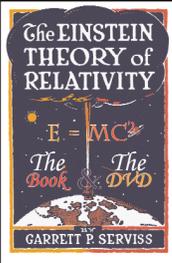


Online Book review May 2006 at

IN THE BALCONY

inthebalcony.com

**The best spot on the web for fans of classic movies!
News, reviews, previews, and lots of other fun stuff!**



Get Smart!

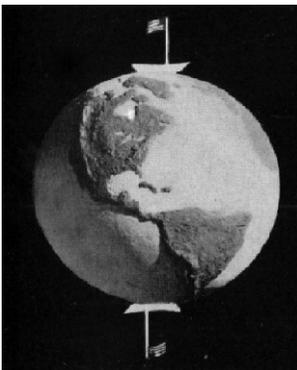
In 1923, Max Fleischer (who went on to create all those wonderful Betty Boop and Popeye cartoons) released a pair of unusual animation/live-action hybrids to explain a pair of then-novel scientific concepts to the masses: Einstein's Theory of Relativity and Darwin's Theory of Evolution. The two rare films are now available on DVD, and we've got the review! Click the pic at left!

Weird Science!

In 1923, Max Fleischer of "Out of the Inkwell" fame produced a pair of unusual films intended to illustrate two of the most talked-about scientific topics of the day. Once thought lost, *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* and *Evolution* are now available on a DVD from Apogee Books, and the 96-page explanatory book that was sold at the showings of Relativity is also included to make a highly attractive package.

The film and book for Relativity were written by Garrett Serviss, who wrote scientific articles for the New York American. Fleischer had served as art editor for Popular Science Monthly during the pre-WWI era. Together, they set out to make a film that would explain Einstein's theory to the masses, and the two-reeler that resulted did such a good job that even I could understand it.

Here is an example of how Einstein's theory might be explained. Suppose I'm standing at the back end of the number 7 express to Flushing. The train and I are traveling 60 miles an hour. I spot a friend at the front end of the car, and to get her attention, I take off one of my inline skates and throw it at her. I have a good arm, so the skate is thrown at 40 miles an hour. To us it is, anyway. To Mayor Bloomberg, who happens to be standing on the platform observing the incident as the train roars by, the shoe is traveling at 100 miles an hour (the 60 of the train and the 40 of the shoe). And to Derek Jeter, in an express train going the opposite direction at 60 miles an hour, the shoe is traveling 160 miles an hour and my friend, if I hit her, is going to most likely be knocked unconscious for several hours, which is why people don't go about chucking skates on the train if they can avoid it.



The film illustrates the above scenario (more or less) and several other interesting tenets of relativity. Optical illusions are demonstrated, and then explanations from the world of relativity are shown to illustrate why we're not seeing what we think we're seeing (this concept was not yet called "spin"). Guns are shot at moving vehicles, people on opposite sides of the earth are asked to point "up", a man poles a raft through a channel without ever going anywhere, and the speed of light remains constant despite everybody's best efforts to do anything about it. It's a fast-moving, highly entertaining film and after watching it and reading the accompanying book (which is well illustrated, and includes a drawing of a bespectacled Koko the Clown reading Einstein's work) I walked around boring my friends for two days with endless examples about relativity. I'm happy to report that I got over that (the fact that I was hit in the forehead with an inline skate and required 11 stitches helped) and am now back to boring them with endless stories about old movies.

Apparently, the Relativity film was a success, because Max then turned to Evolution, in the news due to the Scopes Monkey Trial. Working this time with Edward J. Foyles of the American Museum of Natural History,



Fleischer creates a film that's twice as long but half as entertaining as Relativity. The impressive part of the film is the beginning, which shows the sun and the eight planets forming (Pluto wasn't formed until 1930) from stardust. Most of the film is composed of shots of various strange animals, including walking fish, although there are animated dinosaurs and illustrations of the species of humanoids then believed to have existed, the Java, Neanderthal, Cro-Magnon, and yes, Piltown Man. Primitive African natives (including topless women) are shown and all in all there isn't much animation after the opening sequence. The film ends with the coda, "Some call it evolution - others call it the work of God!"



www.apogeebooks.com

The DVD and book can be ordered from Apogee Books for a low \$15 plus shipping, and at that price it's a steal.

Note that while the films look fine, with only minor damage here and there, and come with an appropriate musical score, a small, faint "Apogee" logo appears in the lower left corner throughout both films.

They can be ordered here: <http://www.cgpublishing.com/Books/DVD/Einstein.html>

...and pay no attention to the hyperbole written to describe the film, which suggests that Steamboat Willie is considered the first cartoon.