In the subsequent frame, the patch is left unpainted (Figure 2.11 c) probably due to the painter's negligence. The tiniest details on each frame might only take up 1/24 of a second of screen time; if *Snow White* is being watched at "normal" speed, they remain invisible to our naked eyes.

Similarly, a frame-by-frame viewing of *Princess Iron Fan* enables us to discover the incidental mistakes or imperfections that Frank reads as *traces* of hands, *traces* of production, albeit in a different cultural and historical context.⁵⁶ For example, in the scene where Monkey transforms himself into a bee, within a single frame, we see a blurry spattering of frantic brushstrokes (Figure 2.12)—an obvious mistake that soon disappears in the next frame; in one frame from the close-up of the Banana Leaf Cave (*Bajiao dong*) plaque, an unwanted ink block is visible at the upper-left corner (Figure 2.13), indicating the small accident of knocking over the inkwell; when photographing the scene of Monkey as the bee in the dark liquid environment of *Princess Iron Fan*'s stomach, one cel was not placed in the right exact position. As a result, part of the white paper under the cel was accidentally taken into the photographic frame (Figure 2.14). These errors or imperfections serve as testaments to the simple yet often forgotten fact that every frame of cel animation is a photograph, a photograph of a drawing; it is the process of photographing the nearly 200,000 celluloid sheets of *Prince Iron Fan* that has preserved the "derailed" ink and paint.

⁵⁶ Frank, "Traces of the World: Cel Animation and Photography," 23–39.



Figure 2. 12 A blurry rush of spattered, frantic brushstrokes, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941)



Figure 2. 13 An unwanted ink block at the upper-left corner, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941)

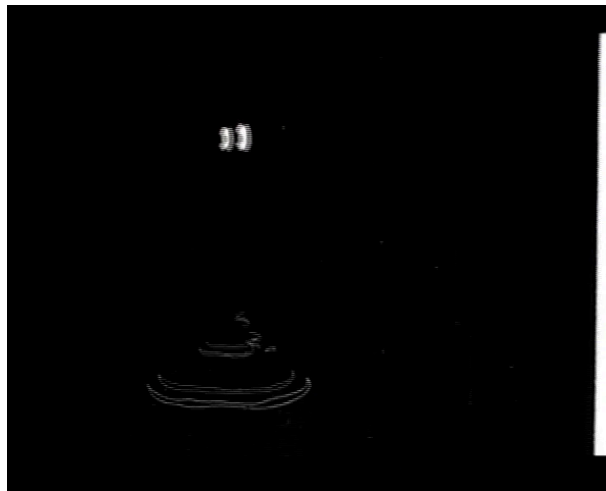


Figure 2. 14 When the cel is not placed in the right position, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941)

When we think more of cel animation as photography, the concept of the “world” once more spirals to the forefront of theoretical inquiry. As discussed in the first chapter, Stanley Cavell never denies that the cartoon can offer us “a world.” And yet, what is more important for him is that, unlike photography (and, likewise, live-action cinema), the cartoon does not provide “a view of the world.”⁵⁷ Although we have demonstrated how stop-motion animation has challenged this claim, a potential theoretical gap the previous chapter leaves concerns whether Cavell means “cel animation cartoon” *only* when he says “cartoon.” To fill in this gap and to counter Cavell’s thesis completely, the current chapter turns to the cel animated cartoon. Again, each frame of cel animated cartoon is a photograph; it *does* offer us “a view of the world.” Here, *the* world pertains to the United China Studio, including its often-unfavorable working conditions. As each of the smears, errors, and traces on the cels *records* a moment of laziness, burnout, or even passive-aggressive defiance, each frame of *Princess Iron Fan* becomes a historical document of its own production.

One might go on to debate that when Cavell writes that the cartoon gives us “a world,” he is really referring to a diegetic one: a fictional world of self-closure, self-generation, and self-transformation (as exemplified by *Duck Amuck* and the animated credit sequence of *The Pearl Necklace*, discussed in the first chapter). It is *a closed loop*, which makes no allowance for *the* world outside of it.⁵⁸ This loop, however, is knocked wide open when the *traces* of human hands come into view. With the brushstrokes, specks, and errors, one can no longer deny the intensity of human labor that runs from the world we call reality into the cartoon universe. This is one of

⁵⁷ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 168

⁵⁸ Dana Polan, “Daffy Duck and Bertolt Brecht: Toward a Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinema?,” in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 350–51.

the great potentials of frame-by-frame analysis: it opens up the conceptual space where the life of animated films in the social vector can be pursued. In this space, issues of texts and formal features—the traditional concerns of cinema studies and art history—intersect with those of industry and labor, history and society, culture and viewers—the primary concerns of cultural studies. In this space, connections between image and studio, fiction and reality, visual analysis and social discourse are all being constantly drawn and redrawn.





Figure 2. 15 a-d The drunken scene, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941)

Our adoption of *frame-by-frame* analysis from Hannah Frank is by no means a critique of *layer-by-layer* analysis, the analytical mode that, at least in Thomas Lamarre's formulation, privileges the spatial relations within frames over movement across frames. Rather, I argue that, in practice, *frame-by-frame* analysis enables us to understand compositing—the interactions between layers—in the medium of animation. In other words, *frame-by-frame* analysis aids in the task of *layer-by-layer* analysis. This is additional academic potential of the methodology.

An example beckons from a long take in *Princess Iron Fan* (Figure 2.15 a-d). On the background layer, rendered in a linear perspective, the framing device of columns and banisters presents a view of the exquisite architecture of the “outside” world, and, thus, articulates a sense of spatial depth. Further contributing to the depth of the pictorial space is the four-legged, sandalwood table at the center of the scene. The Bull Demon King (here, he is Pigsy in disguise) and Princess Iron Fan, both drunk, stagger towards the table, swaying all the way but eventually making a full circle around it. Their interaction and relative spatial relationship to the table—resembling those of characters in live-action cinema or even the spectator’s own experience of his or her own body in the world—convince the audiences that the two animated characters inhabit the same space. At first glance (Figure 2.15 a), audiences might assume that the Bull Demon King, *Princess Iron Fan*, and the table are, from front to back, three distinct layers—a conventional way of layering. Yet looking at this shot, frame-by-frame, reveals a more a complex arrangement of spatial relations between layers are at work here. Perhaps we can call it a “*mise-en-frame*.” The Bull Demon King shouts to Princess Iron Fan on the other side of the table, “Come over here! Drink a little!” and she puts one of her hands on the table (Figure 2.15b and c). Her sleeve slightly occludes the table from view, indicating that she is layered above the table. At the same time, however, a small part of Princess Iron Fan’s white, long skirt is visible through the table’s four legs, implying that she is behind the table layer. That is to say, to render this possible, Princess Iron Fan must be animated on at least two distinct layers, the upper part of her torso on one, the lower half on the other. It is likely that her belt is the divide. As the original cels used in the *Princess Iron Fan* production process were not preserved, it is not always clear how many layers there are and what their relations are to each other, but it is clear that, in this shot, Princess Iron Fan’s body is fragmented and distributed onto different layers. Indeed, only

by fragmenting her body can the relatively convincing spatial relations between Princess Iron Fan and the table be conveyed. Even the lower half of Princess Iron Fan's torso—her long, white skirt—is not always the background layer in relation to the layer of the table. In fact, the two layers must have been *switched* at some point during the long take in the process of photographing the cels (between Figure 2.15 c and Figure 2.15 d) so as to achieve the motion of Princess Iron Fan “coming over here.” Looking at the shot frame by frame helps make visible the hidden details in the animated film, disclosing quite unknown aspects within it, and even allows us to see the act of switching the layers. In contrast to the understanding of faithfully preserving a temporal-spatial whole as the prize of the long take in live-action cinema, the animated long take requires a higher degree of *mise-en-frame*, one that violates a consistent relation of foreground-background layers.

Having put *frame-by-frame* analysis and *layer-by-layer* analysis into conversation, I hope I have shown how the two methods supply, support, unearth, and animate each other. Here, software programs, in the hands of researchers, become tools for creating, generating, or making a perverse yet potentially productive viewing experience. Looking at a work of animation frame by frame while deciphering it layer by layer across enigmatic incidents, forgotten paths, and poetic fragments, presents us with an unparalleled amount of information. Admittedly, this process is very tedious and not suitable for all investigative inquiries. Putting some shots in slow motion, if a frame-by-frame viewing experience is not always necessary, may also enable us to identify details that would otherwise remain unseen. In this way, we might refer to this method as “temporal analysis” rather than “frame-by-frame analysis.” In a similar vein, the combination of certain layers might retain few traces; thus, to be pragmatic, we can analyze those layers between which the interstices are more obvious. Therefore my inclination, is not always to call

such examination “layer-by-layer analysis” but to put it more broadly as “spatial analysis.” To combine the two methods into one, to register at a more general level, I want to make clear that what I am interested in developing is a more comprehensive mode of *temporal-spatial analysis*, which makes use of digital programs to intervene in the temporal-spatial structure of cinema so as to open up new possibilities. Key to this mode of analysis is a structure of viewing, analyzing, and recreating animated films with scholars’ own consciousnesses, creativities, philosophical concerns, and technological sensibilities.

MOVING INTO DEPTH: THE MULTIPLANE CAMERA

Now my critical lens is focused on the Wan Brothers’ cameras. While some contemporary reports suggest that the Wan Brothers purchased a camera stand in 1927 from an American merchant who failed in his attempts to run a cartoon company in Shanghai and they used it in the making of cartoon shorts for the Great Wall Company, the camera set used for the production of *Princess Iron Fan* was probably a new one, a version of a multiplane camera purchased around 1934 from the United States.⁵⁹ The machine was about twenty feet tall. Each of the multiple layers was capable of moving not only horizontally but also vertically. The camera mounted on the top of the multiplane stand could also rotate. Four layers of lighting could be used to achieve different lighting effects. Four to five cameramen were necessary to operate the set.⁶⁰ In this

⁵⁹ See “Zhonguo di yi bu changpian katong yingpian Tieshan gongzhu,” (China’s first feature-length cartoon: *Princess Iron Fan*), *Wanxiang*, vol. 1, 1 (1941): 64; Wan Laiming 萬籟鳴, Wan Guchan 萬古蟾, “Zhonguo di yi bu katong Tieshan gongzhu: women de gongzuo baogao” (中國第一部長篇卡通電影: 鐵扇公主我們的工作報告 China’s First Feature-length Cartoon *Film Princess Iron Fan: Our Working Report*), *Wanxiang*, vol. 1, 1: 63–64; “Wan shi katong jiqi mimi yun di tiexiang huayuan” (萬氏卡通機器秘密運抵丁香花園 The Wan Brothers’ Cartoon Machine Secretly Arrived at Dingxiang Garden). *Zhonghua yingxun* (中華影訊 *China Film Report*), vol. 1, 17 (1940): 130. See also Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 365–366.

⁶⁰ See “Zhonguo di yi bu changpian katong yingpian Tieshan gongzhu,” (China’s first feature-length cartoon: *Princess Iron Fan*), *Wanxiang*, vol. 1, 1 (1941): 64.

section, I elaborate on how the multiplane camera conveys a sense of moving deep into space in cel animation.

At the outset, it is crucial to point out that, conventionally, cel animation produces space in a manner that is probably more akin to visual arts than to live-action cinema. As in painting, cel animation provides audiences with various depth cues, including but not limited to relative size, texture gradient, color gradient, filled and unfilled space, the blurring of close objects, attached shadows, cast shadows, and, as illustrated in our analysis of *Princess Iron Fan*, partial overlap.⁶¹ However, the conventional design of the animation stand—a relatively static camera always facing a set of drawings—makes it extremely challenging to produce a sense (and sensation) of “movement into the world of the image, into its depth,” which “many consider the hallmark of the (live-action) cinema.”⁶²

To avoid confusion, when I say “moving into depth,” I mean the effect of a *dolly* shot, which is the actual, physical act of moving closer to or further away from an object, rather than that of a *zoom* shot, which only requires an adjustment in the camera’s focal length. Dollying changes the spatial relation to the surroundings of the subject, while zooming does not. In cel animation production, moving the painted background layer closer and closer to the camera while it is being photographed frame by frame creates the *zooming-in effect*, rather than a forward tracking shot. Whenever we talk about camera movement in cel animation, it is not the physical camera that moves; rather, it is all about stimulating the effects thereof.

⁶¹ Daniel J. Weintraub and Edward L. Walker offer a nice summary of depth cues. See Daniel J. Weintraub and Edward L. Walker, *Perception* (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1966), 22–9. This is cited in Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, 106–20.

⁶² Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, xxv.

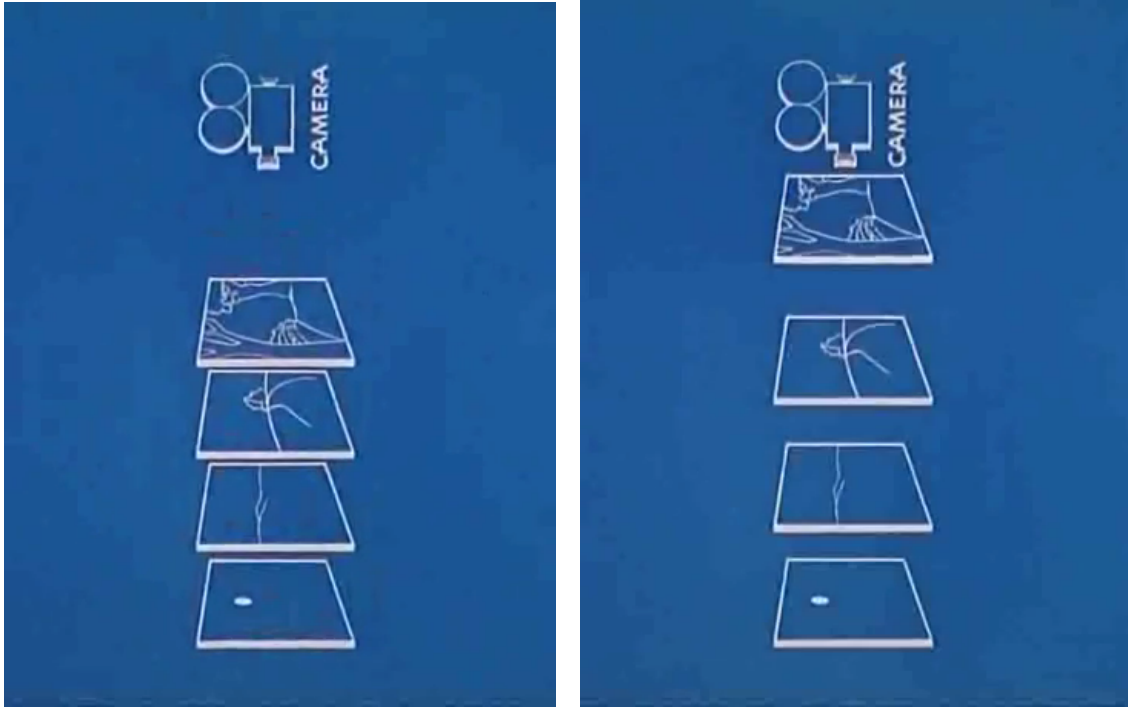


Figure 2.16 a-b How the Multiplane Camera Works

Take a classroom example: you are walking on a country road, past trees and bushes, toward a barn under the full moon. The trees and bushes—the things closest to you and on both sides of you—are gaining greater weight than the barn. Not only does the barn look bigger as you walk toward it, but it also it starts to block out some of the other things around it in the field of vision. The distant mountains, too, look bigger, yet only slightly so. The full moon remains the same size (according to your sentiments). Moving a painted background layer of the moonlight scene toward the cel animation camera only results only in a joke: the moon suddenly gets very big. The question is “How does one take a landscape painting and make it behave like real scenery on camera?”

The multiplane camera solves this problem in a costly and time-consuming manner (Figure 2.16 a-b). The different elements of background scenery are separated into multiple layers

according to their various distances from the viewer on the country road: for instance, the plane of trees and bushes, the plane of the barn, the plane of the distant mountains, and the plane of the full moon. Then it becomes possible to have different planes of scenery moving at different speeds: the further away from the camera, the slower the speed. The movement of each plane is calculated, and each position is photographed frame by frame. The result is the sensation of movement into depth, of moving inside the animated world. The multiplane camera, therefore, functions as a key asset in establishing a more believable space. With multiplane photography, I activate a movement from animation as *products* to the *production* of animation to *the production of space in animation*.⁶³

In the history of the Disney Studios, the multiplane camera was used experimentally in the production of the *Silly Symphony* cartoon short “The Old Mill” in early 1937 then in the production of *Snow White*. In the opening sequence, a castle appears on top of a mountain. *Snow White* replicates the opening shot of *The Old Mill* as the multiplane camera, through three successive tracking shots, and moves into the Queen’s palace. Two dissolves link the three forward tracking shots. In addition, the sequence of Snow White’s escape through the dark forest witnesses the most virtuosic multiplane photography ever. She gets entangled in the old trees as she runs away from the huntsman. Then she runs *deep* into the forest where she encounters a series of monstrous images and animals.⁶⁴ Combining the horizontal and vertical movement of layers with the rotation of the camera head, the sequence imparts the fullest sense of moving

⁶³ My inspiration comes from Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992.)

⁶⁴ I write the sequence description with reference to Eric Smoodin, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (London: British Film Institute, 2012).

around inside the haunted forest.⁶⁵ The mutiplane system greatly enhances the life-like feel of Disney animation, if not to use the heavily-connotated term “realism.” Without dipping into the question of whether Disney’s pursuit of realism in animation should be considered reductive, the virtuosity of the multiplane camera was, first of all, prized as a technological marvel in the 1930s.

The opening of *Princess Iron Fan* is also done with multiplane photography: with an iris shot, temples appear on top of a mountain. As if to replicate that of *Snow White*, the multiplane camera of *Princess Iron Fan* tracks toward one of the temples. Then a *dissolve* leads us to the interior of the temple with an entrance to an inner chamber and a colossal column in the foreground. The camera moves *through* the entrance to the inner space, where we see a censer as well as burning candles on a square table. On the one hand, *Princess Iron Fan* readily borrows the pattern of “successive tracking shots + dissolves” from *Snow White*. On the other hand, it consciously adds the device of the interior entrance so as to enhance a sense of dimensionality. The technique here is “*jie jing*,” literally meaning “borrowed views;” it refers to inclusion of a view of a natural landscape outside a garden or other architectonic space, often by building a window or an entrance, aesthetics with origins in Chinese garden art. It allows the viewer to have one view within another. As a form of depth clue, *jie jing* belongs to the realm of architecture and the pictorial arts. At the same time, it is largely a mobile experience. In this particular sequence, the technique of *jie jing* with its similar function of linking the exterior and interior spaces, replaces a dissolve. As the multiplane camera tracks in, passing through the interior

⁶⁵ An astonishing variation of multiplane photography appears in the scene where the Queen drinks the potion, and the surroundings start to spin around her. The effect of rotation is achieved by having the background and foreground layers of the multiplane set move in opposite directions.

entrance, it reveals to audiences the Chinese pictorial space, which is mobile, fluid, and ever-expanding.

A parallel example appears when the multiplane camera finds its way into Princess Iron Fan's chamber. The sequence starts with a frontal view of an audience hall. Standing in the foreground are a tripod-like object with two flaring handles and one high lid on top, and a colossal column, both rendered in silhouette. At the center of the audience hall is an interior entrance behind raised drapes. Through the entrance, we can steal a view of Princess Iron Fan lying on her bed—another form of *jie jing*, which includes a beauty as part of the view. The camera tracks in, *through* the entrance, into the inner chamber. Princess Iron Fan is depicted here as a typical beauty in “spring nap paintings (*chunshui tu*).” Gradually, she wakes up—literally a drawing coming to life (it is animation!). The entrance is the obvious divide of the two spaces of significantly different atmospheres. With a succession of forward tracking shots, audiences enter deeper and deeper into a system of consecutive enclosures. Having passed through the entrance, the camera (as well as audiences) arrives at a *feminine space*,⁶⁶ a world composed of a bed, a mountain-and-water (*shanshui*) screen, other architecture and woodwork, tea cups, peach blossoms in a vase, a view of banana trees borrowed from the back garden, and Princess Iron Fan, her maids, and their activities. Princess Iron Fan's armor on the hanger, however, introduces a sense of restlessness to the quiet, feminine precinct. Here, the multiplane camera lends itself to a voyeuristic mode of viewing, satisfying audiences with ever-increasing scopophilic pleasure. The movement appears “natural” enough as the plane of the silhouette objects, the plane of the

⁶⁶ For Wu Hung's seminal study of feminine space, see Wu Hung, *Zhongguo huihua de “nüxing kongjian”* (中國繪畫的女性空間 *Feminine Space in Chinese Painting*) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2018). See also Wu Hung, “Beyond Stereotypes: The Twelve Beauties in Qing Court Art and the Dream of the Red Chamber,” in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, eds. Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 306–65.

front hall with the entrance, and the plane of the sleeping beauty move at different rates according to their real or apparent distance. Throughout *Princess Iron Fan*, the pattern of “tracking shots + *jie jing* + moving through an entrance” is used four times in total.⁶⁷ The use of the multiplane camera accrues further complexity in the Chinese context and requires re-accommodation to conceptual frameworks. The mobile space that it creates, therefore, becomes the intersection of the axes and fusion of the depth cues of the visual arts and the depth cue of motion (temporal parallax), “traditional” aesthetics (that never truly leave us) and travelling technologies (that do not merely belong to the West). Such negotiations and exchanges hold the key to the production of space in Chinese animation.

A further corollary of the multiplane camera’s intervention in our understanding of the relation between animation and photography is about the notion of off-screen. The multiplane system reminds us that what we see on screen is not just a photograph of a painting but is also, very often, *part* of a photograph of a painting. The scenery planes of the multiplane system are huge; sometimes even painted on transparent glasses, and only a small section of the scenery on the glass falls into the view of the camera. Thus, it opens up a fresh territory of investigation regarding the *off-zone* of an image.

Again, I am taking Stanley Cavell’s *The World Viewed*, especially as regards the differences between a painting and a photograph, as my point of reference: “You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense asked of a painting. You can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality.”⁶⁸ Reformulating the differences of a painting and a photograph, Hannah

⁶⁷ In the other two sequences that I do not have much space to elaborate upon, the multiplane camera moves through a cave and the columns of a pavilion respectively.

⁶⁸ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard

Frank notes: “The frame of a painting is centripetal, pulling us inward, toward a world found only within its borders; the photograph, by contrast, is centrifugal, pushing us outward, beyond its bounds: a window.”⁶⁹ The analogy between a photograph and a window means that we are always curious to see more than a window allows us to see. The question that naturally arises—“What is in the *off-zone* of the photograph?” —points to a past existence: at the moment of the pressing of the shutter, there must be something that exists there but does not fall into the view of the camera. However, *materially*, there is nothing outside the borders of a painting. In this respect, we arrive at a commonplace assumption: whether we can *query* the off-zone is the touchstone of the ontological divide between painting and photography, an assumption that I challenge.

The multiplane system, for instance, has a propensity of bringing back to life the question of the off-zone of a painting. As the camera lens brings a small section of transparent glass with painted scenery on it into view, it simultaneously blocks out the larger areas of the painting (on glass). The areas not included in the camera’s view become the diegetic off-zone of the painting. They are, indeed, part of the fictional world of the animated film. The diegetic off-zone of a painting, or off-screen painted space, has, to borrow Burch’s words, a “fluctuating” existence.⁷⁰ The off-zone can gradually become on-screen space, or vice versa, and, *as a result*, audiences sense the *effect* of the camera tracking out or tracking in. Rather than speaking of ontological differences between painting and photography in relation to the off-zone, I argue that it makes

University Press, 1979), 23–24.

⁶⁹ Frank, “Traces of the World,” 23–24.

⁷⁰ Noël Burch, “*Nana*, or Two Kinds of Space,” in Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 17–31.

more sense to see media precisely as embedded in different circumstances which may (or may not) bring out a specific propensity.

One must be reminded again that the “camera” in quotes is not the creator of the narration’s spatial qualities but the *product* of them. Alternatively, as I prefer to say, the “camera” is the *by-product of the production of space* in animation. To sum up the operation of the multiplane system, we might say that cartoon characters find themselves in a huge labyrinth comprising multiple movable layers. A tangle of vertical and horizontal movement of layers ceaselessly conquers, charts, mediates, recharges, redraws, and redefines on-screen and off-screen space.

ROTOSCOPING BODY, ROTOSCOPING TIME

Further complicating the relationship between animation and photography is another technical aspect shared by *Snow White* and *Princess Iron Fan*: their use of live-action reference footage. If the multiplane camera is a milestone in cel animation production toward lifelike movement into depth, the technique of rotoscoping and its variants aim to create lifelike movement of animated bodies.

The rotoscope machine was first an invention of Fleischer Studios in the 1910s.⁷¹ In the Fleischer rotoscoping process, an animator is drawing on a transparent easel, onto which the movie projector is throwing an image of a live-action film frame. A system of pulleys allows the animator to advance the live-action film frame by frame. The animator will “copy” the bodily movement of the actor or actress on the live-action film frame while drawing each frame of a cartoon character. The technique helped create the smooth, fluid, bodily movement of Koko the

⁷¹ Max Fleischer made a new machine that he called “a rotoscope” in 1914, and he patented it in 1917.

Clown in the *Out of the Inkwell* series, which gained huge popularity in China in the early 1920s.⁷² The rotoscoping method was brilliantly used in Fleischer's 1933 cartoon short *Betty Boop in Snow-White*.⁷³

During the production process of Disney's feature-length *Snow White*, Marjorie Belcher⁷⁴ worked as the model for Snow White in filming the live-action reference footage. She was chosen for the role when she was 14, and for about two years, she came to the Disney studios two or three times each month to act as Snow White in the live-action reference footage. She got paid ten dollars a day. In the surviving fragments of the live-action reference footage, we can see Marjorie Belcher wearing a costume similar to Snow White's, but the costume was then in white (only later did animators decide to change it into the blue-yellow look). For a brief yet miserable time, she was asked to wear a football helmet so that her head-to-body ratio would approximate her animated doppelganger. At some point, she was even asked to wear a robe and try whether she could also act as the model for Dopey. She was not credited in *Snow White*.

To be precise, Disney's use of live-action reference footage in the production of *Snow White* was not strictly rotoscoping. Or put differently, whether that counts as "rotoscoping" depends on how you understand the term. As Michael Barrier points out, "although [Disney] had members of his staff make tracings from the frames of live-action film—just as Max Fleischer did for his rotoscoped cartoons of the twenties—Disney did not want the tracings themselves presented as

⁷² In the *Out of the Inkwell* series, the model for Koko the Clown is Dave Fleischer, the producer of the studio's output.

⁷³ Fleischer Studios made three Betty Boop cartoons: *Minnie the Moocher* (1932), *The Old Man of the Mountain* (1933), and *Betty Boop in Snow-White* (1933), tracing over live-action footage of legendary bandleader Cab Calloway.

⁷⁴ Later she was known as the dancer Marge Champion.

animation. Instead, the animators used them as guides for their own drawings of Snow White, altering proportions and revising not just the girl's appearance but also actions, as needed."⁷⁵

Animators who were responsible for supervising different scenes, such as Grim Natwick, Hamilton Luske, and Jack Campbell, also seemed to have taken different approaches regarding to what extent the animation should rely on Marjorie Belcher's filmed movements. The result was a sense of unevenness of the "rotoscoped" effect in the final product.⁷⁶

Disney studies is filled with legends. In the "standard" account of Disney's strategies, one thing (or legend) has been frequently mentioned: Marjorie Belcher's role in the production was a secret. Writing on Disney's dancing girls, Elizabeth Bell, for one, notes, "although the actresses and singers who voiced the characters are given screen credits in the latter films, the live-action models for the teenaged heroines are lesser known and remain largely unacknowledged outside Disney histories."⁷⁷ There is an echo in Mihaela Mihailova's recent article: "Disney's extensive use of live-action footage of actors and the role that these women played in the production process was kept from the press until the 1960s."⁷⁸ For Mihailova, Disney had good reasons for its anti-publicity of dancing models: "The studio brand could only suffer from public evidence of the films' reliance on live-action recordings, as this would undermine any medium-specific

⁷⁵ J. Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 196.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Bell, "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 110.

⁷⁸ Mihaela Mihailova, "Collaboration without Representation: Labor Issues in Motion and Performance Capture," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 11, no. 1 (2015): 47.

arguments about the supposedly unique appeal of the animated image, repackaged here as ‘Disney magic.’”⁷⁹

Snow White’s publicity in Chinese newspapers and magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, however, challenges the “standard” discourse. In 1938, a bilingual article in *East-West Pictorial* (*Dongxi huabao*) published images of Marjorie Belcher acting alongside Louis Hightower, the model for Prince Charming: “This production took three years to complete and called for *the use of human models for each and every figure in the cartoon* (in English in original; my emphasis)”⁸⁰ (Figure 2.17). More stills from the filming of the live-action reference footage for *Snow White* were published in *South Sea Silver Star* (*Nanghai yinxing*), right before the joint premiere of *Snow White* at Nanking Theater and Metropol (Da Shanghai) Theater.⁸¹ We can immediately recognize that the expressions and poses of the figures recorded here were a reference to the wishing-well scene, the forest scene, and the final departure scene. In an earlier issue of *South Sea Silver Star*, we could also find a swimsuit photo—the one that also appeared in *East-West Pictorial*—captioned: “Beautiful Miss Belcher, the model for *Snow White*.” Clearly, these illustrated articles in Chinese magazines did not intend to downplay the role of models in Disney’s production. Rather, they made visible the use of reference footage to emphasize the utmost effort put into making the animated film.

One question arises: where were these photos from? If all these photos were at that time strictly kept from the press in the United States, how could they fall into the hands of Chinese

⁷⁹ Mihailova, “Collaboration without Representation: Labor Issues in Motion and Performance Capture,” 47.

⁸⁰ “White,” *Dongxi huabao* (東西畫報 *East-West Pictorial*), vol. 1, 6 (1938): 4.

⁸¹ “Baixue gongzhu Beijing de mimi” (白雪公主背景的秘密 *The Hidden Secret of Snow White*) *Nanghai yinxing* (南海銀星 *South Sea Silver Star*), vol. 1, 6 (1938): 1.

magazine publishers? Diving deep into the buried histories of *Snow White*, I eventually found out that these photos were all transplanted from a double-page, illustrated article in the April 4, 1938, issue of *Life* magazine (Figure 2.18), which offered us an account contradictory to the familiar legend. “Marjorie Belcher’s performance of *Snow White* began and ended within the studio walls. It will never appear on a screen, *LIFE* herewith presents her pictures for the first time,” writes the author.⁸² A comparative reading of the *Life* article and the ones from the abovementioned Chinese magazines suggests that the Shanghai magazine editors and publishers produced their own articles largely by rearranging photos and other elements from the *Life* article—a form of spatial montage. Images were cut and pasted without a sense of copyright. Photolithography made the “convenient” form of magazine production possible. In the *East-West Pictorial* article, the *traces* of scissors can even be seen around the image of Snow White surrounded by two dwarfs and two squirrels. It is once again a play with layers (despite a different medium): on the second page of the *LIFE* article, for instance, a drawn filmstrip slightly occludes the photograph of Marjorie Belcher and Louis Hightower over a pool in a Hollywood garden. It could be imagined that when the photograph was pasted into the *East-West Pictorial* page, the unwanted corner of the drawn filmstrip went with it. That was probably why the *East-West Pictorial* editor chose to paste the image of Snow White with Doc, Happy, and two squirrels right at the center of the page: to use part of the image—one dwarf’s head—to mask the corner of the filmstrip from view. This prompts us to think about editors as creative agents in the field of cultural production and to contextualize editorial practices as a special form of layering, one that involves a consecutive, dynamic process of decontextualization and recontextualization of images.

⁸² “Snow White Sets Record: Here is Her Model,” *Life*, April 4 (1938): 18-19. It remains unclear why the *Life* article seemed to have little impact in the United States.



Figure 2. 17 Marjorie Belcher in *Dongxi huabao*, vol. 1, 6 (1938)



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**SNOW WHITE SETS RECORD
 HERE IS HER MODEL**

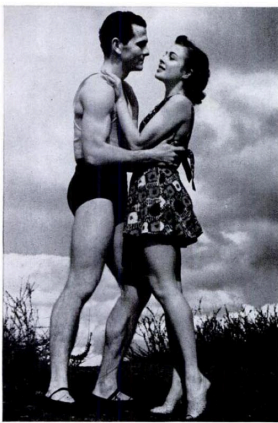


Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is well on its way to becoming the greatest money-making picture in movie history. Twenty million people have seen it in its first three months and everywhere it plays it sets new box-office records.

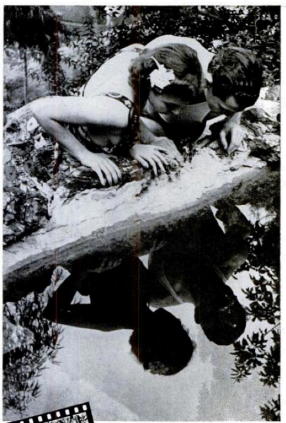
There is one person besides Walt Disney who watches the popularity of the fairy princess Snow White with a peculiarly personal interest. Her name is Marjorie Belcher and she lives in Los Angeles. Princess Snow White is the creature of Disney's imagination but the Disney animators, like all artists, had to have a model. Miss Belcher was the model—a real-life Snow White who started all the scenes of the story, so that animators could study her expressions and poses. Marjorie Belcher's performance of Snow White began and ended within the studio walls. It will never appear on a screen. LIFE here will present her pictures for the first time.

The real-life Snow White, Miss Marjorie Belcher, is the 14-year-old daughter of a Los Angeles dancing teacher. Disney was delighted to find a girl who could not only dance and act but also looked like his conception of Snow White.

The hardest scene Miss Belcher had to make was of Snow White running through the forest in terror. Here are re-enactments (right) some of the poses which the Disney animators studied and copied (below).



Prince Charming also had a model, Louis Hightower. He was a natural choice because he is one of Miss Belcher's father's pupils and has recently been her dancing partner. Disney also liked his sturdy legs.



The wishing-well scene is re-enacted by the real-life Snow White and Prince Charming over a pond in a Hollywood garden. A movie was made of their scenes and the animators re-created it for realistic poses.

Miss Belcher's Snow White (above) was so good that she is now modeling in Disneyland Disney's next feature. Only thing which might end her unique career would be stardom in her own right at another studio.



Prince Charming carries Snow White off to his castle, for the scene shown at left. Miss Belcher's Prince Charming in private life is Arthur Bahblitt, one of the Disney animators, whom she married last summer.



Figure 2. 18 a-b Marjorie Belcher in *Life* magazine (1934)

When we shift our attention to *Princess Iron Fan*, it becomes apparent how the intensive use of models was packaged as part of the film's charm. A 1940 article from *China Film Report* (*Zhongguo yingxun*) included a complete list of models of animated characters for *Princess Iron Fan*. The models were addressed as "stunt performers (*tishen yanyuan*)."⁸³ The models of Monkey and Pigsy in *Princess Iron Fan* were no one but Han Langen and Yin Xiucen, the two comedians who played the roles of Dopey (*Da Yaba*) and Bashful (*Paxiu*), respectively, in Wu Yonggang's *Chinese Prince Snow White*. Han Langen had been given the nickname "Skinny Monkey" (*sou pi hou*) because of his excellent performance in the role of Little Monkey in *Song of the Fishermen* (*Yu guang qu*, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1934). The cast prompts us to consider not only what motivated the Wan Brothers to choose a particular star to be the model of a particular cartoon character but also how stars might make good use of their participation in the filming of the reference footage for an animated film so as to reinforce their star image. Most notably, live-action reference footage was used for *Princess Iron Fan*'s semi-erotic dancing-and-singing sequence in the film, with Bai Hong, a songstress in 1940s Shanghai, acting as the dancer and singing the song. Indeed, Bai Hong was frequently named as a selling point in advertisements for *Princess Iron Fan*.⁸⁴

As the camera tracks in through two columns of a pavilion within the back garden, we find ourselves inside the pavilion, surrounded by banisters, drapes, and banana trees, where *Princess Iron Fan* is dancing for her husband, Bull Demon King (the Pigsy in disguise), and serving him

⁸³ "Tieshan gongzhu tishen yanyuan jieding," (鐵扇公主替身演員決定 Stunt Performers for *Princess Iron Fan*), *Zhongguo yingxun* (中國影訊 *China Film Report*), vol. 1, 11 (1940): 83.

⁸⁴ According to a *Shenbao* newspaper report, Bai Hong was once invited to play the role of the stepmother in Wu Yong'gang's *Chinese Princess Snow White*. The role was given to Lu Luming instead due to scheduling conflicts with Bai Hong's acting as the cartoon model for *Princess Iron Fan*. See *Shenbao*, September 19, 1940.

with fine wine. Here, her singing is coded in a performance context: “To perform a song is to submit oneself to the gaze as well as the ears of another, and there is a tendency for the audience to conflate the physical beauty of the singer with the acoustic beauty of the song.”⁸⁵ The pavilion-as-stage further confirms a relation between the looker and the-to-be-look-at-ness, presenting Princess Iron Fan as, both metaphorically and literally, a singing picture. Throughout the dance, she frequently rotates her body. Her water sleeves (*shuixiu*)⁸⁶ emphasize the movements of her arms and hands, express her complex emotions toward her long-absent husband who has now returned home, and, in a way, demonstrate Bai Hong’s water sleeves skills and training. Thanks to tracing the live-action footage, the enfolding of Princess Iron Fan’s water sleeves and skirts in time look graceful and natural enough. However, Princess Iron Fan’s movement is not entirely a result of copying Bai Hong’s dance. Instead, she moves fluidly within her own spatial register. In the midst of dance, for instance, Princess Iron Fan remains in the air for seconds, exposing an alternative form of cartoon physics for which “gravity is a sometime thing.”⁸⁷

Princess Iron Fan uses her—Bai Hong’s—voice as a testament to her suffering from her unfaithful husband and her desire and dissatisfaction, and her singing addresses Bull Demon King in second person as a way of directly soliciting empathy: “My King! You dumped the old one. You love another woman. Countless tears were spilled for you. When the light is out and the

⁸⁵ Judith Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh: The Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China.” in *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79–80.

⁸⁶ “Water sleeves” (*shui xiu*), which appeared in Chinese theater in the Ming dynasty (1368—1644), are the white silk extensions to the cuff of garment sleeves that are capable of producing movements like the ripples of water.

⁸⁷ Bukatman, “Some Observations Pertaining to Cartoon Physics,” 303.

curtain is dropped, you will sleep alone. You too will taste loneliness. Pardon me for not keeping you company.” The strong sexual connotations of the lyrics and the song-performance as a sexual lubricant suggest the intended audiences of *Princess Iron Fan* might not be “children”, as the opening credits of the film claim. The space of a song is associated with a mode of directness, one that allows the female voice to emerge at the fore as the locus of emotional intensity, but it is also embedded within a voyeuristic framing that treats the song as “a story element that we spy on or, more pointedly, overhear.”⁸⁸ It is also noteworthy that the bouncing ball, another invention out of Fleischer Studios, is deployed here. The little white ball, which Michel Chion considers “one of the most poetic effects of popular cinema,”⁸⁹ bounces above the song lyrics that appear as subtitles, inviting moviegoers to join in with Princess Iron Fan’s song, and indicating to them when to sing the syllables in time. In this way, it arouses a sense of immediacy and contributes to the mode of direct address.⁹⁰

If the dancing-and-singing sequence successfully evokes audiences’ voyeuristic pleasure, part of that pleasure must come from, as Mihailova speaks of, a naked scene achieved by the decades-younger technique of motion capture, “the tension between the denial of corporeality on one hand and the specter of stardom on the other.”⁹¹ It seems to me that the ghost of Bai Hong is evoked here less so via frame-by-frame approximation of her bodily movement than via her

⁸⁸ Jean Ma, *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema* (Duke and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 59.

⁸⁹ Chion, *Words on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), 54.

⁹⁰ A bouncing ball also appears in *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, dir Yuan Muzhi, 1937), starring Zhou Xuan. The little white ball bounces from right to left as traditional Chinese reading does. In *Princess Iron Fan*, however, the ball runs from left to right. It is tempting to think that at some point in the intervening four years, the more recent, Westernized, left-to-right reading had become more widely accepted in China.

⁹¹ Mihailova, “Collaboration without Representation: Labor Issues in Motion and Performance Capture,” 49. For some, rotoscoping is the predecessor of motion capture.

distinct voice that won her the honor of “Singing Queen” in the 1934 Radio Singing Star Competition, a voice highly recognizable for Shanghai audiences at that time. In other words, it is largely Bai Hong’s voice that comes to represent the authenticity of her physical, corporeal self. The unity of voice and bodily movement, the combination of dubbing and rotoscoping further enhances the authenticity. If rotoscoping is an art of deception, one that hides a physical, corporeal self behind a succession of drawn images, a further corollary of the interplay between the deception in the film’s diegesis and the deception of rotoscoping can be made. In *Princess Iron Fan*, Pigsy transforms himself to look like the Bull Demon King in order to approach Princess Iron Fan and borrow her magic banana fan. That is, in the singing-and-dancing sequence, hidden in the appearance of Bull Demon King is Pigsy. As an incitement, Pigsy’s deception in the film’s diegetic world perhaps prompts audiences to guess who is hidden in the appearance of Princess Iron Fan, pointing to the rotoscoping process that has its imprints on the on-screen reality but not part of the diegesis. Guesses as such are “not a parasitic intrusion” but “part of the thoughts that may well occur to (some of) us as we watch.”⁹² Here, the unity of voice and bodily movement allows for a single answer. In this way, *Princess Iron Fan* shares with its contemporary discourses in Chinese-language magazines the potential and pleasure of revealing a secret. Furthermore, they perhaps disclose a starting point for an investigation of the dangers and deceptions of our culture, danger, and deceptions that we—and the film and its discourses—also participate in.⁹³

⁹² Chion, *Words on Screen*, 4.

⁹³ This is an echo of Gunning’s claim regarding the value of popular cinema, see Gunning, “Gollum and Golem: Special Effects and the Technology of Artificial Bodies,” in *From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings*, eds. Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2006), 342.

What truly intrigues me is not that rotoscoping might offer an ideological critique but that it might open up a temporal analysis.⁹⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I have continued to inquire how animation *thinks*—not “thinks about” or “thinks through”—time and space to a degree unthinkable in live-action cinema. Put differently, this study is concerned with epiphanies that only animation could bring to us, epiphanies that animate an understanding of space that is neither completely geographical nor entirely graphic, and of time as nonlinear, convoluted, disruptive, and surprising. However, the multiplicity of animation forms, in conjunction with the multiplicity of animation techniques, may actually resist any form of theoretical generalization. Focusing on rotoscoping, this section argues that this specific animation technique—neglected, and under considered as it might be—has a *propensity* toward temporal analysis, a tendency to reveal that homogeneous time is an artificiality when it is paradoxically the embodiment of it.

Let me get started with Henri Bergson, the French thinker whose major works concerning the philosophy of time, were translated, introduced, reinterpreted, and popularized in China in the Republican Era.⁹⁵ In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson distinguishes between heterogeneous time (or pure duration) and homogeneous time (or time-as-space).⁹⁶ Homogeneous time refers to the understanding of time as a line or a chain, in which the relation of “past” and “present” is that of “before” and “after.” This understanding not only conceptualizes time as a homogeneous medium in which events are ranged alongside one another as in space but also implies a sense of

⁹⁴ Bliss Cua Lim calls it “temporal critique.” I would, however, prefer to use the term “temporal analysis” as it engages with the temporal-spatial analysis that I lay out earlier in this chapter. See Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009)

⁹⁵ For a fine summary of the vernacular process of translating Bergson in modern China, see Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 13-14, 63-82.

⁹⁶ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson (NY: Dover, 2001), 272.

chronological progression. By contrast, heterogeneous time refers to a multiplicity of coexistent but noncoinciding durations.⁹⁷ That the past or a plurality of pasts coexists with the present can be said to be the signature feature of heterogeneous, enchanted, ghostly time. According to Bergson, heterogeneous time tells us the truth about time, whereas homogeneous time is a false-but-familiar illusion that dominates modern society because it satisfies our utilitarian purposes: say, only by treating time as a measurable quantity (days, hours, minutes, etc.) can the inkers and painters on the precision-driven assembly line (for *Snow White*, *Princess Iron Fan*, or whatever) sell labor time in the form of commodity. An irruption of the homogeneous, disenchanting, clock time that dominates the labor space can be a strike.⁹⁸

On the one hand, I argue that rotoscoping is an embodiment of homogeneous time. For Bergson, cinema is an instantiation of homogeneous time because it gives audiences the impression that time is a series of equidistant intervals, that is, 24 frames in every second.⁹⁹ But cinema hides its clockwork in mechanical movement. Rotoscoping, I contend, is a more pronounced instantiation of homogeneous time, because it *makes visible* the spatialized temporality by throwing images of live-action film frames, one by one, onto a transparent easel. It suffices to say that at the heart of the rotoscoping process is a form of temporal translation, one that projects time into space, one that intervenes in time by breaking it down into distinct spatial

⁹⁷ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 272–75.

⁹⁸ It remains a curious question whether Western-style clock towers, which steadily increased in number in Chinese cities from the 18th century onward, might be read as the inception of modern homogenous time in China. See Wu Hung, “Monumentality of Time,” in *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of A Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 131–164. Also, for the relation between labor and time, see, for instance, Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁹⁹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 305–308.

units. When animators carefully count frames of images as a way of calculating time, the homogeneous time logic is secretly at work.

On the other hand, rotoscoping discloses its capacity of undertaking a critique of homogenous time, a temporal analysis to reveal an alternative model of temporality, that of heterogeneous, enchanted, ghostly time, which is never fully tamed. To illustrate this aspect, let us back up a few steps, returning to the distinction between animated cartoon and live-action footage from the previous chapter. Live-action footage presents audiences an event past, a duration *past*, an experience of “That was happening.” Animated cartoon, by contrast, presents audiences a sense of presence, an experience of being present, a feeling of “This is happening”; audiences would never conceive a cartoon sequence as an event past. Watching the singing-and-dancing sequence in *Princess Iron Fan*, for instance, the vividness of her movement entails a sense of immediacy, presence, and evocation. At the same time, audiences might also experience a strange but pleasing familiarity, an “uncanny sense of déjà vu”¹⁰⁰ that is, the haunting and return of the ghost of the live-action reference footage featuring Bai Hong. The reference footage is not dead; instead, it coexists with the animation sequence unfolding in the present, engaging with it in an intense form of imaginative play. In this way, a rotoscoped animation sequence pulls away the notion of linear, chronologically ordered time and leans toward a plural understanding of temporal cohabitation.¹⁰¹ In other words, it is the invisible mechanism of rotoscoping that

¹⁰⁰ The phrase comes from Tom Gunning, “Heard over the Phone. The Lonely Villa and the de Lorde Tradition of the Terrors of Technology,” *Screen* vol. 32, 2 (Summer 1991): 185. Gunning is speaking of our first experiences of technologies more broadly.

¹⁰¹ In addition, the practice of recycling live-action reference footage might make the coexistence of multiple temporal layers even more apparent. To give an example: Marjorie Belcher’s dance footage for Disney’s 1937 *Snow White* was reused in the 1973 animated feature *Robin Hood*. Snow White becomes Maid Marian, an anthropomorphic fox with the exact same moves. When I am watching Maid Marian’s dance sequence in *Robin Hood*, Snow White’s dance sequence seems to be in front of me at the same time—an animated sequence pregnant with layers of past.

makes visible, makes perceptible, the relationship of multiple layers of time. The sequence thus constitutes an “immiscible”¹⁰² zone where time unveils its heterogeneous face. In such a zone, animation and photography intertwine.

In short, rotoscoping makes itself available for a highly paradoxical form of temporal analysis, one spearheads the deception, contrivance, absoluteness, and tyranny of homogeneous time of our modern society yet is also ineluctably enmeshed in it. This is not to say that only rotoscoping can undertake such a form of temporal analysis, one that promises a more illuminating understanding of time as heterogeneous, as pure duration. Rather, the possibilities of discussion that the rotoscope opens up is just a small part of many. In the chapters that follow, we will continue to play with all sorts of philosophical toys, which unhinge the most basic logics of space and time in ways different from the rotoscope. We will also pursue further inquiry concerning the approach of *making time visible*, a method that I call “rotoscoping time.”¹⁰³ Language is largely paralyzed in front of time, one of the most mysterious entities that we might ever encounter in the world. As Augustine writes, “What then is time? I know what it is if no one asks me what it is; but if I want to explain it to someone who has asked me, I find that I do not know.”¹⁰⁴ In this regard, the visual becomes one possible road towards the nearly impossible goal of defining time. Although we can never clearly and accurately articulate what time is, we can, at a certain moment, through a visualized form, “draw” the heterogeneous face of time. Through

¹⁰² Once again, I am borrowing the word “immiscible” from Bliss Cua Lim. See Lim, *Translating Time*, 32.

¹⁰³ See Deleuze’s statement: “What is specific to the images is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationship of time...” See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xii. This is also inspired by Tom Gunning’s discussion on “Philosophical Dilemma, Visual Resolution,” see Gunning, “Animating the Instant: The Secret Symmetry between Animation and Photography,” in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Redrobe (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 49–51.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, book 11, trans. Rex Warner (NY: New American Library, 1963), 267.

rotoscoping time, we harvest a drawing of the face of time, rather than the real face of time itself, as time never turns its real face to us. But a drawing is also an understanding.

PART II

ANIMATION AND VISUAL ARTS

CHAPTER THREE

ANIMATED LANDSCAPE:

WHAT INK ANIMATION CALLS THINKING

The heart originally has no fixed dwelling;
Every encounter with things leads to mediation.
How is that a single pellet of ink
Can expand into mountains and streams?
— Su Zhe¹

Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium.
— W. J. T. Mitchell²

The first book on Chinese cinema to appear in English was Jay Leyda's *Dianying Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*.³ From 1959 to 1964, Leyda worked at the newly founded China Film Archive in Beijing as an “advisor,” earning a salary of 500 yuan per month (in Leyda's own words: “very comforting to learn this is the amount of Mao's salary”).⁴ Perhaps one should be very cautious in using the word “first” when dealing with histories of cinema and histories of scholarship on cinema, since so many facts remain unknown in the thickets of history. However, there is little

¹ Su Zhe (1039—1112), *Mo chan tang* 墨禪堂. The poem was written as a response to *Mountain Villa (Shan zhuang tu)* by Li Gonglin (1049—1106). For English translation, see Robert E. Harrist, *Painting and Private Life in Eleventh-Century China: Mountain Willa by Li Gonglin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 45.

² W. J. T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” in *Landscape and Power*, Second Edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 5.

³ Jay Leyda, *Dianying Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

question that Leyda's book—which he began to write in the summer of 1963, one year before he left Beijing—was the first book-length work on this topic. It was an unorthodox, almost diary-like history of Chinese cinema loose in both attitude and in structure and sprinkled with Leyda's distinct sense of humor: “conscience has forced [him] to call it an ‘account.’”⁵ Pages of this book were given to Chinese animation. Leyda's account of Chinese animation forcefully challenges the understandings that Chinese animation did not receive any attention in the Anglophone academia until the recent two decades. It also departs from the conventions of treating the history of Chinese animation as completely separated from that of (live-action) Chinese films, as evident in existing book-length treatments on Chinese animation in the Chinese language.

Leyda's general attitude toward Chinese animation was not enthusiastic. He said he could never understand why Chinese puppet animated films could be so uninteresting, given such a lively puppet tradition in China. In Leyda's opinion, animation works that tried out new materials and techniques—such as paper-cutting animation (*jianzhi pian*) and paper-folding animation (*zhezhi pian*)—also failed to be as experimental as they could have been. Even *Princess Iron Fan*—the 1941 Chinese animated feature discussed in the second chapter—showed a fear that prevented the Wan Brothers from “ventur[ing] far from Fleischer-Disney orthodoxy.”⁶ There was, however, one kind of Chinese animation that made Leyda's eyes pop out: ink animation (*shuimo donghua*), the subject of the current chapter.

⁵ Leyda, *Dianying Electric Shadows*, Foreword.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

The ink animation work that Leyda watched was *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (aka. *Where Is Mum? Xiaokedou zhao mama*, Shanghai Animation Studio, 1960), a watery adventure of newly born tadpoles from Qi Baishi's (1864—1957) paintings. "It was wonderful," wrote Leyda, "to see a kind of *Chinese* animation on the screen that had its own fluidity, wit, and charm...It was a completely new film experience."⁷ Leyda was not unfamiliar with Qi Baishi's art at the time he watched the ink animated film. During his first month in Beijing, Leyda was taken to a shop in the Liulichang Culture Street, which had both reproductions and originals of Qi Baishi's painting for sale. I suspect that the shop was probably the Studio of Glorious Treasures (*Rong bao zhai*). There Leyda bought an extremely handsome piece for the price of 75 yuan, though he was warned that he might not be able to take it out of China.⁸

Taking Leyda's account of the metamorphosis from Chinese painting to animation as a point of departure, this chapter reanimates the history of *shuimo donghua* from the 1960s to the present. Like Leyda, I keep this history relatively loose in spirit so as to give room for secondary reflections. Most frames of ink animation, if frozen, are Chinese landscape paintings (*shanshui hua*, sometimes translated as "mountain-and-water paintings"). I contend that the animated landscapes in the distinct genre of Chinese animation demand philosophical and meditative contemplation on space and time—and motion—to a degree unimaginable in either live-action cinemas or traditional "motionless" landscape images in painting, photography, and other media. In its double role as Chinese painting and cinema, ink animation also allows me to transplant certain concepts, ideas,

⁷ Leyda, *Dianying Electric Shadows*, 294.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

and thoughts from traditional Chinese art and aesthetics to Chinese animation, and eventually to the field of film and media theories, complicating the geopolitics of the field.

A clarification about terminologies and translations is needed. The term “landscape painting” has no equivalents in the Chinese language. The closest term, *shanshui hua*, implies a symbiotic relationship between *shan* (mountain) and *shui* (water)—the two characters cannot be torn apart. Thus, the literal translation for the Chinese term—mountain-and-water painting—fails to convey a sense of mutual-responding of the two basic elements. Similarly, *shuimo donghua* has been translated as “ink-and-wash animation,” “water-and-ink animation,” or simply “ink animation.” In this chapter, I would prefer to call it “ink animation” partly because the translation’s simplicity provides readers with space for imagination. It is also because both “ink-and-wash animation” and “water-and-ink animation” betrays a fundamental assumption of the Chinese term *shuimo*: it is a dynamic *interaction* of water and ink, if not to say that ink is itself a kind of water.⁹

REMEDICATION: PAINTING, ANIMATION, AND SOMETHING MORE

For the staff at Shanghai Animation Studio (*Shanghai meishu dianying zhipianchang*), the tradition of ink painting is a cultural heritage that simultaneously inspired pride and imposed technical difficulties. In conventional cel animation production, as I have detailed in the preceding chapter, contour lines of cartoon characters are drawn on celluloid sheets before filling in pigments in a neat and flat manner. Indeed, core to cel animation is the movement and transformation of the *contour line*. In Sergei

⁹ Traditional inksticks had to be mixed with water to make ink.

Eisenstein's notes on Disney cartoons, written between 1940 and 1941 and edited by Jay Leyda in the 1980s, what explains the attractiveness of Disney works is the "plasmatic" quality of the line which seems to possess a visual ambiguity that allows for a cartoon character to change its form with an immediacy and clarity: it is "a rejection of once-and-forever allotted form, freedom from ossification, the ability to dynamically assume any form."¹⁰ Taking her cues from Eisenstein, Vivian Sobchack argues at a more conceptual level that "the line, in existence, is a *meta-object* that can be conceived, drawn, and rendered but does not substantially exist 'as such'." In other words, the line is not yet a "thing." For Sobchack, it is the line that draws that distinction between hand-drawn cartoons and live-action cinema.¹¹ In traditional Chinese ink painting, however, seldom can we find contour lines. What matters much more is the ink stroke. If the artist uses more water and presses the brush gently, keeping it in touch with the rice paper, the result is an ink blot with soft edges (rather than a clearly defined shape). Therefore, how to produce a form of animation without the contour line, and how to render the subtle gradients of ink on screen while opening it to transformation became the *de facto* problems for Duan Xiaoxuan, A Da, Qian Jiajun and many more staff members involved in the experimentation process.

Contradictory accounts can be found regarding the invention of ink animation techniques at Shanghai Animation Studio. For instance, employing a Great Leap Forward rhetoric, a *People's Daily* report claimed that "after fighting for three days and three

¹⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda and trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), 21.

¹¹ Vivian Sobchack, "The Line and the Animorph or 'Travel Is More than Just A to B,'" *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3, no. 3 (2008): 251–63.

nights, the technical difficulties were solved.”¹² By contrast, Qian Yunda, an animation director at the studio, recalled that “many animators cried with frustration.”¹³ The names of key contributors to the collective new invention also varied from account to account. My interests here, however, lie less in verifying every production detail (work such as interviewing the older generation of Shanghai Animation Studio staff needs to be done) than thinking anew the experimentation process as a distinct case of remediation. By *remediation*, I mean “the representation of one medium in another”¹⁴ and the transformation that involves. It is clear that how animation borrows from and refashions another medium has become a virtual thread that weaves together many parts of the dissertation. As I will show, to think about animation’s encounter with ink painting is not just a question of how the existing medium called ink painting finds its second life in the seemingly newer medium called animation but also one of how animation infuses its exciting transformative power into ink painting, an older medium with its own aesthetics conventions and historical burdens.

Let me start with the “old” medium: which Qi Baishi paintings were used as references in the experimental phrases before and during the production of *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960)? In her recent book *Animated Encounters*, Daisy Du discusses Qi Baishi’s 1951 painting *Sound of Frogs Distantly Heard in the Mountain Spring* (*Washeng shili chu shanquan*) as the inspiration for the ink animation, and discusses how the absence of the mother frog in both the painting and the animated film’s

¹² *Renming ribao* (人民日報 *People’s Daily*), August 31, 1960: 7.

¹³ See Helen Kang, “Shui Mo Dong Hua: The History and Development of Brush Painting Animation,” *Animation Journal* 14 (2006): 6.

¹⁴ Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 45.

narrative becomes a source of surprise. In the ink painting, it is the absence of the mother frog that brings to us a sound dimension, that is, the frog's singing from the other side of the mountain. In the animated film, it is the absence of the mother frog that propels the group of baby tadpoles to embark on their watery journey in search of their mother and the meaning of the word "frog."¹⁵ It is also important to remember that the painting *Sound of Frogs Distantly Heard in the Mountain Spring* is in its own right a product of remediation: the title of the painting was a line borrowed from the Qing dynasty poet Zha Shenxing (1650–1727), and it was the renowned writer Lao She who dwelled on the idea of "painting sound" and invited Qi Baishi to come up with a painting responding to Zha's poem.

Another book particularly pertinent here is *Who Created Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother?* (*Shui chuangzaole xiaokedou zhao mama*), a biography of Te Wei (1915–2010), the head of Shanghai Animation Studio,¹⁶ whose life and work were inevitably intertwined with the studio's history. As noted in the biography, in early 1960, Duan Xiaoxuan (1934–present), a camerawoman working for decades in the state-owned animation studio, shot and developed the filmstrip of the first test shot of ink animation: a frog jumping into water. This was soon followed by a trailer titled *Ink Animation Fragments*, including sequences about frogs, chicks, and shrimps. The success of the trailer eventually led to *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960).¹⁷ The existence of

¹⁵ See Daisy Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940s–1970s* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 132.

¹⁶ Zhang Songlin 張松林 and Gong Jianying 貢建英, *Shui chuangzao le xiaokedou zhao mama* (誰創造了《小蝌蚪找媽媽》) *Who Created Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother?* (Shanghai: Shanghai People Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Ibid, 114–115. For an excellent account of Duan Xiaoxuan, see Daisy Du, "Socialism and the Rise of the First Camerawoman in the History of Chinese Animation," *Animation Studies 2.0*, December 3, 2014,

the trailer not only throws the “first” in “first ink animated film”—an honor given to *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* in countless accounts—into question, but also indicates that there must have been a wide range of Qi Baishi paintings on different subjects used as referential images in the animation production process.

One way to identify the “model” paintings is to examine the ten-volume *Qi Baishi’s Full Collection (Qi Baishi quanji)*, page by page.¹⁸ I am well aware that this is a path leading to some speculations *only*, rather than conclusions, since each of the frogs, chicks, shrimps, crabs, catfish, turtles, and other creatures on the screen might have multiple paintings as their inspirations, and animators could certainly modify the creatures in their model paintings when they set their hand to the celluloid sheets. One may say, for instance: “Among the seven Qi Baishi paintings in which a catfish appears, the catfish character in *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* resembles most the one from *Fish*, dated 1952.” But this does not mean that animators did not consult other catfish paintings.

However, having a full set of Qi Baishi paintings in mind does cast some new light on my (re-)viewing experience of *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*, adding a layer of subtle pleasure indebted to a clear consciousness of intermedial borrowing and appropriation and a game of hide-and-seek. If, to borrow Leyda’s words, ink animation brought to audiences “a completely new film experience,”¹⁹ the very form of remediation showed a peculiar logic by staging old as new.²⁰ If *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*

<https://blog.animationstudies.org/?p=977>

¹⁸ Qi Baishi 齊白石, *Qi Baishi quanji* (齊白石全集 *Qi Baishi’s Full Collection*), eds. Lang Shaojun and Guo Tianming (Changsha: Hunan meishu, 2017)

¹⁹ Leyda, *Dianying Electric Shadows*, 294.

²⁰ I am writing with a nod to Bao Weihong’s description of the 1940 *Mulan Joins the Army* incident—a scripted

charms through its poetic quality, the fleeting, poetic images on screen are marked by moments when the duality of so-called old and new media is, to borrow Bachelard's words from a different context, "iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions."²¹



Figure 3. 1 The shrimps, *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960)

One of my speculations is about the shrimps in *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (Figure 3.1). The bellies of the two shrimps stretch and bend vigorously. The carapaces of the shrimps are painted with both thick and light ink. The result is a still remarkable transparency (despite a lesser degree if compared with Qi Baishi's originals). Especially vivid are the shrimps' eyes, stretching out horizontally, as the shrimps make their way in the watery realm. My speculation about the on-screen shrimps, therefore,

event transformed the screening of the film into an avant-garde theatrical performance, including setting the film print on fire—as an intermediality that “ran a peculiar logic by staging old as new.” See Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915-1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3–4.

²¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), 4.

takes on the form of a negation: they were not based on Qi Baishi's early works—in his forties—wherein the eyes of his shrimps were still two ink dots, but in his relatively later works wherein the ink dots as eyes were replaced by horizontal strokes painted with heavy ink.²² According to Hu Peiheng and Hu Yan, Qi Baishi's shrimps have gone through a process that might be called “becoming minimalist”: In his late sixties, Qi reduced the number of swimmerets of each of his shrimps from ten to eight. After his seventy-eighth birthday, the number was again reduced to only five.²³ Thus, a further, reasonable speculation about the on-screen shrimps—each of which has only five swimmerets to be seen—is that they were likely based on Qi's works in his late seventies and beyond. In addition, each of the two shrimps in the ink animation has two strong, straight pinnars and six long, thin feelers. But they do not have any short feelers common in Qi Baishi's shrimp paintings, which were probably reduced so as to ensure the simplicity of animal characters in animation.

Seldom did Qi Baishi paint goldfish in his life. There was one exception, though: *Goldfish (Jinyu)*, painted on a screen (*pingfeng*) and dated about early 1940s. However, the two goldfish in the painting bear no resemblance to the ones in *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (Figure 3.2). Rather than modeling on Qi Baishi, Singaporean-born Chinese animator Dai Tielang designed and painted all goldfish in the animated film. The goldfish's encounter with the baby tadpoles turned out to be the most

²² For a nice description of Qi Baishi's shrimps, which I consulted when depicting the shrimps on the animated screen, see Wang Chunfu, “Preface,” in Qi Baishi, *Qi Baishi huihua jingcui* (齊白石繪畫精萃 *The Essential Collection of Qi Baishi's Paintings*) (Changchun: Jilin meishu chubanshe, 1994).

²³ Hu Peiheng 胡佩衡 and Hu Yan 胡彙, *Qi Baishi huafa yu xinshang* (齊白石畫法與欣賞 *Qi Baishi's Painting Skills and Appreciation*) (Beijing: Renming meishu, 1963), 60–61.

whimsically delightful sequence throughout the film. The goldfish on screen problematize the viewpoints that see the making of *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* as merely transplanting a set of Qi Baishi paintings from one medium to another, casting a new dynamic and initiating a leap towards an understanding of creativity as something that could be founded in both the act of imitation and the possibility of moving away from it.



Figure 3. 2 The goldfish, *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960)

The question of remediation is by no means a travel from point A (painting) to point B (animation). Further complicating this notion is a variety of other media that were also borrowed, involved, and transformed in the production of *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*, including but not limited to seals, woodblock water printing (*muban shuiyin*), and photography. First of all, as Lin Wenxiao, who was credited as animation designer, recalled, she made a seal in the shape of a dot for quickly printing the heads of the large group of baby tadpoles so that she did not need to paint them one by one. The use of a “tadpole head” seal is not merely a labor-saving technique but also adds another layer

of remediation between painting and animation. More intriguingly, the core technique of ink animation found its inspiration from woodblock water printing, a unique craft owned and developed by the Studio of Glorious Treasures (*Rong bao zhai*). In the process of woodblock water printing, different thicknesses of ink are broken down into different woodblocks. Similarly, in ink animation production, the layers of ink of different thickness—even if together they form a stroke—are separated into different celluloid sheets. As I have elaborated in the second chapter, Kristin Thompson was among the first scholars to ruminate on the great potential of cel animation to reveal *spatial disruption* as the cel system makes possible the coexistence of highly disparate graphics and contradictory perspectives.²⁴ In conventional cel animation production, however, any color block enclosed by its contour line is painted on *one* celluloid sheet, therefore, maintaining a basic, spatial order between different colors. I argue that this order was no longer maintained in the making of ink animation. Instead, ink animation lends itself to a working system whose degree of spatial disruption, incongruity or rift strikes me as unparalleled. In this sense, ink animation can be said to be the super medium—superior to the conventional form of cel animation—for reflection on the concept of space and the contradictions within it. Lastly, the camerawork, especially the control of exposure, also contributes to the feel of ink blots with soft edges in ink animation. The furry chicks (Figure 3.3) in *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*, for instance, were realized by controlling the camera exposure in the process of photographing celluloid sheets onto the filmstrip. Photography thus became an active agent in the metamorphosis from ink painting to ink animation. The

²⁴ Kristin Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 106–20.

often neglected yet extremely important role that seals, woodblock water printing, and photography play in rendering ink on screen brings out multiple levels of mediation: whenever we talk about the dynamic between two media, there is always something more. To rethink the concept of remediation, we are encouraged not only to spell out the something more but also to discover unexpected connections between different media, mobilizing the dynamics between the old and the new. Viewed in this light, animation becomes a bridge, a fruitful site of overlap, or even a collision of different media.



Figure 3. 3 The furry chicks, *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960)

LITERATI LANDSCAPE, EMPTY SPACE

After *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*, Shanghai Animation Studio produced a handful of stunningly exquisite, time-demanding, and labor-consuming ink animated films in its two golden eras, roughly 1954–1966 and 1976–1989, interrupted by the storm

of the Cultural Revolution.²⁵ Exemplary films are *The Herdboy and the Flute* (*Mu di*, 1963),²⁶ *The Deer's Bell* (*Lu ling*, 1982), and *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (*Shan shui qing*, 1988). In a way, China's planned economy period—when the state, rather than the studio, took care of all matters regarding marketing and distribution—created a “vacuum zone” where it was totally possible for the staff at Shanghai Animation Studio to conduct numerous experiments or to spend years on a very short piece of work, given seemingly endless time, resources and funding:²⁷ you go work every weekday “on time,” but you do not need to worry how much work you can finish. The production timeline of *The Herdboy and the Flute*, for instance, was longer than seven-hundred days, and Chinese ink painting master Li Keran, especially noted for the lively water buffaloes in his paintings, mailed to the animation studio more than twenty pieces of his work as references.²⁸ Not surprisingly, Li Keran was a beloved student of Qi Baishi, who even wrote the colophons for three of Li's buffalo paintings.²⁹ The interactions between the two artists thus underline the

²⁵ It is perhaps debatable when exactly the two golden eras were. Li Hua, for instance, lists the two golden eras as 1957-1965 and 1976-1983. See Li Hua, “Animating Science and Technology: From Little Tadpoles to the Space Monkey (1950s-1980s),” *Association for Chinese Animation Studies*, September 1, 2017, <http://acas.ust.hk/2017/09/01/animating-science-and-technology-from-little-tadpoles-to-the-space-monkey-1950s-1980s/>

²⁶ *The Herdboy and the Flute* was re-released in 1979. During the Cultural Revolution, Te Wei was criticized for directing a pastoral picture as such, and in a rather bitter and ironic manner, he was imprisoned in a cowshed.

²⁷ For a very brief history of Chinese animation against the background of politic and economic changes, see John Lent and Xu Ying, “Chinese Animation Film: From Experimentation to Digitalization.,” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, eds. Zhu Ying and Stanley Rosen (HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 112–25.

²⁸ Zhang Songlin and Gong Jianying, *Shui chuangzao le xiaokedou zhao mama (Who Created Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother)* (Shanghai: Shanghai People Press, 2010):118–123.

²⁹ See Li Keran 李可染, *Li Keran shuhua quanji (李可染書畫全集 Album of Li Keran's Calligraphy and Paintings)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renming meishu, 2019).

animation lineage (if I may pun) from *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* to *The Herdboy and the Flute*.

Instead of setting down another account of remediation between painting and animation, this section takes a more productive approach, one that, following W.J.T. Mitchell, sees landscape as “a dynamic medium, in which we ‘live and move and have our being,’ but also a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another.”³⁰ This approach invites me to explore the ways in which landscape or *shanshui* circulates, functions, or looks back at us. If my dissertation seeks to develop a paradigm from which to make sense of the interactions of animation and space—where animation is understood as a form of material imagination and where space is understood as an image of time—and the current chapter focuses on the mutual illuminating of animation and landscape, a clarification on the relation between space and landscape is in order.

To begin, landscape can be said to be a kind of space encountered as “sight,” or put differently, as a framed view.³¹ The word “landscape” implies a viewing subject. While the primacy of “space” as an analytical framework is gaining currency in cinema studies, art history, East Asian studies, and many other disciplines, together forming the “spatial turn” in the humanities,³² the difficulty of working with “space” as an analytical tool in the

³⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Introduction,” in *Landscape and Power*, 2.

³¹ For thinking space, landscape, and place as a conceptual totality, see W. J. T. Mitchell, “Preface to the Second Edition,” in *Landscape and Power*, vii–xii.

³² Building on the work of Henri Lefevre and Michel Foucault, Edward Soja sees the spatial turn in the humanities and social science as “a response to a longstanding if often unperceived ontological and epistemological bias (that privileged time over space) in all the human sciences, including spatial disciplines like geography and architecture.” For Soja, the spatial advocacy is by no means against historical discourse; rather, it is “fundamentally an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations.” See Edward Soja, “Taking Space Personally,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 11–35; Most pertinent is Wu Hung’s observation on the spatial turn in art historical research: “one of the most significant shifts—or indeed *the* most significant shifts—in the

visual field is obvious: space appears to be a component of perceptual situations and a possible anchor for visual analysis only when it is specified. Space without an adjective placed right before it can be abstract, vacuous, and futile. To some degree, landscape, less abstract as a term, provides a relatively more “grounded” entry point for the visual arts. However, it is often the case that “landscape” as an analytical tool also demands being specified. To be specific, what audiences frequently encounter in *The Herdboy and the Flute* and *Feeling from Mountain and Water* is *literati landscape*.

Slippery a term as it might be, *literati landscape*, or *wenren shanshui*, does exhibit, develop, and naturalize an open set of characteristics: (1) in terms of visual motifs, it depicts mountains, streams, and, at times, small, “decorative figures” (*dianjing renwu*); (2) in terms of brushwork, it is often performed with monochromatic ink and calligraphic brushstrokes, or at times with minimal palette. In particular, it cherishes the notion of *moxi*, literally “playing with ink,” which destabilizes the dichotomy between artists and the so-called tools, and creates a noncoercive engagement with ink, water, and the rice paper that opens the self to experience;³³ (3) in terms of composition, *literati* painters often leave empty space in their composition of a landscape painting to represent water, sky or mist, depending on different situations; (4) in terms of self-expression, it is “expected to display a highly refined taste yet also revel a spontaneous spirit unburdened by painterly

discipline of art history in recent decades, i.e. the 1990s onwards, is precisely the rapid dissemination and reinforcement of spatial concepts.” Wu also points out that “art history lags behind other disciplines in the self-reflexive coming to terms with its own spatial turn.” See Wu Hung, “*Kongjian*” *de meishu shi (Space in Art History)* (Shanghai: Shiji wenjing/Shanghai renming chubanshe, 2018), 232–33.

³³ I am writing with a nod to Miriam Hansen’s interpretation of Benjamin’s notion of “play,” see Hansen, “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 312–13.

techniques or worldly concerns.”³⁴ To borrow a phrase from Fong Wen, literati landscape is “images of the mind.”³⁵ Mia Liu’s recent book, *Literati Lenses*—in which she discusses the representations of literati landscape in live-action feature films of the Mao era—is very helpful for thinking about the “chemistry” that literati landscape might have as it is etched into ink animation (*shuimo donghua*): the often-unexamined, linked equation—*shuimo* = literati landscape = refined taste—seems to function as a vehicle in ensuring the quality of the ink animated films, unbinding animation from its bad reputation as merely childish, funny pictures, and endowing it with artistic and literary legitimacy.³⁶ In this light, *shuimo donghua* is not only an animation modality but also a value standard. In studying the circulation of literati landscape from painting to screen, I unabashedly privilege ink animation (over live-action cinema) because only ink animation reproduces on screen ink and brushstrokes (the last missing in Mia Liu’s discussion). The ink on the animation screen simultaneously continues and rebels against the art-historically informed discourses on brushwork. On the one hand, the restless ink embodies an important aspect of the notion of “play” as it dances with its own vitality, as if gaining a life of its own. On the other hand, the individual, freestyle, unruly practice of *moxi*— playing with ink—is replaced by a production mode of high control, one in which each stroke is broken down into multiple layers and is carefully reproduced frame by frame.

³⁴ Mia Liu, *Literati Lenses: Wenren Landscape in Chinese Cinema of the Mao Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019), 5.

³⁵ Fong Wen, *Images of the Mind* (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1984).

³⁶ Mia Liu, *Literati Lenses: Wenren Landscape in Chinese Cinema of the Mao Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019).

More needs to be said about “empty space (*liubai*),” which I listed as one of the characteristics above. An example beckons from *The Herdboy and the Flute* (Figure 3.4). When the buffalo is swimming, with the lower part of its inked body unseen, what we can see is an empty space, but we feel that water is indeed there, and it is flowing. The “empty space” on screen, especially situated in an elegant pedigree of literati painting, not only adds another layer to the relations between space and landscape in the Chinese context but also puts into play the duality of substance (*shi*) and void (*xu*), of presence and absence.³⁷ As art theorist Zong Baihua points out, the “empty space” is not “a dead space,” but a space that “allows us to breathe,” “full of vivacity, spirit and creative imagination.”³⁸ The very notion of “breath,” if I am allowed to give an interpretation, suggests the expenditure of energy, which opens the empty space into a new dimension of cosmic dynamism. It is also a pause, a marking unit, breaking up flow, as in singing or in playing the flute or another wind instrument. A breath is a brief moment. The act of taking a “breath”—a process of diastole-systole—indicates duration, and thus it associates space with time. Here, empty space is animated at the intersections of time variables and mobile elements. The vacuity is the message itself. The flow of water is the flow of time.

Writing on Disney cartoons, Eisenstein is fascinated by the affinities between Disney cartoons and fire, as for Eisenstein, fire is the natural element capable of most fully

³⁷ Kiu-wai Chu touches on the composition of contrast of substance and void in Chinese *shanshui* aesthetics and links it to Chinese ink animation. See Kiu-wai Chu, “Animating *Shanshui*: Chinese Landscapes in Animated Film, Art and Performance,” in *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function*, ed. Chris Pallant (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 109–24.

³⁸ Zong Baihua 宗白華, *Meixue sanbu* (美學散步 *Wandering in Aesthetics*) (Shanghai: Shanghai renming chubanshe, 1981), 94.

conveying the dream of a flowing diversity of forms.³⁹ This claim, I would add, is also true for water. To move a step further, I find it irresistible to draw out the affinities between Chinese ink animation and water, not only because this form of animation is born out of water and ink but also because the spectacle of empty-space-as-water spells out a world in dissolution, one of flowing diversity, incessantly changing, and continual flux⁴⁰—that is, a world of animation.



Figure 3. 4 Empty space as water, *The Herdboy and the Flute* (1963)

To paraphrase what Eisenstein says of fire,⁴¹ we are getting closer and closer to a conclusion on water:

³⁹ Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 24.

⁴⁰ In addition to Eisenstein, most instructive in formulating the argument here is Tom Gunning, “Landscape and the Fantasy of Moving Pictures: Early Cinema’s Phantom Rides,” in *Cinema and Landscape*, eds. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 31–7.

⁴¹ Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 45–47.

... water is a process...

... water is physical time...

... time is the first sensuous essence...

... time is pure coming into being...

There we are:

Water is an image of coming into being, revealed in a process.

TRAVELING IN THE ANIMATED LANDSCAPE

Any discussions on landscape should consider the viewer, either explicit or implicit. A Chinese tale that film theorist Béla Balázs recounts more than once in his books on cinema provides a unique entry point here:

There was once a painter who one day painted a landscape. It was a beautiful valley with wonderful trees and with a winding path leaning away towards the mountains. The artist was so delighted with his picture that he felt an irresistible urge to walk along that path winding away towards the distant mountains. He entered the picture and followed the path towards the mountains and was never seen again by any man.⁴²

According to Balázs, this tale expresses a Chinese attitude towards painting, one that is profoundly different from the European ideas of art. The European spectator conceives the internal space of a picture as distant, inaccessible, self-enclosed, and self-sufficient: even when holding a landscape painting in the hand, one is not only physically

⁴² See Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd, 2012), 50. For a brief version of the Chinese tale, see Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter and trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 173. Balázs is also the author of *The Cloak of Dreams: Chinese Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

incapable of setting one's foot onto the painted landscape, however beautiful it is, but the idea of imagining oneself traveling in the picture will not appear either.⁴³ Balázs seems to hear an echo of what he calls the Chinese attitude in Hollywood cinema, which successfully creates the illusion that the spectator is in the middle of the action in the film's diegetic space. However, it remains rather curious to me that when it comes to a discussion of American cartoons (Felix the Cat), Balázs evokes the Chinese tale once more only to demonstrate that the Chinese painter's brush "create[s] reality" whereas the American cartoon artist's pencil invents a whole art world, one with its own rules,⁴⁴ leaving in darkness the question whether spectators might imagine themselves to be in the middle of the action in a cartoon's diegetic space.

Here, I am picking up where Balázs left off. For some, Balázs's contrast of the European and Chinese attitudes towards painting might sound essentialistic and ahistorical. Indeed, from Augustus Earle's *Distant View of the Bay of Islands* (1827—28) to Saul Steinberg's *The Spiral* (1964) in his *The New World* series, we can find examples in the so-called Western context of a spectator figure (who might be the artist) standing in the picture, gazing into the landscape. In the meantime, it should be pointed out that a Chinese person's attitude towards painting, if such a thing ever exists, shifts over time in part as a result of China's absorption and assimilation of other cultures. If Balázs's Chinese tale does reveal something rarely seen outside the Chinese context, that is the ending of the tale: the man *vanishes*.

⁴³ See Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

For readers familiar with Chinese culture, this tale perhaps recalls the idea of *wo you*, literally “traveling while lying down,” attributed to Zong Bing (375—443), a Chinese artist of the late 4th and early 5th century, whose treatise *Instruction to Painting Landscape* (*Hua shanshui xu*) has a significant imprint on the understanding of landscape in the history of Chinese art.⁴⁵ Zong Bing claims that, although he is too old to visit famous mountains, he can still put all his landscape paintings on the walls in his chamber and then “travel while lying down.”⁴⁶ The experience of entering into the picture and traveling in the painted landscape is less a legend than a common experience in Chinese painting appreciation. It is not aimed at “creat[ing] reality.”⁴⁷ Rather, the traveling experience fulfilled by the imagination places significant emphasis on the dual existence of the viewer, who participates in the aesthetic experience, both *mentally* and *physically*, and finds himself or herself both *inside* and *outside* the painting world at the same time. Chinese landscape painting’s ambiguous relation with what we call reality is further exemplified by another intriguing detail in Zong Bing’s biography: he tells his friends that he enjoys playing *guqin* in front of his landscape paintings because all the painted mountains will resound.

⁴⁵ For English translation of *Hua shanshui xu*, see Susan Bush, “Tsung Ping’s Essay on Painting Landscape and the ‘Landscape Buddhist’ Mount Lu,” in *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 132–64. Bush discusses Zong Bing’s approach as a combination of elements of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

⁴⁶ The exact phrase “travel while lying down” (*woyou/ wo er you er*) appears in “Biography of Zong Bing,” in *Song shu* (宋書 *Book of Song*), vol. 93. *Song shu* is a historical record of the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479 CE) of the Southern Dynasties of China. In 492–493, Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) was largely responsible for compiling *Song shu*.

⁴⁷ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 191.

The experience of “travelling while lying down” is reawakened in the viewing experience of early cinema. In 1924, Zhou Jianyun and Wang Xuchang, co-authors of an early film textbook in China, praised cinema’s capacity of taking audiences to every corner of the world: “people say reading a travelogue makes one ‘travel while lying down’ (*woyou*); seated in the movie theater watching newsreels and landscape films amounts to ‘travelling while sitting down’ (*zuoyou*).”⁴⁸ The most ambitious, systematic, and aesthetic-driven account of idea of *you* in Chinese cinemas, in relation to so-called classical landscape aesthetics, goes to Lin Niantong (Lam Nin-tung, 1944—1990)’s book *Jing you*, published in 1985 in Hong Kong.⁴⁹ Lin’s direct source of inspiration is not Zong Bing but Guo Xi (1020—1090), who, in his *Lin quan gao zhi* (*Lofty Record of Forests and Streams*), expresses that, among all landscape paintings, the true masterpieces are the ones that allow the viewer to travel, dwell, and wander—an experience of *you*.⁵⁰ To shore up the idea of *you* as a cinematic experience, Lin lists an array of Chinese live-action films as his examples. And yet, he also mentions *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* in passing.⁵¹ In

⁴⁸ Zhou Jianyun 周劍雲 and Wang Xuchang 汪煦昌, “Yingxi gailun” (影戲概論 Introduction to the Photoplay), in *Changming dianying hanshou xuexiao jiangyi* (昌民電影函授學校講義 *The Teaching Materials of the Changming Motion Picture Correspondence School*) (1924); reprinted in Ding Yaping 丁亞平 ed., *Bainian zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan 1897—2001* (百年中國電影理論文選 1987—2001, *Selected Works from a Hundred Years of Chinese Film Theory 1987—2001*), vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2002), 23. For an excellent discussion of the 1924 textbook for film, see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896—1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 130–148.

⁴⁹ Lin Niantong 林年同, *Jing you* 鏡遊 (Hong Kong: suye chubanshe, 1985). For Victor Fan’s reading of Lin Niantong’s idea of *jing you* (“mirroring-drifting”) as “a conscious attempt in post-war Hong Kong to re-examine the relationship between the subject and the object in cinematic perception,” see Victor Fan, “Mirroring-Drifting: Lam Lin-Tung and Film Aesthetics,” *Asian Cinema* 27, no. 1 (2016): 29–42. For a critical reading of some of Lin’s arguments, see James Udden, “Hou Hsiao-Hsien and the Question of a Chinese Style,” *Asian Cinema* 13, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 54–71.

⁵⁰ Guo Xi 郭熙, *Lin quan gao zhi* (林泉高致 *Lofty Record of Forests and Streams*) (Taipei: shijie shuju, 1962).

⁵¹ Lin Niantong, *Jing you*, 31.

elaborating the live-action film examples, Lin emphasizes the long take with slow camera movement, which, for him, embodies the aesthetics of the Chinese handscroll.⁵² Lin further argues for a dynamic, continuous spatial composition in Chinese cinemas wherein spaces are divided but not isolated.⁵³ It must be noted, however, Chinese landscape painting and the handscroll are not two interchangeable concepts: while the handscroll can be a medium for Chinese landscape painting, not all Chinese landscape paintings are handscrolls. For the purpose of clarity, the current chapter mainly focuses on landscape painting (leaving the question of the handscroll to the coda of the dissertation).

In English-language publications, a number of scholars have also commented on filmmakers' evocation of and spectators' perception of mountains and water in live-action Chinese films possibly as a reenactment of the experience of appreciating a Chinese landscape painting. In an early analysis of *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, dir. Chen Kaige, 1984), for instance, Esther Yau likens the views of distant ravines and slopes of the Loess Plateau to "a scroll painting of the Chang'an school," emphasizing the "non-perspectival use of filmic space."⁵⁴ But Yau, too, seems to confuse Chinese landscape painting with the scroll. Art historian Jerome Silbergeld offers a word of caution for this approach, a warning against generalizations: either the style of Chinese painting nor the temperament of Chinese film exists in the singular.⁵⁵ In this regard, Mia Liu's new book seems to offer a

⁵² At times, Lin emphasizes static shots to be found in Chinese cinemas.

⁵³ Lin, *Jing you.*, 36.

⁵⁴ Esther Yau, "'Yellow Earth': Western Analysis and a Non-Western Text." *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Winter, 1987–1988): 22–33.

⁵⁵ Jerome Silbergeld, "Cinema and the Visual Arts of China," in *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, ed. Zhang Yingjin (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 400–416.

response by focusing on one genre of Chinese landscape and narrowing down the temporal scope to the Mao era.⁵⁶ Many of Liu's key examples, all of which are live-action films, overlap with Lin Niantong's choices.

Participating in yet shedding a new light on the discussions about landscape in Chinese cinemas, I unabashedly center on ink animation. This is because only ink animation can be said to be Chinese landscape painting in motion in a literal sense. I contend, it is in ink animation that the experience of travelling in the painted landscape is reawakened, reenacted, and reanimated in the fullest sense.

Take for example the wandering camera in “searching for the lost buffalo” sequence from *The Herdboy and the Flute*. As the boy climbs up to the top of the mountain, the camera pans slowly to show us a panoramic view of craggy, lush mountains, one after another. With his two hands on his cheek, the boy is no doubt the diegetic viewer, who is completely occupied in contemplating the scenery, and takes no action at all throughout the whole sequence. Just like reenacting the viewer's shifting line of sight when appreciating a Chinese landscape painting, the camera dances and drifts roughly along the waterfall, all situated in the boy's point of view—at the foot of the waterfall stands the buffalo. We seem to be flying, sometimes high and sometimes low, sometimes slow and sometimes fast. It is a world of presence in which one's eyes travel, dwell, encounter, and discover.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Mia Liu, *Literati Lenses: Wenren Landscape in Chinese Cinema of the Mao Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

⁵⁷ I am writing with Wu Hung's description of the “moving” viewing experience of Guo Xi's *shanshui* masterpiece *Early Spring* in mind. See Wu Hung, “Immortal Mountains in Chinese Art,” in *Wang Wusheng: Celestial Realm: The Yellow Mountains of China* (NY: Abbeville Press, 2005), 24–25.

Up to this point, I have examined how painting lends itself to animation. Now it is time to shift my “line of sight” to ask what animation might offer for painting. My short answer is animation offers for painting *a way of seeing*. In this much broadened sense, the word “animation” demands a redefinition.

An ink animation sequence like the “searching for the lost buffalo” sequence from *The Herdboy and the Flute* is, in a very real sense, a classroom illustration of the partly invisible, largely inferred, sometimes mystified experience of appreciating a *shanshui* painting in Chinese culture. It helps us understand the Chinese pictorial space as one unbound by the system for representing space that is known as Renaissance linear perspective, but one that welcomes, accommodates, segmented, and penetrated by a floating gaze. It highlights the dimension of time of a painting. If I may dare to ask: Has animation, as a way of seeing, always been with us, even before animation was invented?⁵⁸

To be clear, my point is not that a painting gains a new dimension of time when it is made into an animated film. Rather, running through many parts of this dissertation is the understanding that all arts (painting, poetry, photography, film, animation, etc.) are spatial-temporal constructions, not to be labeled spatial arts or temporal arts. Writing on Lessing’s *Laocoon*,⁵⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell convincingly argues that the Lessingian distinction of “spatial” and “temporal” arts, which informs the history of Western thought, “is misconceived insofar as it is employed to sustain an *essential* differentiation of or within

⁵⁸ Here, I am deliberately echoing Deleuze’s question of Bergson: “Has the cinema always been with us even before cinema was invented?” Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 1–2.

⁵⁹ Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

the arts.”⁶⁰ For Mitchell, spatiality and temporality become articulated in both painting and poetry via considerably direct or indirect means. The propriety of space and time, if that ever exists, “is at bottom a matter of the economy of signs.”⁶¹ Shifting attention from Western thought to the history of Chinese arts, I am highlighting here a tradition wherein temporality inherent in painting (as well as spatiality inherent in writing, a topic that I will explore in the last chapter of the dissertation) is not imagined to be an exceptional practice but an everlasting impulse.

The mediating experience of a painting, carrying with it a temporal awareness, is not unique to China. Instead, since the 1970s, the field of art history has witnessed one of its main tendencies, that is, to approach a work of art as a site of operations and to “mobilize” it in art historical interpretations — Jonathan Hay, for one, sees the mobile stance as “one of the main achievements of recent art history.”⁶² The popularization of film and the moving image, I suspect, is the subtext of these revisionist art historical accounts. There are some precedents here. Michael Fried criticizes minimal art, which for him, is a genre of *theater*, extorting from the beholder a special *mise-en-scene*.⁶³ Studying Chinese painting, Richard Vinograd argues that a painting “does not cease to be an *event* after it becomes an object.”⁶⁴ To cast a different light onto these discourses, I suggest the

⁶⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 98.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶² Jonathan Hay, “Interventions: The Mediating Work of Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. no.3 (Fall 2007): 435–59.

⁶³ See Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood (1967),” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72.

⁶⁴ Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14.

possibilities of *seeing painting as animation*. Similar to painting as theater or painting as event, my approach of seeing painting as animation seriously considers the viewer, either contemporary or later, as an active agent in the mediating experience, and strives for an understanding of the full complexity of a painting's temporality. In contrast to painting as theater or painting as event, my emphasis on seeing painting as animation retains a space for performing a close analysis of all kinds of signs within the painting: lines, strokes, shapes, and colors. That said, it mobilizes the painting without losing sight of what is really in front of our eyes. This very experience of mediating a painting as a work of animation, as we have shown, has a much longer history and a well-established tradition in China. It is my hope that this way of seeing is also ready to travel in the academic landscape of art history and to lend itself to arts in different cultures.

CONTEMPLATION AS A SPECTATORIAL MODE

In *Landscape and Film*, Martin Lefebvre distinguishes two types of landscape: *landscape as setting* and *landscape as landscape*. Landscape as setting refers to a piece of landscape that sets the stage for human bodies, actions, and occurrences; by contrast, landscape as landscape, which Lefebvre calls "autonomous landscape," or simply "landscape," is a piece of landscape freed from eventhood.⁶⁵ Running in cinema, briefly put, the distinction works in this way: in landscape-as-setting, space is subordinate to narrative; in landscape as landscape, space is no longer subordinate to narrative. Questions now to be pursued are: Under what circumstances does autonomous landscape

⁶⁵ Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film* (NY: Routledge, 2006), 19–60. Lefebvre's main inspiration is from Anne Cauquelin, *L'Invention de Paysage* (Paris: Plon, 1989).

emerge in ink animation? How will our observations of the emergence of autonomous landscape in ink animation leads us to a deeper understanding of the pas de deux of the viewer and landscape?



Figure 3.5 Opening shot, *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (1988)

One circumstance is *prediegetic space*. In Chatman’s definition, prediegetic space is the view of a space before the arrival of characters and the advancement of the action while postdiegetic space is the view of a space after the characters have left it and the action has occurred.⁶⁶ Take for example the opening shot of *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (Figure 3.5): Falling into our field of vision are, first of all, diluted ink “clouds” in highly abstract fashion. As the camera tracks laterally and slowly, from left to right, we are shown the title of the film—*shan shui qing*—in the form of calligraphy. Then, we encounter a couple of clumps of trees on one of the ink “clouds,” which now come to be

⁶⁶ Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *Antonioni, or, The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 89.

the “land” of “landscape.” As if it is reluctant to take on any narrative function, the land remains, for an extensive period of time, empty without a character—a piece of landscape in its own right. The empty frame makes palpable the sensation of passing time.

Audiences, who, up to the point, have so little to take in, are given the time to immerse themselves in a state of meditation. The landscape is made particularly portentous largely by the delay of the arrival of the human character. With wind hissing, the arrival of the old *guqin* master is eventually realized by virtue of an extremely slow dissolve. It is almost a phantomization of the experience of appearing and disappearing: ghostly, spectral, and evanescent.

Another circumstance is a gaze. Again, the “searching for the lost buffalo” sequence from *The Herdboy and the Flute* might serve as a salient example here. The sequence adopts a point-of-view structure, which guides the spectator’s gaze to the big waterfall. While point-of-view editing is generally considered a tool in the system of continuity editing in service of the narrative task, we might come to realize that the point-of-view structure here fosters only a false continuity of the gaze: its true purpose is not to imply a spatial relation linking the boy with supposedly what he sees but to *isolate* the landscape for a brief moment of contemplation. It says, “Look at me.” What demands being looked at here, it must be noted, is not merely a representation of a waterfall but also the full expression of liquidity and immediate flow of the ink. Because of the gaze, prolonged, tranquil, yet regarding the field of vision with a certain degree of aloofness and disengagement,⁶⁷ the waterfall transforms itself from a setting to a piece of autonomous

⁶⁷ It is interesting to think about what makes a gaze distinct from a glance. In this regard, the seminal work is probably Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 94–95.

landscape. The ink and strokes incessantly falling into our field of vision further contributes to this *felt* experience—immediate, direct, intuitive, subtle, dreamy, and rhythmic. Watching this sequence, at least at certain moments, audiences tend to forget the mountains and waterfalls before their eyes are actually related to the act of “searching for the lost buffalo” and find themselves in a trance-like, meditative state. It is the audiences who are “lost.” Let us call the unique mode of spectatorial activity *a contemplation*.

The contemplative mode of spectatorship immediately accrues further complexity as it is situated in the Chinese *shanshui* tradition, wherein the wandering of eyes is also the wandering of mind. Contemplating *shanshui*, at least in the Chinese tradition, always has a higher aspiration, that is, to take a spiritual flight into the transcendental realm.

Contemplating *shanshui* allows one to sense, if not know, that there exists somewhere a whole— or *Dao*— which is changing, and which is open somewhere. There is probably too wide a gap between art history and philosophy here, with all kinds of risks that I might be running, but there can be no doubt that, since the era of Zong Bing, *shanshui* has been thought of as a concrete image capable of embodying the whole cosmic, philosophic, and religious conceptions. Earlier I have described how the Chinese viewer (who I shall maintain, is not a “given”) enters the painted world. Now I should add that his or her ultimate goal is to enter another world—the transcendental world. The original force of transcendence—if it even exists, that is—is not within the painted world, but its fragments catch in our mind, with its mystery intact. It should be fair to say that at the heart of the contemplation is an interplay between the painted world and the transcendental world, between microcosm and macrocosm. A dynamic form of microcosmic and macrocosmic

interplay as such survives in our viewing experience of ink animation, thus requiring re-accommodation to the notion of contemplation as a spectatorial framework.

At this stage, one might wonder why, in the midst of the above-analyzed sequence, audiences are given a second shot of the herdboy, occupied by the activity of contemplating the scenery. I read it as a signal that, at this point, the ink animated film wants the viewer to pick up the (very slender) narrative thread before it might completely disappear in his or her consciousness. Ink animation is not entirely devoid of narrative. In fact, all ink animated films in my analysis possesses a certain degree of narrative, yet each of the stories remains simple enough that audiences do not need to pay attention or make an effort to follow it—There is therefore no need to recount them here. *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (1960) might be somewhat different in this aspect in that it is dominated by a third-person voiceover—given by Zhang Ruifang, who played the role of revolutionary heroine in a number of live-action films and theatrical productions⁶⁸—narrating the story in an almost redundant manner. It is a sad fact: the voice-over narration reduces the open, multivalent, plasmatic images on the screen into a singular meaning. In *The Herdboy and the Flute* (1963), *The Deer's Bell* (1982), and *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (1988), nonetheless, we witness a tendency that I call a conscious retreat of the narrative: the three animated films give up not only the voiceover but also dialogues of any sort. In conceding their own inability of multitasking, the three films make clear that their main task is showing rather than telling. If there is still a narrative of some sort, it seems to me that the narrative is designed only to set the human and animal characters on an

⁶⁸ Zhang Ruifang's most celebrated character is the heroine in rural comedy *Li Shuangshuang* (1962), which won her Hundred Flowers Award for Best Actress.

outdoor journey so that mountains and water can be shown: in *Herd and the Flute*, the buffalo must get lost so that the boy will have to climb up the cliffs to look for it; in *The Deer's Bell*, the girl must fall sick so that the small deer will have to embark on a trip to the butcher's shop on the other side of the mountain in lieu of her; in *Feeling from Mountain and Water*, the old *guzin* master must hold on to the teaching philosophy that "nature is the best teacher" so that he takes his young protégé on a boat ride through rivers and streams. With very subtle revision, we may adopt Martin Lefebvre's two modes of spectatorial activities to speak of the experience of watching ink animation: that is, a tug-of-war between a narrative mode and a contemplative mode. The two modes likely come into play at different moments, permitting audiences to easily grasp the story, and whenever they want, to contemplate on the animated landscape. Watching ink animation, audiences might even notice the shift from the narrative mode to the contemplative mode and back again from one moment to the next.⁶⁹ Yet for ink animated films, or at least the later three ones, the narrative task has retreated to such a degree that the mode of contemplation becomes dominant.

DISAPPEARANCE AND REAPPEARANCE

By the time *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (1988) was made, Shanghai Animation Studio had been undergoing a dramatic institutional change: As China entered the market economy period, the Chinese government gradually weaned animation studios off state support. Shanghai Animation Studio, like others, had to scramble to support itself,

⁶⁹ See Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film* (NY: Routledge, 2006), 19–60.

speeding up production primarily to satisfy the big appetites of TV stations and serving as a workstation for oversea clients. A strong desire to survive pushed the studio towards digitalization, commercialization and globalization at an alarming rate.⁷⁰ Against this historical background, it is not difficult to understand why, during the whole decade of the 1990s, there was not a single ink animated film made: it was so labor-intensive a mode of production that it could hardly return a profit.

In this context, we can also come to grasp the elegiac sentiments underlying *Feeling from Mountain and Water*. After retiring from the position of the head of Shanghai Animation Studio in 1984, Te Wei, together with Ma Kexuan and Yan Shanchun, directed this internationally award-winning animated film in 1988. In a sense, *Feeling from Mountain and Water* could be said to be Te Wei's last teaching for young animators, just like the last *guqin* lesson offered by the old master in the film. Thereafter, Te Wei witnessed Shanghai Animation Studio being pitilessly held hostage by the invisible hand of the market economy. At the time of making the film, he was already well aware of the irrevocable fate of the studio. In the very last shot of *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (Figure 3.6), accompanying the closing credits is the word “end” (*wan*), in the form of a Chinese seal—it is the end of Te Wei's career, the end of the handmade animation working mode, as well as the end of the golden age of Chinese animation.

⁷⁰ See John Lent and Xu Ying, “Chinese Animation Film: From Experimentation to Digitalization.,” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, eds. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 112–25.



Figure 3. 6 The ending credits, *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (1988)

The disappearing art of ink animation, however, returned to the screen in the 2000s with the coming of 3D ink technology.⁷¹ In 2002, *Pond (Tang)*, a seemingly insignificant ink animation work created by Huang Ying—who was then a graduate student at Beijing Film Academy—marked an early attempt to create CGI ink through 3D modeling. In 2003, a more technically mature 3D ink animated work, *Ode to Summer (Xia)*, directed by Xu Yi,⁷² came to the fore.

With visual and sonic cues highly reminiscent of the golden era works, *Ode to Summer* depicts a little dragonfly, after seconds of hesitation, stopping at a lotus flower within an ink painting. Expectedly, the whole painting comes to life. Moving into the space of the painting, we encounter a pond, a school of gold fish, and lastly a female poet chanting the ode to summer. It appears that the film could appropriately end here.

⁷¹ The 3D models are built in software programs such as 3ds Max or Maya. During the 2010s, Nelson Chu invented and developed Expresii, a program specifically for creating digital ink. For the development of the program, see <http://www.expresii.com>

⁷² As shown in the film's credits, Xu Yi's English name is Ron Hui.

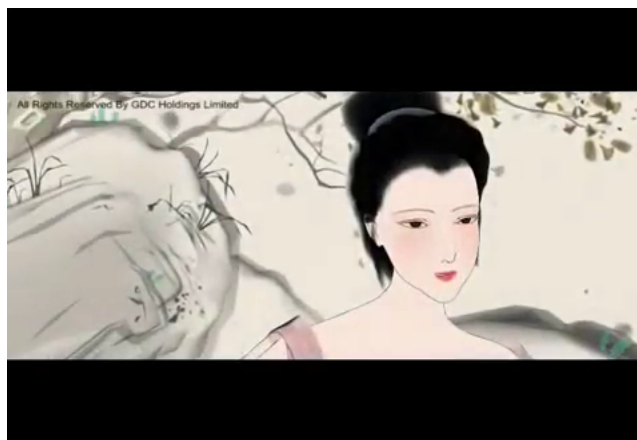
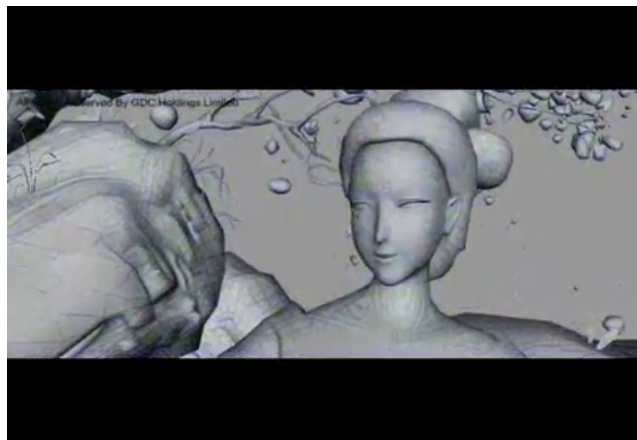


Figure 3. 7 a–c 3D modeling process, *Ode to Summer* (2003)

Nevertheless, it rather strikingly moves into another sequence, which reveals, step by step, how the film was made through 3D modeling (Figure 3.7 a-c), a process in which ink becomes a texture, a kind of “skin,” to be pasted onto the near-completed models as the last step of production. The self-reflective gesture creates a strong experimental flavor, propelling the viewer to treat the activity of watching animation as a way of experiencing technology itself and announcing the film’s departure from the Shanghai Animation Studio “brand” of ink animated films. In addition to significantly reducing time and cost, the use of 3D programs also refashions ink animation by adding something unprecedented to it: that is, so to speak, the virtuosity of camera movement, especially the sense (and sensation) of diving into the depth of the pond, of running through the space between lotus leaves, of tracking forward and backward, and of moving *around* the world of the image.⁷³

In general, the last two decades saw two forking paths of ink animation: mass productions and experimental practices. On the one hand, as CGI ink technologies reached maturity around the mid to late 2000s, they were soon absorbed into the arsenals of television and the mass-produced. Like a sticky note, digital ink was pasted onto whatever TV products that needed to showcase China’s “unique” cultural identity: for instance, *Believe the Power of Brand* (*Xiangxin pingpai de liliang*, 2009), a China Central Television channel promo; *Harmonious China* (*Hexie zhongguo*, 2010), the promo video screened in the China Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo; and *A Taste of China* (*Shejian shang de zhongguo*, 2012), a seven-episode documentary series about Chinese food, just to list a few. It is fair to say that, over the past twenty years, China’s increasing exposure to

⁷³ As I have elaborated in the second chapter, in cel animation production, the effect of moving into depth can only be painstakingly achieved by using a multiplane camera. To my knowledge, during the two golden eras of Shanghai Animation Studio, multiplane cameras were never used in making ink animation.

and confrontation with “the world”—which was often imagined to be the West—has reinforced an urgent sense of national identity, stimulated the desire to re-position China on the global stage with a cheerful image, and encouraged the wide dissemination of ink images on TV and other media platforms. Yet in these seemingly diverse cultural products flawed by eternal sameness,⁷⁴ ink was sadly reduced to a ready-made, formulaic, cliché symbol, with much of its historical significance erased, a symbol that could represent “China” so conveniently, and now so cheaply, often caught in the twin tendencies of oversimplification and self-orientalization.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the fresh wind of independent animation has been blowing onto China’s screens roughly since the new millennium, initially feebly yet growing more powerful, constituting a new vista that is neither completely within nor entirely outside contemporary Chinese art. The high instability of this nascent field is in part reflected by its many alternative names: “animation video,” “new media art,” “experimental animation (*shiyan donghua*),” and “avant-garde animation (*xianfeng donghua*),” and “independent animation (*duli donghua*),” depending on the situation. In this vein, some recent independent animation works both utilize and transform, revitalize and redefine, the culturally burdened vocabulary of ink from within and without.

Representative artists include Qiu Anxiong, Chen Shaoxiong, Chen Hailu, Ruan Yunting, Lin Junting, Sun Xun, Ding Shiwei, and arguably Xu Bing.⁷⁵ Despite their many

⁷⁴ Here, I am speaking in the spirit of Horkheimer and Adorno. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁵ For brief bios of some of these artists, see Wang Chunchen 王春辰, Zhang Xiaotao 張小濤, and He Jinfang 何金芳 eds., *Xinling shijie: zuowei xuni yishu gongcheng* (心靈世界：作為虛擬藝術工程 *The World of Soul: As Virtual Art Engineering: Documents of the First Shenzhen Independent Animation Biennale*) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2012), 168–201.

differences, these recent works share an impulse toward abstraction or semi-abstraction and maintain a dialogue with international art scenes. The still-evolving trend of experimental ink animation, as I am inclined to call it, is the subject of scrutiny in the remainder of this chapter.

To throw some light on the present-day trend of experimental ink animation, it is necessary to situate it within the historical lineage and broader spectrum of experimental ink (*shiyān shuǐmò*), a movement that can be traced back to the 1980s,⁷⁶ and, I believe, is still unfolding, riddled with risk and anxiety, as well as potential. In the vibrant, rebellious cultural climate of the '85 Art New Wave, artists actively sought various ways of subverting the established norms of Chinese ink painting. For instance, eschewing the literati motifs of water and mountains, Wang Gongyi created an ink painting titled *Time and Space* in 1986, a work that contrasted diluted ink clouds with geometric patterns, motion with stillness. Rejecting the norms of *bīmò* (brushwork), Liu Zijian completed an ink painting titled *Memory: The Cross* in 1989, a work that explored the montage of memory by juxtaposing conflicting elements that he termed *mòxiàng* (ink images). But it soon became clear to artists in the trend that only changing what to paint or how to use the brush to paint would never shake the deeply rooted, medium-based division between *guóhuà* (Chinese/national ink painting) and *xīhuà* (Western oil painting). The tenacious habit of using a brush to paint on rice paper and even the idea of treating the art of ink as a genre of the two-dimensional art called painting were exactly the barriers that prevented them from adventuring further in the experimental direction. That said, the new hope of

⁷⁶ For a history of experimental ink, see Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History, 1970s-2000s* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 310–337.

experimental ink lay precisely in medium-dismantling and medium-crossing. Zhang Yu's early experiment of repeatedly pressing his own finger on rice paper with ink could be said to be a gesture of throwing away ink painters' crutch of the brush.⁷⁷ In the 1980s, Cai Guoqiang began experimenting with gunpowder as his material. His 2019 work *Pulse (Mountain)*, for instance, can perhaps be said to be an ink painting without ink. Rice paper gained a life of its own, free from the ossification of the brush or the medium of painting, in Zhu Jinshi's *The Tao of Rice Paper*, a large-scale yet delicate installation made with over 30,000 sheets of wrinkled rice paper, exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1997. Zhang Yu filled six hundred white porcelain bowls with kettles of ink in his 2013 performance-installation at the Gwangju Museum of Art in South Korea. Photography and video were frequently used to document and record experimental ink in installation and performance contexts, further contributing to ink art's cross-media fertilizations. If, in a certain sense, installation, performance, photography, and video—all of which are often thought to be non-cultural-specific—give these Chinese artists a language of universality and contemporaneity, *shuimo* remains a minor language of their own, one that finds its way into, wrestles with, and deterritorializes the so-called “universal” artistic language in the global spheres of contemporary art.⁷⁸ In doing so, artists seem to have found a way of

⁷⁷ Zhang Yu's early experiment, conducted in 1991, did not receive much critical attention at that time, but it eventually led to his fingerprint series, with ink or color, in the 2000s. Zhang's experiment can be situated in a long tradition of painting with fingers and nails in China and Japan. Gao Qipei 高其佩 (1660—1734), for instance, is known for developing finger painting.

⁷⁸ The concept of deterritorialization, in the sense that I am using, is tied up with the possibility of finding a voice within a major language. The result is being simultaneously alien and familiar—a sort of stranger within one's own language. My inspiration comes from Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

refashioning their art and themselves as simultaneously local and global, simultaneously “Chinese” and “contemporary.”

A careful contextualization of experimental ink allows me to rethink ink animation over the course of time. My point is that those ink animated films made in the late 1980s were not indifferent to the “New Wave” cultural climate. Think about the emotional climax sequence of *Feeling from Mountain and Water*: What we see on scene is a “storm” of near shapeless ink, splashing, washing, rendering, and spraying. We find ourselves swept up in a blurry rush of spattered frantic brushstrokes—an almost unconscious impulse. Almost a sequence of abstract animation! Another example is the little-known animated film *Blue Flowers* (*Lan huahua*, 1989), from Beijing Science and Education Film Studio. *Blue Flowers* uses ink animation techniques very similar to Shanghai Animation Studio’s, but its saturated colors, untrammelled style, and use of *suona* (to produce loud and high-pitched music) forcefully subverted the norms of literati aesthetics. These collectively produced works of the late 1980s shared a sense of openness, a desire for abstract expression, and a sense of excitement about experimentation, all of which were certainly not limited to makers who identified themselves as independent or avant-garde artists. Commenting on Clark’s seminal book *Landscape into Art*, W. J. T. Mitchell writes, “the history of landscape painting is often described as...a quest for pure painting, freed of literary concerns and representation... one end to the story of landscape is thus abstract painting.”⁷⁹ In a similar vein, we can perhaps transplant the claim to say that the landscape in the late 1980s ink animated films was calling for more abstract forms for

⁷⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” 13. See also Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

themselves, which manifested, in a belated and fitful manner, in the very recent surge of independent animation since the new millennium. The impulse toward abstraction penetrated a temporal gap of more than a decade in the history of Chinese ink animation. In this light, the appearance of experimental ink animation in the 2000s is in fact a reappearance.

The legacy of experimental ink also raises a question about animation's relation to the space of contemporary Chinese art. Apart from a few exceptions of which I am aware, the recent trend of independent, experimental animation has seldom been discussed under the rubric of contemporary Chinese art.⁸⁰ Ink animation, in particular, has largely been excluded from existing accounts of experimental ink. This is in part because animation video has been considered a latecomer: The history of video art in China goes back to the late 1980s⁸¹ and animation video did not gain much visibility until the 2000s. For some scholars and critics, animation is treated as a less serious member within the family of video art, compared with, let us say, documentary, while some others wonder whether animation might be just a neighbor of that family. Indeed, animation's elusive presence in contemporary Chinese art makes it difficult to grasp. Like ink animation itself, it is a story of appearance, disappearance, and mutation. The task of the following two sections, mainly two case studies, therefore, is not only to write a sequel to the history of experimental ink, incorporating into it the new phrase of animation video, but also to show

⁸⁰ One exception is Wu Hung's giant 456-page book *Contemporary Chinese Art*, which includes animation works (Feng Mengbo, Zhou Xiaohu, Cao Fei, etc) in a section titled "Video and New Media Art."

⁸¹ Zhang Peili's making of *30x30* in 1988 is often regarded as the beginning of Chinese video art. In the early 1990s, Zhang and a group of his students continued to explore the new medium of video and transformed themselves into the so-called first generation of video and new media artists in China.

how a biographical approach will help make sense of animation's *spatial* relation to contemporary Chinese art, especially how animation, in all its mobility, moves in and out of the sphere of contemporary Chinese art.

THE NEW BOOK OF MOUNTAINS AND SEAS

Now my critical lens is focused on Qiu Anxiong's three-part *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* (*Xin shanhaijing*, 2006, 2009, 2017). From 1998 to 2004, Qiu spent six years as a graduate student in painting at the University of Kassel in Germany, where he audited some animation courses yet did not set his mind to working on video art which he had once disparaged as "belonging to western culture, and not of interest to him."⁸² In 2004, Qiu moved back to China. His first video work *Jiangnan Poem* (*Jiangnan cuo*), shot in Shanghai in the summer of 2005, seemed to have demonstrated to Qiu himself to what degree a work of video art could bear the "imprint" of a Chinese painting: a sequence of monochromatic, almost static images of the branches of trees, with a vast area of empty space that we call sky. In a manner reminiscent of the "wind in the tree" in early cinema, Qiu's camera captures the slightest incidents of the world around us: rustling leaves, moving clouds, and jumping birds.⁸³ An unpretentious, unobtrusive work, *Jiangnan Poem* shows us how painting-like stillness and contingent motion complete each other.

⁸² David Briers, "Qiu Anxiong," *Art Monthly*, 317 (June 2008): 36–37.

⁸³ For a revisionist account of "wind in the trees" that I find quite helpful, see Jordan Schonig, "Contingent Motion: Rethinking the 'Wind in the Trees' in Early Cinema and CGI," *Discourse* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 30–61.



Figure 3. 8 An image of the tree branches, *Jiangnan Poem* (2005)



Figure 3. 9 The tree branches, *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I* (2006)

The continuity of Qiu's work was evident as he picked up the long-lost thread of ink animation in *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I*: there is not only the same desire of “taming” the medium of video into an extension of Chinese painting aesthetics, but also the “same” image of the tree branches, which reappears as a literally painted image in *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I* (Figures 3.8 and 3.9). It must be made clear, however, that Qiu's original drawings for the videos were mainly done using acrylic paints on

canvas or metal plates, rather than ink on rice paper. Qiu did try ink at the beginning, but the difficulty was that rice paper would easily crinkle once ink was applied. When a series of ink paintings on rice paper were photographed, one by one, into frames and played quickly in succession, the result was unevenness between frames. Employing diluted acrylic paints instead solved the problem. At times, he mixed white powder and black acrylic paints to create different shades of grey.⁸⁴

Qiu also found his technical inspiration in South African artist William Kentridge whose work he came across when he was studying in Germany. Kentridge used a technique that became a feature of his work: “a sequential reworking of a set of charcoal drawings ... in an obsessive ritual of addition and subtraction, accumulation and erasure.”⁸⁵ Qiu’s successive alternations on the same sheet of his acrylic drawing is most obvious in the shot of the vicissitudes of the landscape in *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I* (Figure 3.11 a–c): farmlands, cottages, smoke, watchtowers, and city walls, coming into view bit by bit. These are created by photographing *one* acrylic drawing, making changes or erasures, and photographing it again for one or more frames. The whole process—moving back and forth between the painting and the camera in a physical space—can be attributed to stop-motion animation. But the purpose of splicing the frames has been radically altered: Unlike conventional stop-motion animation which, as I have discussed in the first chapter, strives for what can perhaps be called a form of literally “seamless editing” within a shot, Qiu splices multiple frames together so as to retain the

⁸⁴ For Qiu’s technique, see Cao Kai and Shi Changjie, “Asia from the West: A Case Study and the History of Chinese Experimental Animation,” *Shenzhen Independent Animation Biennale Archive*, December 21, 2013.

⁸⁵ Amanda De la Garza, Néstor García Canclini and Lilian Tone, *William Kentridge: Fortuna* (Mexico City: Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 5.

traces of his hand. The smoke emitting from the cottages' chimneys, for instance, clearly bears the traces of erasure. Also involved here is the technique of painting over previous layers of acrylic paints, most evident in the rolling forward of the opaque light-grey pavement, which soon covers over dark-colored farmlands over—an effect that would have been impossible but for the “transparent” medium of traditional Chinese ink and paints. A shot as such, in a sense, documents Qiu’s painting in progress. The shot, probably perceived as “slow” for most audiences, is in fact a “fast motion” of Qiu’s painting process, a process wherein time has been folded into the crevices between frames.



Figure 3. 10 a-c Different frames *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I* (2006)

It is fascinating to think about the process of subtraction and addition in Qiu's creation exactly as a visual form of the conceptual transformation of the genre of ink animation. In the lineage of experimental ink, Qiu's videos seem to share with Cai's gunpowder paintings the logic of substituting an unexpected kind of material for ink. Qiu's creative choice of materials, albeit out of practical concerns, also gestures toward an understanding of ink animation not as a genre strictly defined by its materiality but as a concept composed of an open set of paradigms whose "identity" is not necessarily undermined by subtractions and additions of new elements.⁸⁶ If *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* belongs to the genre of ink animation, it is a restless member that constantly contests for the power to redefine the genre. In the process of subtraction and addition, of deviation and compensation, the genre of ink animation transforms itself, keeps itself alive, and opens itself to experiments.

The chaos of temporality characterizes the three-part *The New Book of Mountains and Seas*. Part I seems to unfold in a huge framework of temporality, starting from ancient China when the Great Wall was built. At the same time, the images of a polluted environment, industrial bustle, cruelly treated animals, and uneasy bodies in the video almost unmistakably point to contemporary China. The relation between *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* and *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* offers some clues to tackle the temporal paradox. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing)* is a *descriptio mundi* largely about fanciful geography in pre-Qin dynasty China.⁸⁷ In it, mountains and

⁸⁶ Cavell's distinct understanding of the concept of genre is very instructive here. See Cavell, "The Fact of Television," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 59–86. For an elaboration of the concept of the open set, see D.N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 74.

⁸⁷ The author and date of *Shanhaijing* is a subject of debate. More recently, it is accepted by most scholars that it was

rivers, flora and fauna, and humans and gods are all depicted as having monstrous forms. *The New Book of the Mountains and Seas* is not a new edition of the ancient book. Rather, it shows how today's world becomes "an enchanted land," as if seen through the eyes of someone coming from the age of *The Classic of the Mountains and Seas*.⁸⁸ In Parts I and II, there is never a human protagonist in the videos; rather, it is the audience who is placed in the position of the absent, time-traveling subject, if not to say the naïve observer. In this way, the past becomes a perspective that paradoxically coexists with the present. The disparate, noncoinciding temporalities are crystalized in the images of single-eyed submarines, oil-pumping scorpions, giant birds laying bombing eggs, and many other modern inventions that all take on monstrous shapes.

Both Part I and Part II of the large-scale video work use something like a long, horizontal scroll as their aspect ratio, a departure from the aspect ratios with which audiences are more familiar, such as 4:3 or 16: 9. When Part I was launched at the Shanghai Biennale, it required three regular screens set up side by side⁸⁹—a physical feature that coincides with the occasional use of three split screen in the video. No particular logic could be discerned to justify the juxtaposition of the three spaces: They are adjacent yet disconnected. It is equally unpredictable when a cut will occur and what the next image will be in the enchanted world of *The New Book of the Mountains and Seas*.

compiled and assembled by different authors over a period of some six to eight centuries. The text of *Shanhaijing* has been closely associated with illustrations, some of which might exist prior to the text. For a modern edition, see Luan Baoqun 樂保群 ed., *Shanhaijing Xiangzhu* (山海經詳注) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019).

⁸⁸ Hasegawa Yuko, "Witness of an Enchanted Land: Qiu Anxiong" (2008), <http://www.qiuanxiong.net/en/article2008.html>

⁸⁹ Ibid.

These are, in a sense, two forms of disconnected space, perceived by audiences either synchronically or diachronically. Indeed, Qiu's work shares with a robust body of recent experimental animation videos the weakening of causal or logical linkages between images, a tendency that I read as the emergence of the time-image, which is historically and socially grounded in post-socialist China.

In Deleuze's account, movement-images dominate classical, pre-WWII cinema, whose plot is dense and intense, and whose narrative form is largely composed of the arc of actions and reactions, causes and effects. Yet, in the aftermath of World War II, a significantly different configuration of time—what he calls “the time-image”—surfaced with modern cinema: “the action-image tended to shatter, whilst the determinate locations were blurred, letting *any-space-whatever* (my emphasis) rise up where the modern affects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed and interminable waiting were developing.”⁹⁰ In the new type of cinematic image, the story, the plot, or the action can be diluted like a pellet of ink. No longer caught up in a spatial and temporal series defined by the arc of actions and reactions, effects and causes, any “real” locations in the world can, let us say, be easily painted over and become undifferentiated space. For Deleuze, the key factor that contributed to the collapse of the action-image was World War II. Deleuze's theorization of the historical event cannot be applied into the context of the recent trend of experimental Chinese animation without modifications. But “the post-war situation to which we no longer know how to react,”⁹¹ as Deleuze describes it, to some degree, finds its

⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 121.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

resonances in Qiu Anxiong's reflection on his own motivation for working on *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* :“I have been upset by the chaotic situations of the world today and found it difficult to reconcile what is happening around me.”⁹² In his “Preface to *The New Book of Mountains and Seas (Xin shanhaijing xu)*,” partially written in classical Chinese, Qiu again reveals his motivation, yet in a self-mystifying manner: “I have already forgotten my original motivation for writing the *New Classic of Mountain and Seas*. I suppose I have seen many strange things go on in our society. So many feelings, so many sensations. I can't not speak of them.”⁹³ Combining the two accounts, it becomes clear that what Qiu feels compelled to “speak of” is an unspeakable sense of not knowing how to respond to the frenetic world around him, an unspeakable feeling that can only be made visible, made perceptible, by these images. In this sense, the emergence of the time-image in the recent trend of experimental animation is capable of giving expression to a strong sense of social upheaval and uncertainty at a time when China is said to be characterized by the radical and sometimes horrifying changes that we all witness in everyday life. This sociopolitical stance, transfigured by Qiu's image-making practice, is paradoxically manifested in a detached calmness. If there is indeed an implied time-travel character in *The New Book of Mountains and Seas I and II*, that character never takes on a corporeal form, but only provides a point of view, which also means the impossibility of taking any action. The issue of undoing plot, in Qiu's case, takes on an extreme form of undoing character. The literal “empty space” that Qiu borrows from Chinese painting becomes the

⁹² Hasegawa Yuko, “Witness of an Enchanted Land: Qiu Anxiong” (2008).
<http://www.qiuanxiong.net/en/article2008.html>

⁹³ Qiu Anxiong, “Xin shanhaijing xu” (新山海經序 Preface to *The New Book of Mountains and Seas*) (2006), trans. Philip Tinari. <http://www.qiuanxiong.net/en/article2006.html>

figurative “any-space-whatever” in a Deleuzian sense, demanding not only a moment of contemplation but also a way of thinking.

SAND, INK, OR WHITE SNAKE

I now turn my analytic spotlight onto *White Snake* (*Baishhe*, 2007), an experimental ink animated film directed by Ruan Yunting (b. 1980). The work shows a rebellious spirit in at least two senses. First, *White Snake* subverts the well-known Chinese folktale—a romance between a man and a white snake spirit⁹⁴—by turning it into a tale about desire and betrayal. One of its boldest gestures is combining the character of Xu (the man who is genuinely in love with White Snake) and the character of Fahai (the Buddhist monk who always tries to separate the couple in the name of the law of heaven) into one. The emotional intensity and amplitude of the experimental animation strike me as unprecedented in other cinematic adaptations of the tale, not despite of but because of the fact that it is a work less than six minutes in length: the radically different phrases of a relationship are quickly whisked away as we watch, a faithful lover turning into a moral kidnapper in a flash, in the twinkle of an eye. Second, *White Snake* subverts the material-based assumption of ink animation by employing beach sand as the matter of its animated images. It is, again, a work of ink animation without ink. It was created by dumping sand on a flat piece of glass, with lighting coming from below, ranging and rearranging the

⁹⁴ For one early Chinese vernacular account of the folktale, see Feng Menglong 馮夢龍(1574–1646) ed., “Bainiangzi yong zhen leifengta” (白娘子永鎮雷峰塔 Madame White is Madame White is Kept Forever Under the Thunder Peak Tower) in *Jing shi tong yan* (警世通言 *Stories to Caution the World*) (1624). In it, white snake spirit is depicted as an evil demon. Over the centuries, however, the folktale has involved into one centering on romance. For a modern edition, see Feng Menglong, ed., *Jing shi tong yan* (警世通言) (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1994).

shape of the sand by hand, and photographing it with the camera amounted above the glass, frame by frame —a technique indebted to Caroline Leaf’s sand animations produced under the National Film Board of Canada, an influence that Ruan frankly confirmed in a Weibo private message to me.⁹⁵ Sand animation, properly speaking, derives its charm largely from a paradox: famous or infamous for its ephemerality, the alive, impromptu, ungraspable art of sand performance is astonishingly grasped, transfigured, and even made reversible by the mechanical reproduction medium called animation.

Matter does matter. In *White Snake*, the grains and textures of the sand in thick and thin layers displays a range of subtle gradations comparable to ink. Materiality retains a grip on our affective response, especially in an age when everything seems to be going digital. It is exactly because beach sand is so primal a matter that it seems to penetrate into the most intimate depths of our being. The point is not to conceal the identity of sand such that it can be perceived as a work of ink animation. Rather, *White Snake* wants the audience to see it simultaneously as a work of sand animation and a work of ink animation: the positive and negative shapes that it knows our eyes will follow. Grains of sand, ink images, and the realm of the representational constitute three distinct orders that gnaw into each other. It is less an art of fabrication and more the possibility of seeing what is *not* there that stirs up the audience’s true delight and astonishment. At the film’s most telling moment, White Snake uses her figure to draw a circle on the (sand?) ground so as to imprison herself (Figure 3.12)—a self-reflexive gesture.

At the presentational level, we can say that the circle that White Snake draws swiftly turns into the Thunder Peak Tower at the side of the West Lake, with her body

⁹⁵ Ruan Yunting, Sina Weibo private message, Fall 2013.

crushed under it—a body that eventually becomes a landscape. Yet, it is more than that. The phrase of becoming-Sand intervenes with the process of becoming-Tower, a process in which the distinction between the figure and the ground starts to fray and the whole world is forced to change. To borrow Ryan Pierson’s words, it is a case of “whole-screen metamorphosis”: a whole world as fluid as sand, under which we can no longer know where we are, where even the concept of a “world” is in itself in question; “we are lost.”⁹⁶ At this point, we find our acquired cinematic vocabularies of camera movement paralyzed almost completely for the purpose of describing movement as such, while being swallowed by or becoming part of the motion itself, in an irrevocable manner. A *spatial vertigo*, in all its horror and beauty, dominates our viewing experience of *White Snake*.



Figure 3. 11 A self-reflexive moment, *White Snake* (2007)

⁹⁶ Ryan Pierson, “Whole-Screen Metamorphosis and the Imagined Camera (Notes on Perspectival Movement in Animation),” *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 1 (2015): 6–21. Also see Pierson, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), especially the third chapter.

As a case study, *White Snake* also testifies to the ambiguous relationship between the recent trend of experimental animation and contemporary Chinese art. In mapping out the topography of contemporary Chinese animation, Paola Voci proposes what I consider as an anatomy of space. In Voci's view, outside the two universes of the animation industry and contemporary Chinese art, there is a third space, a transitional, short-lived and unregulated sphere of animation making and viewing practices. These animation practices, some of which are student works, are certainly not part of the mainstream animation industry. At the same time, most of these animation practices remain mostly outside the more established space defined by museums and galleries. Often circulating online and carrying little economic "weight," these animation works are perhaps defined by their *lightness*.⁹⁷ At first glance, *White Snake* appears to belong to what Voci characterizes as the third space of contemporary Chinese animation in that it was Ruan Yunting's MFA thesis project at China Academy of Art in the city of Hangzhou. However, scrutiny of the work reveals that it does not sit quietly in the third space. As I have suggested above, Ruan's *White Snake* shares with Qiu's *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* a very similar line of inquiry in regard to material substitutions, and therefore, it might be more properly conceptualized as an extension of experimental ink in the vein of video and new media. The fact that *White Snake* has been shown at Annecy International Animated Film Festival, among others, but not at any museum does not necessarily undermine its identity or potential as a work of contemporary Chinese art. If a piece of work is defined as a work of art only when a museum or gallery recognizes it, whereas museums and galleries are

⁹⁷ Paola Voci, "DV and the Animateur Cinema in China," in *DV-Made China: Digital Subjects and Social Transformations After Independent Film*, eds. Zhen Zhang and Angela Zito (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 260–88. See Paola Voci, *China on Video: Smaller-Screen Realities* (NY: Routledge, 2010).

defined as spaces where art works are on display, the two definitions become a tautological loop. But this is not to deny that independent curators and critics often play a decisive role in the recognition of an artwork. In the meantime, Ruan is best known not for her experimental animation practices, but for her highly popular comic books and illustrations in China. Her reputation as a commercial artist in the creative industry seems to have obscured her other identities, keeping her work far away from the contemporary art scene and out of the purview of most art critics. The three spaces on Voci's map are by no means parallel universes. Rather, crucial to our understandings of animation in contemporary China is exactly the crossroads and mutual penetrations of such spaces. More precisely put, contemporary Chinese animation is "constructed in different yet interrelated spaces."⁹⁸ What matters is to trace, document, and explain how the meaning of a work of animation changes subtly when artists, curators, scholars and critics, and animated images traverse and interact with these spaces. If the unregulated sphere of animation making and viewing practices, the third space in Voci's account, does exist, it must be a liminal one: artists in this sphere are open to different possibilities and new territories. They are constantly repositioning themselves and reflecting on their self-positioning and repositioning. A work of animation video might change its critical valences when it finds its way into the so-called "art space" of museums and galleries, the more commercially driven space of movie theaters, or the widespread yet perhaps more short-lived cyberspace. At times, it might be simultaneously in and out of the world of contemporary Chinese art.

⁹⁸ Again, I am taking my clue from Wu Hung. See Wu Hung, "A Case of Being 'Contemporary': Conditions, Sphere, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008), 11–12.

Such a form of *trans-spatial* thinking also cries out for an interdisciplinary approach, one that bridges cinema and media studies and art history, an approach that I have consciously put into practice throughout this chapter. At a time when the word “interdisciplinary” has become almost ubiquitous, I need to specify or reemphasize in what sense I am using it. If having a film session as the last class of an art history course is certainly not enough and turning “the whole history of art” into “a massive footnote of the history of film,”⁹⁹ as Hollis Frampton once asserted, still sounds too exaggerated, we need to find a way out. This chapter has striven to articulate how cinema and media studies and art history reanimate each other methodologically. We look at the frames of an individual animated film with the seriousness of an art historian in order to escape our habit of watching movies. We foreground the importance of seeing painting as animation, and in doing so, animation will never leave us. We bring scholarship about time, largely produced by film and media scholars, and analyses of space, largely conducted by art historians and theorists, into a fruitful mash-up, letting them flow through our fingers like sand, and in the process discover that “China” is not merely a location marker, an identity construct, but “a way of broaching the inevitably *contextual* process of media theorization itself.”¹⁰⁰ We borrow a floating gaze—yes, from the experience of viewing a Chinese painting—in order that, in studying a work, be it a film or otherwise, we might weave in and out of different historical and theoretical contexts.

In “Film Theory’s Animated Map,” Karen Redrobe writes:

⁹⁹ Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video: Texts, 1968–1980* (Rochester, N.Y.: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), 123.

¹⁰⁰ I borrow the words from Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahkten in the Japanese context. See Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahkten, “Introduction,” in *Media Theory in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

In addition to highlighting the need for contemporary film theorists to move beyond static national paradigms in order to develop crucial methods for engaging mobile networks of ideas across borders—what Edward Said calls “travelling theory”—an animated view of the field also reveals the extent to which graphic images have played a neglected role in shaping the way we think about both space and movement, which in turn shapes how the evolution of theoretical speculation about film.¹⁰¹

What Redrobe has in mind is something that would be like Google Earth, a global map that depicts film theorists, ideas, and concepts that are constantly on the move—a visualization of the “field” of film and media theories today. What comes to mind is an East Asian scroll painting that might serve as a visualization for the same purpose in a similar yet not identical way. In what I call “film theory’s animated scroll,” we wouldn’t be able to take view of the entire “Earth” of film and media theories, as we scholars are all human beings with limitations. But a scroll would remind us that there are always some theories out there that exceed our capacity to take them in at a single glance. Film theory’s animated scroll would free us from the isolated, linear point of view that takes the so-called “West” as its vantage point. Instead, it would provide us with an intellectual space, in which a multiplicity of theoretical monads could be imagined separately and linked together in that floating gaze.

¹⁰¹ Karen Redrobe, “Film Theory’s Animated Map,” *Framework* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 480.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPATIAL MONTAGE:

XU BING'S *THE CHARACTER OF CHARACTERS* AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF CALLIGRAPHIC ANIMATION

Gestures rather than signs,
Departures
Awakening
Further awakenings
—Henri Michaux¹

Characters are born from ink.
Ink is born from water.
Water is the blood of characters.
—Chen Yizeng²

This chapter focuses on the encounters between calligraphy and animation. This almost unexamined topic did not come to me by accident. In the previous chapter, I have showed how a distinct genre of Chinese animation was born out of water and ink; in the story, the figure of Chinese painting tends to enlarge. In the Chinese tradition, calligraphy and painting share the same origin, we're told. One of the most powerful legends from China's mythological past describes the moment when Cang Jie, the ancient sage who had four eyes, invented the Chinese written characters by noticing patterns in nature. In a dramatic

¹ Henri Michaux, *Stroke by Stroke* (Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2006): n.p.

² Chen Yizeng is a calligraphy master in the Yuan dynasty. See Cheng Yizeng 陳繹曾, *Hanlin yaojue* 翰林要訣 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2016), 13.

fashion, it has been depicted as a moment when “the sky rained millet” and “the ghosts wailed in the night,” a moment when “painting and calligraphy had the same body, unseparated from each other.”³ In this regard, my inquiry into the secret symmetry between calligraphy and animation could be seen as a variant of the far more obvious affinity between painting and animation that I have discussed in the previous chapter. If Chinese painting and calligraphy are indeed two branches growing out of the same trunk, the second branch yields surprising results when it encounters with animation.

My central example in this chapter is Xu Bing’s 2012 animation video, *The Character of Characters* (*Hanzi de xingge*), which mediates the history of Chinese calligraphy and its intimate relationships with nature and painting within a highly conceptual framework. *The Character of Characters* was a newly commissioned video installation presented at the exhibition *Out of Character: Decoding Chinese Calligraphy* at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco from October 5, 2012 through January 13, 2013.⁴ The museum’s online introduction to the exhibition describes animation as “a medium that is new for both the artist and the museum.”⁵ At the same time, the work was made available as a DVD, which accompanied the very thin book *The Character of Characters: An Animation by Xu Bing*.⁶ In the preceding chapter, I have included Xu Bing as one of the representative artists when introducing the recent trend of experimental ink animation, a trend in which “ink” is no

³ One written account of this powerful legend can be found in Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (815—877), *Lidai minghua ji* (歷代名畫記 *A Record of Famous Paintings of All Dynasties*) (Shanghai: Renming meishu chubanshe, 1964): 2.

⁴ From April 29 to August 17, 2014, an exhibition of the same title was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵ “Out of Character: Introduction.” <https://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/ooc/intro.html>

⁶ Xu Bing and Britta Erickson, *The Character of Characters: An Animation by Xu Bing* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2012).

longer a material entity but a culturally burdened vocabulary—perhaps even a language as I am inclined to call it— that has been constantly revitalized and redefined. Different from most animation works in this evolving trend, which are not recognized or are still waiting to be recognized by voices from the sphere of contemporary Chinese art, *The Character of Characters* seems to have a rather “secure” position in the contemporary art world owing to Xu Bing’s international reputation as one of the best recognized and most widely discussed contemporary Chinese artists. Indeed, there is no shortage of books, articles, exhibitions, and conferences devoted to Xu Bing. However, as Wu Hung acutely observed, most writings on Xu Bing “have concentrated on analyzing a few individual works.”⁷ In particular, *Book from the Sky (Tianshu/ Xishijian)*, the immersive installation of thousands of “false” or meaningless characters that Xu Bing created from 1987 through 1991, has almost become the *ne plus ultra* of his work, spawning critical exegesis of every conceivable kind. Yet apart from Britta Erickson’s essay and Xu Bing’s own reflection,⁸ *The Character of Characters* has thus far received very scarce critical attention.

The goal of my analysis of Xu Bing’s *The Character of Characters* is therefore twofold. First, the chapter fulfills a gap in the existing Xu Bing scholarship by placing *The Character of Characters* in the context of his oeuvre and writings. In particular, I will put my reading of *The Character of Characters* in dialogue with the *Landscape* series (*Wenzi xiasheng*, 1999—present), *Book from the Ground (Dishu)*, 2013—present), *The Mustard Seed Garden Landscape Scroll (Jieziyuan shanshui juan)*, 2010), and *Dragonfly Eyes*

⁷ Wu Hung, “Xu Bing: Experiments in Media and Visual Technique (2001),” in *Wu Hung on Contemporary Chinese Artists* (HK: Time Zone 8, 2009), 29.

⁸ Both are published in Xu Bing and Britta Erickson, *The Character of Characters: An Animation by Xu Bing*.

(*Qingting zhiyan*, 2017). Second, I take *The Character of Characters* as a monad, a thinking lab, one in which I constantly ask what calligraphy offers for animation, and vice versa. Pairing *The Character of Characters* with *36 Characters* (*Sanshiliu ge zi*, dir. A Da, 1984), an educational animated short out of Shanghai Animation Studio, I will underscore how the transformative and performative qualities of archaic Chinese hieroglyphics come into play in the medium of animation. I will also explore how audiences react to calligraphy—or dancing lines—on screen with immediate, visceral excitement. The new possibilities that calligraphic animation might bring to us, negotiated through a set of oscillations between image and text, between animation and montage, between spatiality and temporality, between diegetic and nondiegetic conventions, enable me to pinpoint, scrutinize, and seek for the powerful intermedial creativity and its implications in an age of global media mix.

WORDS ON SCREEN

My point of departure is Michel Chion's highly original and incisive book *Words on Screen*.⁹ In it, Chion makes the distinction between diegetic writing and nondiegetic writing. Like diegetic music, diegetic writing in a fiction film refers to writings that the characters can know and perceive. It is part of the physical world of the characters. There is no shortage of diegetic writing in cinema, but I will give examples from films that I have discussed in the previous chapters as a way of tying together some loose ends and wrapping up the dissertation as a whole. In *The Pearl Necklace* (*Yichuang zhenzhu*, Great

⁹ Michel Chion, *Words on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). The book is originally published in 2013 as *L'écrit au cinéma*.

Wall Film Company, 1926), for instance, the private party for which Xiuzhen borrows the pearl necklace in order to attend takes place in a night garden during the Chinese Lantern Festival. In an establishing shot, the gigantic Chinese written characters “*yuanxiao*” (Lantern Festival) are shown in the form of electric writing. Together with several bulb strings, they decorate the garden gate, through which a group of young ladies—the party’s host and guests—are coming into view. The following shot, however, does not follow the young ladies. Instead, the camera dwells on the electric written words that illuminate the night; in a relatively loose framing, it pans slowly from left to right, and then the other way around, showcasing the rather expensive electric set design elements built for the film’s shooting and the up-to-date technique of shooting at night. In *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* (*Daxia ganfengchi*, 1928), to supply another example we have previously encountered, when the bodyguard with a sword sneaks into the house of an evil medicine dealer, sharp-eyed audiences might notice the written Chinese characters “*jixiang*” (auspicious) as coin patterns that garnish the window in the background. In both cases, the Chinese written characters are a form of diegetic writing, an element of cinematic image, and part of the set, all three at once. This form of writing does not necessarily want to be read. In the former case, reading the written characters “*yuanxiao*” (Lantern Festival) might help situate time and location. In the latter case, the written characters “*jixiang*” (auspicious) serve more as a stylistic device, one whose visual meaning overpowers its literary meaning.

Nondiegetic writing, by contrast, refers to writings that occur on the screen but could not be perceived by the characters (the screen world’s human inhabitants). Opening credits, foreign-language subtitles, and title cards are habitually conceived as nondiegetic

writing. For instance, in the semi-erotic dancing-and-singing sequence in *Princess Iron Fan*, the song lyrics appear as subtitles. Audiences see the song lyrics while Princess Iron Fan and Bull Demon King (Pigsy in disguise) cannot. Like many other forms of nondiegetic writings, the song lyrics here serve a utilitarian function: to make sure audiences can understand the song lyrics even if they might not be able to hear every word of the song clearly.

WHEN THE BOUNDARY BLURS

It is, however, not always easy to differentiate diegetic and nondiegetic writing. Here, I am problematizing the conceptual distinction between diegetic writing and nondiegetic writing by positing a kind of border—that is a *space*—between these two categories, which we might suggestively label a “fantastical gap,” if we borrow Robynn Stilwell’s term in her discussion of the blurred boundaries between diegetic and nondiegetic music.¹⁰ First, foreign language translation does not always sit quietly in the non-diegetic realm. One typical example of the so-called diegetic translation can be found in *The Pearl Necklace* (1926). On the morning when the couple discovers that the borrowed necklace has disappeared, Wang Yusheng (the husband character in the film) reads a letter/written message from the jewelry store owner, who urges him to return the necklace right away. Held in Wang’s hand, the letter is written vertically and in Chinese. It then dissolves into a shot of the same letter, now written horizontally and in English, but with similar composition and still held by Wang. This act of translation is rather important

¹⁰ Robynn J. Stilwell, “The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark and Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184–202. Jeff Smith offers a powerful critique of the way that Stilwell has applied the concept of the fantastical gap. See Jeff Smith, “Bridging the Gap: Reconsidering the Boundary Between Diegetic and NonDiegetic Music,” *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no.1 (Spring 2009): 1–25.

for *The Pearl Necklace* because of the film's dependence on the Southeast Asia market, where audiences may or may not read Chinese. The convention of diegetic translation, however, was abandoned rather quickly in the history of international silent cinemas due to its artificiality. The letter written in English can be said to be diegetic writing in that it is indeed perceived—held—by Wang, a character in the film, yet there is no reason for the jewelry store owner to write the letter in English, so we can only arrive at the conclusion that the translated letter is meant for the film's viewers, rather than for Wang. Hovering between diegetic and nondiegetic realms, the letter written in English provides us with contradictory cues that can be interpreted in mutually exclusive ways.

Second, writings that could only be perceived or imagined by one particular character in a fiction film mark another circumstance where the diegetic/nondiegetic distinction becomes ambiguous and unstable. As I have elaborated in the first chapter, at an enchanted moment, the threads and buttons on Xiuzhen's table dissolve into the pearl necklace. It dances in circles, metamorphosing into the shape of the two Chinese written characters "*huo huan*" (misfortune). It is *her* hallucination. Writing on narrative discourse in fiction, Gérard Genette has made the distinction of at least three levels of narration: the diegetic, the nondiegetic (which he calls the extradiegetic), and the metadiegetic (pertaining to narration by a secondary narrator).¹¹ Taking her cue from Genette, Claudia Gorbman considers music that is imagined by a particular character within a fiction film metadiegetic music.¹² In a similar vein, we can perhaps speak of the Chinese written words of "*huo huan*" as a case of metadiegetic writing, a kind of writing on

¹¹ See Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 228–234. Genette first put forth the terms in *Figures II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 202.

¹² See Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 22.

screen that only one character (or one group of characters) seems able to see, perceive, or acknowledge. The anatomy of words on screen is far more complex than commonly assumed. A reading of what falls through the cracks of the diegetic /nondiegetic distinction is, I contend, ultimately more productive.

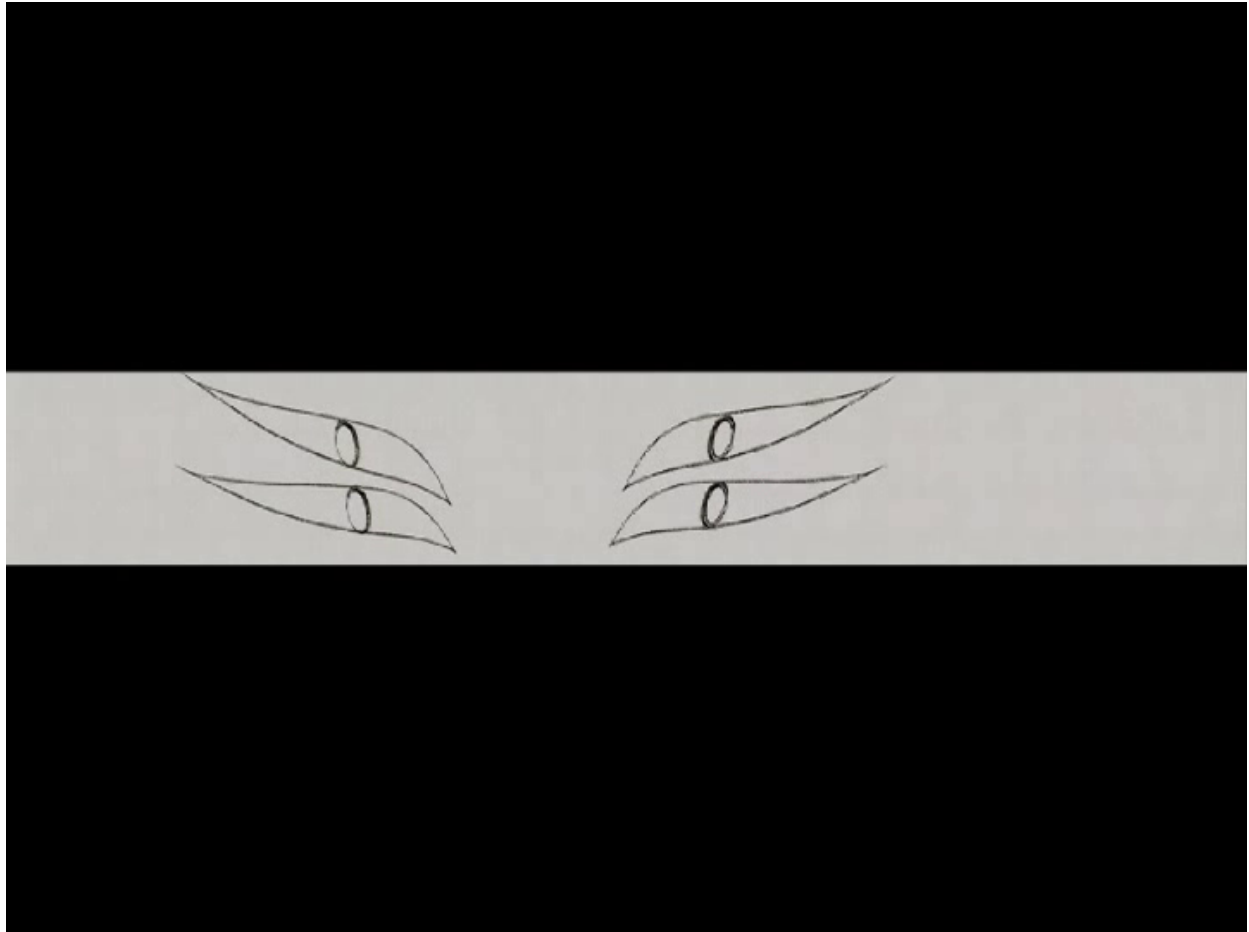


Figure 4. 1 Cang Jie's four eyes, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

Xu Bing's *The Character of Characters* counters the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic writings—and counters it completely. The written words in *The Character of Characters* are not minor roles but protagonists. They sense. They take actions. They form a

boundless universe. They spell out norms of social behavior. Stimulating immediacy, ambiguity, and thought, the characters in *The Character of Characters* call into question whether the deeply entrenched distinction between diegetic writing and nondiegetic writing is still helpful and pertinent in such an experimental work.

And yet, there is an alternative reading. In one section of the animated film, a pattern of plant vines occupies the scroll-like screen. It morphs into a gigantic eye, literally, in the twinkling of an eye. Zooming out, the single eye soon duplicates itself into four eyes (Figure 4.1). Eyebrows and bags under the eyes appear. A cluster of hair-shape leaves frame the four eyes. A face without contours. It is Cang Jie: “By pondering the transformation of heaven and earth; by observing the revolutions of a constellation in the sky; and by examining the patterns on turtle shells, bird feathers, mountains and rivers, and palms and fingers, written characters were created.”¹³ In the following shot of the animation, the eyes of Cang Jie wander like leaves in a dream-like ambiance, turning natural patterns—mountains, turtles, and worms—into written characters. If we acknowledge Cang Jie as the human character in the animated film, and conceive all the written characters as his inventions, we might arrive at the alternative conclusion that all the written characters are all safely situated within the diegetic realm. If we retain the understanding that the criterion that distinguishes diegetic and nondiegetic writings is whether the characters can know and perceive the writings, the question of who the “characters” are becomes the site and vortex of mutually exclusive interpretations.

Xu Bing is well aware that his animation work plays with the tension and potential that the diegetic and nondiegetic ambiguity creates. The opening credits of *The Character of*

¹³ This description can be traced back to *Chunqiu yuan ming bao* in the Han dynasty, a very comprehensive account of astronomy, geography, history, and myths and legends, partially extant in fragmental fashion. This is cited in Xu Bing, “*The Character of Characters: An Animation*,” in *The Character of Characters: An Animation by Xu Bing*, 34.

Characters are simple and conventional: stroke by stroke, the film's title and the name of the director come into view. An English translation follows. More intriguing is the animation's ending sequence: the breathlessness of city life, the accumulations of capital and commodities, the flows of vehicles, and the mushrooming of advertising boards with written characters. When the hustle and bustle of city life fades out, the written characters remain on the screen, rearrange themselves, and assume the conventional form of ending credits. Rather than creating a whole new universe of written characters out of nowhere, Xu Bing controls his own creations, which might at times take on the form of chaos, with an assumable, peaceful order. As I will continue to show in this chapter, this is perhaps what defines Xu Bing's art: to reinvent a convention, to dance with shackles, and to rebel with a cause.

A ONE AND A WORLD

Now permit me to dwell, for a moment on the first section of the animation video. An ink dot appears on the wide screen. As if the dot has been taken for a walk by a visible hand with a brush, it stretches very slowly toward the right, gradually forming a single horizontal brushstroke (Figure 4.2). It is the Chinese written character "one" (*yi*). It is not just a character but also a work of calligraphy. The full-screen dot-stroke moves with its pauses, hesitations, lucidity, and grace. The larger the stroke is, the stronger the sense of temporal pause it conveys. Xu Bing's purpose is less to have audiences read out loud the character "one" than to have them learn to appreciate the microscopic texture of the brushstroke. In a hand-drawn sketch of the stroke (Figure 4.3), Xu carefully marks a number of sections and indicates that the microscopic texture of the stroke, in its different sections, should resemble that of shimmering lakes, waves, reeds, weeds, crushed stones, fields, hillocks, trees, and mountains respectively.

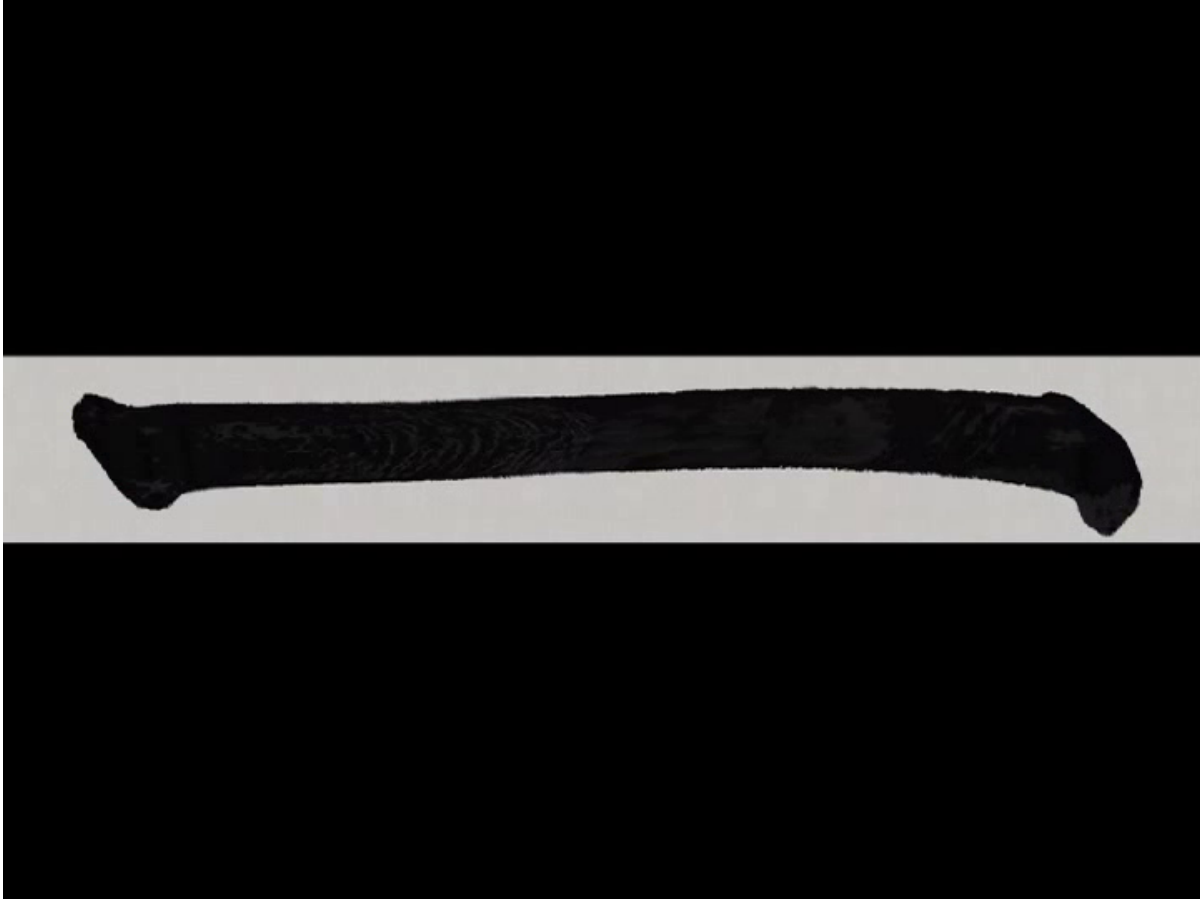


Figure 4. 2 “One” or a single horizontal brushstroke, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

One question naturally arises: who wrote the “one”? In Chion’s formulation, the distinction between diegetic writing and nondiegetic writing further implies a distinction between diegetic reality and cinematic reality: while diegetic writing is clearly part of diegetic reality, nondiegetic writing is part of cinematic reality but does not belong to diegetic reality. For Chion, beyond diegetic reality and cinematic reality, there is a third reality, profilmic reality, which he defines as what supposedly happens in the various stages of filmmaking.¹⁴ A question about profilmic reality—like “who wrote the ‘one’?”—is what audiences might reasonably ask

¹⁴ Chion, *Words on Screen*, 3–4.

as they watch the first section of the animation video, and it is indeed part of our film viewing experience. At first glance, the video itself seems to give us the answer: zooming out, the “one” turns out to be one character in the calligraphy work *The Sutra on the Lotus of the Sublime Dharma* (*Dacheng miaofa lianhua jing*) by Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) in the Yuan dynasty. At the age of sixty-two, Zhao created the calligraphy work, one of a set of seven, for his teacher and friend, Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323), a Buddhist monk. A small standard script composed of more than 10,000 characters, the scroll displays regularity, peace, introspection, and balance without losing Zhao’s unique voice. In fact, Xu Bing made the animation video as a contemporary response to *The Sutra on the Lotus of the Sublime Dharma* (*Dacheng miaofa lianhua jing*), which was borrowed from the collection of Yang Zhiyuan, co-founder of Yahoo, and his wife, Yamazaki Akiko, and was also on display at the exhibition *Out of Character: Decoding Chinese Calligraphy*. The call-and-response, more than seven hundred years apart, forges at least two layers of temporalities and draws attention to an exhibition’s spatial structure, and to dynamics of the exhibition space, which can itself become an experimental site.¹⁵ What confounds the answer to the question, however, is the scroll of the single brushstroke, created by Xu Bing on rice paper (Figure 4.3), which was also part of the exhibition, and was placed adjacent to the wide screen showing the animation video. By exhibiting part of the profilmic reality, the exhibition throws the cinematic clues into question.

In traditional theories of calligraphy, a set of vocabularies pertaining to the issue of spatial structure has been developed. Two important concepts are *jieti* and *zhangfa*. *Jieti* denotes “the arrangement of strokes and dispositions in a character”; *zhangfa* is also called *fenhang*

¹⁵ Wu Hung’s concept of an “exhibition space” is inspiring here. See Wu, “Spatial Narratives: Curating Three ‘Temporal’ Exhibitions,” in *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008), 214.

bubai, literally meaning “the division of rows and the arrangement of blank spaces.”¹⁶ In short, *jieti* is the spatial structure within a character, while *zhangfa* is the spatial structure between characters and rows. A standard script like Zhao’s *The Sutra on the Lotus of the Sublime Dharma* retains relatively consistent space between rows. Calligraphy scholars, such as Qiu Zhenzhong and Hu Kangmei, have argued for the importance of accentuating space as an analytical framework for Chinese calligraphy and have renewed the conceptual framework with contemporary sensibilities.¹⁷ Seeing calligraphy as an art of spatial divisions, alternations, and negotiations—between black and white, between ink strokes and rice paper—enables us to analyze *bimo* (brushwork), *jieti*, and *zhangfa* not as three separate concepts but as an organic whole. The line-based movement and the spatial relations that it underlines, divides, and creates make Chinese calligraphy conceptually different from the configurations of shapes and planes in Western oil painting. Moreover, what both Qiu and Hu imply, yet do not explicitly discuss, is that the space in Chinese calligraphy is not a static, solid, and ossified one, but rather a spatiotemporal process of becoming. The “generation” of the single brushstroke, for instance, can be alternatively read in this way: the dividing of the blank space, a process rendered in time.

Indeed, in the art of Chinese calligraphy, the fusion of spatiality and temporality reaches a degree that is probably unprecedented in other traditional art forms. The space-time problem has intrigued scholars in the East and West alike. One of the most persistent and influential voices comes from Ernest Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*.

¹⁶ For Wu Hung’s summary of the two concepts, see Wu Hung, “Kongjian” *de meishushi* (*Space in Art History*) (Shanghai: Shiji wenjing/Shanghai renming chubanshe, 2018), 268.

¹⁷ See Qiu Zhenzhong 邱振中, *Shufa de xingtai yu chanshi* (書法的型態與闡釋 *Forms and Interpretations of Calligraphy*) (Beijing: Zhonguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2005); Hu Kangmei 胡抗美, *Zhongguo shufa zhangfa yanjiu* (中國書法章法研究 *A Study of Zhangfa in Chinese Calligraphy*) (Beijing: Rong bao zhai, 2014).

For Fenollosa, no language is more lovely than Chinese as it effortlessly transcends the boundary—I would say, the Lessingian boundary—that ascribes the dimension of space to iconic media and that of time to verbal language.¹⁸ Fenollosa’s very bold statement, however, does not dispute the intuitively obvious boundary itself. Drawing on W. J. T. Mitchell’s critique of Lessing’s *Laocoön*,¹⁹ I have argued in the previous chapter that both spatiality and temporality are articulated in any art form, be it iconic or verbal. The temporality inherent in Chinese ink painting that I have detailed there and the spatiality inherent in Chinese calligraphy that I have discussed above thus form a full circle.

Here, I am speaking of the temporality of calligraphy as an iconic medium. My point is not that a work of calligraphy displays the dimension of time because it is a poem, a letter, or a Buddhist scripture. Rather, the temporality is inherent in the line-based movements that we call the creation and appreciation of calligraphy. To begin with, there is a notion of irreversible time embedded in the act of calligraphy. The moment the nib of the brush touches the rice paper, rhythm unfolds. Each gesture leads to another. Each stroke leads to another. As Henri Michaux beautifully writes, “in this particular calligraphy—this art of the temporal, expressing as it does trajectory, passage—its most admirable quality (even more than its harmony or vivacity) is its spontaneity. This spontaneity runs, sometimes, to the point of shattering.”²⁰ Under the thrall of what Michaux calls spontaneity, each calligraphy work gains an independent life of its own,

¹⁸ Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1936). For a powerful interpretation of Fenollosa, see Andrea Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ See W. J. T. Mitchell, “Space and Time: Lessing’s *Laocoön* and the Politics of Genre,” in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 95–115.

²⁰ Henri Michaux, *Ideograms in China*, trans. Gustaf Sobin (New York: New Directions, 2002), n.p.

unrepeatable and irreversible. Unlike painting and sculpture, calligraphy resists *bubi*, literally “added-on strokes.”

Digital technologies, however, pose a powerful challenge to the notion of calligraphy’s irreversible time. Consider how the shot of the “generation” of the single ink stroke is created: scan the whole image of the scroll of the single brushstroke, created by Xu Bing on rice paper (Figure 4.3); import the scanned image into a digital program such as Photoshop; erase the right end of the stroke in the image; save the new image; erase a little more; save another frame; repeat and continue the process; finally, place all the images that have been saved in an editing software program as successive frames in reverse order: the image that is saved last becomes the first frame of the shot. In this manner, time is reversed.

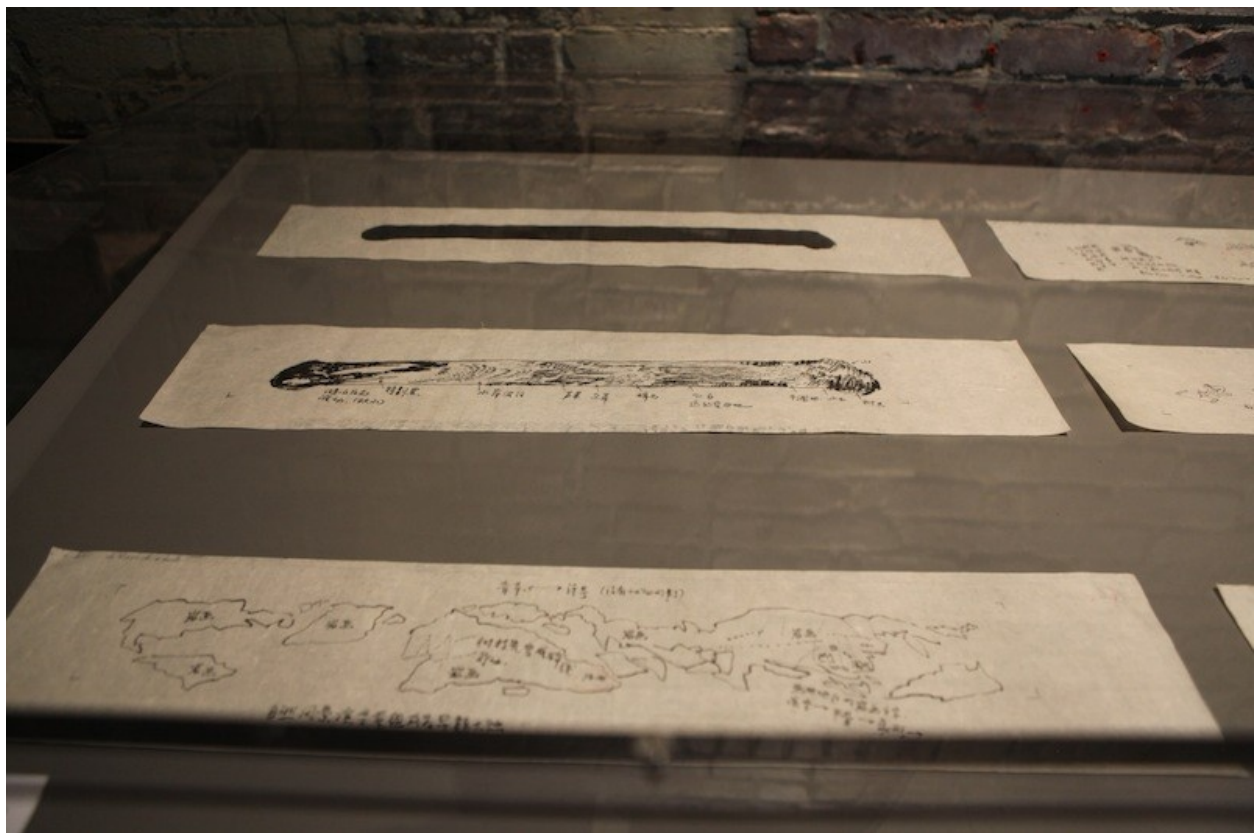


Figure 4. 3 Drafts for *The Character of Characters*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2012) (Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio)

There is a notion of “belatedness” in the appreciation of a work of calligraphy. In George Kubler’s formulation, the role of the art historian is strikingly similar to that of the astronomer: both deal with “appearances noted in the present but occurring in the past,” “transpos[ing], reduc[ing], compos[ing], and color[ing] a facsimile which describes the shape of time.”²¹ In this light, calligraphy makes itself distinct from other traditional art forms in that, in the “facsimile” of calligraphy, the trajectory — passage — of time never hides itself. Through the presence of the physical “brush trace” (*biji*), a work of calligraphy enables audiences to experience — indeed re-experience — the brush or wrist movement of an artist. An interpretive relation of the ink strokes within and between written characters, in all its consecutive phases, is visible within the “facsimile.” As Lothar Ledderose, describes, “A proper viewer follows with his eyes the brush movements through each of the characters and the sequence of the lines. He thus re-creates for himself the moments of the actual creation. The viewer senses the technical dexterity and the subtleties in the movement of the writer’s hand, and he may feel as if he looked over the shoulder of the writer himself and observed him while he wrote. The viewer thus establishes an immediate and personal rapport with the writer of the piece.”²² The re-embodiment of movement in calligraphy, as I term it, also allows the viewer to perceive, approach, and revivify the emotional, mental, and psychological state of the artist at the moment of creating the piece of work. The Chinese phrase “as my hand copies, my heart follows” (*xinzhui shoumo*) sums it all up.

²¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 48–49.

²² Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 29. Also see Richard Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 27.



Figure 4. 4 *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* (1295), Zhao Mengfu, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 28.4 x 90.2 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei



Figure 4. 5 A variation of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

While I find it truly fascinating that the re-embodiment of movement forms what I consider to be the secret affinity between calligraphy and camera movement, I shall resist wandering too far into that direction and try to remain focused on the first section of *The Character of Characters*. In a matter reminiscent of the Daoist wisdom that “one gives birth to two; two give birth to three; three give birth to the myriad things of the world,”²³ the calligraphy scroll *The Sutra on the Lotus of the Sublime Dharma* (which contains “one”) shatters, entering into an animated landscape. For art-historically minded audiences, the landscape is immediately recognizable as a variation of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* (*Que hua qiuse tu*) completed by Zhao Mengfu in 1295 (Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5): the conical form of Mount Hua at the right and the bread-loaf of Mount Que at the left make its identity unmistakable. As Zhao Mengfu’s own inscription on the scroll, also written in standard script, tells us, *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* was done for his close friend Zhou Mi, who had lived his entire life in the south and never had the opportunity to visit his ancestral hometown, the Jinan region of Shandong in the northeast, close to Mount Hua and Mountain Que. After visiting the scenery of his friend’s hometown on his way home, Zhao painted the two uniquely shaped mountains from memory.

My intention here is not to offer an iconographic study of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*, as such scholars as Li Chu-Tsing, James Cahill, and others have done admirable work in this regard.²⁴ Instead, I am more interested in the variation of *Autumn Colors on the Que*

²³ This line appears in *Laozi*, chapter 42. It is the fundamental Daoist philosophical text credited to Laozi. The work *Laozi*, also called *Daodejing*, was compiled in its final form in the late third-century B.C. Wang Pi (226–249) is one of the most important interpreters of the *Daodejing* text. The edition of *Daodejing* that Wang Bi used in his commentary has been the basis for almost every translation of the work into Western languages. For a modern reprint, see Wang Bi ed., *Laozi daodejing zhu* (老子道德經注 *An Annotation of Laozi’s Daodejing*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1.

²⁴ See Li Chu-Tsing, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch’iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-*

and *Hua Mountains* in *The Character of Characters* as another distinct case of remediation. In particular, I am concerned with how the transformations, either intended or not, are made possible by the medium of animation, and how they might also help us think anew about the original painting.

In *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*, the message of autumn is beautifully conveyed through Zhao's handling of colors. The use of archaic blue-and-green, in its endless variety, ties together the two iconic mountains, the marshy islet in the middle section, and the tree foliage. The use of red, yellow, and tan forms a complementary warm color spectrum where the four almost identical roof-tops, the dark red and orange tree foliage, the trunks, and the five goats painted in bright yellow unite in a visual harmony.²⁵

In *The Character of Characters*, however, the autumn scenery of multiple colors is turned into an universe of ink monochrome. Gone are the great number of seals, inscriptions and colophons in non-chronological order in which the whole afterlife of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* is hidden. Gone are the cracks of the painting that render visible the passage of time, most noticeably the one that runs through Emperor Qianlong's oval seal on the upper right corner. Gone are the "decorative figures" (*dianjing renwu*) that Zhao painted with an extremely thin hairbrush: fishermen in boats, womenfolk in the cottages, and below the cluster of trees marking the foot of Mount Que, a gentleman strolling up the path. If these "decorative figures" were to be included in the animated land, bodily movement for each of the figures would be necessary. This would be technically challenging given that these figures are drawn so

Fu (Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 1965); James Cahill, *Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yüan Dynasty, 1279–1368* (New York: Weatherhill, 1976).

²⁵ I am referring to Li Chu-Tsing with some modifications. Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains*, 15.

tiny that they can scarcely be noticed. Also, these conventional activities that they are engaged in make no service for Xu Bing's animated thesis regarding the relation between calligraphy, painting, and the character of Chinese people. Abandoning colors, traces of time, and the finest details, the variation of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* is less a nostalgic scenery in a specific season and a specific location, or a highly acclaimed artifact in the history of Chinese art, than a conceptual schema that displays clarity, ease, and calm.

Most importantly, Xu Bing has effectively manipulated the spatial segmentation of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*. While the original painting is largely segmented into three sections, the composition of the animated variation is organized in a section-by-section relation across five spatial cells. Opening the first section, starting from the right, is a cluster of willows that guide the viewer's unsettling line of sight. This is a section without a counterpart in the original painting. The second spatial cell, far more complex and largely transplanted from Zhao's, centers on the conical form of Mount Hua, surrounded by a row of thick-foliage pine trees. Extending the visual unit or spatial cell are two other groups of trees, whose sparse leaves might remind us of the autumn season, bending in different directions. In the third spatial cell, also missing in the original painting, a piece of land emerges in water in the distance. Standing on it are clusters of trees, whose species are similar to those we have encountered in the first two sections. The fourth spatial cell leads our attention to the foreground. The disproportionately large trees with twisting and clawing twigs are obviously modeled on the middle section of the original painting, but the number of trees rendered cleanly is significantly reduced. The verticality of the trunks is balanced by a row of reeds, a new element near the lower edge of the section. This row of reeds and the land on water in the previous section also echo each other. The last spatial cell is a salient example of the tripartite depiction of space in Chinese painting, as Li

Chu-Tsing has pointed out in his discussion of Zhao's work: as our floating gaze moves into greater distance, we encounter in the foreground, a group of willows facing left; in the middle ground, a cluster of trees of various species; and lastly, in the background, the bread-loaf of Mount Que.²⁶

I call Xu's practice here a form of broadly defined *spatial montage*, the juxtaposition or rearrangement of various pictorial elements within one image or one shot, tentatively suspending the debates surrounding the concept of montage: whether the various elements need to absolutely conflict with one another and whether the juxtaposition must establish a new meaning.²⁷ Xu's spatial montage, it must be noted, is best understood not as a deviation from Zhao's artistic vision but rather as a continuity of it: as James Cahill, among others, has pointed out, Mount Hua and Mount Que, "in reality far apart, are arbitrarily drawn close together and shown as though they were modest protrusions from a marshy plain."²⁸ A form of spatial montage is already at work as Zhao takes artistic license with the distance.²⁹

²⁶ Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains*, 14.

²⁷ For Eisenstein's explorations of montage, see "Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" and "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Leyda (New York and London: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1949). Taking his cue from Eisenstein, Lev Manovich defines spatial montage and sees it as the key logic of digital media production. See Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

²⁸ Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River*: 41.

²⁹ It is also debatable whether there is a spatial dislocation in Zhao's *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*. According to Zhao's own inscription on the scroll, Mount Que is to the east of Mount Hua. However, as Qianlong Emperor repeatedly emphasizes in four of his nine inscriptions on the scroll, Mount Que is to the west of Mount Hua. As for why Zhao made such a "mistake" in his inscription, Peng Feng offers two possible explanations. First, when working on the scroll, Zhao was facing south; yet, the visual image of the two mountains in his memory was a result of viewing them when he was facing north. The second explanation is a political one. Zhao was a southerner, a descendant of the Song Dynasty's imperial family. But he worked for the Yuan Dynasty governors (from the north)—a career choice that brought him much criticism. The fact that he was facing north when viewing Mount Que and Mount Hua might be read as a sign of his subordination to the Yuan government, especially given the conventional understanding in Chinese culture that "the Emperor faces south while his courtiers face north." Therefore, it might be possible that Zhao deliberately wrote that "Mount Que is to the east of Mount Hua" in order to show that he was facing south instead. See Peng Feng 彭鋒, "Dongxi yu zuoyou: Zhao Mengfu weishenme hui

It is reasonable to argue that Xu manipulates the spatial segmentation of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* in order to fit into the 6.43: 1 ratio of the animation video. Yet, a close observation of the animation of the shot reveals more convincing reasons. A myna flies into the picture, and as if knowing that the myna needs a twig to land on, two trees from the fourth spatial cell enlarge themselves to the full-screen mode, and a twig turns itself around. If Zhao, an artist of the Yuan period, is paying tribute to an earlier tradition of Chinese landscape painting in which the size of each object is arbitrarily determined by its importance, according to the artist's perception, rather than reality, Xu uses animation as his means of making visible the process of proportional manipulation that both he and Zhao are engaged in. A human appears on the right and competes with the myna in a voice contest (Figure 4.6). The human, however, does not take on the form of any decorative figures in Zhao's painting but instead manifests itself as a modern icon, one that is reminiscent of the human symbol on the cover of Xu Bing's *From Point to Point*, a book written with existing symbols drawn from the public sphere, the central product of his *Book from the Ground* project (2013—present). "He" is not this or that person, but rather the abstraction of the concept of a human-being. Through the art of spatial montage, Xu retains ample empty space between the myna and the human, allowing primitive musical symbols to pass from one to the other, and the other way around. The tree on which the myna stays is facing right, and the willow near the human is facing left. Together they form an arc, which largely coincides with the trajectory of the flying musical symbols. It can hardly be imagined how the sound production competition takes place in Zhao's original composition.

fan fangwei cuowu" (左右與東西：趙孟頫為什麼會犯方位錯誤 East-West and Left-Right: Why Zhao Mengfu Made a Spatial Mistake), *Dushu* 讀書, vol. 4 (2020): 51–54.



Figure 4. 6 The voice contest between a myna and a human, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

THE PICTOGRAPHIC MYTH

Let me pick up, and hopefully carry further, another strand of thinking indebted to Michel Chion. In *Words on Screen*, we also harvest countless examples, if not yet an anatomy, of what I call “words-becoming-images”: when written inserts providing locations, expository intertitles, dialogue overlays, and other forms of on-screen inscriptions become iconogenic, conveying meanings through their shapes, textures, colors, and movements. To give one example, among many, from *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1927): following a series of passionate kisses, the city woman gives her country lover the idea of drowning his wife:

“Couldn’t she get drowned?” The intertitle appears in two phrases. “Couldn’t she get” comes first. Then, a fade-in of the word “drowned?”: an unbelievably diabolical idea gradually becomes clear. Moreover, the little picture called the intertitle melts, sags, and sinks. In short, it is the intertitle that gets drowned. It is a calligram.

The idea of “words-becoming-images” can be extended in at least two ways. First, the tendency of “words-becoming-images” becomes almost inescapable when it comes to digital animation. In most graphic and animation programs, text is processed and exported as an image.³⁰ Second, the idea of “words-becoming-images” makes an assumption: that words are not images. That assumption gets very shaky when we take into consideration Chinese calligraphy, which is text and image at once. While Chion has used some Chinese films as examples in his abovementioned book, he has never placed Chinese calligraphy in his analytical spotlight. The art of calligraphy, as D.N. Rodowick says of the calligram, “aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetic civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.”³¹ To gain a fuller understanding of words on screen, I argue, it is necessary, indeed urgent, to foreground the model of pictographic scripts that confounds the phonocentric model.

³⁰ Before the age of the digital, the invention of Printed English in 1948 had instigated what Lydia Liu calls “the ideographic turn of the phonetic alphabet.” In Shannon’s invention, Printed English is composed of a 27-letter alphabet including letters A to Z plus a “space” sign; it is a statistical system of symbols, because of which alphabetic writing has become more ideographic than it ever was. See Lydia Liu, “Post-Phonetic Writing and New Media,” *Writing Technologies*, no. 1 (Spring 2007), <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/groups-and-centres/centres/writing-technologies/writing-technologies-vol-1>. See also Lydia Liu, *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Lydia Liu, “iSpace: Printed English after Joyce, Shannon, and Derrida,” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 516–50.

³¹ D. N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 63.

If the pictographic script has long been opposed to the phonetic alphabet, this is a binary conception that Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* aims to dismantle. What emerges in Derrida's project of dismantlement can be said to be a theory of calligraphy: it is the graphic mark, trace, character, rather than the spoken language, that plays the dominant role in our thinking about writing.³² To move away from the binary conception, one thing must be made clear first: the understanding that Chinese written characters are pictographs is a misconception. This belief, over-simplified yet enchanting to some, seems to have something to do with the legend regarding Cang Jie's invention of Chinese characters that I have recounted, in a sense twice, at the beginning of the chapter and through a sequence analysis of *The Character of Characters*. According to the legend, Chinese characters, supposedly mimetic of patterns that Cang Jie discerned in nature, are true to reality. It is important to make a point that counters the popular imagination of what we might call the pictograph myth: among the over 85,000 Chinese written characters of the present day, only a very small fraction of the characters and their radicals are actual pictographs.³³ Indeed, a far more complex set of rules are at play regarding how Chinese characters are formed or derived. In traditional Chinese lexicography, there are at least six types of Chinese characters: *xiangxing* (form imitation), *zhishi* (indication), *huiyi* (joined meaning), *jiajie* (phonetic loan), *xingsheng* (form and sound), and *zhuanzhu* (reciprocal meaning).³⁴ While both *zhishi* and *huiyi* are often referred to, without much theoretical precision, as ideograms or ideographic in English, they work in different ways. The principle of *zhishi*

³² For Derrida, the spoken language is merely "a possibility founded on the general possibility of writing." See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 52.

³³ Andrea Bachner's reflection on the pictorial myth is illuminating to me here. See Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 157.

³⁴ One written account is Xu Shen (58 AD—148 AD), *Shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字 (Beijing: Jiuzhou, 2001), 876.

means creating a new character with abstract meaning by modifying an existing pictographic character, such as adding one more stroke. The principle of *huiyi* aims to create a new character through a joining of two or more existing characters. More often, ideograms are somewhat loosely defined as characters with imagist elements, of which the pictographs are a subgenre. But among the six rules, two are clearly associated with sound. André Leroi-Gourhan, for one, draws our attention to the phonetic role in Chinese, pointing out that a majority of present-day Chinese characters contain a phonetic particle, which is intended to remind the reader of the character's pronunciation. Speaking highly of the mutually complementary relationship between the phonetic and pictographic aspects of Chinese characters, which offers "superb possibilities" for calligraphy and poetry, Gourhan writes, "the rhythm of the words is counterbalanced by that of the subtly interrelated lines, creating images in which each part of each character, as well as the relationship of every character to every other, sparkles with allusive meaning."³⁵ Xu Bing, too, is mindful of the role of sound production, which leads to oral communication, and eventually to the development of Chinese written characters, as evident in the voice contest scene between a myna and a human that I have analyzed.

The tension and negotiation between the Chinese writing and phonocentrism are brought to the fore in the script revolution in the history of the People's Republic of China. The script revolution, in particular the simplified character movement in the 1950s and 1960s, finds its way into *The Character of Characters* and is situated in the longer history of reforming the Chinese writing system. In the simplified character movement, a sizable proportion of Chinese characters went through the process of reducing the number of strokes, with the first set of 515 simplified characters published by the government's Language Reform Committee in 1956. In the

³⁵ André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 207.

animation video, three examples are given: the head of the Chinese character *er* (“child”) is cut off; the character *fei* (“flying”) loses one of its two wings; the heart of the character *ai* (“love”) is stolen. The three characters alternate with images of a child, a bird, and a heart, ensuring that audiences who do not read Chinese will comprehend the meaning of the sequence (Figure 4.7). The simplified characters are not inventions out of nowhere: some were based on previously unorthodox forms founded in the marketplace, and some others, perhaps surprisingly, had their source of inspiration in the literati’s cursive or “grass” calligraphy (*caoshu*), a form of script which is said to be written fast, and in which the number of strokes can be reduced to single scrawls or abstract abbreviations of curves and dots. Mao Zedong explicitly encouraged the later approach.³⁶ Instead of treating the simplified character movement simply as a vulgar act that stripped Chinese characters of parts and feelings, we can perhaps gain a not-too-simplified understanding of the movement as a process of undermining and relearning Chinese calligraphy at once.

A more radical phrase of the script reform involved the romanization of the Chinese language, in particular in the form of *pinyin*, literally “phonetic spelling.” In 1958, the Chinese government published the *pinyin* system developed by Zhou Youguang and other linguists. The system was revised several times. At different moments in history, the need for writing the Chinese language in the Latin alphabets carried with it an impulse to speed the way toward mass literacy or functioned as a response to symptoms of anxiety caused by computational input. *Pinyin* did not eventually replace Chinese written characters as some of its enthusiastic advocates in the script revolution once hoped for. The “failed assault on Chinese characters”³⁷ in the history

³⁶ Richard Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 77.

³⁷ Kraus, *Brushes with Power*, 75.

of the People's Republic of China paradoxically proved the Chinese script as “a generative case of survival and regeneration.”³⁸ And yet, *pinyin* has been very helpful on multiple occasions, including the way I use it in this dissertation: at a very basic level, using *pinyin*, rather than Chinese written characters, when writing on China-related topics allows readers with Chinese language proficiency to recognize the original Chinese words without resulting in inconsistent line spacing.



Figure 4. 7 The simplified character movement in China, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

³⁸ Zhong Yurou, *Chinese Grammatology: Script Revolution and Chinese Literary Modernity, 1916-1958* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 15.

FILM THEORISTS' HIEROGLYPHILIA

Now let us shift the question “What is an ideogram” to a different yet related one: “How did the term ‘ideogram’ come into currency?”³⁹ Tracing the time when the words “ideograph,” “ideogram,” and “photograph” entered English, that is, the years of 1835, 1838, and 1839, respectively, Christopher Bush offers a rather subversive answer to the question: “The ideograph is *a modern Western invention*, one contemporaneous with, and related to, such other modern inventions, such other forms of writing, as the telegraph, the photograph, and the cinematograph [my emphasis].”⁴⁰ In other words, the ideogram is neither ancient nor Chinese. For Bush, the idea of “ideograph” crystallizes in a form of Oriental writing, one in which China is not the true object of study, but rather an exotic other which Western thinkers evoke, flirt with, and make use of from time to time in formulating a thesis of Western modernism and its entanglement with the question of language. “China” eventually disappears in the very form of writing.⁴¹

Indebted to yet not identical to Bush, I wish to make a more specific point, one that aims to make sense of the connections and interactions between the cinematograph and the ideograph, between cinephilia and hieroglyphilia (a term coined myself). While I achieve the goal mainly through a rereading of two important thinkers of cinema, Vachel Lindsay and Sergei Eisenstein, along with some more recent interpretations, I want to emphasize that a rereading is also a repositioning, a process in which the disappeared “China” might reappear. The critical valence of a concept like the “ideogram” shifts when the subjectivities, often in plural form, of the writer,

³⁹ Haun Saussy’s writing is thought-provoking here. See Haun Saussy, “The Prestige of Writing: Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography,” in *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 35–74.

⁴⁰ Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

⁴¹ Bush, *Ideographic Modernism*, 69–83.

enter theoretical discourses. As a Western-educated Chinese woman writing a dissertation on Chinese animation in English, I also constantly reexamine my own writings and remind myself of the danger and pitfalls of self-orientalization. Early writings on the ideogram, some of which might be read as orientalist, force us to question whether there is such a thing as purely Western thinking and bring to the fore the intercultural flows of ideas. They are, at the very least, more intellectually satisfying than a complete ignorance of cultural differences or a historicist approach of treating “China” as merely facts. Through a strategic repositioning, I hope to show that we might reorient the strand of thinking concerning the ideogram to excavate the possibilities of China as methodologies.⁴²

It is no coincidence that it was Vachel Lindsay, a poet, who endeavored to show us a certain striking parallelism between hieroglyphics and silent cinema in his *The Art of the Moving Picture* as early as 1915.⁴³ The book is written in a relatively casual style that suits readers who make themselves comfortable in their den at eight o’clock at night. Lindsay’s theoretical claims, incisive yet not always fully articulated, leave ample empty space for his interlocutors. Hieroglyphics, as Gunning puts it, “form the most seductive and elusive of Lindsay’s concepts.”⁴⁴ To be clear, Lindsay’s main source of inspiration is Egyptian hieroglyphics, although he is also aware of the East Asian tradition where poetry and brushwork are often the

⁴² I am writing with a nod to Mizoguchi Yūzō, “China as Method,” *Journal Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17 (2016): 513–18. In this famous polemical essay, Mizoguchi criticizes the type of sinology that takes the world, which is in fact Europe, as the method, and forces China into its framework. In contrast to this, he contends that China is now capable of showing the world a world in China is a part. It is possible for one to examine Europe from the perspective of China (or vice versa). The concept of ideogram, I believe, has the potential of generating such a line of inquiry.

⁴³ Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

⁴⁴ Tom Gunning, “Vachel Lindsay: Theory of Movie Hieroglyphics,” in *Thinking in the Dark: Cinema, Theory, Practice*, eds. Murray Pomerance and R. Barton Palmer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 23.

gifts of the same person. In a chapter titled “Hieroglyphics,” Lindsay invites readers to play a game: Imagine one is given eight hundred hieroglyphic signs from Egypt, in the form of cardboards, and create sceneries by arranging and rearranging these little pictures in rows. Lindsay, then, unpacks a dozen of Egyptian hieroglyphic signs as his examples, including the hieroglyphs of a hand, a bowl, a duck, a lioness, and an owl, just to name a few. What complicates Lindsay’s little game is that each cardboard can be turned over: on the other side of the cardboard, one could write a more abstract meaning. For instance, the cardboard of a lioness, besides being taken literally, could be assigned the meanings of terror, glory, courage, and so on, depending on the occasions.

For Lindsay, the game of cardboards is the photoplay: only through a proper balance of literary and symbolic meanings could “photoplays with souls” be created.⁴⁵ “The underlying concept of hieroglyphics,” as Miriam Hansen summarizes, “is one of a language of mystical correspondence and visual self-evidence, reincarnated in the new universal language of film.”⁴⁶ Andrea Bachner, however, senses Lindsay’s hesitation in equating silent cinema with a purely visual language known to all in the oscillation between literal and symbolic meanings of the hieroglyphic sign and in the poet’s proposal of minimalizing but not eliminating silent film intertitles.⁴⁷

Xu Bing too is a “cardboard” player. Written or drawn on his cardboards are the contemporary hieroglyphic signs called emoji. The game now is renamed as *Book from the*

⁴⁵ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, 171–188.

⁴⁶ Miriam Hansen, “Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer,” *New German Critique* no. 56 (Spring - Summer 1992): 58.

⁴⁷ Bachner, *Beyond Sinology*: 174–181.

Ground. Although Xu had been collecting hundreds of safety cards since the 1990s, it was the proliferation of logos, icons, and signs in the 2000s, most of which could be found online, that eventually made it possible for Xu to complete *From Point to Point*, an experimental fiction of twenty-four hours in the life of a urban white-collar worker—the human icon that also appears in *The Character of Characters*, and is sometimes referred to as “Mr. Black.” *Book from the Ground* expresses, in Xu’s own words, “my quest for the ideal of a universal script.”⁴⁸ In 2012, Xu built or rebuilt, in both literal and figurative senses, a Tower of Babel by piling up 2,400 copies of *From Point to Point*.⁴⁹ Here, we hear the echo of Lindsay’s words regarding a new phrase in the history of picture-writing, something which has been around since the stone age: “[it is] an expression of the old in that spiral of life which is going higher while seeming to repeat the ancient phase.”⁵⁰ Moreover, what Lindsay repeatedly emphasizes is the importance of the motion of the new hieroglyphics of his time: “it stands to reason that each successive tableau should be not only a charming picture, but the totals of motion should be an orchestration of various speeds, of abrupt, graceful, and seemingly awkward progress, worked into a silent symphony.”⁵¹ And yet, whether Lindsay conceives of Egyptian hieroglyphic signs as literally “motion pictures” remains curious. If the answer is yes, we can perhaps take a fanciful flight toward a sober argument: the hieroglyphics of a hand, a bowl, a duck, a lioness, and an owl in Lindsay’s

⁴⁸ Xu Bing, “Regarding *Book from the Ground*,” in *The Book about Xu Bing’s Book from the Ground*, ed. Mathieu Borysevicz (Cambridge: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; The MIT Press, 2014), 45.

⁴⁹ Mathieu Borysevicz, ed., *The Book about Xu Bing’s Book from the Ground*, 70–73.

⁵⁰ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, 171.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 110. This appears in a chapter titled “Painting-in-motion.” Admittedly, this chapter is not about animated cartoons. But Lindsay’s examples of shoes marching without human feet have an uncanny apparition in the stop-motion animation sequence from *Kan the Great Knight-Errant* (*Daxia ganfengchi*, 1928), which I have discussed in the first chapter.

description are a form of proto-hieroglyphic animation, one that existed even before animation was invented, now reincarnated in the short animation videos created by Xu Bing Studio as part of the ongoing *Book from the Ground* project. In short, Lindsay's picture-writing theory offers one way to understand Xu's art, and the *Book from the Ground* project, in particular, helps us envision the possible scope of Lindsay's ideas.

The concept of hieroglyphics was a source of inspiration for Sergei Eisenstein's formulation and exploration of montage theory. In Eisenstein's 1929 essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," also known as "Beyond the Shot," we reencounter Cang Jie, whose name is Romanized as Ts'ang Chieh. Eisenstein seems to believe that Cang Jie is a historical figure, identifying his era and celebrating his calligraphy. What truly fascinates Eisenstein, however, is less the *xiangxing* (form imitation) principle than the *huiyi* (joined meaning) principle of Chinese characters: "a mouth + a bird= to sing. . . this is montage."⁵² In "A Dialect Approach to Film Form," written in the same year, Eisenstein summarizes it as "a concrete word (a denotation) set beside a concrete word yields an abstract concept."⁵³ Transplanting this understanding into cinema, Eisenstein strongly advocates the use of montage, which does not simply denote editing, but rather refers to a specific form of editing in which a concrete shot set besides a concrete shot yields intellectual thinking. Collisions, clashes, and conflicts underline Eisenstein's relatively narrowly defined concept of montage at this time.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Eisenstein gained some knowledge of Chinese written

⁵² Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, 65.

⁵³ Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, 104.

⁵⁴ The concept of montage, like other concepts in Eisenstein's system, is constantly evolving, yet his ideas are not without rigor. In "Methods of Montage," written in Autumn 1929, Eisenstein lists several types of montage: metric montage, rhythmic montage, tonal montage, overtonal montage, and intellectual montage. As each type organically grows from the other, the concept of montage no longer has fixed boundaries. See Eisenstein, "Methods of

characters through learning Japanese, and in fact, the “ideogram” essay was originally published as an “afterword” to N. Kaufman’s pamphlet, *Japanese Cinema*. The montage principle, which Eisenstein feels largely unexplored in Japanese filmmaking practices at that time, is surprisingly dominant in the art of papercutting taught in Japanese schools: “Here’s the branch of a cherry-tree. And the pupil cuts out from this whole, with a square, and a circle, and a rectangle—compositional unit: He frames a shot!”⁵⁵ How to mobilize concepts and ideas from East Asian arts in the field of cinema studies is something that I have learnt from Eisenstein and have consciously put into practice in this dissertation. As Jacques Aumont puts it, “the process in which Eisenstein engages—a remodeling, a transformation, a dynamiting of the cultural ‘heritage’—has as its equivalent and accompaniment the almost permanent *invention* of new concepts, elicited by and applied to practically everything.”⁵⁶ This approach is transmedial and transcultural at once, old-fashioned and innovative at once. Its implication is at least twofold. First, it provides an opening for traditional East Asian arts to be studied in a modern context. Second, it testifies to the possibility and productivity of East Asia as method, with which cinemas and other cultural forms inside and outside the East Asian context can be examined.

The concept of montage generates new lines of inquiry when it encounters animation and new media. In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich distinguishes temporal montage and spatial montage: if at the beginning of the twentieth century, film discovered *temporal montage*, a time-based mosaic of different shots that gives birth to new meaning, by the end of the century,

Montage,” in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, 154–175.

⁵⁵ Eisenstein, “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram,” 86.

⁵⁶ Jacques Aumont and Lee Hildreth, “Montage Eisenstein I: Eisensteinian Concepts,” *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 5 (Spring 1983): 42.

computer programs such as Photoshop made it far more convenient to achieve *spatial montage*, the juxtaposition of various elements within one image or one shot, which also establishes meaning.⁵⁷ In Manovich's view, Eisenstein's theories of montage "ultimately focused on one dimension—time."⁵⁸ The abovementioned examples of ideograms in China and the art of papercutting in Japan, however, demonstrate that Eisenstein did not neglect the spatial dimension of montage. Whether Manovich simply overlooks or strategically avoids these examples of what can be called spatial montage from East Asian cultures remains unclear since he has cited several of Eisenstein's essays but not the "ideogram" one. Each case of montage, I contend, is a space-time continuum. Consider Xu Bing's *Book from the Ground: From Point to Point*: on the one hand, the spatial juxtaposition of a number of existing icons on each page of the book makes it a case of "spatial montage" in point; on the other, it creates a narrative flow over time in the process of reading. More recently, Xu explores the art of montage to its extreme in his 2017 film *Dragonfly Eyes (Qingting zhi yan)*—a romantic melodrama on appearance—by editing together surveillance footage taken from public live-streaming websites. A temporal montage, as Manovich might call it, establishes new meaning for various surveillance footage shot in and collected from different locations/spaces. In fact, *Dragonfly Eyes* bears an internal connection to *From Point to Point* in that it too creates a fiction narrative composed of bits or bricks of reality.⁵⁹ And yet, the heavily loaded voiceover in *Dragonfly Eyes* seems to offset the ideal of telling a story by virtue of a succession of surveillance footage *alone*.

⁵⁷ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 155–60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁹ Eisenstein describes the Kuleshov school of filmmaking as "screw by screw, bricks by brick": "if you have an idea-phrase, a particle of the story, a link in the whole dramatic chain, then that idea is to be expressed and accumulated from shot-ciphers, just like bricks." See Eisenstein, "Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" and "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, 77.

In brief, the distinction of temporal and spatial montage is basically “a matter of the economy of signs.”⁶⁰ I would, however, retain the term “spatial montage” for at least two reasons. First, as I shall continue to show in the remaining part of the chapter, a variety of artworks by Xu Bing, albeit highly diverse in terms of medium, form, and style, are interconnected through the idea and practice of spatial montage, reactivating, triggering, and stimulating each other. Indeed, Xu’s oeuvre exhibits, on the one hand, a logic of collecting, selecting, recycling, and reworking something existent, be it China’s cultural tradition or contemporary life, and on the other, a consistent pursuit of establishing new meanings, like a coronavirus that functions in the human brain.⁶¹ The two aspects, both essential to the working of Xu’s mind, crystallizes at once in the concept of montage. Second, the idea of spatial montage offers an alternative paradigm from which to make sense of the interactions of animation and space. In a short article, “Toward a Theory of Animation,” Edward Small and Eugene Levinson argue for the notion of animation-as-montage and the concept of montage-as-animation. Thinking back, in the first chapter, I have questioned whether, for animation, a frame qualifies as a shot. Imagine you have a cinematic shot in hand and keep reducing its length in your conception: you are approaching the single frame as a limiting case. If we do accept a frame as a minimum-length shot, the mechanism of assembling individual frames through animation is the very process of montage-as-editing. As for the concept of montage-as-animation, the most salient example beckons from Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925): a sleeping lion, an awakening

⁶⁰ Again, I am speaking in light of W. J. T. Mitchell’s critique of the distinction of temporal and spatial arts, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 98.

⁶¹ Xu Bing mentions that “contemporary arts are like coronavirus...” in his conversation with Haun Saussy and Rachel DeWoskin at the University of Chicago, February 6, 2020.

lion, and a rising lion. The montage of the three shots is perceived not as the alternations of three lions but as a fluid metamorphosis, that is, animation.⁶² If montage and animation are mutually substitutable, at least under certain circumstances, the concept of spatial montage goes into the very heart of the dissertation, where montage is understood as a version of animation and where space is understood as an image of time.

CALLIGRAPHIC ANIMATION'S EDUCATIONAL DREAM

36 Characters (Sanshiliu ge zi, 1984), an educational animated short produced in the late golden era of Shanghai Animation Studio, attracts my attention not only because it simultaneously mystifies and demystifies the pictograph myth but also because it can be said to be a precedent of *The Character of Characters*.⁶³ A Da, who was born Xu Jingda, worked as the scriptwriter, director, and animation designer for *36 Characters*. As my dear reader might recall, A Da was also one of the key figures in the invention of the ink animation technique. Born in a Western-influenced home in Shanghai and absolutely fluent in English, A Da frequently attended international animation festivals in the 1980s as a representative of Shanghai Animation Studio. Therefore, he is described by John Lent as “China’s animated open door to the West.”⁶⁴

⁶² See Edward Small and Eugene Levinson, “Toward a Theory of Animation,” *A Critical Journal of Film and Television* (Fall 1989): 67–74.

⁶³ Thomas Lamarre compares A Da’s *36 Characters* with Xu Bing’s installation *The Living Word (Niao fei le)*, first mounted in 2001 at the Sackler Gallery. For Lamarre, the two works are quite similar: “a flat black and whitish space of writing transforms into a boldly colorful animated space where layering imparts a sense of mobility and dimensionality.” See Thomas Lamarre, “Nothing Doing: Xu Bing and the Nonsensuous Life of Chinese Characters,” in *Immediation I*, eds. Erin Manning, Anna Munster, and Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (London: Open Humanities Press, 2019), 79–10.

⁶⁴ John A. Lent, “A Da, China’s Animated Open Door to the West,” in *Animation in Asia and the Pacific* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 17–20.

In the framing photographic sequence of *36 Characters*, a child approaches his father with a book in which some oracle bone characters—the earliest identified form of script in China—are written. The father, then, teaches his little son about Chinese hieroglyphic culture. To be clear, I describe the framing sequence as photographic rather than live action as it was created not by a continual running of a movie camera but by a montage of a series of still photographs featuring the father and the son, repeatedly posing while one photograph was taken and changing pose before the next photograph. The result is something close to pixilation. In other words, in the world of *36 Characters*, the two human actors are treated as objects in object animation, and the 36 characters become true living characters.

The father's teaching method is largely non-teaching: writing the 36 Chinese characters with a brush, stroke by stroke, and letting the child guess what the characters mean by himself. The child's recognition—if not immediate—of their meanings, seems to reiterate the myth that the Chinese language employs a mode of signification that is self-evident and self-identical. Supposedly from the child's point of view, audiences witness how archaic Chinese hieroglyphs, such as “water” (水), “sheep” (羊), “tiger” (虎), and “rain” (雨), come to life in the form of animation. A swarm of vivid shorthand pictures of the operations of nature is offered via a seemingly unbroken murmur of motion (Figure 4.8).⁶⁵ Each written character possesses a life or vital force only when the father's hand temporarily leaves the screen, and the hand continually reappears, writing the next character, disrupting the delight in animism, and asserting his will and willfulness.⁶⁶ Yet, the father does not seem always to be able to fully control the products out of

⁶⁵ I am mirroring Fenollosa in tone. See Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1936).

⁶⁶ For an incisive analysis of the animator's hand from *Little Nemo* (1911) to *Le mystère Picasso* (1955), see Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 106–34.

his own hand. Unable to stop the “rain” he has created, for instance, the father draws an umbrella (that is the character for “umbrella”) to block the rain instead.

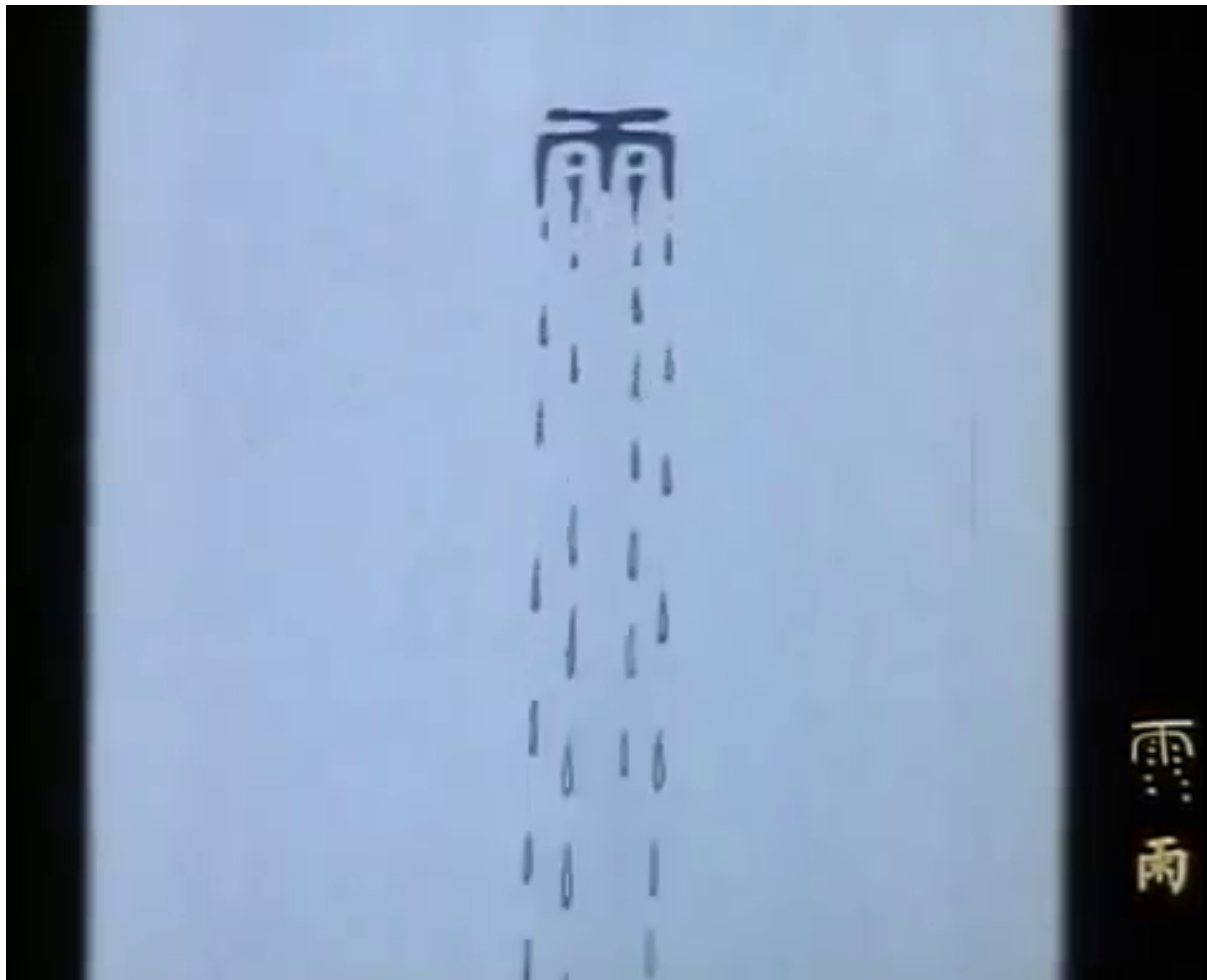


Figure 4. 8 “Rain” with drops falling down, *36 Characters* (1984)

Each of the brush’s strokes quickly leads to another. Whenever the father finishes one character, there may come a moment of equilibrium. But no! It is unstable, and the movement and shapeshifting of the character begins anew. Energy flows. Rhythms unfold. The father’s visible hand is constantly reminiscent of the invisible hands of the animators. At first sight,

audiences might have the impression that there is a line of energy, materialized through the father's hand and the brush, into the ink-trace.⁶⁷ On second thought, however, the audiences must know that the movement and shapeshifting of the thirty-six characters are made possible not by the father, but rather by Pan Jiyao, Xue Meijun, Hu Yihong, and Fu Hailong—the four animators credited in the animated film.

The admirable ambition—or fatal mistake—of the animated film is to tell a story with the thirty-six characters. By the end of the film, the child tries to give a title—“The Adventure of a Man”—to the story, but the father insists that education is his main purpose. The father and the son's voiceover—for me, rather annoying—harnesses the phantasmal dimension of archaic Chinese hieroglyphics into a seemingly coherent narrative and paradoxically proves that it is impossible to construct such a narrative via the 36 characters *alone*. In this sense, the animated short simultaneously revivifies and re-murders the myth of picture-writing.

36 Characters is a work of what Laura Marks calls “calligraphic animation.”⁶⁸ Marks makes a great effort to illustrate that, in the Islamic context, a playful and willful oscillation between text and image—“text seems to morph into image and morph back again”—manifests transformative, performative, and even talismanic qualities. Marks finds her examples of ornamental Islamic scripts in ceramic bowls, mosque walls, and elsewhere. The performative qualities of ornamental Islamic scripts come to inform new media art. “Animation,” writes Marks, “is an ideal playing field for the transformative and performative qualities that Arabic

⁶⁷ For an account of “brush-strength,” see John Hay, “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy,” in *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, eds. Thomas P. Kasulis, Roger T. Ames, and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 179–212.

⁶⁸ Laura Marks, “Calligraphic Animation: Documenting the Invisible,” *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6, no. 3 (2011): 307–23.

writing, especially in the context of Islamic art, has explored for centuries.”⁶⁹ In other words, it is another old dream awakened. To a large extent, I have been aligned with Marks in seeing motion in the “still” arts, but I would also suggest that the “motion” of a motion picture does exhibit a new quality: we cannot see a motion picture as still (unless we take a snapshot). In the Chinese context, the performative qualities of the oracle bone script, marked on turtle shells or cattle shoulder blades, is often associated with animistic worldviews and superstitious beliefs: as a form of divination, cracks in the written characters show the heaven’s will. There is also a type of scripture called *guihuafu*, literally meaning “scripture drawn by the ghost”: a brush writes as if automatically, free from a human hand, and delivers a message from the afterworld—which appears in one scene in *The Character of Characters*. Here, writing registers a spectral effect, one that is reminiscent of all the special effects that make possible impossible movement introduced in the first chapter. Once again, animation plays the role of a ghost, exhibiting a performative property that is capable of communicating between this world and the next, life and death, present and past.⁷⁰ In addition, *guihuafu* can also function as amulets. Often produced from a set of two peach-wood panels hung on door posts on which characters are written in a style that is too frenzied to be legible, it is said to have the function of protecting the household from evil spirits. In quotidian language, *guihuafu* becomes a common phrase referring to poor

⁶⁹ Laura Marks, “Calligraphic Animation: Documenting the Invisible,” *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6, no. 3 (2011): 307–23. See also Laura Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010).

⁷⁰ For an intriguing account of written communication from ghost in Chinese literature, see Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 195–96. Zeitlin emphasizes that, very often, it is the material traces of the written characters rather than the information conveyed by the words that most clearly register a ghostly effect.

calligraphy.⁷¹ In short, pairing *36 Characters* with *The Character of Characters* enables us to see calligraphic animation as a site of encounter between primitive energy and modern technology.

TOWARD A DOUBLE VISION



Figure 4. 9 The flying manual, *The Character of Characters* (2012)

In analyzing *The Character of Characters*, I have avoided laying out its twenty-five scenes (or “shots”) in a chronological order. Indeed, as a video installation in a museum setting, it welcomes the viewer to enter it at any point, and each scene can lend to us epiphanies. The

⁷¹ See Xu Bing, “The Character of Characters: An Animation,” in *The Character of Characters: An Animation by Xu Bing*, 39.

intellectual quality of Xu's work avails itself of a form of art criticism, one in which an artwork is not something to be deciphered by applying theories of some sort but rather a fresh critical voice that wrestles with multiple strands of thought. In the very last section of the chapter, I focus on the landscape/landscript scene from the animation video. I will show how this particular scene *thinks* pictographic scripts on screen, as well as space and time, to an unprecedented degree and *envisions* a double vision significant to us all.

Pouncing into view is a landscape. Fish, trees, bamboos, sheep, birds, and stones fly into a book—a calligraphic manual of some sort—and become the “heartfelt” Chinese characters so dependent on nature (Figure 4.9). Images become words. My main focus here is camera movement, which is one of the most difficult and elusive areas for conducting formal analysis of animation. To be clear, there are no empirical facts of a camera that physically moves in production. For most of the time, descriptions of camera movement in animation, mine included, rely on terminologies borrowed from live-action cinema, with an eye toward effects, rather than causes. To borrow Bordwell's words, what we have are some “on screen configurations” that we identify as “camera movement.”⁷² In the course of the scene (or “shot”), the camera *tracks* purely laterally from left to right to reveal off-screen space adjacent. The book is now surrounded by a group of children, who are occupying themselves with copying the characters (or patterns). Again, the camera moves slowly, exactly along the 180-degree line. Surprisingly, it leads audiences to discover the microcosmic structure of the human brain, wherein the repetitive activity of calligraphy practice takes root. In short, as the camera moves, sideways to what we see, it forces our attention in a rather precise direction.

⁷² David Bordwell, “Camera Movement and Cinematic Space,” *Ciné-tracts: A Journal of Film, Communications, Culture, and Politics* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 20.

In fact, throughout the animation video, this is the first time that the camera moves. The pattern of horizontal movement is used three times in total, and it is the only form of camera movement that we encounter in the video. For some, the extreme stylization of camera movement, in collaboration with the video's unusual aspect ratio, might be reminiscent of the viewing experience of a handscroll. But our viewing experience of a handscroll is never so mechanical. In fact, the camera movement here exhibits a highly anti-anthropomorphic, anti-illusory tendency. In contrast to the effect of movement-into-depth that I elaborated in the second and third chapters, the very form of camera movement here explores the aesthetic potential of the flatness of the screen. Jordan Schonig terms this motion form *spatial unfurling* and sees it as “the gestural agents of two-dimensional screen phenomena.”⁷³ As Schonig describes, “camera movements can take on the superficial materiality of animate brushstrokes, producing the very material stuff that constitutes the look of the screen's surface.”⁷⁴ Compared with tracking forward (or backward), which, in the context of animation production, can be painstakingly accomplished either by multiplane photography or 3D modeling, it is much less technologically demanding to achieve the effect that the camera tracks purely laterally. The “secret” here is relative movement: if, in the production process, you slide the image layer to the left, along the 180-degree line, the sensation is that the camera tracks to the right.

The lateral tracking shot is also a long take. Instead of placing the flying book, the group of children, and the human brain in three shots of radically different scales, it uncovers the possibility of a cinematic form that would permit, in a sense, the change of subject matters and

⁷³ Jordan Schonig, “Cinema's Motion Forms: Film Theory, the Digital Turn, and the Possibilities of Cinematic Movement” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2017), 181.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

shot scales without chopping the world up into little fragments. Here, the specificity of an animated long take, especially in relation to time and space, is something that needs to be opened up to scrutiny. In a long take in a live-action film, time and space are said to be—and celebrated in a Bazinian sense as—united and irreducible. Often working hand in hand with deep focus cinematography, a long take captures reality, “reveal[ing] the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them.”⁷⁵ A long take in animation, however, is still a frame-by-frame construct: as mentioned, it is arguably a form of editing—montage—as long as we accept one frame as a minimum-length shot. In this sense, the exact opposite of my previous argument becomes true: a world composed of many “little fragments.” It is not a matter of preserving a preexistent temporal-spatial configuration, but rather a case wherein montage and long take become one. Put differently, an animated long take is a form of montage within one shot and across a succession of many (minimum-length) shots.

A closer look reveals that the landscape is a landscript: namely, landscape-in-script. In order to gain a better understanding of the animation video, we need to examine it in relation to Xu’s *Landscript* (*Wenzi xiesheng*) series. As early as 1999, Xu experimented with the new method of “landsript”—rendering landscape motifs such as mountains, water, and grass with corresponding Chinese characters—in his sketchbook while trekking through the Himalayas. In these early sketches, some characters have clear pictographic origins, but not the others. For instance, in one small sketch of a thatched pavilion, Xu repeats the Chinese word *tudou* (“potato”), which does not resemble what it represents. In another sketch, he wryly writes the Chinese character *bai* (“white”) to represent the empty space common in Chinese landscape painting. The schema of landscript takes a more mature form in Xu’s 2002 work featuring a

⁷⁵ André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 38.

forest. In it, all landscape elements are substituted by characters with pictographic elements. Among (the characters of) apricot, pine, mulberry, and chestnut trees, repeated in clusters, a self-reflexive inscription is hidden: “Here there are all kinds of trees, from the North and the South. Each kind has its own painting method.” In 2013, for the exhibition “Landscape/Landscript: Nature as Language in the Art of Xu Bing” at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Xu created two new pieces. The subtlety of the forms of the characters in the works distinguishes them from his earlier ones: the written characters, albeit recognizable, are assimilated to a much greater degree into the natural and architectural elements being depicted.⁷⁶

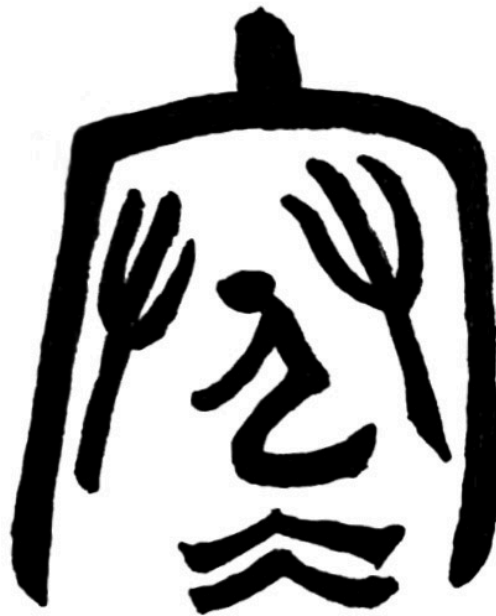


Figure 4. 10 The character of *han* (“cold”), reproduced by Yang Panpan

⁷⁶ For a comprehensive study of Xu Bing’s *landsript* series, see Xu Bing and S. J. Vainker, *Landscape/Landscript: Nature as Language in the Art of Xu Bing* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2013). See also Britta Erickson and Xu Bing, *The Art of Xu Bing: Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words* (Washington: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; In association with the University of Washington Press, 2001).

The “flying book” scene in *The Character of Characters* is exactly based on one of two landscript pieces completed in 2013. As it is the case in Xu’s treatment of Zhao’s *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains*, what we see in the animation video is not a duplication but a variation of the 2013 landscript work; it requires a form of broadly defined spatial montage, that is, the reorganization of compositional elements. The flying book, as Xu indicates in one of his sketches for the video, is intended to be *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (*Jieziyuan huapu*), first published in 1679 in five colors. Commissioned by Shen Xinyou and compiled by Wang Gai and others, the manual can be said to be a pattern book or dictionary of Chinese landscape painting. For instance, you can learn the eighteen ways of drawing a tree that are codified in it.⁷⁷ The schematized nature of Chinese landscape painting, if not Chinese culture in general, greatly interests Xu. By selecting, cutting, rearranging, carving, and printing motifs from different pages of the 1679 edition, Xu created *The Mustard Seed Garden Landscape Scroll* (2010), a handscroll version of the highly influential manual. In the whole process, the scale of the motifs remains absolutely unchanged. Again, spatial montage is the working principle here. There aren’t visible conflicts between the selected elements now arranged in the handscroll; instead, they form a seamless whole (Manovich would call it “anti-montage”⁷⁸). Yet, the spatial manipulation still spells out a new meaning.

One question naturally comes to us: what does it mean to *animate* the landscript? In addition to giving life to characters depicting animals, such as “fish,” (a graph from “a particular bronze tripod vessel known as the *Xi bo ding*,”⁷⁹) animating the landscript also makes some of

⁷⁷ For a facsimile reprint, see Wang Gai (1677–1705) 王槩, ed., *Jieziyuan huapu* (芥子園畫譜 *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian yingyin, 1982).

⁷⁸ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 143.

⁷⁹ Xu Bing and S. J. Vainker, *Landscape/Landscript: Nature as Language in the Art of Xu Bing*, 139.

the characters with more complex forms much more legible. To give one example, the character surrounded by trees and stones at the left of the composition is the early predecessor of *han* (“cold”). Implied in the character is a vivid story: a person walks out of a house to get some straw. He then returns and wraps his little house with the straw so as to keep warm. The house, the person, the straw on both sides, and the ice on the ground together form the character *han* (Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10). Animation shows us the whole process, the entire narrative, one that might not be immediately comprehensible to some if the character appeared in static form. Most importantly, the animation of the flying manual creates a journey of discovery, encouraging us to pick out the characters subtly shaped, one by one, and giving us ample time to digest them.

Xu Bing once wrote, “in ancient Chinese the character *shu* referred to three things: books, written characters, and also the act of writing. My works are mostly concerned with this.”⁸⁰ The three understandings of *shu* are all encapsulated in the animation scene. Writing on Xu Bing, Wu Hung remarks, “if we say that from the 1980s until the early 1990s the ‘dialogue of media’ in Xu Bing’s art mainly employed Chinese cultural idioms (such as his already noted interest in the relationship between ink rubbing and woodblock printing or scrolls and stitch-bound books), from the mid-1990s forward, this dialogue increasingly took place between *shu* and the computer.”⁸¹ For *The Character of Characters*, the use of computers not only makes it

⁸⁰ Xu, “*Jing tiandi, qi guishen*,” (驚天地, 泣鬼神) in *The Library of Babel* (Tokyo: Inter-Communication Center, 1998), 72. A number of contemporary Chinese artists share a complex love-hate relationship with *shu*, together constituting a distinct pattern of imagination in contemporary Chinese art, see Wu Hung, with the assistance of Peggy Wang, *Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 2006).

⁸¹ Wu Hung, “Xu Bing: Experiments in Media and Visual Technique (2001),” in *Wu Hung on Contemporary Chinese Artists* (HK: Time Zone 8, 2009), 32.

possible to create an animation video in which the three meanings of *shu* run neck and neck but also brings out a new layer of what words-becoming-images means: as previously mentioned, text is processed as an image in most computer programs. I argue that to think about pictographic scripts on the animated screen is to see the screen as a space crosshatched with multiple temporal rhythms, one in which the ancient story of “images-becoming-words” coexists with the present tendency of “words-becoming-images.”

Xu’s aspiration must go beyond that. Guillaume Apollinaire’s famous calligram of his lover, for instance, and F. W. Murnau’s title card “Couldn’t she get drowned?” fuse image with text, yet the ordering of signs that renders looking and reading into two activities, separate from each other, remains intact.⁸² Chinese calligraphy might encourage the convergence of looking and reading, but the latter activity has to be suspended for those who do not have the language proficiency. Sometimes the brush moves so swiftly that even those proficient in the language are unable to read the ink trace. Xu’s landscript schema, however, powerfully challenges the ordering of signs. This is especially true when the landscript is mediated through animation. Ultimately, the landscript-in-motion seeks to invoke a double vision that sees words on screen as linguistic texts and pictorial shapes at the same time, a vision through which and because of which looking and reading are no longer separate activities. If, as Hansen writes, “the historical process of disenchantment, in Horkheimer and Adorno’s account, inevitably entails a dissociation of verbal and pictorial function,”⁸³ a double vision that enables a re-association of

⁸² N. D. Rodowick is a source of inspiration here. See D.N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media*, 62–63.

⁸³ Hansen, “Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer,” *New German Critique*, no. 56 (Spring—Summer 1992): 49. See also Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Verso Classics (London: Blackwell Verso, 1997).

verbal and pictorial functions perhaps indicates the unwitting and spectral return of dream, imagination, and poetic possibilities in the mundane world.

CODA

EDWARD YANG'S UNFINISHED ANIMATED FILM *THE WIND*

In 2002, Edward Yang (Yang Dechang), one of the leading filmmakers of the Taiwanese New Wave, started working on an ambitious project: a martial arts animated feature entitled *The Wind* (*Zhui feng*). However, serious financial problems occurred during its production, bringing it to a halt in 2005. Edward Yang passed away on June 29, 2007, leaving this animation project unfinished. All we can find today are a less-than-ten-minute-long demo, a slightly-longer-than-one-minute “behind-the-scenes” clip that was shown at the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival in 2007, a character sheet, and some drawings by Edward Yang. To paraphrase the title of a film that is said to have stolen the teenager Edward Yang’s heart, Federico Fellini’s *8 ½*, the unfinished *The Wind* became, in an uncanny manner, Edward Yang’s *8 ½*th film.

Let me deal with these fragments in the coda, a section that itself is smaller than a chapter, that is, a sort of fragment itself. Instead of lamenting the orphaning of the animated feature, I hope to bring to the fore the productive possibilities that an unfinished film opens up for us. For instance, to where else shall we turn our attention: to drawings and other materials in the pre-production phase? Do we need a more innovative research methodology to approach an unfinished film, perhaps a materialistic reverie in which the researcher rehabilitates a form of imagination, and expands it in a new way? To what extent is working with an unfinished film similar to dealing with nonextant, or partially extant films, a task that I have attempted in the first chapter? When is an unfinished film

not an unfinished film? Because the surviving demo of *The Wind* reprises but pulls in new directions many of the key themes traced in the previous chapters—the vexed notion of authorship in animation production, the possibility of layer-by-layer analysis, the staging of a singing picture, the remediation of a Chinese painting, the motion form of an animated long take, and animation’s secret affinities with water—a close reading of it also provides a fitting endpoint for this dissertation. To use *The Pearl Necklace*, the 1926 silent film analyzed in the first chapter, as a metaphor, the coda will function as a thread that weaves together many of the scattered “pearls” in this study, while giving them a new life.

THINKING WITH LAYERS, LAYERS OF THINKING

According to Xu Huangsheng, who uploaded and posted the demo of *The Wind* on YouTube on March 18, 2011, it was created in 2003 and was not a ready-for-release version. Only Photoshop and Flash were used in the making of the demo. Its publication soon stirred an online discussion that expressed concern about the question of authorship. It considered whether this demo should be said to be Edward Yang’s work if it was handed over to an animator or a team of animators who *also* made creative decisions. Moving away from the rigid division between creative and manual labor, the dissertation, and, most prominently, the second chapter, has striven to reimagine the production of animated films as a space wherein multiple agents—humans as well as machines—communicate, negotiate, and work together, and question the relation between the production of space in animation and the production space of animation. The emphasis on concrete production contexts of animated films is significant as it signals a move from a linear, progressive

mode of historical writing to a spatial, reconstructive mode of historical writing.¹ This corresponds to a synchronic rather than diachronic approach. In other words, we do not constantly ask, “what happens next?” Rather, we slow ourselves down from time to time, dwell on a particular “slice” of history, and surrender ourselves to the sway of imagination so as to recreate what it once was in all its complexity, subtlety, vividness, and freshness. To use the metaphor of the animation stand once more, only by carefully inking and painting each historical layer with the fullest details first can a historian come to reanimate the history.

My interests here lie less in the human agents than in the software applications used in the production of the demo, particularly Photoshop, which, according to Manovich, “has become synonymous with ‘digital media.’”² I conceptualize the invention of Photoshop as resulting from the collision of cel animation and darkroom film development, which is emblematic of media shifts beyond the analog/digital divide.³ In the second chapter, I have detailed how the layering feature in cel animation production allows us to see through the transparent areas of a cel to the cels below, reduces the number of times an image has to be redrawn, and redefines our understanding of what an image is. Photoshop layers work in exactly in the same way: “like a film camera mounted above the animation stand, Photoshop software is continuously ‘shooting’ the image

¹ I say this with a nod to Wu Hung, “Quanguo shiye zhong de meishushi yanjiu” (全球視野中的美術史 A Global Perspective on Art History Studies), *Meishu yanjiu* (美術研究 *Art Research*), no. 02 (2019): 10–14.

² Lev Manovich, “Inside Photoshop,” *Computational Culture: A Journal of Software Studies*, no. 1 (2011), <http://computationalculture.net/article/inside-photoshop>.

³ A source of inspiration is Friedrich A. Kittler, who sees the invention of cinema as a resulting from the collision of photography and gun. See Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 123–25.

created through a juxtaposition of visual elements contained on separate layers.”⁴ Layering is essential to Photoshop as it allows a graphic designer to modify a visual element of his or her work on a certain layer without redrawing or affecting any other layers; this is impossible in many “consumer” image editors. With the miraculous design of layers, Photoshop has become the *de facto* industry standard in image-making.

In the second chapter, I have also testified to the possibility of looking at a work of cel animation frame by frame so as to have it deciphered layer by layer across enigmatic incidents, forgotten paths, and poetic fragments. These “incidents” include a patch on Snow White’s skirt that suddenly changes its color; a blurry rush of spattered, frantic brushstrokes in a frame wherein Monkey transforms into a bee, an unwanted ink block; and a cel that is not placed in the exactly right position. And there must be more. Each incident tells us something about the procedure of the animated film’s making; each frame is “a document of its own production.”⁵ When animation production goes digital, of course, the demise of “incidents” as such follows. I contend, nonetheless, that the tool of digital animation production—the structure of Photoshop layers—lends itself to being a production record: when an existing image is imported for reference purposes, what elements are painted over, how many layers are added, etc.? As W. J. T. Mitchell points out, the Photoshop layers palette “preserves the ‘history’ of transformations... so that any transformations can be reversed.”⁶ If, for instance, we had access to the Photoshop file of

⁴ Manovich, “Inside Photoshop.”

⁵ Hannah Frank, “Traces of the World: Cel Animation and Photography,” *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 23–39.

⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, “The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction,” in *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 320.

the demo for *The Wind*, would a different form of layer-by-layer analysis, that is, the unpacking of the Photoshop layers, help make visible the hidden details in it, disclose its quite unknown aspects, and even allows us to see how “history” was reversed?

In this regard, the word “poetics” in the title of this dissertation takes on a double meanings: it is not merely the persistent pursuit of the making sense of the process of making animated films but also an innovative mode of critical analysis that could be said to be a form of *making* itself. The temporal and spatial structure of an animated film can be altered both conceptually and technologically. Ideas, variable and fluid as water, gushes out of the interstices between frames. Fresh meaning gushes out of the interstices between layers. Ultimately, what I strive for is a union of temporal-spatial manipulations and idea-forming activities.

DOUBLE SCREEN

The demo of *The Wind* begins with a frontal view of a group of standing spectators in fine, colorful clothing. With the exception of one woman presumably from a pleasure district, most of the audience are male. A teenage boy, whose name is Changhui, awkwardly stretches his head out of the group, and fixes his eyes on something offscreen. The visual presentations of the customers, in simultaneous association with the hearing of singing, a sweet female voice, offscreen at this moment, identify the group as “a zone of audition.”⁷ A reverse shot shows a teenage girl, whose name is Qihong, singing alone while strumming on the plucked accompaniment of *pi-pa*, in the crowded environment of a

⁷ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 90–91.

teahouse (Figure 5.1). With layers of seated and standing audiences surrounding her, she is no doubt the center of attraction. She is seated in front of a painted screen (*hua ping*) featuring lotus flowers executed in broad ink-wash.



Figure 5. 1 A singing picture, demo of *The Wind*

In Chinese culture, hardly could we find an object as versatile as the screen. As Wu Hung notes, a screen “can be an object, a painting medium, a pictorial representation, or all three”;⁸ its multiple role and ambiguous identities make it the site and vortex of

⁸ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago

reconcilable and irreconcilable meanings. In the demo of *The Wind*, the screen, as an architectonic form, differentiates the space of the teahouse, setting a stage for the girl's performance; the screen, as an art medium, offers a flat surface for painting and calligraphy; the screen, as a pictorial motif, has been transplanted from Chinese painting to animation. We know that the painted screen is likely a combined Photoshop layer, one that could be manipulated independently, without affecting the layer of the singing girl. Yet, the image of lotus flowers on the screen obviously supplies a visual metaphor for the girl sitting in front it. The lotus flowers and the singing girl explain, reinforce, echo, and merge into each other. To some degree, the painted screen can be said to be an extension of her body. The stage space that the screen helps divide and set up is a *gendered* one as, in Chinese culture, singing in a performance context, especially when offered in entertainment settings, was culturally coded as feminine.⁹ She is entirely passive, submitting herself to eyes and ears of the dominantly male audience. Because this is animation, she is presented, both metaphorically and literally, as a singing picture. The thick, wooden frame of the painted screen reminds us that the flowers on the surface are no more than a picture, simultaneously enticing the viewer to take the teahouse environment as reality. The real world, however, turns out to be an animated picture, a movie screen. In short, we find here a visual game called “(painted) screen within (movie) screen.”

Posing the question “what does the silver screen screen?” Stanley Cavell writes in *The World Viewed*, first published in 1971, “it screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me

Press, 1996), 9.

⁹ Judith Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh: The Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China,” in *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79–80.

invisible. And it screens that world from me—that is, screens its existence from me. That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality.”¹⁰ Cavell is talking about (live-action) movies. For Cavell, the world of movies *is* our world, albeit a temporal dislocation: “in a movie house, the barrier to the stars is time.”¹¹ In Cavell’s conception, cartoons are not movies precisely because the world is completely left behind. In response to Alexander Sesonske’s critique of this view,¹² Cavell added a lengthy section “More of *The World Viewed*” in the enlarged edition of the book published in 1979. In it, Cavell describes what cartoons present to us as a world but not the world: “a world whose creatures are incorporeal is a world devoid of sex and death, hence a world apt to be either very sad or very happy. At either extreme its creatures elicit from us a painful tenderness.”¹³ Since then, the concept of “the world” and animation’s relation to it have generated animated debates.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the two-character Chinese word for “world” is *shijie*, which comes from “lokadhātu” in Sanskrit. The first character *shi* (“loka”) means time while the second character *jie* (“dhātu”) means space. In this respect, “the world” (*shijie*) is necessarily an important concept in the present study that constantly questions space and time.¹⁵

¹⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹² Alexander Sesonske, “The World Viewed,” *Georgia Review*, 28, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 561–70.

¹³ Cavell, “More of The World Viewed,” in *The World Viewed*, 171.

¹⁴ For Karen Redrobe’s mapping of the debates regarding animation’s worlding, see Karen Redrobe, “The Worries of the World(s): Cartoons and Cinema,” in *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 253–71.

¹⁵ The two-character Chinese word, *yuzhou* (“universe”), is similar: the first character *yu* indicates space while the second character *zhou* indicates time. No later than the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), *yuzhou* has been conceptualized by the Chinese as a spatiotemporal existence. For a discussion on the word, see Wu Hung, *Zhongguo huihua de “nüxing kongjian”* (中國繪畫的女性空間 *Feminine Space in Chinese Painting*) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2018), 23.

Participating in and breathing new life into the debates, each of the four chapters of this dissertation has been structured around a set of questions surrounding the concept of “the world”: If each frame of a stop-motion animation sequence gives us a view of the world, why does the sequence as a whole fail to convince us of a past existence? In what sense is a frame of animated cartoons also a view of the world? Is the concept of “a world” of animation itself an unstable one especially when the whole screen goes through a process of metamorphosis, wherein the distinction between the figure and the ground starts to fray and we no longer know where we are? Is the concept of “a diegetic world” unstable, too? These questions, and the ones that emerge from them, gesture toward a plural understanding of the concept of the world(s) and testify to the effectiveness of piecemeal theorization. My inquiry into animation never stops at the edge of the frame of the animated screen. Moreover, the visual game from the “singing picture” scene analyzed above supplies another question that the main body of the dissertation did not have the occasion to probe: What if the world—that is, our world, the one that we take as reality—is becoming animation? As human creatures of 2020, we know exactly how it feels when the whole world is forced to change. We use animation stickers on social media to replace written languages and, in the process, revivify the pictograph myth. We change virtual background in Zoom in order that we will be seen and perceived on an animated screen. We spend hundreds of hours on our Animal Crossing island because it is now the only place where we can feel alive. Increasingly, to live in the contemporary world is to become an animation character. Animation becomes a worldview.

THE REMEDIATION OF A HANDSCROLL

Now let me return to the demo of *The Wind*. The bulk of the demo is a long take, which, to a certain degree, animates a renowned Chinese handscroll: *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming shanghe tu*, aka. *Qingming Festival on the River*), painted by Song dynasty artist, Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145).¹⁶ The handscroll, 24.8 centimeters in height and 529.7 centimeters long, depicts in stunningly clarity a parade of everyday activities through a spatial and temporal unfolding from the countryside through the bustling Rainbow Bridge and on into the city gate.¹⁷ It shows in great detail humans of all levels of the society from rich to poor, goods of all kinds being displayed for sale, and boats swinging their ways forward. Arvin Chen, who was involved in the production of *The Wind*, recalled that “day by day we were scanning *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, from which we learn how to create the flavor of traditional Chinese painting in animation.”¹⁸ According to him, Edward Yang was deeply invested in the architectures of the Northern Song city, Bianjing (today’s Kaifeng in Henan), and even the technical process of urban planning.¹⁹ The keyword of “city” might readily pin *The Wind* onto Edward Yang’s oeuvre: each of his films lends itself to a city allegory. However, this time, it is not contemporary Taipei but ancient Bianjing. Edward Yang has expressed more than once that in order to save budget, his films had to be set in modern urban milieu, which required minimal set design. In this light, we can come to grasp the “luxury” that only the medium of

¹⁶ *Qingming shanhe tu* (清明上河圖 *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*) is now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. The handscroll can be viewed on University of Chicago’s East Asian Scroll Paintings website. <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/52>

¹⁷ Julia Murray discusses *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* as a tour de force of Chinese narrative illustration. See Julia K Murray, “What Is ‘Chinese Narrative Illustration’?,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4 (December 1998): 602–15.

¹⁸ Wang Yunyan, *Zaijian, Yang Dechang* (再見,楊德昌 *Goodbye, Edward Yang*) (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2014), 288.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

animation can afford; when set design can be accomplished with a kind of paintbrush, it is time to realize—that is, to reanimate—his architect dream since childhood in the most prosperous ancient Chinese capital.²⁰

As I have made note of it in passing, a handscroll has the basic feature of being a long, narrow horizontal composition; while its height is limited, its length is far greater. But it is not that any long, narrow, horizontal composition is a handscroll. A handscroll is a medium composed of material substrates, most basic of which is a round wooden roller bound with sections of paper or silk. It can be said to be a medium for painting (which is itself a medium). Related to and made possible by its physical form, a handscroll engenders a distinct viewing experience. Jerome Silbergeld, for one, describes: “the painting is viewed from right to left... unrolling a bit at a time from the roller and transferring the excess to a loose roll temporarily maintained around the stretcher on the right. About one arm’s length is exposed at a time for viewing.”²¹ Building on yet drawing attention to the “reversed” process of rolling back the scroll, Wu Hung adds, “some connoisseurs prefer to combine it with a ‘reversed’ reading of the picture from left to right, while halting now and then to review some details of specific interest.”²² Moreover, Wu emphasizes the handscroll as “a ‘vista-vision plus’ composition”²³: there is always something outside the viewer’s field of vision that keeps him or her searching. It is for this reason that, in this dissertation, I use the handscroll as a metaphor for a model of theorization

²⁰ Another Chinese painting, *Peaceful Start for the New Year (Taicu shihe tu)* by Ding Guanpeng (active 1708–1771), also had significant influence on the style of architectural design in *The Wind*.

²¹ Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 12–13.

²² Wu Hung, *The Double Screen*, 58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

that I am pursuing, one that acknowledges the limitation of a theorist's vision while turning that into an advantage. Unbinding the linear point of view that takes the so-called "Western theory" (which is in fact a citizen of many nations) as the vantage point, I advocate and put into practice a form of theorization that takes into consideration the mobility of ideas from different cultural frames, a decentered network of theoretical frames that could be viewed one at a time and linked together as one keeps "rolling on." Our visualization of this model of theorization as a handscroll is particularly instructive in the adjacent fields of film studies, media studies, and visual studies as it foregrounds how a visual object shapes the ways in which we think about time, space, and mobility, which in turns shape our theoretical formulations of images.²⁴

If, as illustrated by the viewing experience described above, the handscroll "is literally a moving picture, with shifting moments and loci,"²⁵ what if the "moving picture" is transformed into a moving picture? The animated long take in *The Wind* sheds light on such a line of inquiry. In the last chapter of the dissertation, I have discussed the animated long take in Xu Bing's *The Character of Characters* (2012): it is in the extreme form of purely horizontal movement (that is, exactly along the 180-degree line). In contrast to the mechanical, non-anthropomorphic tendency that the horizontal movement entails there, the camera movement in the long take of *The Wind* is more natural, more anthropomorphic, and more akin to the floating gaze of a viewer of the handscroll. The camera dances, drifts, and gyrates, showing the viewer around in Bianjing, the ancient Chinese city, and guiding him or her to direct attention toward one detail then another. It *walks* around. It lingers over selected details. While it moves from left to right for the bulk of the

²⁴ As previously indicated, my approach of visualizing theorization in the visual fields, as one might call it, is influenced by Karen Redrobe. See Karen Redrobe, "Film Theory's Animated Map," *Framework* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 480.

²⁵ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen*, 59.

time, it also moves from right to left at certain moments, initiating something like a reversed reading of the handscroll. Different from the animated long take of *The Character of Characters* that links three spaces—the “flying book” landscape/landsript, a group of children practicing calligraphy, and the microcosmic structure of the human brain—which are impossible to coexist adjacently and physically, the animated long take in *The Wind* links a stone bridge under the moonlight, multifarious shops, vendors, passers-by, the boy (Changhui) and the girl (QiuHong) walking home together, two martial art figures hidden in the trees, a cat on the roof, and countless other details through a continuous terrain.

If the long take uncovers the fantasy of a cinematic form that would allow everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, the act of walking—both the camera’s and the central characters’ —“selects and fragments the space traversed.”²⁶ For a significant portion of screen time, the camera largely follows the boy and the girl in a burgeoning relationship, who are placed in a mediating position that underwrites spatial exploration of the ancient capital with personalized narratives, perceptions, and emotions; their footsteps make parts of the ancient Chinese capital disappear and exaggerate others. Momentarily, the camera moves away from the central pedestrian characters, swaying to the anonymous martial art figures who appear to have been secretly following our hero and heroine along the way; a sense of suspense is successfully conveyed to the audience in the midst of seemingly ordinary activities. The camera is neither completely attached to nor entirely detached from any character or character group in the demo. It is a structure that we might call triple attunement: taking into account each of the two groups’ activities or deliberations while revealing something they can

²⁶ Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988):101.

neither see nor acknowledge.²⁷ The camera is not simply a surrogate for the viewer, either; as Vivian Sobchack reminds us, “the camera and the viewer are linked through their animate bodies in an intersensory and lived unity within the world as it limitlessly provides the figures (or objects) and grounds (or spaces) of their specific and directed focus, their horizontal experience.”²⁸ The camera here can be said to be an active agent in its own right, one that at times walks in the city and at times flies through the air. The pas de trois of the walking teenagers, the martial art figures and the camera creates a sense of mobility that is almost unprecedented in animated films in the Sinophone world. What is engendered here is a framed vision beyond the natural perception of the human eyes in the world that we inhabit.²⁹

Here, the question of remediation is not merely evoking the viewing experience of the handscroll in cinematic animation but also how the experience is *transformed*. Put differently, in terms of viewing condition and reception, what are the differences between the moving picture called handscroll and the moving picture called cinema? In terms of movement, the “moving” of the handscroll depends on direct physical contact: a hand rolling and unrolling it. Its motion forms can be manipulated or adjusted within a space that is continuous with the viewer’s physical body. By contrast, we won’t be able to hold still the motion of motion picture cinema. Watching something like the long take in *The Wind*, the viewer is simultaneously guided and

²⁷ Writing on camera movement in Ophuls’s films, Daniel Morgan theorizes what he calls *dual attunement*, a specific kind of camera movement that “responds to both the states of mind of characters and the social world they inhabit.” In other words, if the camera articulates the desire of certain characters, the desire might be denied by the moral world surrounding them. The work of both articulation and denial is done by the camera. See Daniel Morgan, “Max Ophuls and the Limits of Virtuosity: On the Aesthetics and Ethics of Camera Movement,” *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2011): 127–63.

²⁸ Vivian Sobchack, “Toward Inhabited Space: The Semiotic Structure of Camera Movement in the Cinema,” *Semiotica* 41, no. 1–4 (1982): 319.

²⁹ For a recent study of the phenomenology of cinematic motion, which I believe will generate significant impact in the field, see Jordan Schonig, “Cinema’s Motion Forms: Film Theory, the Digital Turn, and the Possibilities of Cinematic Movement” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2017).

“alienated” by a disembodied vision. The act of remediation also results in a slide in the private-public spectrum of viewership. Traditionally, the viewing experience of the handscroll is an extremely private, even intimate, one, which stands in sharp contrast to the experience of movie-watching where an enormous audience is sitting in the dark. While modern and contemporary museum settings have turned the experience of appreciating a handscroll from a private one to a public one, streaming video and other devices have increasingly reconfigured movie-viewing as a private activity.

Guided by these and other observations, this dissertation has attempted to make sense of the perplexing permutations and ramifications of a distinct pattern of imagination in Chinese animation—the remediation of photography, painting, and calligraphy. And there must be more. What if animation encounters *other* art forms, say, puppetry, Dunhuang murals, and porcelain art? What transformations are involved? In the context of Chinese animation, animation studios and independent artists have responded to questions as such with impressive animated films: *Peacock Princess* (*Kongque gongzhu*, dir. Jin Xi, 1963), *The Nine-Colored Deer* (*Jiu se lu*, dir. Qian Jiajun and Dai Tielang, 1981), and *Mr Sea* (*Hai gongzi*, dir. Geng Xue, 2014), just to give a few examples. These are some of the “encounters” that this dissertation did not have the occasion to open up for scrutiny and are perhaps subjects for future inquiry. In my investigation, and in other stories of animation’s encounters with other art forms that would be written and rewritten, animation lends itself to be a particularly productive site with which to intervene in a material imagination where simple distinction between moving and static pictures, spatial and temporal arts, graphic and photographic representations, and animated and live-action films no longer seemed persuasive.

IF WATER KNOWS THE ANSWER

It is not too surprising that a thematic strand—water—runs through almost all the film examples in this dissertation: tea pouring itself out in *The Haunted Hotel*, the tears in *The Pearl Necklace*, the wishing well in Disney's *Snow White*, the watery adventure of newly born tadpoles in *Where Is Mum?*, the pond in *The Herdboy and the Flute* and in *Ode to Summer*, the river in *Feeling from Mountain and Water* and in *The Wind*,³⁰ and restless ink in ink animation and calligraphic animation. It seems that *Princess Iron Fan* lacks this feature, but it compensates for it, by showcasing fire for a significant portion of its screen time; it is after all a story about how to cross the “fiery mountain” (*huoyan shan*).

What is capable of most fully conveying the dream of a flowing diversity of forms?

Water, fire, and animation.

Water is, too, the locus of theoretical speculations of this study. Water is a metaphor for time: water (as a whole) might seem eternal, yet any given drop of water is immediately whisked away as we watch, perhaps never to be seen again. Water is the feeler of the earth, its instrument for exploring space. Water is a space where reverie begins; it is, most often, the presence of limpid water, bubbling with crystalline music, as Bachelard, the master dreamer of water, tells us.³¹ The reverie here is a materialist one, crystallized in the image of a child playing with water. Playing with animation, this study is meant to be a materialist reverie, a critical discourse that centers on the interrelations of space and time, or as I prefer to put it, space × time. Writing at a time when animation is everywhere, I find the love poem that the narrator cites near the end of

³⁰ Edward Yang's *The Day, on the Beach* (*Haitan de yitian*, 1983), commonly regarded as the first breaker of the Taiwanese New Wave to hit the shore, is also a film about water.

³¹ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell, The Bachelard Translation Series (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2006), 47.

The Shape of Water (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2017) so appropriate for conveying my feeling toward animation: “unable to perceive the shape of you. I find you all around me.” No one can go deep into the imaginary realm that animation opens up without falling in love with it again. Like a ripple from a center point, animation thinks centrifugally, constantly expanding our understanding of space and time.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

A Da 阿達

ai 愛

bajiao dong 芭蕉洞

baxian guohai 八仙過海

bai 白

Bai Hong 白虹

biji 筆跡

bimo 筆墨

Bianjing 汴京

bubi 補筆

Cai Guoqiang 蔡國強

Cang Jie 倉頡

Cao Fei 曹斐

caoshu 草書

Chang'an 長安

Chang E 嫦娥

changcheng huapian gongsi 長城畫片公司

Changhui 常麾

Chen Hailu 陳海璐

Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟

Chen Kaige 陳凱歌

Chen Peilin 陳沛霖

Chen Shaoxiong 陳紹雄

chuban 出版

chuan 串

chunqiu yuan ming bao 春秋元命苞

chunshui tu 春睡圖

dacheng miaofa lianhua jing 大成妙法蓮華經

Da Shanghai 大上海

Da Yaba 大啞巴

Dai Tielang 戴鐵郎

Dao 道

deng yingxi 燈影戲

dishu 地書

dianjing renwu 點景人物

dianying 電影

dingge donghua 定格動畫

Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬

Ding Shiwei 丁世偉

duli donghua 獨立動畫

Duan Xiaoxuan 段孝萱

Emei 峨眉

er 兒

Fahai 法海

fei 飛

feijian baiguang 飛劍白光

fenhang bubai 分行布白

Feng Mengbo 馮夢波

Fu Hailong 傅海龍

Gan 甘

Geng Xue 耿雪

gudao shiqi 孤島時期

guqin 古琴

guoguang 國光

guohua 國畫

guohuo 國貨

han 寒

Han Langen 韓蘭根

Hangzhou 杭州

He Xiang 何仙姑/荷仙姑

Henan 河南

hexie zhongguo 和諧中國

Hou Yao 侯曜

Hu Yihong 胡依紅

hua ping 畫屏

hua shanshui xu 畫山水序

huaxin yingye 華新影業

Huang Ying 黃穎

huanshu yingpian 幻術影片

huguang 滬光

huiyi 會意

huodong huaji yingpian 活動滑稽影片

huo huan 禍患

huoyan shan 火焰山

jixiang 吉祥

jiajie 假借

jiannan jushe 囡囡劇社

jianzhi pian 剪紙片

jiangnan 江南

jie jing 借景

jieti 結體

jieziyuan huapu 芥子園畫譜

jieziyuan shanshui juan 芥子園山水卷

Jin Xi 靳夕

jinyu 金魚

Kaifeng 開封

Kunlun 崑崙

laoshan daoshi 嶗山道士

Lao She 老舍

Li Gonglin 李公麟

Li Keran 李可染

Li Rudi 李如棣

Li Tieguai 李鐵拐

Li Zeyuan 李澤源

Lianhua 聯華

Liao Enshou 廖恩壽

Lin Junting 林俊廷

Lin Meimei 林美美

Lin Wenxiao 林文肖

Lin Zecang 林澤蒼

liubai 留白

liulichang 琉璃廠

Liu Zijian 劉子健

Lu Luming 陸露明

lunxian shiqi 沦陷时期

Ma Kexuan 馬克萱

Mao Zedong 毛澤東

Mei Qi 梅綺

Mei Xuechou 梅雪儔

minzu fengge 民族風格

mo chan tang 墨禪堂

moxiang 墨象

muban shuiyin 木板水印

Ni Changmin 倪長民

nüxia 女俠

paxiu 怕羞

Pan Jiyao 潘積耀

pinyin 拼音

pingfeng 屏風

Qi Baishi 齊白石

Qian Jiajun 錢家駿

Qian Yunda 錢運達

Qingming shanghe tu 清明上河圖

Qiu Anxiong 邱黯雄

Qiu hong 秋虹

Que hua qiuse tu 鵲華秋色圖

Ren Pengnian 任彭年

rong bao zhai 榮寶齋

Ruan Yunting 阮筠庭

Su Zhe 蘇轍

Sun Xun 孫遜

suona 嗩吶

shan 山

shanshui 山水

shanshui hua 山水畫

shan zhuang tu 山莊圖

shangyuanyin 上元銀

Shanghai meishu dianying zhipianchang 上海美術電影製片廠

shejian de zhongguo 舌尖的中國

Sheng Pihua 盛丕華

shi 實

shijie 世界

shiyan donghua 實驗動畫

shiyan shuimo 實驗水墨

shou pi hou 瘦皮猴

shou yingxi 手影戲

shu 書

shuangbao an 雙包案

shui 水

shuimo 水墨

shuimo donghua 水墨動畫

shuixiu 水袖

taicu shihe tu 太簇始和圖

Taipei 台北

Tang Cheng 唐澄

Te Wei 特偉

texiao 特效

tishen yanyuan 替身演員

Tianjin 天津

tianshu 天書

tingpai 停拍

tudou 土豆

washeng shili chu shanquan 蛙聲十里出山泉

wan 完

Wan Chaochen 萬超塵

Wan Dihuan 萬滌寰

Wan Guchan 萬古蟬

Wan Laiming 萬籟鳴

Wang Gongyi 王公懿

wenren shanshui 文人山水

wenzi xiesheng 文字寫生

wo you 臥遊

Wuhan 武漢

Wu Yonggang 吳永剛

xi 戲

xihua 西畫

moxi 墨戲

xishijian 析世鑒

Xinliang 新亮

xianfeng donghua 先鋒動畫

xiangxin pinpai de liliang 相信品牌的力量

xiangxing 象形

xinguang 新光

xinhua yingye 新華影業

xinzhui shoumo 心追手摹

xingsheng 形聲

Xiuzhen 秀珍

xu 虛

Xu Bing 徐冰

Xu Yi 許毅

xujiahui 徐家匯

xuegao 雪糕

xuegu qiyou 雪姑七友

Xue Meijun 薛梅君

Yan Shanchun 閻善春

Yang Aili 楊愛立

Yang Dechang 楊德昌

Yang Xiaozhong 楊小仲

yi 一

yinshen shu 隱身術

Yin Xiucen 殷秀岑

yingxi 影戲

yuanxiao 元宵

Zong Bing 宗炳

zuoyou 坐遊

Zha Shenxing 查慎行

zhangfa 章法

Zhang Peili 張培力

Zhang Ruifang 張瑞芳

Zhang Shankun 張善琨

Zhang Tiren 張體仁

Zhang Yu 張羽

Zhang Zeduan 張擇端

Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫

zhezhi pian 折紙片

zhishi 指示

Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本

zhongguo lianhe yingye 中國聯合影業

Zhou Mi 周密

Zhou Xiaohu 周嘯虎

Zhou Xuan 周璇

Zhou Youguang 周有光

Zhu Jinshi 朱金石

zhuanzhu 轉注

FILMOGRAPHY

Note: Many translations are original, some are my own.

Chinese-language films

QING XU MENG (*An Empty Dream*) 清虛夢

Commercial Press, 1922

Dir: Ren Pengnian

DANAO HUASHI (*Uproar in the Studio*) 大鬧畫室

Great Wall, 1926

Dir. Mei Xuechou, Wan Guchan

FENGYU ZHIYE (*The Stormy Night*) 風雨之夜

Da zhonhua baihe, 1925

Dir. Zhu Shouju

YICHUANG ZHENZHU (*The Pearl Necklace, aka. A String of Pearls*) 一串珍珠

Great Wall, 1926

Dir. Li Zeyuan

HUOSHAO HONGLIANSHI (*The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*) 火燒紅蓮寺

Mingxing, 1928

Dir. Zhang Shichuan

DAXIA GANFENGCHI (*The Knight*) 大俠甘鳳池

Great Wall, 1928

Dir. Yang Xiaozhong

YU GUANG QU (*Song of the Fishermen*) 漁光曲

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Cai Chusheng

MALU TIANSHI (*Street Angel*) 馬路天使

Mingxing, 1937

Dir. Yuan Muzhi

ZHONGGUO BAIXUE GONGZHU (*Chinese Princess Snow White*) 中國白雪公主

Huaxin, 1940
Dir. Wu Yonggang

TIESHAN GONGZHU (*Princess Iron Fan*) 鐵扇公主
United China, 1941
Dir. Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan

XUEGU QIYOU (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) 雪姑七友
Xinfeng Film Company, 1957
Dir. Zhou Shilu, Lu Yuqi

XIAOKEDOU ZHAO MAMA
(*Where is Mum? aka. Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*) 小蝌蚪找媽媽
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1960
Dir. Te Wei, Qian Jiajun, Tang Cheng

DANAO TIANGONG (*Uproar in Heaven*) 大鬧天宮
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1961; 1964
Dir. Wan Laiming, Tang Cheng

LI SHUANGSHUANG 李雙雙
Shanghai Film Studio, 1962
Dir. Lu Ren

MU DI (*The Herdboy and the Flute*) 牧笛
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1963
Dir. Te Wei, Qian Jiajun

KONGQUE GONGZHU (*Peacock Princess*) 孔雀公主
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1963
Dir. Jin Xi

JIU SE LU (*The Nine-Colored Deer*) 九色鹿
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1981
Dir. Qian Jiajun, Dai Tielang

LU LING (*The Deer's Bell*) 鹿鈴
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1982
Dir. Tang Cheng, Wu Qiang

HAITAN DE TIDIAN (*The Day, on the Beach*) 海灘的一天

Zhongyang; Xinyicheng, 1983
Dir. Edward Yang

HUANG TUDI (*Yellow Earth*) 黃土地
Guangxi Film Studio, 1984
Dir. Chen Kaige

SANSHILIU GE ZI (*36 Characters*) 三十六個字
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1984
Dir. A Da

SHAN SHUI QING (*Feeling from Mountain and Water*) 山水情
Shanghai Animation Studio, 1988
Dir. Te Wei, Yan Shanchun, Ma Kexuan

LAN HUAHUA (*Blue Flowers*) 蘭花花
Beijing Science and Education Film Studio, 1989
Dir. Li Geng

TANG (*Pond*) 塘
Independent work, 2002
Dir. Huang Ying

XIA (*Ode to Summer*) 夏
Independent work, 2003
Dir. Xu Yi

NIANGNAN CUO (*Jiangnan Poem*) 江南錯
Independent work, 2005
Dir. Qiu Anxiong

XIN SHANHAIJING (*The New Book of the Mountains and Seas*) 新山海經
Independent work, 2006; 2009; 2017
Dir. Qiu Anxiong

BAISHE (*White Snake*) 白蛇
Independent work, 2007
Dir. Ruan Yunting

HANZI DE XINGGE (*The Character of Characters*) 漢字的性格

Independent work, 2012

Dir. Xu Bing

HAI GONGZI (*Mr Sea*) 海公子

Independent work, 2014

Dir. Geng Xue

QINGTING ZHI YAN (*Dragonfly Eyes*) 蜻蜓之眼

Independent work, 2017

Dir. Xu Bing

ZHUI FENG (*The Wind*) 追風

Kaijia yule, unfinished

Dir. Edward Yang

Non-Chinese-language films

THE HAUNTED HOTEL

Vitagraph, 1907

Dir. James Stuart Blackton

THE "TEDDY" BEAR

Edison Studios, 1907

Dir. Wallace McCutcheon, Edwin S. Porter

THE REDMAN AND THE CHILD

Biograph, 1908

Dir. D. W. Griffith

LITTLE NEMO

Vitagraph, 1911

Dir. Winsor McCay

BRONENOSETS POTYOMKIN (*Battleship Potemkin*)

Mosfilm, 1925

Dir. Sergei Eisenstein

DIE ABENTEUER DES PRINZEN ACHMED (The Adventures of Prince Achmed)
Comenius-Film GmbH, 1926
Dir. Lotte Reiniger

SUNRISE: A SONG OF TWO HUMANS
William Fox Studio, 1927
Dir. F. W. Murnau

MINNIE THE MOOCHER
Fleischer Studios, 1932
Dir. Dave Fleischer

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN
Fleischer Studios, 1933
Dir. Dave Fleischer

BETTY BOOP IN SNOW-WHITE
Fleischer Studios, 1933
Dir. Dave Fleischer

THE OLD MILL
Walt Disney Production, 1937
Dir. Wilfred Jackson

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS
Walt Disney Production, 1937
Dir. David Hand, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen

TARZAN'S NEW YORK ADVENTURE
Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1942
Dir. Richard Thorpe

BAMBI
Walt Disney Production, 1942
Dir. David Hand, James Algar, Samuel Armstrong, Graham Heid, Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield, Norman Wright

DUCK AMUCK
Warner Bros. 1953
Dir. Chuck Jones

8 ½,
Cineriz; Francinex, 1963
Dir. Federico Fellini

ROBIN HOOD

Walt Disney Productions, 1973.

Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman

THE SHAPE OF WATER

TSG Entertainment; Double Dare You Productions, 2017

Dir. Guillermo del Toro

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Shenbao 申報

Wanying 萬影

Xin guomin huabao (New Citizen Pictorial) 新國民畫報

Xinhua huabao (New China Pictorial) 新華畫報

Xin yinxing (New Silver Star) 新銀星

Xing huo (Star Fire) 星火

Yin hua ji (A Collection of Silver Flowers) 銀花集

Yinxing (Silver Star) 銀星

Yingwen zazhi (English Magazine) 英文雜誌

Yuandong huabao (Far Eastern Illustrated News) 遠東畫報

Zhongguo dianying zazhi (Chinese Film Magazine) 中國電影雜誌

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