

An Unholy Alliance of Eisenstein and Disney: The Fascist Origins of Otaku Culture

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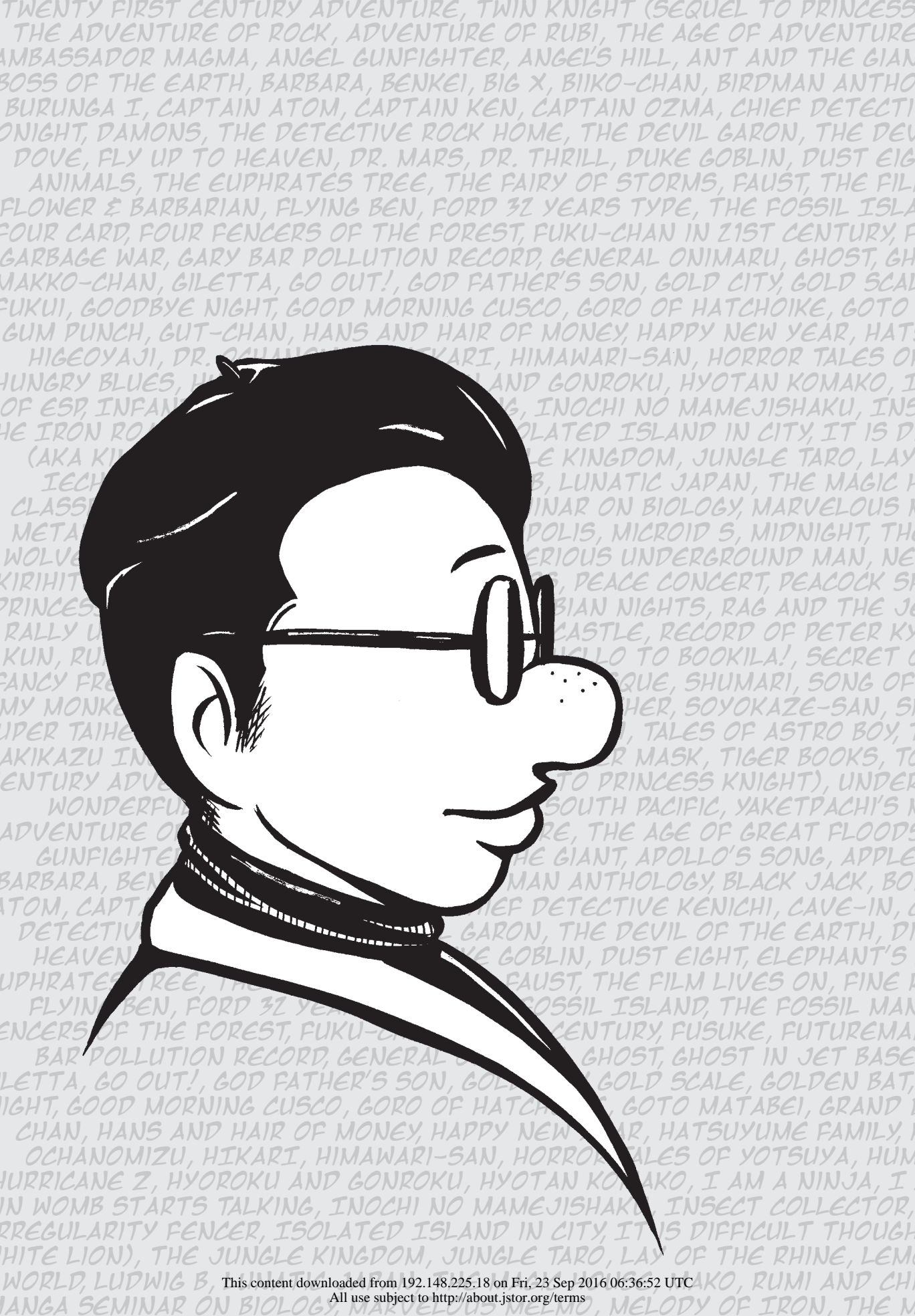
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Everyday Life



ŌTSUKA EIJI

Translated by Thomas Lamarre

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An Unholy Alliance of Eisenstein and Disney: The Fascist Origins of Otaku Culture

The very fact of speaking about Japanese animation and manga to a non-Japanese audience is for me a source of not inconsiderable consternation. When I was young, that is, not much past thirty, ours was the first generation of young people to be called “otaku.” To present this in the passive—“we were called”—creates something of a false impression. It would be closer to the truth to say that we actively adopted the name ourselves. As a matter of fact, the term “otaku” first appeared in the mid-1980s, in a column in a pornographic manga magazine for which I served as editor.¹ The term “otaku” came into the public eye somewhat after, in 1990, when the term was bandied about in the mass media in the context of describing the psychology and preferences of a young man convicted of sex crimes, purportedly a fan of comics, animation, and SFX films. Incidentally, I believe that the porn magazine I was involved in was also one of the sources of what is today called *moe*, a term referring to “elements of sexual attraction of shōjo characters in the world of animations,” which has even become academic terminology for foreign scholars researching Japanese manga and animation. The image of the young man mentioned above, the one who committed sexual crimes, is close to what is in Japan today called *hikikomori* (social recluse) or NEET (not in education,

AN AESTHETIC UNIFICATION
OF EISENSTEIN AND DISNEY
UNDER CONDITIONS OF
FASCISM IS THE ORIGIN
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AND ANIMATION.

employment, or training). One wouldn't think that such terms explain his crime, but from around the late 1980s in Japanese society, the term "otaku" took on very negative connotations, describing young people with severe socialization problems.

Among the readers of the pornography magazine I edited, however, were considerable numbers of Tokyo University students. Among them were Azuma Hiroki and Miyadai Shinji who today speak eloquently to foreign audiences about Japanese pop culture. As they and some of their peers have attained high status in the academy and the world of government officials, the attitude toward otaku in Japanese society has changed dramatically. We've reached the point where officials in the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry have taken notice of the foreign approval of otaku culture, and contemporary artists intent on self-promotion have jumped on the wagon, insisting, quite arbitrarily, that otaku and *moe* are representative of Japanese pop culture.

Incidentally, some ten years ago, I became involved in the trial of the sexual perpetrator. While there is absolutely no excuse for his actions, I became somewhat angry about how judgment of his crimes kept shifting onto otaku hobbies or tastes. He was sentenced to death in 2008. His name was Miyazaki Tsutomu. I think it important to keep in mind both his name and his interest in Japanese manga and animation.

Speaking before all of you who are interested in Japanese manga and animation, I feel it important to relate to you, on the one hand, the negative cultural aspects of otaku and *moe* in Japan today, and on the other hand, to speak about the circumstances in Japan whereby the government, the academy, and contemporary artists make use of otaku and *moe* for the purpose of self-promotion.

The manga and animation about which I have been speaking so critically is today being used to promote the nation of Japan, and so I cannot bring myself to celebrate how these forms of expression have gained in popularity. Because Japanese manga and animation are being used in this way, I wish to speak in such a manner as to challenge the situation in contemporary Japan in which the forgetting of "history" is turning us into a nation of thoroughly triumphant patriots, but also in a manner easy to understand for foreign audiences.

An aesthetic unification of Eisenstein and Disney under conditions of fascism is the origin of the Japanese manga and animation that everyone today associates either with Japanese traditions or with postmodernism. I

should first mention that the two key sites for my thinking about the unholy alliance of Disney and the Russian avant-garde in Japan. The first is the aesthetics of drawing characters, and the second is the aesthetics of staging or presentation.²

Let me first address the problem of drawing characters. In Japan as in Western Europe, an avant-garde art movement arose in the latter part of the 1920s. As Murayama Tomoyoshi has indicated, it had a major impact on the domains of drawing and painting in the form of “constructivism” (Figure 1). Under the rubric of constructivism, Murayama includes (a) Americanism, (b) mechanized forms of expression intended for the masses, (c) glorification of the mechanical itself, and (d) constructivist forms of expression using geometrical designs and materials. In Figure 2, we see an instance of constructivism as young

Japanese artists understood it at the time. The “construction” of a cargo automobile is rendered through the use of geometric designs such as circles and straight lines. While such works are clearly borrowed from those drawn by “original artists” of the Soviet avant-garde, it is very interesting to note how much simpler in execution was the Japanese understanding of constructivism at that time. In the early 1920s, as in any other country or period, such artists were fearless young men. Figure 3 shows some of the young men who participated in the Japanese avant-garde art movement of the 1920s. Takamizawa Michinao is among them. They were the first in modern Japanese art to stage all manner of “performances”—enacting strange dances half nude, as in Figure

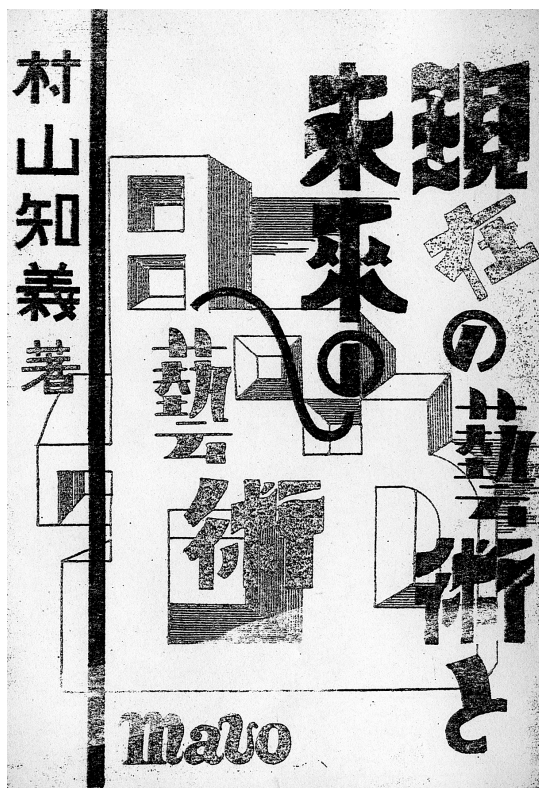


FIGURE 1. Murayama Tomoyoshi, from *Genzai no geijutsu to mirai ni geijutsu* (1924).

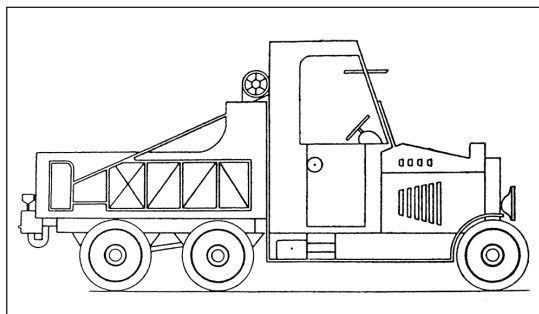


FIGURE 2. Yanase Masamu, “Kamotsu jidōsha,” from *Mizue* (July 1925).

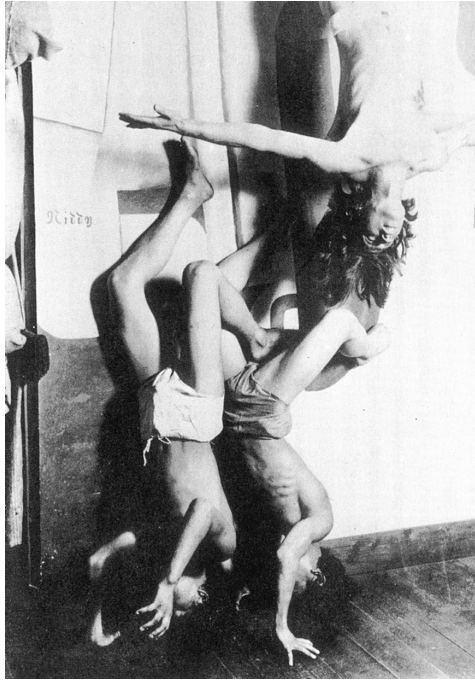


FIGURE 3. “Odori” featuring Iwanofu Sumiyabitchi, Okada Tatsuo, and Takamizawa Michinao, from 1920 *nendai Nihon* exhibition catalogue (1988).



FIGURE 4. Tagawa Suiho, *Norakuro jōtōhei* (1931).

tally contrast this rabbit with Mickey Mouse (which we are unable to reproduce due to copyright), however, you’ll surely see that the character Norakuro bears greater resemblance to Mickey Mouse.

3, or wandering around the city with drawings in a cart and calling it an “art exhibition” or throwing stones at authorized art exhibitions and running off.

In the 1930s, however, Stalin began to criticize constructivist artists in the Soviet Union. Under the influence of Soviet socialism, many of the avant-grade artists in Taishō Japan shifted their emphasis from constructivism to social realism. One of the young men among them, Takakimi Michinao, suddenly changed his name to Tagawa Suiho and started to produce works like the one shown in Figure 4—the character Norakuro. Takakimi transformed himself into manga artist Tagawa Suiho in 1931, the first year of the Fifteen Year Asia-Pacific War. That Norakuro was born in the first year of the Fifteen Year War is highly emblematic of the times. Such was the fate of Japanese manga and animation as media produced under conditions of war.

Within Japanese art history, Tagawa is considered a traitor, for he abandoned the avant-garde art movements of the mid-1920s and shifted his allegiance to manga, a mass-oriented form of expression. Yet did Tagawa truly abandon avant-garde art? He did not. Rather he created a ground for modern manga expression by taking up Disney within the framework of constructivism.

Let’s look closer at this process. Figure 5 presents a rabbit from *Chōjū jimbutsu giga* (a twelfth-century picture scroll of “animal person caricatures”), which is often taken as the origin for Japanese manga. If you mentally

In fact, in the 1930s, beginning with Mickey Mouse, massive amounts of American animation poured into Japan. As a result, within a very short period of time, Japanese manga was full of characters modeled on Mickey Mouse and Felix the Cat (Figure 6). And the 1930s saw a dramatic increase in the numbers of manga aimed at children. Suddenly pirate editions of Mickey Mouse were being published. Figure 7 is excerpted from a work called *Mickey Mouse Chūsuke*, which opens with a Japanese mouse who, jealous of Mickey Mouse's popularity, makes himself a costume to become Mickey. Pirate editions of Mickey stories were also produced. Figure 8 shows a work called *Shiro chibi suihei* (Little white sailor). The little white sailor is a white bear, who then is soaked in octopus ink (Figure 9). Here, too, it is abundantly clear that he is Mickey Mouse.

The manga artists who appeared on the scene in the 1930s were conscious of the fact that they were pirating Mickey and company. Tagawa Suiho created *Norakuro* by adopting the techniques for drawing characters in Disney and Hollywood animations. Particularly important was the adoption of the “drawing techniques” for characters established in the American animation industry in the 1920s. Of particular interest are instances like that in Figure 10, where works associated with Tagawa's avant-garde circles—that is, “constructivism”—are cited in the middle of *Norakuro*.

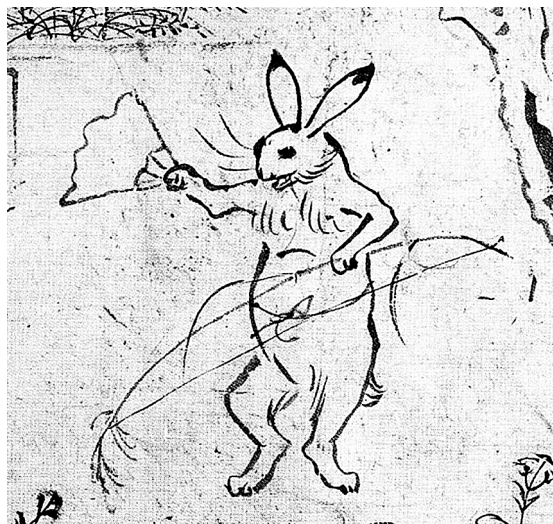


FIGURE 5. Detail from *Chōjū jimbutsu giga emaki* (twelfth century).

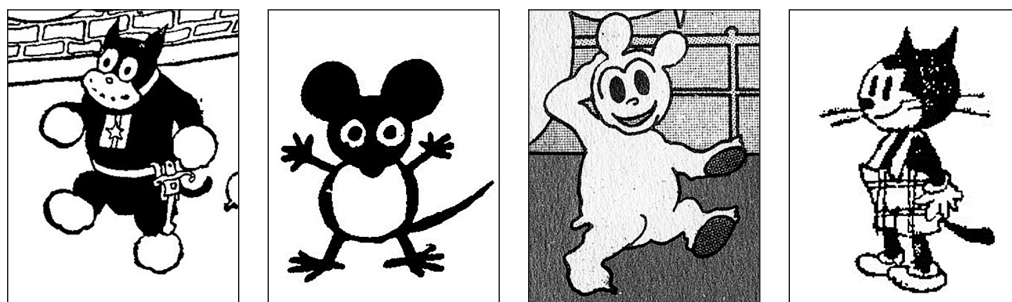


FIGURE 6. The four characters are the stray black dog from Tagawa Suiho's “*Norakuro* series” (1931–39); the mouse from Shimada Keizō's *Bōken Dankichi* series (1934–1938); the white bear by Ōshiro Noboru's *Shirochibi suihei* (1933), and the cat from Shimada Keiji's *Nekoshichi-sensei* (1940).

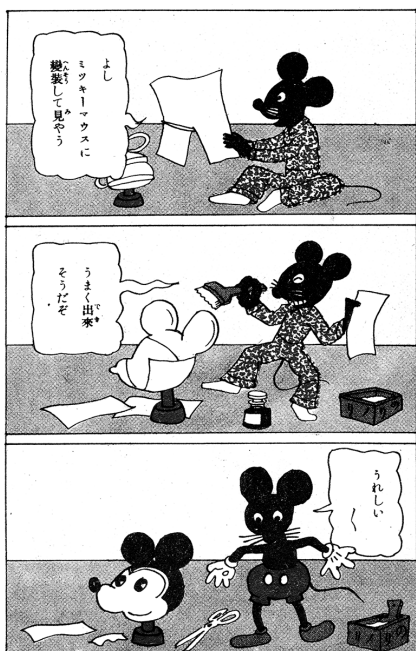


FIGURE 7. Hirose Shinpei, *Mikkii Chūsuke* (1938).



FIGURE 8. Ōshiro Noboru, *Shirochibi suihei* (1934).

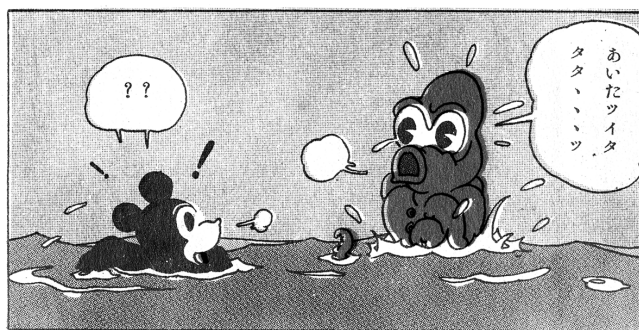


FIGURE 9. Ōshiro Noboru, *Shirochibi suihei* (1934).

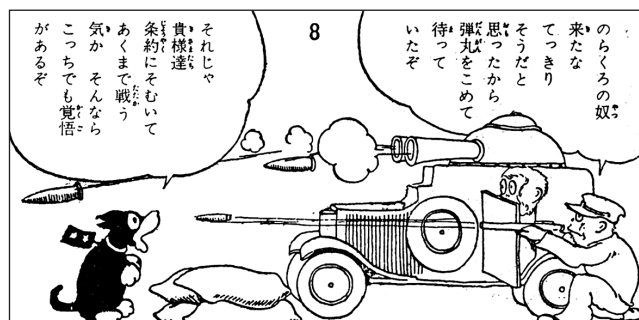


FIGURE 10. Tagawa Suihō, "Mōken guntai no Norakuro ittōhei," from *Shōnen kurabu*, April 1932.

Above all, Tagawa used the Americanism of Disney characters as a form of expression targeted toward the masses within the print medium of manga. As a manga artist, Tagawa had already addressed the topic of “machines” in his very first work, *Jinzō ningen* or “Artificial Human” (Figure 11). The artificial human was a notion borrowed from such works as Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and Karel Čapek’s *RUR*. The robot was an emblematic motif in the Japanese avant-garde movement.

Similarly, Tagawa understood Disney’s characters above all as “constructions.” It was the same for other manga artists. The young men who experienced the avant-garde movement in Japan understood Mickey Mouse as a form of “drawing based on geometrical construction.” Figure 12 shows a guide for drawing Mickey by animator Ōfuji Noburō. Mickey is clearly understood as a “construction” based on “circles.” Thus these men approached the “form” of that representative character of Hollywood animation, Mickey, within the conceptual framework of “construction.” As it became Disneyified, manga expression in 1930s Japan constituted a radical break with prior traditional modes of expression.

The emphasis on *Chōjū jimbutsu giga* as the origin of manga expression begins in 1924 with Hosokibara Seiki’s general history of manga, *Nihon manga-shi* (History of Japanese manga) (Figure 13). In the Edo period, the style of twelfth-century picture scroll *Chōjū jimbutsu giga* became known as “Toba-e” or “Toba-style drawing,” which Kuwagata Keisai made into a highly conventionalized “sketching style.” Kuwagata’s manga were a prolongation of this “sketching style,” which tradition persisted until the mid-1920s, that is, well into the Taishō era. Hosokibara’s book was published just after the rise of what I am calling Disneyification. Even today, however, because histories of Japanese manga still refer to his book, they continue to present *Chōjū jimbutsu giga* as the origin of manga. That tradition came to an end with the advent of



FIGURE 11. Tagawa Suihō, “Jinzō ningen,” from *Fuji*, April 1929.

avant-garde artists, however, and the history of Japanese manga begins in fact with the Disneyification of Japanese manga.

At the risk of getting ahead of myself, a quick comparison of Mickey with the characters of Tezuka Osamu, the pioneer of postwar Japanese manga, makes this Disneyification very clear (Figure 14). Tezuka's style of drawing characters shows him to be a direct heir to the Disney style of manga and animation established during the Fifteen Year Asia-Pacific War.

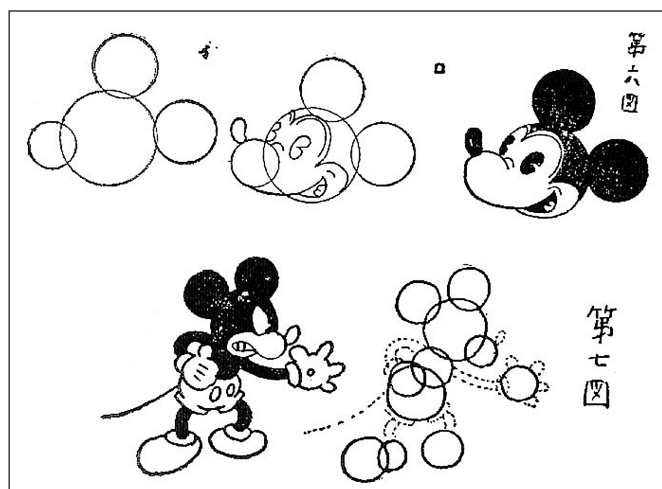


FIGURE 12. Ōfuji Noburo, "Manga no kakikata" from *Patēshine*, May 1937.



FIGURE 13. Hosokibara Seiki, *Nihon mangashi* (1924).

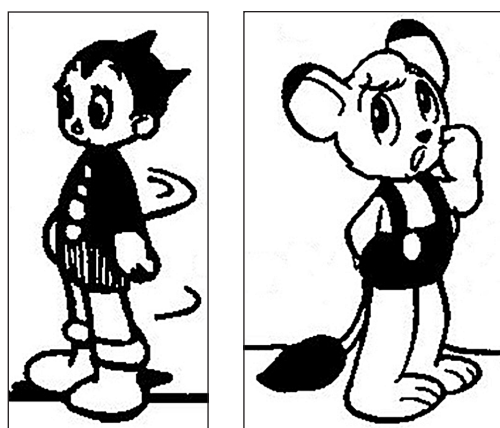


FIGURE 14. The two characters are Astro Boy by Tezuka Osamu (*Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū 21: Tetsuwan Atomu*, Kodansha, 1979) and Leo the Lion by Tezuka Osamu (*Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū 1: Jyaguru taitei 1*, Kodansha, 1977). Used by permission of Tezuka Productions Co., Ltd. All rights reserved.

To return to my discussion, manga expression for Tagawa Suiho was indeed an extension of Taishō avant-garde expression. Yet because he was not much of a theorist, he didn't write much about his work. He has thus come to be seen as someone who abandoned the avant-garde art movement. If contemporary artists in Japan today feel uncomfortable about designating manga as art, it is because they remain ignorant of this history of manga expression as a direct heir to the avant-garde movement. What is more, it so happened that conventions for making such art in Japan came of an initial unification of Disney with the avant-garde art movement.

I would now like to discuss how the conventions for staging or presentation in manga and animation came about through a unification of Disney and Eisenstein. Let me begin with a look at traditional forms of Japanese art.

Figure 15 shows a scene from a twelfth-century picture scroll called *Banno daïagon ekotoba*. Such scenes were drawn and painted onto long scrolls to create a story. If we take seriously the claim of Studio Ghibli's Takahata Isao that the scenes of picture scrolls are like the panels of manga, we would come up with something like Figure 16. Takahata feels that techniques of staging in manga and animation are close to those of Japanese picture scrolls, and so, to make his argument clear, he transformed the picture-scroll presentation into a manga presentation.³ Similarly, Figure 17 shows a scene from a picture scroll produced in the late twelfth century, *Shigisan-engi*. And in Figure 18, we see how my college students transposed it in the same manner as Takahata. These students, who are studying manga expression, were able, just like Takahata, to transpose the picture scroll into a manga panel layout. I did not offer them any concrete explanation of how Takahata had actually transposed a picture scroll into manga form. Yet they produced such a transposition without any particular trouble.

As we see in Figure 19, Japanese picture scrolls have a "base line" running through the middle of picture to provide a point of reference for viewing, allowing the viewer's eyes to shift back and forth from upper to lower halves, or to pause in places. It is, in fact, possible to transpose such a movement of the viewing position into the form of manga panels.

My discussion thus far will probably lead you to conclude that traditional arts are indeed the origin for Japanese manga and animation. Yet it is due to a completely new sensibility established during the Fifteen Year War that we are today able to look at traditional arts in light of developments in manga panel layout. Both Takahata and my students are faithful heirs to it. This very conceptual matrix was brought about through an Eisensteinification of manga and animation expression.

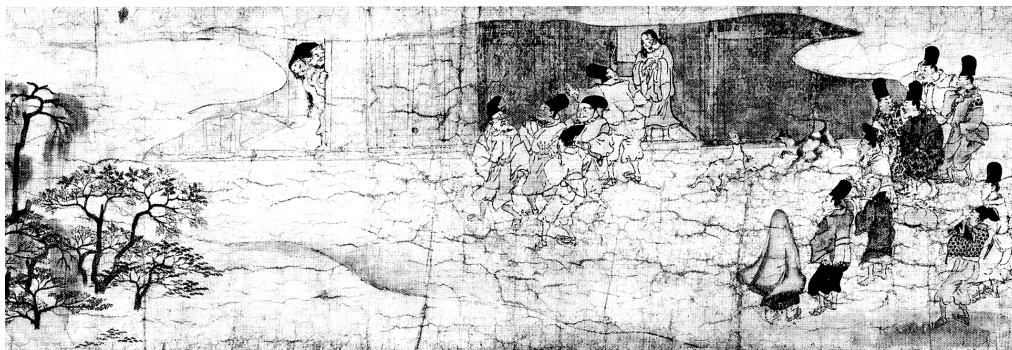


FIGURE 15. Bannō Dainagon Ekotoba (twelfth century).

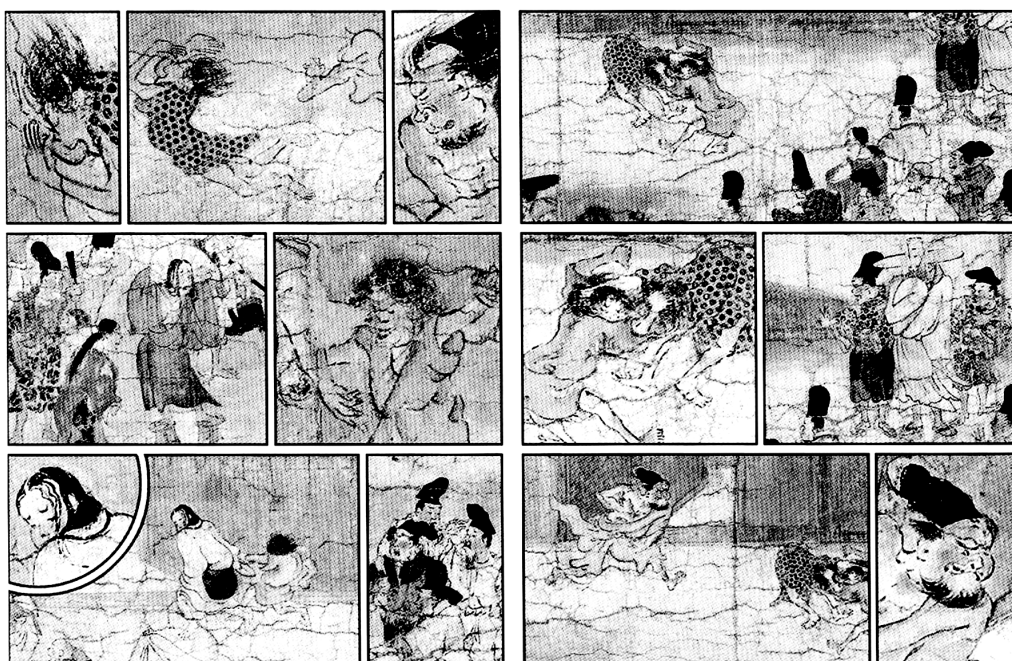


FIGURE 16. From Takahata Isao, *Jūni seki no animeeshon: kokuhō emakimono ni miru eigateki—animeteki naru mono* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1999).

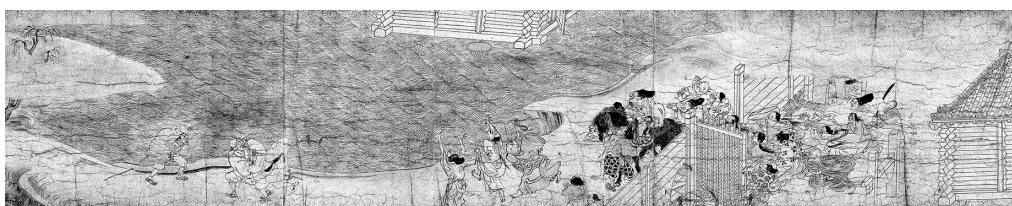


FIGURE 17. *Shigisan-engi* (twelfth century).



FIGURE 18. From practical exercises by students in Ōtsuka Eiji's research group at Kobe Design University (2011).

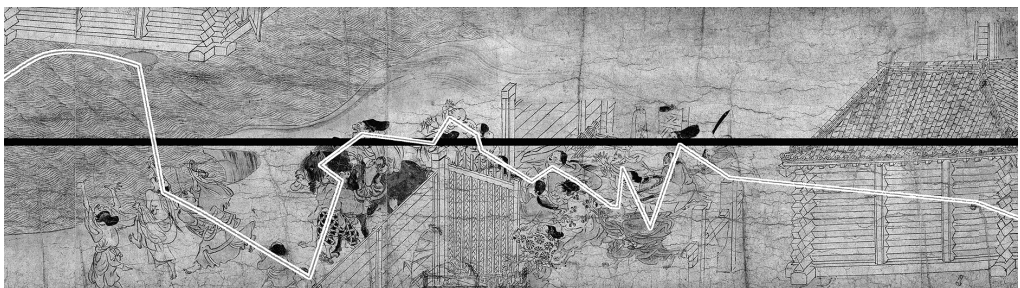


FIGURE 19. *Shigisan-engi* (twelfth century) with base line drawn.

Consequently, it is necessary for us to gain some understanding of the powerful impact of Eisenstein's montage theory in Japan between 1931 and 1945. Figure 20 shows but one of many of Japanese translations of Eisenstein and Soviet film theory. *The General Line* (aka *Old and New*, 1929, dir. Sergei Eisenstein) was released in Japan in 1931, but Eisenstein's other films were not released until after World War II. In contrast, his montage theory was

widely translated and introduced. The following episode gives a better sense of the extent to which montage theory spread to the general public:

In Kinugasa Teinosuke's *Reimei izen* appears a title about consumer culture of the Edo period, and the film cuts between the courtesan en route, the lord's procession, and the temple ceremony. Someone in the audience called out, "Montage, that's montage," and signs of respect ran through everyone in the theater.⁴

Such a reaction on the part of mass film spectators indicates that montage theory was widely known. Actually, with the exception of Kinugawa Teinosuke, there were hardly any film people who learned film theory directly from the films of Eisenstein and the Soviets. They looked for Eisenstein-style montage

in European films or, after a certain time, in those of Leni Riefenstahl. In other words, from the 1930s, both Eisenstein's film theory and Mickey animations were widely distributed in Japan, simultaneously.

Montage theory became widespread because young men saw it as a form of avant-garde theory, but there was also another reason. Eisenstein sought out montage within Japanese culture itself. For Eisenstein, all Japanese culture was montage. For instance, he wrote:

Another remarkable characteristic of the Kabuki theater is the principle of "disintegrated" acting. [. . .] [The actor] performed his role in pieces of acting

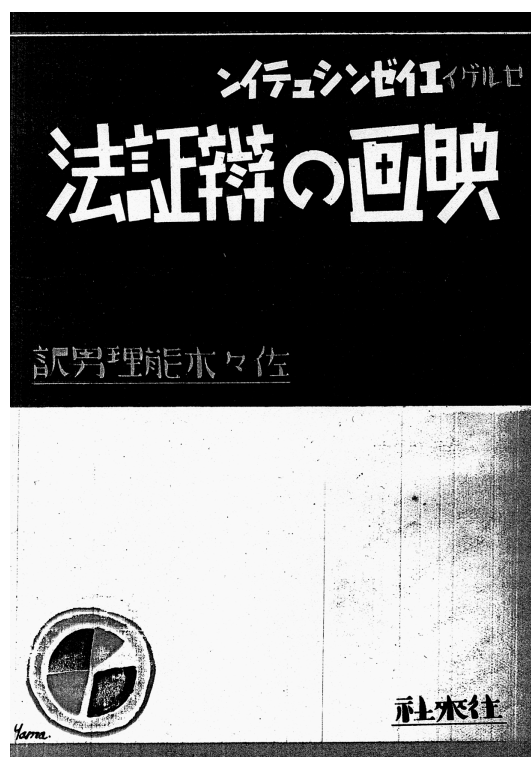


FIGURE 20. Sasaki Norio's translation of Sergei Eisenstein's *Eiga no benshōhō* (Dialectics of film) (Ōrisha, 1932).

completely detached from each other: Acting with only the right arm. Acting with one leg. Acting with the neck and head only.⁵

So it is that Eisenstein saw “montage” in the disintegrating acting of the kabuki actor. Chinese characters were also instances of montage for him:

The point is that the copulation (perhaps we had better say, the combination) of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is to be regarded not as their sum, but as their product [. . .] For example: the picture for water and the picture of an eye signifies “to weep”; the picture of an ear near the drawing of a door = “to listen” . . .⁶

In Figure 21 appears the character that Eisenstein used in his explanation of montage. On the left side is what is called the “radical” for “water.” On the right side is the character for “eye,” which was originally a pictogram. A “montage” of the two characters results in the new character shown in Figure 21, which is read *rui* or *namida* in Japanese, that is, “tears” or “to weep.”

And in Figure 22 we see the practical diagrams Eisenstein used to demonstrate montage within Japanese painting. In other words, he insists that the Japanese method consists in using so-called cuts within a painting. Eisenstein tells us that the Japanese approach a single painting as constructed of parts, that is, as montage.

The Russian avant-garde in which Eisenstein took part also looked for “constructions” in the circus and other popular arts. For them, “constructions” became visible through forms of expression modeled on “primitive” culture or popular culture. Japanese culture was not especially singled out as the only instance of montage, and yet Eisenstein’s account of montage in Japanese culture had a great impact in Japan. As a result, the Japanese of that era began to seize on just about anything as an instance of montage. Figure 23, for instance, shows graphic montage that combines photography and montage in a manner inspired by Soviet propaganda media. From a contemporary perspective, this looks rather like manga panels. Such a technique of treating a series of photographs as cuts within the image and conceptualizing a layout looks just like the method of presentation in contemporary manga. Such an example allows us to look at manga panels anew: both in terms of temporal order and spatial structure within the book, they now appear as montage.⁷

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THEORY AND MICKEY
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SIMULTANEOUSLY.**

泪

FIGURE 21. The character rui or namida.

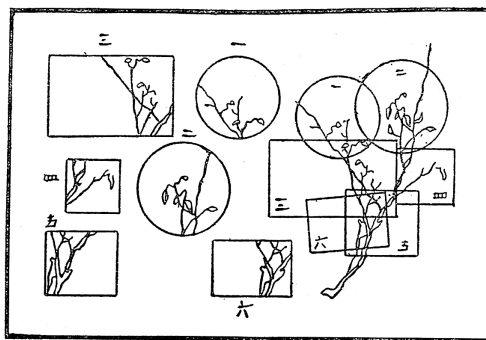


FIGURE 22. From Sasaki Norio's translation of Sergei Eisenstein's *Eiga no beshōhō* (Dialectics of film) (Ōrisha, 1932).

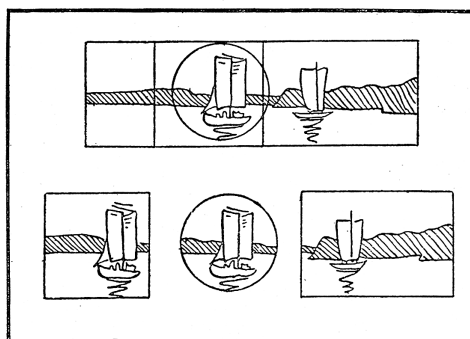


FIGURE 23. Senda Korenari and Horino Masao, "Fade in, Fade out," in *Hanzai kagaku*, April 1932.

In sum, Eisenstein's theory of Japanese culture as montage seems ideally suited to a montage theory of picture scrolls. It was Okudaira Hideo who strongly promoted a montage theory of picture scrolls. But it was Imamura Taihei who subsequently gave it new life by extending it to animation. Imamura even insisted that

the Japanese myths in the *Kojiki* were written in accordance with techniques of montage. Drawing on Eisenstein, Imamura and others insisted that picture scrolls had been constructed in accordance with cinematic techniques such as close-up shots and montage. In this way, the point of view allowing for the transposition of picture scrolls into manga panels took shape in 1930s Japan.

In this context, then, we must touch on the career of Imamura. Imamura wrote the first critiques of animation in Japan as well as critiques of documentary film. After the war, his criticism had a major impact on Takahata Isao of Studio Ghibli. Studio Ghibli recently republished Imamura's book, with a commentary by Takahata Isao.⁸ Imamura's work is typical of film criticism of his era. Which is to say, he immersed himself in Marxism and avant-garde film theory, only to drop Marxism and readily "convert" to nationalism. After Imamura was arrested, he converted. After his release, another form became prevalent in Japan, after the Manchurian Incident of 1931—*bunka eiga* or "culture film," which comprised newsreels and educational films. In Japan of the 1930s and 1940s, documentary films were called "culture films" and were promoted as a part of national policy.

In sum, there were two developments. On the one hand, avant-garde artists absorbed Disney-style manga and animation, and on the other hand, in the wake of the conversion of young filmmakers, the culture film became widely accepted. Filmmakers began shooting documentary films to be used for national propaganda. Indeed, to their chagrin, poets of Marxist persuasion ended up writing scripts for culture films. Among the works of the poet Nakano Shigeharu after his conversion is "Kūsōka to shinario" (1939, The dreamer and the script). The story is that this left-wing poet, starved for work, was asked to write the script for a culture film. In fact, Oguma Hideo, who spoke critically of Nakano's conversion, wrote culture film-style manga conveying scientific pedagogy for children. Within literary history, Oguma is said to be a poet who stuck to his political convictions, but from the standpoint of manga history, he looks in fact like a creator of regulations for manga expression in line with the Ministry of the Internal Affairs.

Thus 1930s Japan saw the emergence of national policy for film and other forms of expression, that is, national propaganda. It is not so surprising

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that Eisenstein and Soviet avant-garde art remained popular. Eisenstein's films, the Russian avant-garde, and social realism were from the outset tools for Soviet propaganda. In Germany, when Joseph Goebbels put pressure on Lang to produce films for Hitler, he presented Eisenstein as a fine example. It is undeniable that Eisenstein's techniques and aesthetics were brilliant as tools for propaganda.

In 1930s Japan, a large number of popular dramatic films were made with military motifs, but not due to governmental pressure; audiences clamored for them, and so the studios went on making them. Non-entertainment documentary films, however, were made under government leadership. The idea that documentary film was a newer art and a loftier one entered the world of Japanese cinema centered on young men who had converted from Marxism. Japan, inspired by Germany, established a Film Law in 1939. Those involved in filmmaking welcomed it, taking it as government recognition of cinema. This Film Law practically mandated screenings of culture films.

As for Imamura, he readily abandoned Marxism but had no intention of abandoning Disney and film theory. Imamura does not give the impression of being a fascist, or a Marxist, or even a patriot. His love was for Disney and film theory. Just before the outbreak of the Pacific War, Imamura published a book called *Manga eiga ron* (A theory of cartoon film). It was a theory of Disney, with the character Mickey drawn on the title page (Figure 24). This book remained in print throughout the war. With the outbreak of the war with the United States, American films, American culture, and English were outlawed in Japan. Yet Imamura continued to write about Disney.

This may explain why the Naval Department ordered the production of animated films in the Disney style. Statements by Imamura like the following may indeed have had an effect:

The prior superiority of Disney cartoons as art lay in their superiority as weapons for propaganda warfare. In them we can see how fine art may play a powerful role in enlightening the public. If we are unable to produce cartoons like those of Disney, we will be overpowered.⁹

Imamura threatens the military, saying that, if Japan does not have animation on par with Disney, colonial rule and propaganda will fail. He even refers to animation as a "weapon." And so the Naval Department, which was far weaker in propaganda than the Army, decided to support animation. Japan

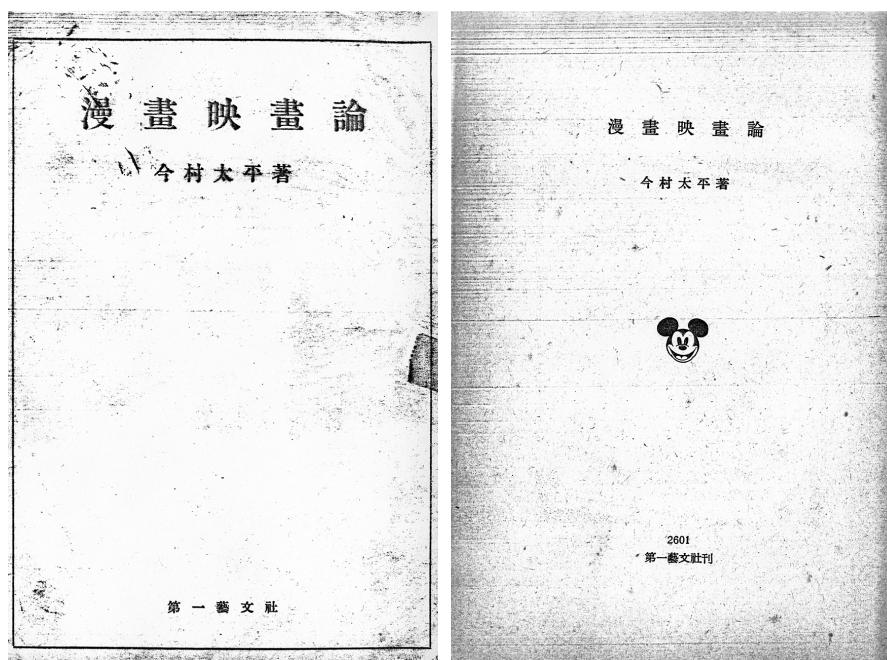


FIGURE 24. Imamura Taihei, *Manga eiga ron* (Daiichi bungeisha, 1941).

by that time was already supporting the special domain of culture films by government fiat. The Navy lent its support to the production of animation as “culture film,” that is, as documentary-style propaganda film. This is how it became possible to produce animation using Disney techniques in accordance with Eisenstein’s theory.

Let’s look at attitudes toward Disney in other countries during World War II. There is some evidence that, even though Disney animation was banned in Germany, Goebbels secretly imported Disney animation to watch. In the Soviet Union, Stalin ordered copying the Disney system of cooperative production, which imitated agricultural cooperatives. Yet these men did not introduce Disney aesthetics into their national animation.

Japan, however, strived to produce Disney-style animation with Eisenstein-style aesthetics. (As I mentioned previously, because Eisenstein’s films were not shown in Japan, the point of reference by default was Lang, whose films anticipated in Nazi Germany the role of Eisenstein, as well as Leni Riefenstahl, who took on the position offered to Lang, directing such films as *Olympia* and *Triumph of the Will*.) Thus a feature-length animated film, *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945, Momotaro: Divine warriors of the sea), was produced under the direction of the Naval Department.

This film recreated in animation the invasion of Dutch-controlled Indonesia by Navy paratroopers in 1942. It might be called a documentary film in animation. It follows the process of the operation for invasion, rather than telling a story. The military operations of these paratroopers also provided material for propaganda art centered on the war, called “war pictures.” Let us look more closely at the aesthetic features of *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei*.

First, there is the coexistence of Disney characters and realism. Characters are drawn as anthropomorphic animals in the Disney manner, while weaponry such as military machinery is drawn realistically (Figure 26) in contrast to the caricaturized “weaponry” found in Disney. Such a coexistence of animation-style characters and realistic weaponry is a characteristic feature of Japanese animation such as Gainax’s *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. I have no particular objection to the coexistence of realistically drawn weaponry with nonrealistic animation characters but simply wish to call attention to this aesthetic lineage.

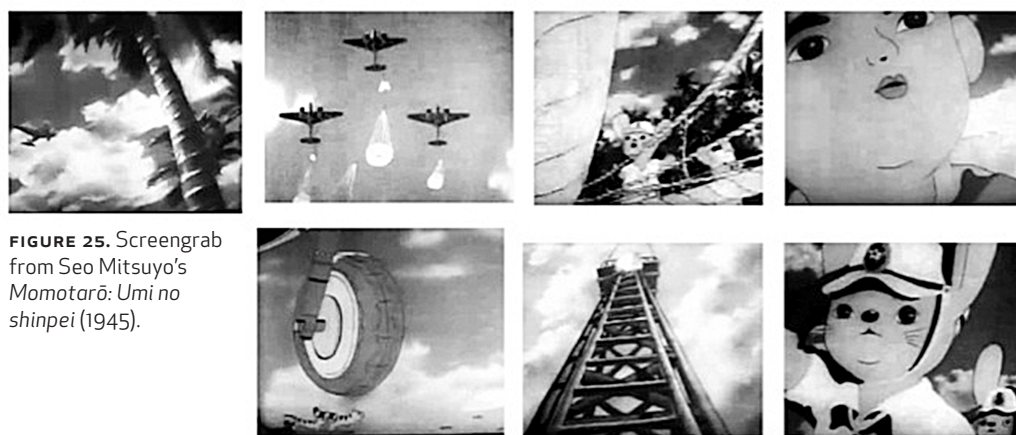


FIGURE 25. Screengrab from Seo Mitsuyo’s *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945).

Second, there is the aesthetics of cinematic composition. From cut to cut, elements related to the camera lens—camera position and camera angle as well as depth and shading—are clearly distinguished. Low angle shots of characters are a prime example. Shooting anonymous soldiers and persons from an extremely low angle is a technique common in Eisenstein’s films, Rodchenko’s photos, and Riefenstahl’s films (Figure 27). A large number of high angle shots is equally common. Composition with high angles was so commonplace that Mishima Yukio, who saw Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* as a boy during the war, made mention of its aesthetics of high angles. The overall composition of screen space is dominated by sharp angles (Figure 28). In

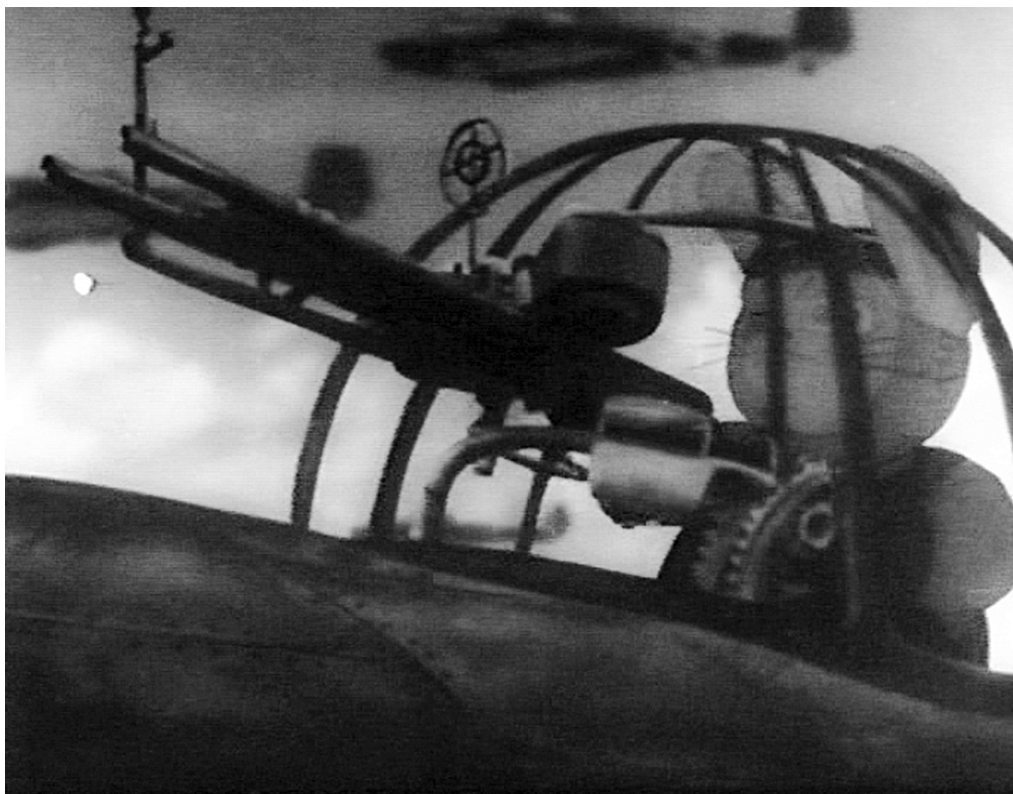


FIGURE 26. Screengrab from Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945).

addition, in Eisenstein's films, objects in the foreground appear blurred, out of focus, which induces an awareness of the camera's presence (Figure 29). This imparts a sense of layers to the image. Compositions consisting of characters and background painted on separate layers were used frequently in *Taiyō no ōji Horusu* (1968, *Little Norse Prince*), directed by Takahata Isao, which may be considered the basis for the aesthetics of Studio Ghibli (Figure 31).

Sometimes this manner of organizing screen space is taken as a characteristic feature of Japanese animation. The Wachowski Brothers' *Speed Racer* (2008) is a live-action remake of Tastunoko Production's *Mahha GOGOGO* (1967–68, *Speed Racer*) using CGI, and in many scenes, they deliberately employ film techniques that separate the background into layers, surely because they take such Eisenstein-style techniques in Japanese anime to be characteristic features of Japanese animation.

Also in relation to cinematic composition, we see in *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* the use of camera work rather than movement as well as compositions with strong backlighting (Figure 32). Here we see the influence of impressionism and Eisenstein.

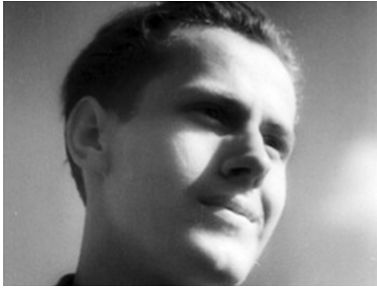


FIGURE 27. Screenshots from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935); Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945); Aleksander Rodchenko's "Pioneer Girl" (1930), and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935).

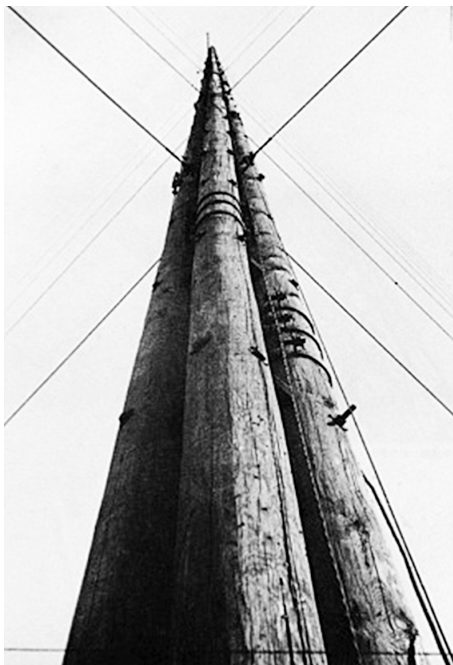


FIGURE 28. Images from Aleksander Rodchenko's "Radio Station Tower," 1929; Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945); and Sergei Eisenstein's *Old and New* (1929).



FIGURE 29. Screengrab from Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945).



FIGURE 30. Screengrab from Sergei Eisenstein's *Old and New* (1929).



FIGURE 31. Screengrab from Takahata Isao's *Taiyō no ōji Horusu no daibōken* (1968).



FIGURE 32. Screengrab from Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945).

Third, there is the creation of a single image through a montage of cinematic cuts. Exactly the same techniques of editing are used in “culture films” and documentary film to connect cuts into an image sequence. All Japanese culture became montage to the point where “Japanese” and montage became the same thing. I should mention in passing that the scene depicting the “labor” of the “collective” in *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* is similar to Eisenstein and Riefenstahl. Miyazaki Hayao is heir to this aesthetics of collective labor.

In sum, in its cinematic composition, camera work, and editing, *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* shows affinity with the documentary style of culture films. The first feature-length animation in Japan was a “culture film” made in accordance with Eisenstein’s film principles using Disneyified characters and animation techniques.

The film was completed in the spring of 1945. Japan soon lost control of Japanese airspace, and Tokyo and Osaka were subject to repeated aerial bombardments. Amid the ruins of the devastated city of Osaka, a boy went to see *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei*. This is what he wrote in his journal:

My first impression of the film was that it seemed to use elements of culture films, and even though called a war film, it had in fact taken on a peaceful form. [. . .]

My next impression was that cartoons had been very beautifully cinematized. As in photography and film, things were depicted from every angle. The scene in which the monkey and dog leap into the river gorge looks so real. What is more, the storyline was clearer than anything before it; it was more like a documentary than a cartoon.¹⁰

The fifteen-year-old boy clearly indicates that, while this film was animation, it was a “culture film,” shot through with documentary techniques and aesthetics. That boy was Tezuka Osamu, the very mangaka who is considered the origin of “postwar” Japanese manga.

Immediately after he saw *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei*, he drew a manga called *Shōri no hi made* (Until the day of victory) in his notebook to show to his friends. In a recently discovered incomplete draft of *Shōri no hi made*, the influence of *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* is evident in the style of cuts. Like *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei*, *Shōri no hi made* is without story. It is a propaganda manga, that is, a culture film–style manga, about the people’s air defense system. Insofar as all of Tezuka’s other works from the same time have stories, the absence of a story makes clear that he had *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* in mind. American animation characters play American soldiers, and Japanese

manga characters play Japanese roles. As is well known, Disney made propaganda animation, and Tezuka evidently understood such techniques of propaganda animation in “mobilizing” manga and anime characters. Note that animation-style characters coexist with realistic weaponry, and composition and camera angles are quite diverse (Figure 34). It would seem that, after seeing *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei*, Tezuka translated in manga the techniques of Disney-style cartoon characters and Eisenstein-style animation.

As mentioned previously, Tezuka experienced the Osaka air raids. In the air raids, strafing by the American military killed noncombatant civilians. Tezuka experienced all of this as a child. We see the effects of such experiences in the climactic scene of *Shōri no hi made* (Figure 35). Mickey, piloting a realistically drawn warplane, is firing on a youth resembling Tezuka (depicted with Mickey-style antirealist drawing techniques). The boy is struck in the chest, and blood gushes forth. The sequence of panels includes a series of different angles and short cuts. Historically speaking, such a sequence succeeds in bringing into manga expression the “unholy alliance of Disney and Eisenstein” that had been achieved in animation. The myth that cinematic techniques first appeared in *Shin Takarajima*, created by Tezuka with Sakai Shichima, is truly a thing of the past, but it is true that Tezuka brought “cinematic techniques”



FIGURE 33. Article on the recent discovery of pages from Tezuka Osamu's *Shōri no hi made* in *Mandarake zenbu* 51 (2011).

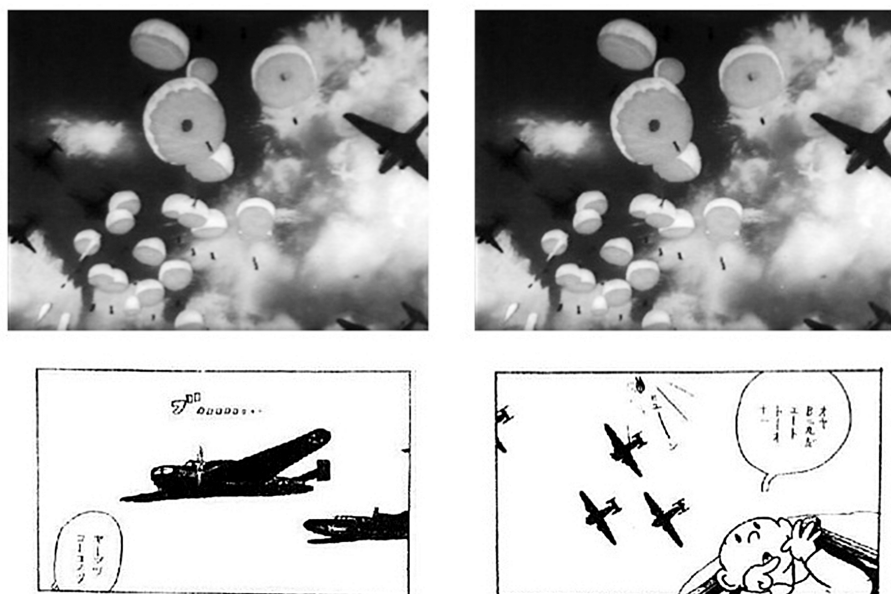


FIGURE 34. Screengrab from Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (1945) and panels from Tezuka Osamu's *Shōri no hi made* (1945; republished: Asahi shinbunsha, 1995). Used by permission of Tezuka Productions Co., Ltd. All rights reserved.

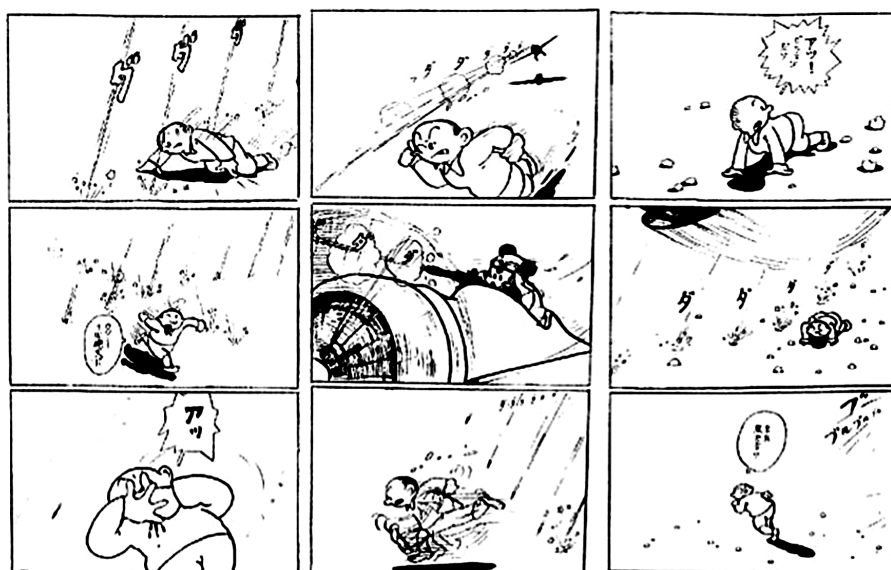


FIGURE 35. From Tezuka Osamu's *Shōri no hi made*. Used by permission of Tezuka Productions Co., Ltd. All rights reserved.

into postwar manga. The cinematic techniques, however, were those of war-time animation expression, and it happened in *Shōri no hi made* not *Shin Takarajima*.

In *Shōri no hi made*, Tezuka made another important contribution to manga expression, the “mortal body” or the “flesh-and-blood body.”¹¹ Tezuka uses Disney-style drawing techniques to depict the youth who resembles him,¹² yet he endows his stand-in with a flesh-and-blood body: when Mickey shoots the youth, he starts to bleed. Disney-style iconography and Eisenstein-style realism are combined in this character’s body, making for a new set of conventions. In imparting a flesh-and-blood body to a character deriving from the Disney style, Tezuka determines the nature of postwar manga.¹³ It was then possible to stage situations for Japanese manga and animation characters that presuppose a body at once vital and mortal, capable of violence and sexuality. Contemporary forms of manga expression portraying sexual behavior of “nonexistent youth” are a result of such a development.¹⁴

By way of conclusion, I would like to give one example from Tezuka where the influence of Eisenstein is very clear. In later years, Tezuka wrote about his drawings as follows:

Well, actually, I think of them rather like hieroglyphs. In my drawings, when someone’s surprised, the eyes get round, and when someone’s angry, like Hige-Oyaji-san, creases always appear around the eyes, and the face jumps about.

There are these patterns, you see. Each is a sort of sign or icon [*kigo*]. When you bring together this pattern and that pattern and yet another pattern, there appears a sort of picture where it all holds together. There are hundreds of them running through my head, these patterns for combinations. But it isn’t like fine art, I think of each one as a highly schematic sign.¹⁵

In manga studies today, there is a good deal of serious analysis of what Tezuka calls *kigo*, that is, “signs” or “icons,” yet there is almost no interest in how Tezuka picks up on Eisenstein’s montage theory of Japanese culture in explaining his drawing. Yet Tezuka may be understood as the historical inheritor of the unholy alliance of Disney and Eisenstein in that he evokes Eisenstein’s montage theory in the context of his drawings based on Disney, which allows him to discuss them as “constructions.”

Tezuka was from probably the last generation to be touched by wartime film theory. He developed techniques for “cinematic manga” in the postwar period on the basis of practical applications of theory. Indeed Tezuka worked

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out exceedingly diverse forms of postwar manga expression on the basis of wartime film theory.

Within animation history, there is also an obvious connection between prewar film theory and Ghibli. To put it more precisely, it would seem that Ghibli continued to grapple with the spell of Eisenstein. An account of Ghibli based on this connection remains to be written.

In sum, while manga and anime were Disneyfied, they were also becoming cinematic. This hap-

pened under conditions that can only be described in terms of an unholy alliance of Disney and Eisenstein under conditions of fascism. That wartime aesthetics extends into contemporary manga and anime aesthetics. The creative style of contemporary Japanese manga and animation has changed considerably from Disney, but Mickey and Minnie are still there at the base, and techniques of staging or presentation are in the lineage of Eisenstein.

As such, it is neither Japanese traditions nor postmodernism that we must see in Japanese manga and animation, but rather the genesis of an aesthetics formed under fascism. Animators and animation theorists linked Disney and Eisenstein within a fascist system, arriving at a unified aesthetic. It is precisely this development that explains the international quality of Japanese manga and animation. A form of expression combining Disney and Eisenstein cannot but reach throughout the world.

Japanese have forgotten this history, however, and those outside Japan look for traditionalism or postmodernism in otaku culture, and none of them strive to see the true history of Japanese manga and animation. I leave to you the historical judgment of whether such a history of Japanese manga and animation should be appraised in terms of a miraculous encounter of Eisenstein and Disney or should be criticized as being after all nothing but a close relative of Leni Riefenstahl.

Notes

[This translation is based on the text for a keynote lecture given by Ōtsuka Eiji on Saturday, February 4, 2012, for a conference series entitled *Experiencing the Media Mix*, organized at Concordia University in Montreal by Matthew Penney, Bart Simon, and Marc Steinberg. Ōtsuka subsequently revised the lecture text for translation in this volume. Because the original text was designed for public presentation, I have made slight changes to the text with the permission of the author. Notes added to the translation by the translator are marked as such, while Ōtsuka's notes are unmarked. —Trans.]

1. [The article entitled “Otaku no kenkyū” (Otaku research) by Nakamori Akio, which is credited as the official debut of the term “otaku,” was published in 1983 in the magazine *Manga Burikko*. —Trans.]
2. [Ōtsuka uses the term *shutsuen* to refer to the use of montage, camera angles, editing, and image composition. To capture his usage, I have rendered it consistently as “staging or presentation,” but *shutsuen* has broader connotations of “stage direction” and even “acting,” and in fact, the Japanese translations of Eisenstein excerpts use *shutsuen* in these senses. —Trans.]
3. [The book in question is Takahata Isao, *Jūni seki no animeeshon: kokuhō emakimono ni miru eigateki – animeteki naru mono* (Twelfth-century animation: Cinematic and animetic effects seen in our national treasure picture scrolls). (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1999). —Trans.]
4. Tsuji Hisaichi, “Dōsō no Pudokin,” *Eiga hyōron*, April 1938.
5. Sergei Eisenstein, “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram,” in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, and The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1949), 43.
6. *Ibid.*, 31–32.
7. The cine-poem, with its style of arranging lines of poetry in the manner of cinematic cuts, is also part of this new mode.
8. [The new edition is Imamura Taihei, *Manga eiga ron* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2005). —Trans.]
9. Imamura Taihei, *Sensō to eiga* (War and cinema) (Tokyo: Geibunsha, 1942).
10. Tezuka Osamu, *Tezuka Osamu daisen 1* (Tokyo: Magajin hausu, 1992).
11. [A full explanation of this aspect of Tezuka appears in Ōtsuka Eiji, *Atomu meidai: Tezuka Osamu to sengo manga no shudai* (Astro Boy theses: On Tezuka Osamu and postwar manga) (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2003). —Trans.]
12. In the postwar era, Tezuka drew upon Disney models again and again. Tezuka’s work *Jyanguru taitei* (*Jungle Emperor* aka *Kimba the White Lion*) draws upon Disney’s *Bambi*. But then Disney’s *Lion King* is exactly like Tezuka’s *Jyanguru taitei*. Such an original is already a matter of mutual imitation.
13. Tezuka also formed story manga by adding story qualities to the cinematic techniques he had previously developed. But that is beyond the scope of this discussion.
14. [The term “nonexistent youth” gained a certain degree of notoriety in 2010, for on February 24 of that year, there were proposals for a new bill that targeted “characters that were clearly defined as minors [*seishōnen*, that is, under 18].” The bill was rejected in June, but the term became more common in referring to underage manga and anime characters with connotations of sexual interaction with them. —Trans.]
15. Tezuka Osamu, “Interview with Tezuka Osamu: Coffee and tea until late at night . . .” org. and ed. Katsuki Chiseko 香月千成子, *Manga senmonshi Pafu* (October 1979).