

Media 101

Semester 2, 2020
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Coraline & Wilbur





Key Ideas and Questions



- What is the relationship between the fantastical and the real?
- What is the relationship between cinematic invention and Alice's looking glass?
- What can film tell us about ourselves?





Lecture Breakdown



1. Animation and Stop-motion
2. Stereoscopic 3D storytelling
3. Gothic Fairytales
4. Sigmund Freud meets Coraline Jones





Animation



- **Animation:** traditionally refers to moving images drawn or painted on transparent sheets of celluloid known as cels, which are then photographed onto single frames of film.

The Film Experience, p. 119/ 154

Meaning:

- to endow with life or to come alive
- to breathe life (into something) or to awaken
- to move or to be moved

Two (Film) Historical Arguments

1. cinema as a subcategory of animation

Alan Cholodenko: “not only is animation a form of film, film, all film, film “as such”, is a form of animation

2. Animation and cinema are two different technological developments that combine at one point

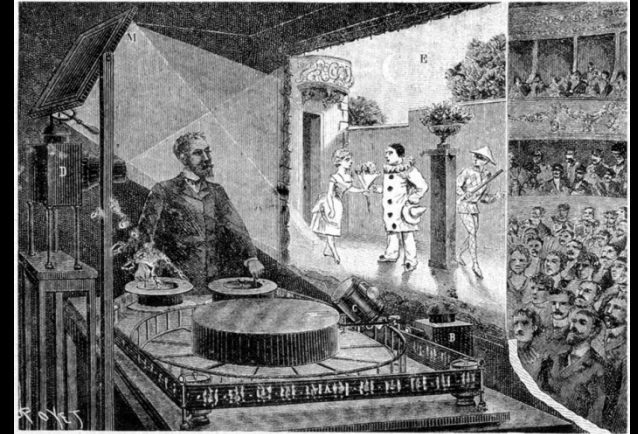
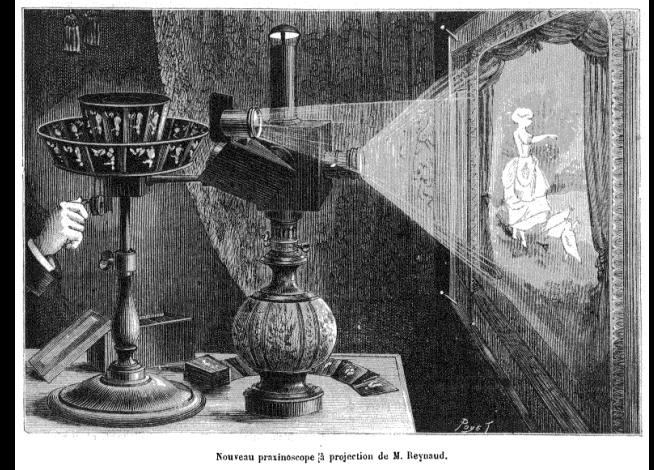




Emile Reynaud



- first projected cartoons
- 1877 praxinoscope (successor of the zoetrope)
- 1889 Théâtre Optique
- hand-drawn animated cartoons
- Could not compete against the Lumière Brother's cinematograph





Théâtre Optique



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncWIXUwN6SY>





Breath of Life



- Animation: From drawing to making puppets
- themes of death and life
- Uses allegories of its own creation
- Relation between life and movement
- E.g. Méliès
- Strong association with the Cinema of Attraction
- combines the real and the fantastic





Disney





Disney's *The Alice Comedies* (1923)



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUdAQ7rtU9I>





Czech Animation



- dates back to the 1920s (tradition of the puppet theatre)
- genuine alternative/ opposition to Disney

Contradiction:

- engagement with the fantastical/ provocation of the imagination as inherently anti authoritarian
- nationalisation of the film industry afforded regular employment and salaries

Despite the totalitarian government— animated films in Czechoslovakia enjoyed freedom



- difficult to censor
- international recognition/ national pride



Dreaming in Czechoslovakia



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xMeOjoPNRc>





Jan Švankmajer



“Surrealism is a journey into the depths of the soul, like alchemy or psychoanalysis”

- Animation not to create a fictional world but rather to reveal the hidden life of the real world

“I am interested not in animation techniques or creating a complete illusion, but in bringing life to everyday objects.”





The Švankmajer Touch



- opposed to the “Disney touch,” (illusory realism)
- Seeing things optically (vision) and textually (touch)
- Touch investigates the psychical power in ordinary objects
- (Decaying) puppets, old toys, mechanized dolls, the “undead”

Švankmajer’s animations are dark, frightening or even disturbing but he suggests that the gentle realism of Disney is even more concerning as it dampens children’s imagination.





Alice – Darkness Light Darkness (1989)



- Surrealist adaptation of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland

Alice dreamworld is linked to the historical development of animation

“Alice thought to herself, ‘Now you will see a film made for children. Perhaps. But I nearly forgot: You must close your eyes. Otherwise, you won’t see anything.’”





Alice – Darkness Light Darkness (1989)





The Stop-Motion Animation



Stop motion photography records, as separate frames incrementally change action, inanimate objects or actual human figures that are then synthesized on film to create the illusion of motion and action

The Film Experience, p. 119/ 154

Coraline:

- Over 55 setups
- Mostly stop motion/ sparsely used CGI
- 1 week of production and 300 people to produce 90 seconds
- Claymation
- Animators as actors





Making Coraline



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGxDQRBKFZI>





Introducing new technologies



- Stop animation has historically been an important platform for showcasing and experimenting with new visual technologies
- Disney tested three colour technicolour in the 1930s

Parallels between the innovation of S3D cinema to the introduction of sound in the 1920s, colour in the 1930s and widescreen in the 1950s

=> *The Wizard of Oz* introduced the use Technicolour



Introducing Technicolour



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lik-qTakrs>





Stereoscopic 3 D



- In *Coraline* the use of S3D parallels the narrative use of colour in the Wizard of OZ
- Coraline's world is depicted in S3D, as a narrative device/celebration of the medium
- Coraline is the first stop-motion film ever shot in stereoscopic S3D and the first 3D movie to explore soft focus through shallow depth of field





Stereoscopy



The principle:

- replicates human vision using two cameras
- provides our sense of depth and three-dimensionality

calls for a rethinking of the cinematic composition

3 D parameters:

- **Interocular distance (IO)** the distance between left and right eye
- **Convergence** –sense of our distance from the object
- **positive parallax** (objects that seem to converge behind the screen surface)
- **negative parallax** (objects that seem to converge in front of the screen)





Coraline 3D



- 3D to differentiate the real world from the other world -> in sync with Coraline's feelings

Ordinary world

- contradictory depth cues -> expressionist distortion
- reduced the interocular distance to make the regular world look more flat
- Creates a sense of confinement (loneliness/ boredom)

Other world

- normal perspective – but uses full 3D depth
- first opens a better world
- Later becomes a point of distress



These effects are supported by the established use of lighting and colour

Depth Cues

- create a sense of three dimensionality of an flat screen (through lighting, depth of field, geometry)



Bedroom/ Other Bedroom





The Gothic



- Neil Gaiman
- Henry Selick (*Nightmare before Christmas*, 1993)

gothic motifs: big old houses, secret spaces, doppelgänger, dream visions, dark tunnels, black cats

- the macabre
- the ghostly
- the anti-expected

The everyday person becomes a heroine or hero – (fairytale)





The Fairy Tale



Assumptions:

- aimed at children
- no relation to reality

However:

- originally aimed at listeners of all ages
- Creepy, gruesome and quite dark
- fantasy to subvert normality resulting in unease/horror
- hopes, desires and greatest fears



cinema has continued to tell, re tell and update the familiar tales

- Often about becoming a subject
- growing up, coping with anxiety and one's darker thoughts
- family relations





The Fairy Tale Family



The Evil Parent Archetype

- Archetypes are characters so abstracted or reduced, they stand in for ideas (e.g. good or evil)
- caregivers become antagonists (the ultimate adolescent fantasy)
- cannibalism, murder and incest
- Fairy tale families are dysfunctional to the point of murder

While fairy tales are often criticised for entertaining unrealistic romantic expectations, their original function was more concerned with broaching uncomfortable subjects/ breaking taboos





Fairy Tale Realities



- Fairy tales address real world problems
- A tool for thought and a way of making sense of reality
- stories of survival -> therapeutic / coping strategy
- extraordinary transformation/ positive change



Coraline can be read as a modern fairy tale, working through similar tropes.



No Place like Home



- Fairy tales force us to rethink the usual equation of family, home and safety

psychological work of the fairy tale

- images of villains and monsters project undirected anxieties and fears

Karen Coats: “The dark landscape, inappropriate lusts, and ravenous villains correspond to the dangerous impulses and aggressions that children actually experience as part of their own mental topography, and fairytales offer narratives that put that scary appetite in their proper places, so to speak .”

- House as a symbol for the protagonist’s mind or psyche
- Coraline’s home as a mirror of her psyche?
- The normal world/ and the other world – the conscious/ the unconscious?





The Unconscious



- **Sigmund Freud:** our minds or our psyches are divided into a conscious and unconscious part
- Freud explains that everything that we lock up in the unconscious nevertheless produces all its effects. (e.g. fears/ painful memories)

Sometimes we unwittingly remember the materials that we have repressed in distorted form

- Repressing our fears and desires never really works
- They come back as uncanny manifestations - often fictional representations that typically feature in our dreams or fantastic fiction such as fairytales/ cinema





Entering the Other World





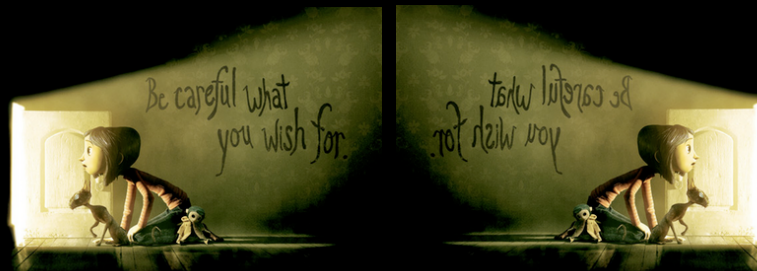
The Return of the Repressed



- the idea that something slips through from the depth of our unconscious and makes an appearance in distorted forms
- Division of the psyche is often imagined as a division into the real world and the other fantastical world (cinema)

Psychoanalysis/fairy tales are about the cross overs between the two

- Physical portals reflects the psychoanalytic work of fairytales
- Coraline enters through the tunnel into the other world/her unconscious





World/ Other World



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSsfuEG4GMA>





The Uncanny



- The Uncanny (1919)
- from the German word “unheimlich” – unhomely -> evokes the home
- Homely: familiar not strange, intimately belonging to the family

The Uncanny occurs when something is both familiar and not familiar – (un)homely

“The uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”

And which now returns evoking **“fear and dread”**





Examples of the Uncanny



- inanimate representations (dolls, doubles or doppelgänger, eyes, distorted mirrors, taxidermy)
- Masks and make ups
- Puppets
- Animation is uncanny





Uncanny Doppelgänger



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haW0vKj99tk>





Doppelgänger Motif



- concept of the diabolical (evil twin)
- negotiates positive and negative aspects of authority or the self

Examples:

- Other mother/ other father/ other Wybie/ other neighbours/ little me
- Grandmother's twin sister
- Caroline – Coraline



Related to the other world as Coraline's unconscious

Coraline imagines growing up as a struggle against a hostile other, but it is more fundamentally a struggle against her own desire for dependency and identification.





Horror Moms



- Horror judges mothers harshly, often criticising over involvement as well as neglect.
- The family breakdown serves as either the source of horror or is the entry point for the monster
- The monstrous feminine
- One purpose of horror film is to stage the threat, and consequent death, of the monstrous feminine
- These moms threaten to absorb us





The Other Mother



- a darker version of Coraline herself?
- Losing eyes = losing self, desires, views, perspective (subjectivity)

Separation between mother and child:

- in psychoanalysis it is assumed that initially mother and child are perceived as one
- growing up means forming our own life's, subjectivities and identities
- Normal process but it can be very painful, even horrific





Separation Anxiety



- Other mother might be Coraline's desire to not separate
- through the fantasy of battling other mother Coraline comes to term with this/ growing up
- Through the fantasy world of the other mother, Coraline achieves self definition and autonomy





Food



Food is equated with love

- Coraline is emotionally starving
- Other mother (unlike real mother) is mostly seen cooking

Food/ love metaphor escalates

‘She wants something to love, I think. Something that isn’t her. She might want something to eat as well. It’s hard to tell with creatures like that.’

- Food as forbidden desires (punishment)
- Food as a means of negotiation/ rejecting food = rejecting other mother





Gardening



- Gardening = nurturing
- parents have no time to do gardening/ spend time with Coraline
- The other mother's garden is all about Coraline
- Garden = metaphor for Coraline's desire that her parent's life be all about her
- narcissistic desire to be cared for all the time





Narcissism and Flowers





Identity Formation



- Coraline needs to learn that her own desires are essential for the formation of a self/ an identity
- She will never be allowed to want anything in the other world/ outside of other mother's care – she will never be allowed to desire
- Coraline gains autonomy by allowing herself to desire but also by allowing her parents to have a desire on their own





Uncanny Hands



Other mother's hand once again exemplifies the return of the repressed

- part of the other mother has not been shot out well enough



Other mother's uncanny hand also a symbol of the animator's hand

- self-reflexivity about the animation process
- particularly in the beginnings of animation it was a common trope to show the hand of the animator



A reminder that all animation is uncanny precisely because it reminds us of the familiar and the unfamiliar – this world and the other world – life and death

