

The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation **Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston**

The Illusion of Life reading for this week's topic on Physics and Visualization lends itself as a primer in animation and lays its foundation. The authors introduce the book by listing the fundamental principles of animation and its evolution. The authors recount these principles from what they have experienced on interacting with Walt Disney, the man behind the huge entertainment conglomerate. Anecdotes from their interactions appear under every principle and this way the reader can truly see the genius of Walt Disney. It is noteworthy that these principles are used even today, almost religiously, as the rules of animation. It was interesting to note that artists and animators recruited into the animation company are taught these techniques that give them the upper hand of being a Walt Disney animator.

Each of the 12 principles of animation is thoroughly explained – from how it came to be a principle in the first place to why it was important. The authors reiterate that these principles are necessary to the extent that makes them inform the reader of the consequences and the haphazardness that would occur in the animations if it lacked these principles. The principles are then elucidated with examples. Some of the most interesting ones were the demonstration of emotions through a half filled flour sack (Page 4), the importance of timing through the bouncing ball animations that could make it seem as an injured rabbit or an angry grasshopper or a sleepy frog (Page 6). More interesting examples, like the animations of “chewing” (Page 3), “determination” (Page 5) etc. demonstrate the wonder what the principles, if followed, can achieve. That is, it brings to life seemingly inanimate objects and imaginary characters thus befitting the title of the book, The Illusion of Life.

The most enlightening principles, in my opinion, were that of Arcs, Secondary Action and Exaggeration. To me the fact that every action takes place in arcs was completely new. Also, while the main action is most important in an animation, secondary actions are equally important and almost add value to the main action taking place. While the authors quote Walt Disney by saying that “our work must have a foundation of fact in order to have sincerity”, it can be seen that even in exaggeration in animation, there is an underlying realism in the emotion/action being exaggerated to an extreme. The anecdote that the authors provide from their experience with Walt Disney shows a sort of conflict in defining the terms *exaggeration* and *realism*. Finally, it is concluded that they both do not mean the same thing and that exaggeration actually stems from realism and makes an animation arresting and appealing to the viewer.

Throughout the article the insight of Walt Disney and the animators are worthy of praise. Simple and basic observations, such as knowing how the body works could be invaluable to any animator, artist, theatre enthusiast or any kind of performer. While the poses to be an easy guide to animation, it should be more used as a beginners lesson as from these principles one learns that being artistic is not adequate to be a animator and that a variety of factors, from how many frames need to be drawn to achieving the maximum effect by not increasing production costs; need to be analyzed.

Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life , published in 1981 , is an acclaimed book by two of Disney's Nine Old Men , Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas . It is widely considered to be one of the best books ever published on the topic of character animation. It tops the list of "best animation books of all time" in a poll at AWN. Totalling five hundred and seventy-six pages, a revised edition, with the inverted title The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation was published October 19, 1995. It contains four