

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.

Of the many books on animation and Disney, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* is probably the best. Written by two of Disney's famous Nine Old Men, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, this book goes back to where animation was born, made and enjoyed by people all over the world. At 576 pages, this huge volume probably covers lots of ground on animation except the how-to-do-it part since this isn't really a tutorial book. There are plenty of illustrious stories o (More pictures at parkablogs.com).Â Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston take you into the heart of the "Disney magic" by giving history lessons and animation lessons on every page. I look forward to reading this book every night. *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (later republished as *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*) is a book by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, two of the key animators at Disney during the Golden Age of animation. Topping the list of "best animation books of all time" in a poll at AWN, it is still used as reference on and source of inspiration for character animation.