HUMA 5730: Animation Theories

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Time & Classroom:
Time: 3-5:50pm, Wednesday
Room: Zoom

Required Readings:
• All available online at “Modules,” Canvas

Course Description:
Animation existed as optical toys long before the birth of cinema, but it was not until the digital age that animation experienced its explosive boom. Recently animation theories began to emerge as a new field of research, offering critical interventions in film studies and even challenging our conventional views of the world. This course explores various theoretical issues in animation studies, such as movement, stasis, affect, automation and agency, TV serialization, digitality, media mix, sound, authorship and spectatorship, gender, race, animals, cuteness, animism and environment. Animated films made in China, Japan, and other parts of the world will be analyzed as case studies. All reading materials, lectures, classroom discussions, and writing assignments are in English.

Course Objectives:
By the end of this semester students should be able to:
• enter the field of animation studies and be familiar with major theories, debates, and approaches
• use a theoretical vocabulary to analyze animated films
• sharpen critical thinking and enhance academic writing
• analyze particular animated films, identify their directors, technologies/techniques, audio-visual styles, and socio-historical condition
• be familiar with major animators, their representative films, and the socio-historical context in which they emerged

Assignments for MPhil and PhD Students:
• Watch all required films and read all required articles and book chapters every week
• Write a reading report and post it online every week (around 200 words)
• At least one presentation (around 15 minutes)
• At least one leading discussion (around 15 minutes)
• Presentation of final research project (5 minutes)
• A research proposal (around 2 pages, double spaced)
• A final paper (around 15-20 pages, double spaced)

Assignments for MA Students:
• Watch the films and read two articles/book chapters every week
• Write a reading report and post it online every week (around 200 words)
• One presentation (around 15 minutes)
• One leading discussion (around 15 minutes)
• Presentation of final research project (5 minutes)
• A research proposal (around 2 pages, double spaced)
• No final paper required

Due Dates:
• 10am, every Monday, Reading Report (submit online)
• 10am, every Tuesday, Discussion Questions (submit online)
• 10am, Nov 14, Research Proposal (email submission)
• 7pm, Dec 2 (last class), presentation of final research projects
• 10am, Dec 15, Final Paper (email submission)

Grading Criteria:
• Attendance: 5% or F
• Participation: 10% (15% for MA students)
• Reading Reports: 10% (30% for MA students)
• Presentation: 10% (15% for MA students)
• Leading Discussion: 10% (15% for MA students)
• Research Proposal: 10% (20% for MA students)
• Final Paper: 45%

Technical Issues:
• Reading Materials: All available online at “Modules,” Canvas.
• Audiovisual Materials: All available online at “Modules,” Canvas.
• Discussions Forum: Students can post questions and comments about this course for open discussion at “Discussions,” Canvas. The instructor will check the forum on a regular basis to address your postings. Your postings will be counted as classroom participation.
• E-mail: E-mail will be used frequently in this course. The instructor will use it to make announcements relevant to the course. You can also use it to ask questions or express your concerns to the instructor. The instructor will reply your emails within 48 hours. Please check your campus email account on a daily basis.
• Contact:
  Canvas: cei@ust.hk Hotline: 2358-6318
  Library Reserve: lbreserv@ust.hk Hotline: 2358-6776
Classroom Facility: Hotline: 2358-6815

Classroom Etiquette

- **Attendance** is mandatory. It is your responsibility to sign up and track your attendance. If you forget to sign up an attendance, the instructor will not make up for it. If you have to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please inform your instructor at least three days in advance and present relevant documents within one week after the absence. Being 5 minutes late for class three times will be counted as one unexcused absence.

- **No Late or Make-up Submission** will be accepted. Please be on time.

- **Preparation**: You are expected to be well prepared before each class begins. Please read related course materials and watch the required films of the week before you come to class. In this way, you can better make the most of classroom discussions.

- **Electronic Devices**: Please turn off your cell phones in class. Laptops, iPads, and other electronic devices are allowed only for learning purposes in class.

- **Notification in Advance**: Always inform the instructor at least three days in advance for absence and other issues that need special attention and accommodation.

- **Religious Holiday Accommodation**: If you wish to claim accommodation for a religious holiday, you should talk to your instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. You need to provide supporting documents.

- **Learning Disability Accommodation**: If you wish to claim accommodation for any kind of learning disability, you should talk to your instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. Please provide supporting documents.

- **Academic Integrity**: Any academic dishonesty of any kind will be officially processed in accordance with the policies of the university.
Week 1 (Sept 9): Introduction: What Is Animation?

Film Screening in Class:
- Miscellaneous animated shorts

Required Readings:
- Paul Wells, “Chapter 1: Thinking about Animated Film,” in *Understanding Animation*, 10-28.

Recommended Readings:

Week 2 (Sept 16): The Art and Technology of Movement

Film Screening:
- Early Disney shorts
- *Princess Iron Fan* (Wan Brothers, 1941)

Required Readings:
- *Eisenstein on Disney*, 7-35.
- Scott Bukatman, “Introduction: The Lively, the Playful, and the Animated,” in *The Poetics of Slumberland*.
- Kristin Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique.”

Recommended Readings:
- Maureen Furniss, “Introduction,” in *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*.
- Miriam Hansen, “Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney.”

Week 3 (Sept 23): Moving Art

Film Screening:
- *Uproar in Heaven* (1961-1964)

Required Readings:
- Du, “Introduction: Animated Encounters: Chinese Animation in Motion,” in *Animated Encounters*.
• Lai-kwan Pang, “Animation and Transcultural Signification,” in *Creativity and Its Discontents*.
• Sianne Ngai, “Animatedness,” in *Ugly Feelings*.

**Week 4 (Sept 30): Automation and Agency**

Film Screening:
• *Metropolis* (Rintarō, Madhouse, 2001)
• *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927)

Required Readings:
• Teri Silvio, “Chapter 1: Animation versus Performance,” in *Puppets, Gods, and Brands*.
• Rey Chow, “Postmodern Automatons,” in *Writing Diaspora*.
• Lydia Liu, “Chapter 5: The Freudian Robot,” in *The Freudian Robot*.
• Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in *Weimar Essays*.

**Week 5 (Oct 7): Suspended Animation**

Film Screening:
• *Astro Boy*, (Japan 1963, released in China in Dec 1980)
• *The Fiery Cliff Slogans* (*Huohong de yanbiao*), 1976
• *The Song of Stone* (*Ishi no uta*, 1963)

Required Readings:
• Laura Mulvey, “Chapter 1 Passing Time & 3 The Index and the Uncanny,” *Death 24 x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*.
• Mely Chen, “Introduction: Animating Animacy,” in *Animacies*.

**Week 6 (Oct 14): TV Animation**

Film Screening:
• *Astro Boy* (1963) (the first episode only)
• *The Story of Afanti* (1979-1988) (the first episode only)
• *Police Chief Black Cat* (1984-1987) (the first episode only)
The Calabash Brothers (1986-1987) (the first episode only)

Required Readings:
- Neil Postman, The Disappearance of Childhood, 67-97

Week 7 (Oct 21): Digitality and CGI

Film Screening:
- Monkey King: Hero is Back (2016)

Required Readings:

Week 8 (Oct 28): Media Mix

Film Screening:
- Persepolis (2007)

Required Readings:
- Joanna Bouldin, “The Body, Animation and the Real: Race, Reality and the Rotoscope in Betty Boop.”
Week 9 (Nov 4): Sound

Film Screening:
- *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* (1979)

Required Readings:
- Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion.”
- James Lastra, “Chapter 3: Sound and Image before the Talkies,” in *Sound Technology and the American Cinema*
- V.I. Pudovkin, “Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*.

Recommended Readings:
- Lea Jacobs, “Chapter 3: Mickey Mousing Reconsidered,” in *Film Rhythm after Sound*.

Week 10 (Nov 11): Animals and Race

Film Screening:

Required Readings:
- Du, “The Dis/appearance of Animals in Animated Film during the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” *positions*.
- Haiyan Lee, “Animals Are Us,” in *The Strangers*.
- Étienne Balibar, “Racism and Nationalism,” in *Race, Nation, Class*.
- Jody Berland, “Introduction,” in *Virtual Menageries*.

Week 11 (Nov 18): Gender and Authorship
Film Screening:

- *Dreaming to be Emperor* (Chen Bo’er, 1947)
- *The Tall Wife and the Short Husband* (Hu Yihong, *Gao nüren he ai zhangfu*, 1989)
- *Cat* (Bu Hua, *Mao*, 2002)

Required Readings:


**Week 12 (Nov 25): Cuteness**

Film Screening:


Required Readings:

- Sharon Kinsella, “Chapter 6: Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*.

**Week 13 (Dec 2): Thing Power, Animism, and Environment**
Film Screening:

- *Princess Mononoke* (1997)

Required Readings:

- Ursula K. Heise, “Plasmatic Nature: Environmentalism and Animated Film.”