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Department of Mathematics, Natural and Computer Science

Acting in Animation

Niklas Björklund

hco06nbd

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Supervisor/Examiner: Sharon A Lazenby
Co-Examiner: Ann-Sofie Östberg

Acting in Animation

by

Niklas Björklund

Department of Mathematics, Natural and Computer Science
Högskolan i Gävle

S-801 76 Gävle, Sweden

Email:

Hco06nbd@student.hig.se

Abstract

It is important to remember actors and animators are similar in many respects, but also very different in some. They both frame and provide life to a character, through thoughts and feelings. To obtain a better understanding of how professional animators work and what methods they use, this thesis contains general background information on animation and the Principles in Animation, as well as the analysis of acting and the different acting concepts. By studying these methods and utilizing them in my own work, a short animation was developed to visualize a characters personality through his actions. The result was then applied to a questionnaire to determine if the audience could pick out the characters personality only through the animation without dialog, music, or sound. According to the interviewed audience, they could feel some of the characters emotions and pick out some of the inner thoughts and feelings from the animation.

Keywords: 3D, character animation, acting, movie script, personality, emotions, screenplay, actors.

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1 Introduction

Computer graphics and especially computer animation is becoming a wider and more common method of usage for both products and services. Motion pictures, advertisement, visualization of products use computer animation as their first choice. The technique and applications becomes better and more advanced every day, which makes work more effective and simpler, not so time consuming as it used to be. In the industry today, animation is almost entirely created with a computer, both in two dimensional (2D) and three dimensional (3D) graphics, mainly because of the effectiveness, but also because of the realism in the renders and visualizations of products. It has not always been this approach. For most part of the 20th century, Disney motion pictures were created by drawing on paper with pencils. Nowadays they draw directly in the computer with a pen or mouse or scan the drawings.

No matter which way you look at it, if you use paper and pencils or computers as your application, animation is still animation; a means of creating the illusion of movement.

What is computer animation? Is it more a technique form than an art form? Brad Bird the famous Hollywood director of Pixar's; *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille* writes in the foreword to Ed Hook's book: "*Animation is often thought to be more technique than art, and its practitioners little more than technicians with pencils (or clay or pixels or puppets) in the eyes of the public.*" [1] I think most people see animators in this manner. In reality, it is not the voice actor that provides a character its personality and feelings even if they receive most of the credit. In some part maybe, however for the most part, it is the animator that is the actor. It is he who grants the character life with its movements, reactions and emotions from his own personality.

The notion that animation should be a list of followed rules is wrong for every character would move and act the same. An animation is not good just because it has no technical errors, just like a script is not good because it contains no spelling mistakes [2].

2 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore and try to describe what resembles an actor as well as answer some questions for myself.

- Do animators have any advantages for studying acting principles?
- Can an animator with help of knowing a characters background, characteristics and abilities visualize the characters personality and character only through the method that it is animated?
- Can the audience see the characters personality and feels it inner thoughts just through the animation?

What I expect to gain from this thesis and project is to have a better understanding of actors and acting and what advantages it could have for me as an animator.

3 Problem description

Can an animator with help of knowing a characters background, characteristics and abilities visualize the characters personality and character only through the method that it is animated? Or is the personality developed, just by the way the character moves and acts on certain situations, without help of music, dialogue or monologue. Can the audience see the characters personality and feels it inner thoughts just through the animation?

4 Method

After studying actors, acting and animation, my goal is to somehow show the importance acting has for animators and animation.

I planned to solve this, by downloading an already finished character with an appropriate rig. The character should be as neutral as possible. It should not establish a personality or any emotions by its form and texture.

I shall then make up a background story for the character. I will also develop who he is, what he does for living, special characteristics, the manner he behaves, age, and status, everything that defines a normal person. Then, I will write a small manuscript for a scene in the characters life, and with these descriptions make a short animation, where the character act as himself in the most realistic approach possible. The movie and sound itself should not establish any emotions. The only sound in it will be the background sound, ambient from body movement and no monologue or dialogue.

Most of the issues are rather clear to me, regarding how to deal with the characters background history, storyboard and manuscript. The real challenge is the animation, maybe not the movement. If he is sitting smoking a cigar by the table, how can I show his thoughts and feelings, his inner motivations, and accomplish that without dialogue or music.

My expected result for the research project is to create the best animation as possible from an acting point of view, and the audience perceives some sort of feeling from the character.

Did I succeeded with my goals to create a character with his own personality and emotion and did those show through the animation, in the way he moves, acts, and thinks in certain situations? I shall also create some short interview questions, such as;

- How would you describe the character?
- What emotions and personality does the character reflect?

I shall then interview ten people and compile, compare and show the results.

5 Animation background

The first animated cartoon is probably “fantasmagoire,” by the French caricaturist Emile Cohl in 1908 (Figure 1). If true, then the animation industry is a little more than hundred years old. [1] To make this film, Cohl placed about 700 drawings on white paper with black lines onto illuminated glass. He put one on and then traced the next drawing with little variation on the top of it.

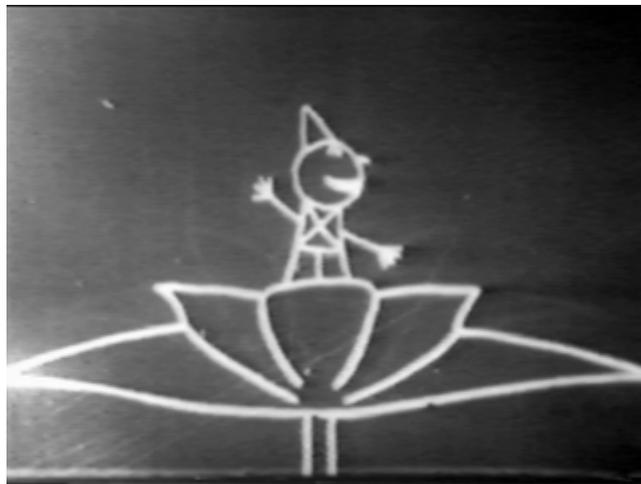


Figure 1: Screen shot from “Fantasmagoire,” 1908.

An animation is a rapid display of images to create the illusion of movement. [3] No matter what kind of animation technique is used, it is just as Cohl created, even if he used a different method than what is used today, animation in its simplest form is still a rapid sequence of images that differs slightly from each other. The usual rate for this is 24 – 30 frames per seconds.

It is established that the animation industry was a little more than hundred years old. In this short period of time, we have seen a major breakthrough in the animation area. We have observed Disney’s classics, such as Mickey Mouse and Snow White to the beginning of computer graphic animation with Toy Story and Monsters Incorporated. And finally, the attempts of photo realism with Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within and Beowolf (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Screen shot from “Beowulf.”

“Today, audiences are not impressed that a character appears to have the illusion of life or that its gestures appear to be motivated.” [1] The actor and acting teacher Ed Hooks has that right; people’s expectations today are sky-high on new motion pictures, television series etc. That is not a bad thing, though it is a challenge. However, it is also an opportunity for animators and the applications to become better and more advanced.

While describing deeper into the animation art, I will provide a little more information about the three most common sorts of animation and the technique behind them.

5.1 Traditional animation

Traditional animation also known as cel animation grew from innovation to an art form at the Walt Disney Studios in the late 1930’s. “*With every picture, actions became more convincing, and characters were emerging as true personalities.*” [11] Cel animation then became the dominated process for animated film during the 20th century. How does cel animation work?

Cel animation is when an animator with the help of ordinary paper and pencils draws pictures. Each picture differs slightly from the one before it. The method the animators use is that they first draw key drawings, which matches exactly in time with the soundtrack. Therefore, the animation timing is exact. After that the animators draw the so called “tweening;” the frames inbetween. Now drawing the backgrounds for each shot is all that’s left. [12] The pictures are then traced onto a transparent cel paper. Where they are painted and photographed onto motion picture film with a special camera (Figure 3). [3]

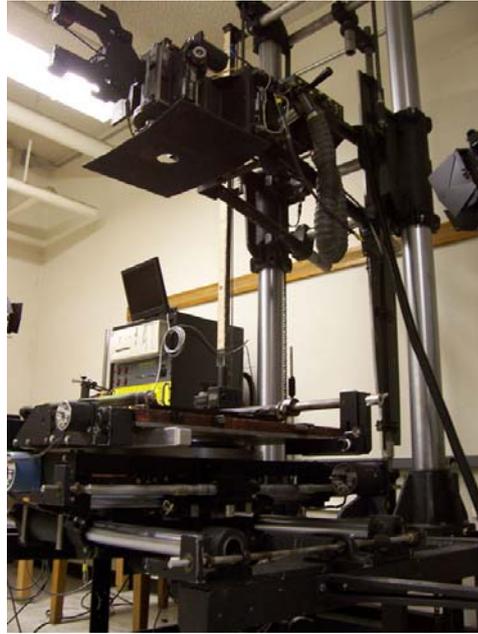


Figure 3: Camera; Oxberry 35mm.

5.2 Stop motion

Stop motion is another common type of animation that is used a great deal. In stop motion, a picture is taken of an object then it is moved a little and then another picture is taken, frame by frame. *“When the images are strung together at an appropriate speed, the eye is fooled into thinking something has moved in a continual manner. It has not.”* [13] Unlike other animation forms the audience does not see the motion at all. The movement that is perceived to have happened in Stop motion happens between the frames. Our brains fill in the gaps, and we think something has actually moved.

There are many types of stop motion techniques; “clay animation,” “cutout animation,” and “puppet animation” to name a few. For example, Clay animation is the technique where the animator uses figures made of clay with some sort of armature or wire inside of them. The animator then poses the figures frame by frame and takes a picture each time. One example of work that uses this method, which almost everyone has heard about, is Wallace and Gromit; the famous British animated short films (Figure 4). [3]



Figure 4: Wallace and Gromit.

5.3 Computer animation

Since Traditional animation became obsolete in the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21th century, computer animation has completely taken over, both in motion pictures and television series but also in cartoons where traditional animation had the major share. What defines computer animation? The Swiss professor Daniel Thalmann wrote in his article;

“Computer animation may be defined as a technique in which the illusion of movement is created by displaying on a screen or recording on a device a series of individual states of a dynamic scene.” [14]

In all animation, no matter if it is computer, traditional animation or something else, the illusion of movement is created.

Computer animation is used both in two dimensional (2D) where the focus lays on image manipulation, and three dimensional (3D) where virtual worlds are built up, and characters can move and interact. [3]

With the help of a computer, frame to frame animation is created. Almost all computer animation today is created using the keyframe system from the early 80s. [4] This system works by setting a keyframe for an object or character in time, move the object or character and then set another keyframe at another point in time. The computer then automatically calculates the transformation/move between the two frames called inbetweens.

In Figure 5, there is an example of a bouncing ball that uses four keyframes, three for the translation in the Y axis, and one for the squash effect when the ball hits the ground.

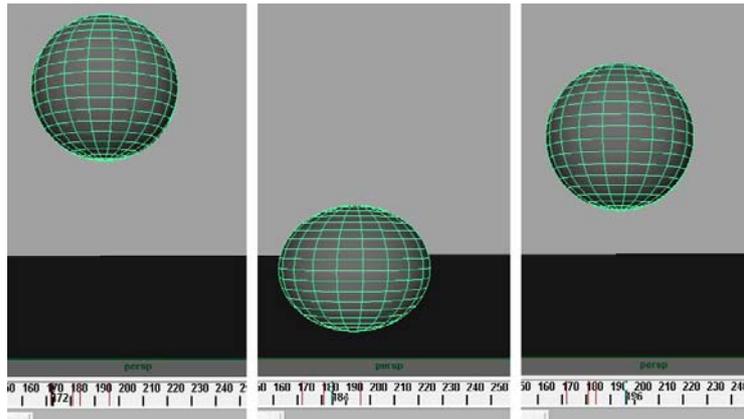


Figure 5: Screen shot from Maya, bouncing ball.

There are also many other computer animation techniques where there is no need for keyframing, such as crowd simulation and particle systems where mathematical functions are calculated.

5.4 Character animation

Since my thesis focus upon acting in animation, it is character animation in computer graphics, which I will mostly focus. Character animation does not just apply to computer graphics. Traditional animation, stop motion and all other animation techniques uses character animation as well.

Character animation is creating the illusion of life, or a clearer definition might be “*Character animation means applying anthropomorphic motion to objects.*” [5] [15] Character animation does not have to be a human or animal character; it can be an object as well.

A great example of an object is the newly made animation feature film *Cars* (Figure 6), where the characters are of course cars. However, they act and think the same as human beings. They talk, feel and interact with each other and the world.



Figure 6: Screen shot from the movie; *Cars*.

Even if objects such as cars could be characters, character animation is very different from animating a bouncing ball or a car moving. In a real or unreal character to create the illusion of life, the character has to have thoughts and emotions that generate its actions. [6] A living character also has limbs that move in certain methods, which implies skeletons and muscles that need to be taken into consideration. How does character animation work?

5.4.1 Skeleton

The simplest and most common method to animate a character is using a skeleton, which are joints that are put together to form bones. The skeleton is then connected to the characters mesh. This process is called rigging. After the skeleton is connected to the mesh, the joints are keyframed and the mesh follows the motion of the skeleton.

5.4.2 Skin deformation

To obtain anatomically believable results, especially on photo realistic characters such as Beowulf in the motion picture with the same name, or the lion Aslan in The Chronicles of Narnia, great skin deformations are very important. Muscles system is probably the best method to use. Muscles are built based on the characters skeleton. When the skeleton is moved, the muscle squashes and stretches and the skin is deformed. [16]

5.4.3 Motion capture

Another useful character animation technique and somewhat different to skeletal animation, is Motion Capture. Motion Capture is the recording of actions and movements of a human actor with a camera. Different points on the actors body and sometimes face is recorded and mapped to the 3D character in the computer. [17]

5.5 Acting in animation

As mentioned in the beginning, animators are often thought as technicians with pencils and “pixels” rather than actors that act an animated character. Animators are in fact the characters actor. It is the animator who grants the character life, emotions, thoughts and personality. An actor and an animator are similar in many respects, but also different in some. They are similar in the manner that they both have to read and understand the manuscript, study the storyboard and try to immerse themselves into the characters. [3] It is very important for both animators and actors to understand characters inner thoughts and emotions which lead to their actions.

Over the last decade the technique and applications in animation industry has have a great progress. Has the acting in animation been left behind? I think it has a little bit. Comparing the classical animation motion pictures such as Shere-Khan and Baloo in the Jungle Book with new motion pictures, today’s characters are pale and dull. [2] The animation is still “perfect” in its form, but

the characters have lost their personality and uniqueness. For example Baloo (Figure 7) in the Jungle book, is very unique in the way he moves, thinks and acts. He is an unforgettable character, just because of the animation.



Figure 7: Baloo from *The Jungle Book*.

We established that the animator is the computer character actor, but does the animator have to be a great actor to do a great animation? Not really, he needs to have an understanding of acting and acting rules and be able to apply these to the character on screen. I did not mean, just following the rules will result in a great animation, because; *“Animation should come from the heart, not the head.”* [18] By understanding those principles both acting principles and animation principles, you have come very far.

6 Animation principles

In animation, there are a large number of principles, rules, and editors that can help the animators achieve an award winning character. The fundamental Principles of Animation are a key element when creating characters.

First a little history about these principles; Walt Disney wanted more realism in the animations from his animators, therefore he set up drawing classes to study actions and movements from real actors. Later on, the techniques that they learned became the rules of animation, which every new animator had to learn. They became the Principles of Animation. [11]

6.1 Squash and stretch

Squash and stretch is the most important principle, almost everything in life squashes and stretches. Either if it is a bouncing ball (Figure 8), or a swelling biceps of a bent arm, it squashes and stretches. Only solid objects such as a glass or a stone do not change their shape during motion. [11] One important thing to remember when applying this technique is that the objects volume does not change during the action. [5] For example; if an object is squashed, its sides must stretch otherwise it appears to shrink. [11]

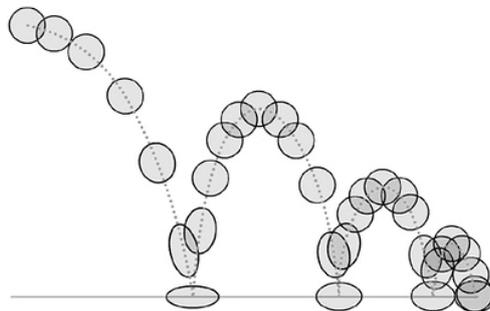


Figure 8: Bouncing ball, showing the squash and stretch technique.

6.2 Timing

Timing is another important principle. Timing is the speed of an action; it helps provide understanding to the meaning of the action, as well as the weight and size of the object. It is crucial to prepare the audience for the anticipation of the action, the time before the action happens. The audience will lose its attention if it is too long, or maybe will not understand the idea behind the action if it is too short. [11]

The weight and size of object is also controlled by the timing in some part. For example for large characters, it takes longer to start a motion and then to stop, and of course the other way around with lighter characters. The emotional state of a character can also be defined by the timing, whether he is happy, nervous etc. [11]

6.3 Anticipation

Anticipation is the time elapsed before the action takes place, the preparation for the movement. Anticipation is great for making the action appear more realistic. If a character jumps off the floor, the knees bend first, or when someone kicks a ball, the kick goes backwards first.

Anticipation is also great to prepare the audience for the action, to cause them to look at the right part on the screen, together with staging and timing. [11]

6.4 Staging

Staging is when the animator directs the audience to look at where the most important part in the scene takes place. To make clear to them what is happening or what is about to happen. [5] The audience should receive the idea behind the action and only one idea at the time. Otherwise the eye does not know where to look. To do this the object of interest should contrast from the rest of the scene, by the placing of the object in the frame, or the angle and position of the camera. [5] [11]

6.5 Follow through and overlapping action

Follow through means the follow through of an action. Not all body parts stop because the character stops. For example when a ball is thrown, after the releasing of the ball the arm continues past the release. [11]

Follow through means that the first action should overlap the second action and so on. Walt Disney explained it this way; *“You walk over to the door – before the walk is finished you’re reaching for the door – before the door is closed you reach for the key.”* [11]

6.6 Straight ahead action and pose-to-pose action

Straight ahead action is when the animator, animates straight from the start to the end of the scene, from the first keyframe to the next and so on. Working in this manner is great when you need some spontaneity in the scene, because it provides more room for ideas. [11]

Pose-to-pose action means that the animator place poses on some keyframes, and then work on the inbetweens. This method needs a lot of planning before it is applied. It is great for animation that requires high quality acting. [11]

6.7 Slow in and out

Slow in and out means that objects needs time to accelerate and slow down. It deals with the inbetween frames between two extremes, the closer to the

extremes the more keyframes are needed, and the further away, less keyframes are needed. An example of extremes is when a character sits down, and standing up. [5]

6.8 Arcs

Arcs are the path of action between one extreme to another. The path is often controlled by the same spline that controls the timing of the inbetweens. These arcs are used for making the animation smooth, and not as stiff as a straight line for path of action would be.

6.9 Exaggeration

A great definition of exaggeration (Figure 9) by Walt Disney was; “*remain true to reality, just presenting it in a wilder, and more extreme form*” which means; if a character is sad, make him sadder, if his worried, make him fret and so on. [5] The use of exaggeration must be balanced though; the animators cannot use it on every action, which would look very unnatural. [11]

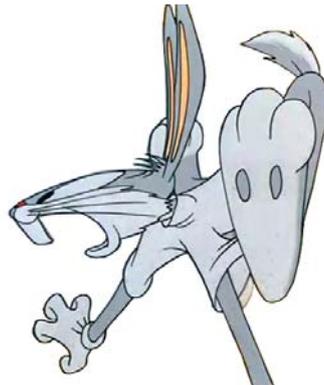


Figure 9: Exaggeration.

6.10 Secondary action

Secondary action means the result from another action. For example when a dog stops running, his ears continue to move forward a bit or a facial expression on a character where the idea behind the action is being told by the body movement. [11] Secondary action helps provide the scene with more life by providing it with a realistic complexity.

6.11 Appeal

Appeal means anything that a viewer feels interesting, whatever the eye is drawn to. Appeal in computer characters corresponds to charisma in an actor. Appealing animation does not mean just being cute and cuddly. All characters have to have appeal whether they are heroic, villainous, comic or cute.

Appeal is very important in designing the characters outcome. [11] If it is too complicated or hard to read, the character loses its appeal. In animation, appeal is created in the posing stage of the character. One side of the character should not mirror the other, no matter if it is a body movement or a facial expression.

7 Acting analysis

Actors and movie stars are among the most appreciated and popular human beings we have in the world today [7]. An actor refers to a person that acts in a comic or dramatic production in the fields of film, television or theater. He displays an already made up character by finding its intensions and motivation and through that, acts in a certain manner [8].

“In its simplest form, acting is nothing more than the transposition of everyday behavior into a theatrical realm.” [10] That statement is also true because even if the characters are made up, they are no different from real people in ordinary social intercourses. In our everyday life, we use our voices, bodies, gestures and costumes to express ourselves, similar to what actors do with made up characters.

Although functioning as a normal person, it does not mean that person is a great actor. There are different techniques and methods that need to be studied and understood.

The first actor believes to be the Greek performer Thespis; he was the first to speak as if he was the character. Before him stories was told in song or in third person. [8] After him acting and actors became more widely spread, but nonetheless it was not until the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century actors become accepted and honored. Nowadays actors, as I mentioned in the beginning of this section, are among the most appreciated and popular human beings that we have in the world. An actor, who has the lead in major feature films, is being called a superstar and actors such as; Will Smith and Angelina Jolie (Figure 10) make millions of dollars for every movie.



Figure 10: Angelina Jolie in the movie; Wanted.

7.1 Method acting

Method acting is a technique which the actor aims to think and feel the thoughts and emotions that the character has and create a lifelike performance. [9] They achieve this by referring these thoughts and emotions to their own in similar situations. Therefore, method actors become their characters throughout the recording period.

This method was invented by the Russian actor Constantin Stanislavsky; he picked up research produced by Sigmund Freud and Pavlov. They were mapping human emotions. [1] The experiment Pavlov did with his dog was a great example. He would ring a bell whenever he fed the dog, and after a while he only had to ring the bell to get the dog to salivate. Stanislavsky thought this method could be used on actors as well, by triggering emotions such as; memories, smell, and sights.

7.2 Stage acting

Stage acting refers to acting in the theater on a stage in front of an audience. It is quite different from acting in film and television. Stage actors are supposed to exaggerate a great deal just as in animation. Film and television actors should not do this for they should move naturally, as we do in everyday life.

Other differences from film actors are that stage actors have to provide a consistent performance. There are no second takes. Stage actors also need to project their voices so everyone in the audience can hear.

This does not say that method acting and stage acting are two different things. In fact it is good for stage actors to use the method acting technique in their performances.

7.3 Presentational acting

Presentational acting refers to the relationship between actor and audience. No matter if it is in films, television or theatre. The actors perform as if he is aware of the audience, by the use of language, looks and gestures.

7.4 Bad versus good acting

What defines good or bad acting? Who decides? Reliable and interesting acting summons good acting, according to the animator Doron A.Meir. [2] I think this is correct, because through thoughts and feelings we receive action and through that we receive credibility. This is similar to real life for we obtain a thought and act on it. Interesting acting requires that the character even if it is a human being or an animated character is unique and easy to remember. No person or character moves and acts the same. It would be very boring if Chip moved and acted just as Dale, in Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers. These characters provided some talented character acting, therefore what about bad acting? Bad acting is just the opposite of good acting, for it does not succeed in achieving a reliable and interesting performance.

8 Acting concepts

In acting as well as in animation, there are a lot of rules and concepts to follow. All actors need to have a basic understanding of these concepts, to display an interesting and reliable character.

8.1 Thinking leads to conclusion; emotions lead to action.

“The mind is the pilot.” That is what Walt Disney once said. [1] Everything begins with the brain, a person thinks of something then he moves accordingly. However, that does not mean you think of every move you make; such as moving your arms while walking or opening your mouth when talking. Emotion comes as a result of thinking; the emotion then leads to an action.

8.2 Acting is reacting. Acting is doing.

Acting is both doing something and/or reacting to something. All acting is reacting to something. For example, there is a reaction when you get stung by a bee. Cars react when the gas pedal is pushed down or when the phone rings you react. Reacting precedes the doing; when the traffic lights turn red, you stop the car. Also, if a character should be cold, the animator should not make his teeth tremble and chatter for that is an example of weak acting. The character should first react to the temperature, then do something about it such as; rubbing his hands together and stamping his feet. [1]

8.3 Characters need to have an objective.

Every character needs to have an objective for otherwise all the action would be unnecessary. As I mentioned earlier, thinking results in an emotion which then results in an action and all action must be in pursuit of an objective. [1] If the character is running, it is an action. Why is he running? To get to the train station in time for the last train home, that is the objective. The objective also affects the action. If the character is haunted by a man with a gun, he would run for his life towards the train, or if he is running to catch the last episode of a sitcom he would not run for his life.

8.4 Characters should play an action, until the next action.

Every character should be doing something, always moving from action to action. There is no such thing as just sitting there, everything has a purpose. A great example of this is Toy Story, when the toys become lifeless as a human enters the room. They are not lifeless; they are just pretending to be. They play the action until the human has left the room again. That is an example of an action because of another external action. There are also internal actions, such as; remembering that the stove was left on, just as the car is pulling out of the

driveway. The action would then be to re-park the car and return to the kitchen to turn the stove off. [1]

8.5 All action begins with movement.

The character should always be moving, even breathing is a movement, and when thinking there are movements, therefore all actions must have movements.

Every thought needs to have an action as I mentioned earlier otherwise it is nothing. When a thought is acted upon there is movement. [1]

8.6 Empathy is the magic key.

The goal for the animators or the actors should be to get the audience to empathize with the character and to relate the characters feelings to their own personal feelings. All humans empathize with emotion, and the goal for the animator or actor should be to expose emotion through the movement, not what the character is doing on a moment-to-moment basis, however what the character feels about or what he is doing. [1]

8.7 A scene is a negotiation.

A negotiation contains conflict; every scene needs some sort of conflict, some sort of obstacle to overcome. In theatrical sense, conflict is not a bad thing. It is what advances the action until the next action. A character can have a conflict with himself, conflict with another character in the scene or a conflict with the situation. [1]

9 Actors versus animators

It is important to remember actors and animators are similar in many respects, but also very different in some. They both frame and provide life to a character, through thoughts and feelings. The best actors act in this manner, and the best animators animate in this technique.

One big difference between an actor and an animator is the method they learn to act. Actors learn from training and presenting scenes. Animators learn from studying the scenes. A great example would be an animator that is concerned whether raising the eyebrows on a character shows curiosity, or how many times a character should blink in a scene. [1] Actors learn not to ask these questions. The result, emotions and expressions should come from inner motivation.

The greatest difference between actors and animators is that actors work in the moment. He goes from action to action without thinking of the emotion itself. A stage actor's performance on Monday is very different from the one on Tuesday, even if it is the same play. The same thing applies to actors in the film industry, even if they could do twenty takes, every single one would be different from the other. [1]

An animator goes through the same process but on a moment to moment basis, and most keep re-creating the same moment over and over again. Why? Because when an animator animates a character, let us say in a ten second shot, the character may be experiencing several emotions during that time. Since ten seconds of animation cannot be finished in the present moment, the animator must return to his feelings a few hours later or maybe even in the next day or two. That is why animators are considered having a more difficult work than actors. [1]

Another difference, but also a similarity between actors and animators is that stage actors obtain an immediate feedback of their work in form of the audience. Animators as well as actors in film and television does not obtain that, they have to perform for the audience in their heads. This is a major disadvantage because the performance is different if you animate or act for a kid's audience other than if it is for an adult audience.

As I mentioned earlier, the animator is the character's actor. Almost every emotion and body movement the animated character shows is the same as the animator behind the screen is feeling and his perception of movement.

Another similarity between actors and animators are the adrenaline rise they feel, actors in their first entrance on a stage and animators in the first screening of his work. No matter if animator does not physically have to be up on stage, it is still he who pulls the strings of the character. [1]

10 Discussion of the animation

10.1 Character description

My character will be a male, 40 years old named Auguste Gudard. He lives in Paris and works as a janitor at the Paris national bank. He is in good physical health, except for some lower back problems he received from scrubbing floors all of his life. He does not have many friends. Since his father died when he was very little, the only family left are his mother and some distant relatives. Auguste does not really like his job as a janitor; however he does not hate it either. His dream is to work as a writer and poet. He even takes a poetry class, where he has met the girl of his life. However she does not know it yet. Auguste sees himself as a gentleman and dresses properly. He is 5'5" tall, bright blue eyes, brown hair, has great hygiene and a strict vegetarian diet. Auguste is not the smartest person on the planet. In fact, he is sort of dumb and clumsy in a funny way. He does not think of himself in that manner, for in his own mind, he is a smart, confident, wine drinking poet. Auguste is not a religious man, but he believes in finding the one, getting married and settling down. That is also his short term goal besides writing and poetry.

Since I was downloading an already finished character, which should not inflict any feelings from the method the character was modeled, a good character description was required. Ed Hooks wrote in his book; "*Actions defines a character.*" [1] This statement is true; however, the description of the character defines his actions as well. How old the character is, his physical health, his family background, his religion and so on. It all defines how the character acts in certain situations, and how the character behaves among others. It even defines in which way the character walks, moves his arms and so on.

The approach I was going for with the description of the character was a somewhat sad, but at the same time a bit charming and clumsy character, similar to Charlie Chaplin and Rowan Atkinson's character Mr. Bean. Maybe it is not the simplest thing to animate such a character, and even harder to make the animation interesting and reliable. However, anything can happen to such a character and everything he does makes people laugh. People can often in some level relate and feel empathy for such a character. Empathy is the key to happiness as Mahatma Gandhi once described it.

When I wrote this character description, I tried not to leave any key characteristics out, therefore every movement the character did in the animation should have a meaning, such as why he spills wine on his shirt, because he is a clumsy person, why he puts his hand on his back when struggling to get on his feet, because he has lower back problems from scrubbing floors all his life.

10.2 Background story

Auguste has been looking at this girl who also takes the same poetry class. He just knows she is the one. She is mature and beautiful, a few years younger than him and looks and behaves as if she wants to find the right guy and settle down. The only problem is Auguste has not dared to ask her out yet.

One day when the poetry class was over for the night, the girl and Auguste were on their way out of the building. They were alone since both of them stayed behind to talk to the teacher. Auguste decides to try his luck, and he puts his hand on her shoulder and asks her if she would like to have dinner with him the next day. She says yes and they decide to meet at Paulie's restaurant at 8 PM the next day.

As I have established earlier the character needs to have a purpose for being in the scene. This defines how and why the character acts in certain conditions. If the character's girlfriend has dumped him right before he enters the scene, he would be sad, angry and easily irritated. Maybe he would have a slow and heavy walk, staring into the floor or not as talkative as he used to be.

The approach I was going for in the background story for the animation was to first establish why the character is in the scene, and why he is at the restaurant which is because he is meeting the girl there for their first date. Second was to establish his inner thoughts and emotions when the scene begins. This can of course change as the time elapses, however, the emotions and thoughts I wanted the character to have was that he is nervous, because he is about to go on a date with a beautiful girl, who must certainly could be the one for him. He is also somewhat confident and happy, because he has finally dared to ask the girl of his dream out on a date, and she said yes.

10.3 Storyboard and Manuscript

Every animation, if it is a story being told needs a manuscript (see appendix) to help the animator to first, know what to animate and second, know the characters' intentions and inner thoughts and feelings.

In the manuscript, the character should enter the scene as late as possible, because the audience can fill in the missing blanks and it is more fun for the audience themselves if they can make up the story on why the character enters the scene. Therefore, the animator does not have to show the character entering the building and walking up the stairs. [1] If I look at my manuscript now, I notice that the character could enter the scene a little later. It does not show the character enter the building; however it shows him being seated at the table, which really is irrelevant for the story.

The storyboard I created was not in the traditional method, where you draw pictures on paper or screen. I used the blocking part of the animation process as the storyboard, mainly because it is easier and I already had everything in my mind.

I decided to leave out the storyboard, because it is not really relevant for the thesis and I only have it as an “animatic” in a movie form.

10.4 Animation review

As mentioned many times earlier, the approach for the animation is that it should be as strong as possible from an acting point of view. Therefore, a recording of a person acting in a scene was needed, for reference material. A friend of mine was more than happy to precipitate.

When the reference material was obtained, the animation process could begin. The pose-to-pose animation technique was used, which means that the animator keyframe poses, then works on the inbetweens. [11] This method is used when the animation needs to have good acting. From posing the character, the next step was to block out the animation, using stepped keys. When the blocking was finished, the only thing left was to start animating the inbetweens. Figure 11 shows the character Auguste in a pose.



Figure 11: Render from the animation.

The animation, while writing this, is not completely finished. In fact there is still a lot of work that needs to be finished. Mainly because, in the early planning process of this project, the animation was around two minutes long. To animate that large amount of frames in this short period of time is very hard and time consuming, even for an experienced animator, to take animation principles and acting concepts into consideration as well, is completely insane.

As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis; can the audience perceive what personality and what emotions the character has, through the character's actions and movements? Even if the animation is not completely finished, the audience may still relate to the character in some level, and see his thoughts and feelings, and maybe know the meaning of his actions. The purpose of this project was never to animate a finished short it was to visualize a character's personality through his actions.

I created two interview questions to see if the audience could understand the character;

- How would you describe the character?
- What emotions and personality does the character reflect?

After showing the blocking animation which contains the full story and the unfinished real animation, I asked ten people to look at these questions, and answer them as truly and good as possible.

I did not bother to put all answers from every single person in this thesis because almost everyone is very similar to the other, with some few exceptions. Here is a summary of all the answers;

On the first question; how would you describe the character?

Eight out of ten people answered that the character looked confident, or that he tries to be confident. They also described him as being a bit clumsy and nervous or maybe a little drunk. The other two would rather describe the character as arrogant and uptight; however, they also thought he was nervous and clumsy.

The majority of the answers to the first question are very similar to what I had in mind, when designing the story and animating the character. The approach for the character was that he should behave as if he was confident, even if in reality he is not. The character should also be a little bit clumsy, and everything he does, should get out of hand.

The second question; what emotions does the character reflect? It seemed like everyone thought the character was experience emotions in many different phases. Several people thought that the character gave the expression to be snobbish, bored, nervous and drunk. Others thought he was superior to others, bored like he is waiting for someone or something, clumsy and crazy. One person thought the character looked like he was trying to act cool, and look good, because he was waiting for a date.

The answers to the second question did not really match the emotions and personality that I wanted the character to have. Some of the answers were close; however, no one perceived it completely right. The approach for the character's emotions was that he first would resemble confidence and happiness, because he is on a date with a beautiful girl. As time elapses and the girl does not show up, he would get more and more nervous, and as an effect of his nervousness he would get clumsy and break and spill things. Since the situation is out of hand, the character would be embarrassed and tries to act funny.

Everyone thought the character looked bored, because he is looking around and checking his watch all the time. That was not my approach. The character should look excited but still nervous in that point of time.

Since these interview questions was asked and answered, based on an unfinished animation, it is hard to draw any real conclusions from the answers. However the any feedback that I will receive later of course will be changed in the final animation.

11 Results and conclusions

The final result for this project as mentioned is not a completely finished animation because of the time frame. From the beginning of this project, my mind was set on animating a complete short story with acting as the main concern. However, the main point of this project was to see if the audience could relate to the character and obtain his emotions and thoughts, through the characters actions and movements.

When summarizing the answers from the interviews, it shows that the people in some level can relate to the character and feel his emotions. Therefore, in that part the animation it did not fail completely. Personally, I think the animation of the character could be a whole lot better, the meaning of his actions should be clearer, the emotions the character is experiencing could also be clearer, and also the timing of animation needs some work.

As mentioned earlier, good acting needs to be interesting and reliable. Reliable acting means that the audience feels that the character's actions are a result of his inner motives. Interesting means the character should be unique and have a great personality. [2]

I think the character succeeds and fails in both statements. The character is reliable because sometimes you can see what emotions the character is feeling, and sometimes you cannot. The character is interesting because he is unique in the way he behaves; on the other hand he does not show a strong personality.

The questions I set out to answer, which also was the purpose for me to do this thesis, were the following:

- Do animators have any advantages for studying acting principles?
- Can an animator with help of knowing a characters background, characteristics and abilities visualize the characters personality and character only through the method that it is animated?
- Can the audience see the characters personality and feels it inner thoughts just through the animation?

The first question there is only one simple answer to it; yes, animators have a huge advantage for knowing acting principles and concepts. If not at least some of these acting concepts mentioned above was applied in the animation, the character would not be as interesting and reliable as he could be.

The second and the third questions can relate to each other. First, it is almost essential for the animator to know the character characteristics, abilities and background story to make a reliable animation. By knowing these things about the character, the animators certainly can display his personality and character. Of course the animator has to have a basic understanding of the animation principles, as well as the acting concepts before.

This answers the third question as well. If the animators succeed in implementing the personality and character of a character, the audience should have no problem to see his personality and feel his thought and emotions. Even by the animation itself, without dialogue, sound or special effects.

A great example of this is the Pixar animator, Cameron Miyasaki's animation; "Bouncing Balls." [20] He succeeds on every plan in his animation, both in an animation principles as well as acting concepts. The audience can really feel the balls thoughts and emotions. This is very impressive because the balls have no face or other features to express feelings, except the movements.

11.1 Future work

Since the animation in this thesis did not get completely finished because of the limited amount of time, the short term goal is to complete it as soon as possible and make it as good as possible. I will then put parts of it in my show reel.

The long term goal for me as an animator is to further study animation and acting principles, mainly acting principles and rules, because I really think a basic understanding of acting is essential for a great animator.

The final animation will be seen on my webpage; niklasbjorklund.com [19] as soon as it is finished.

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Appendix: Manuscript

AUGUSTE arrives at the restaurant a bit early. The WAITER shows him to an empty table.

FADE IN:

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE sits down on the chair, the WAITER gestures to take away the other dinner set since he came alone. AUGUSTE smiles confident and shakes his head

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

The WAITOR goes away; AUGUSTE checks his watch and looks at the surroundings.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

The WAITOR comes back with two menus and fills up the glasses with wine, lights up the candles then leaves again.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE looks at the menu quickly, fingering on the table, Checks his watch again.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE is kind of nervous so he takes a sip of the wine and accidently spill some on his shirt. He hides the stain and look around to see if someone saw. Puts back the glass and tries to rub away the stain, then acts if nothing happened.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE is now more nervous, checks his watch again, hammering on the table with his fingers, shakes his leg frenetic.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE crosses his leg to look a bit less nervous, and just as he does that he hits the table and one of the candles falls over and sets the tablecloth on fire.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE don't know what to do, and in his desperation to put the fire out he pours the glass of wine over it. He hides the black stain on the cloth with one of the menus, then sits down to breath.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

Now he has no wine left in his glass and thinks if the other glass is full and he is empty he would look like a drunk, so he decides to drink hers as well.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE knock backs the other glass of wine. Since he is nervous and little embarrassed of the situation he holds the glass little to hard a breaks it when he is about to put it back.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

The situation couldn't get more out of hand, so he quickly scrubs away the pieces and hide the rest of the glass behind him.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

Now he has two glasses and she only one, so to set everything into order he grabs his glass and throws it away.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

AUGUSTE in a final way to look unaffected by the situation leans back on his chair a little too much and tips over, hitting the table with his foot on the way down so all table ware falls, and he is laying flat on his back on the floor.

INT. RESTURANT PAULIES

The GIRL arrives to the scene, AUGUSTE struggling to his feet just under the table. From the cameras point of view you can see AUGUSTEs head come up at the edge of the table, all messed up in the hair and with a fork in his mouth.

AUGUSTE
hello..!

FADE OUT: