



TP 18: Can I make a movie?

History of Animation

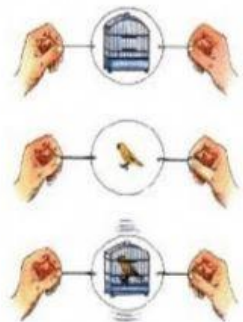
The Early Years: Before Disney



Since the beginnings of time, people have tried to capture a sense of motion in their art. From the eight-legged animals in cave art to the works of famous painters, there is evidence to support the idea that showing movement was a present goal in all artistic environments.



True animation can't be achieved without understanding a principle of the human eye: the persistence of vision. This was first demonstrated in 1828 by **Paul Roget**, who invented the *thaumatrope*. It was a disc with a string or peg attached to both sides. One side of the disc showed a bird, the other an empty cage. When the disc was spun, the bird appeared in the cage. This proved that the eye retains images when it is exposed to a series of pictures, one at a time.



Two other inventions helped to further the cause of animation. The *phenakistoscope*, invented by **Joseph Plateau** in 1826, was a circular card with slits around the edge. The viewer held the card up to a mirror and peered through the slits as the card whirled. Through a series of drawings around the circumference of the card, the viewer saw a progression of images resulting in a moving object.

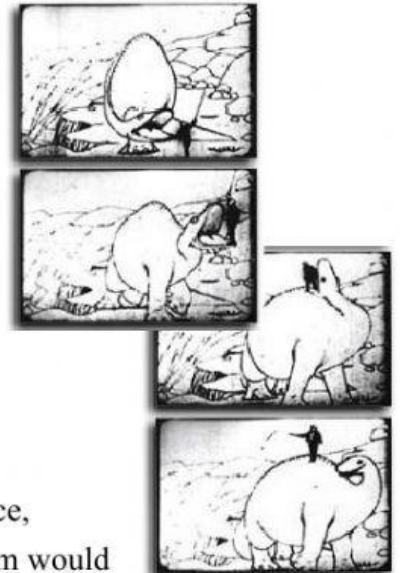
The same technique applied to the *zoetrope*. In 1860, **Pierre Desvignes** inserted a strip of paper containing drawings on the inside of a drum-like cylinder. The drum span on a spindle, and the viewer gazed through slots at the top of the drum. The figures on the inside magically came to life, endlessly looping in an acrobatic feat.



The development of the *motion camera* and projector by **Thomas A. Edison** and others provided the first real practical means of making animation. Even still, the animation was very simple.

Stuart Blackton made a short film in 1906 called *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, where he drew comical faces on a blackboard, photographed them, and then erased everything to draw another stage of the expression. This "stop-motion" effect surprised audiences by making drawings come to life.

In the early 1920s, the popularity of the animated cartoon was on the decline, and movie exhibitors were looking for alternatives. The public was tired of the old formula of gags (actions, especially falling downs or hits to make people laugh) without including a storyline or any character development. What the art of animation could accomplish was not evident in this period, except for the works of **Winsor McCay**, such as *Gertie the Dinosaur*. McCay's major accomplishment was the fact that he developed a character in his dinosaur. The idea of a dinosaur coming to life on the screen was astonishing.



At this time, many of the animations were based on primitive gags and violence, which is still true of cartoons today. One character would hit another, the victim would recover immediately and hit back. Perhaps the hero would use his sword to stop the villain by killing him.

A big change came over the industry in the mid-1920s: commercialization. Big studios took over the smaller industries and set standards for animation. Animators were given numbers of drawings they had to produce per day. Cartoons had to be made in quantity and they had to be cheap.

The same gags were worked and reworked. Audiences were tired of the same drawings coming to life, which caused a depression in the animation business.



1. Read about the history of animation and decide if the sentences are TRUE or FALSE. Correct the FALSE ones.

- A. Early men and women drew animals with eight legs because they wanted to create new creatures.
- B. The persistence of vision shows that our eyes retain images even if we are not looking at them at the moment.
- C. The thaumatrope created by Paul Roget had three images: a bird, an empty cage and a bird in the cage.
- D. With the invention of the motion camera, animation started being more complex.
- E. Using the "Stop-frame" animation, Blackton showed different stages of facial expressions. He drew them, took pictures, and drew again.

F. The main accomplishment of McCay was the visual image of his dinosaur.

G. People always enjoyed animations based on violence and silly movements.

H. Commercialization made animators produce more cheap drawings.

2. Write the movie genres.

