

A comparison of american and japanese animation

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The origin of the modern day term ' Animation' derives from the Latin word ' Animatus', meaning simply ' to give life' yet perhaps the earliest known form of animation, the phenakistoscope, derives its name not from Latin but from a Greek term meaning " deceiving viewer".

The phenakistoscope, invented in 1833 by the Belgian Joseph Plateau was the forerunner of the more famous (and more commercially available) Zoetrope (Greek: Zoe - life / trope - wheel) invented in 1834 by George Horner,

The earliest fully animated cartoon (as they were then more widely known) was produced by a French strip cartoonist Emile Courtet, who, working under the name Emile Cohl used individually drawn images to create the 1908 two - minute long cartoon named Fantasmagorie which subsequently received release in Britain under the title Black and White.

The world's first ' Cartoon Star' Felix the Cat " walked" into the picture and onto the screen in 1919, the creation of already successful comic strip artist Pat Sullivan, Felix was to both revolutionise cartoon making and introduce many

clichés that are still in effect today. Sullivan utilized all the aspects of the comic

strip such as speech bubbles, ' idea' light bulbs and the quite literal use of items such as the humble question mark, in order to bring Felix to life. As Denis Gifford explains:

...[I]f a question mark could be drawn popping out of Felix's head, then it could just as easily be plucked physically from the sky and used as a handy

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hook, especially if a milk bottle stood just out of reach. (The Great Cartoon Stars, a Who's Who!)

While the first cartoon hero may have been a cat, arguably the most famous of all animated stars however, is Mickey Mouse. Featured in "Steamboat Willie" (1928) the first commercial cartoon film to ever include sound, Mickey Mouse, looks quite different from the incarnation familiar to the children of today

Indeed, the ever-changing appearance of animated characters, due mainly to increased improvements in technology has undoubtedly led a much more demanding audience.

picture from IMDb

Where we were once charmed by the grainy black and white image of a happily whistling mouse, more sophisticated techniques and the introduction of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) has opened the door to such astonishing animated films as the Disney-Pixar release "Shrek", the visually stunning "Final

Fantasy- The Spirits Within" (the first animated feature to ever attempt to produce photo-realistic CGI humans) and the deservedly Oscar™ winning Miyazaki Hayao creation "The Spiriting Away of Sen and Chihiro".

Today, animation is everywhere, from televised adverts, children's shows, video games and cinema, animation is no longer simply an art form, but a cultural icon embraced by almost all and guaranteed to instil a childish air of wonder even in the most jaded and cynical of adult hearts.

The application of animation in feature films is by no means a new occurrence - yet the scope of creativity and imagination shown by today's innovators is undeniably impressive and has also been shown to influence more 'mainstream' movie directors such as Quentin Tarantino choosing to add an entire "Animé" sequence to his movie "Kill Bill", to Richard Linklater's decision to make his version of Philip K Dick's "A Scanner Darkly" a wholly animated affair.

The kings however of the art could only be considered American Disney Studio and Studio Ghibli of Japan. The purpose in essence of this essay is to conduct a comparison between these two very different innovators of animatic design.