

RESEARCH PROJECT

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**CAN DISNEY BE USED
TO DEFINE 'ANIMATION'?**

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Can Disney be used to define 'animation'?

On July 19th 2010, an article in The Times began, “For years, Disney has been unquestionably the final word in animation. Yesterday, as a giant Woody the Cowboy led a fatter, shorter Buzz Lightyear around Leicester Square, the moment when Pixar toppled Walt finally came to pass.” (Mostrous & Harvey, 2010, p.1). The opinion, expressed by Alexi Mostrous, Media Editor of the Times, that 'Disney is the final word in animation', is one often found to be backed up by many critics and writers on animation. Animator and teacher Chris Webster begins his book, *Animation: Mechanics of Motion* with a similar statement; “Like it or not, the Disney studio has become the hallmark of animation quality” (Webster, 2005, Preface x). As an animator intending to work on feature films professionally, it is an opinion that intrigues and frustrates me for being so generalised yet seemingly so universal. I aim to question the use of the Disney name by journalists, critics and the general public alike, as the benchmark (or 'final word') for successful animation practice, and whether it corresponds to the actual successes and products of The Walt Disney Company. I will discuss if there is any problems that may result due to this popular opinion, and look into the historical and potential alternatives. Here, 'successful practice' is defined as consistency of quality and box office performance, representation of the studio or individual in the media, and the wider impact on the animation and entertainment industries. My research is focused on American theatrical animation – comparison with Japanese, European, or forms of experimental animation would require separate essays in themselves – so this limits attempts to define the term 'animation' to within this particular focus. Where appropriate I will attempt to distinguish between Walt Disney as an individual and The Walt Disney Company as a media and entertainment conglomerate. I will generally refer to Walt Disney as Walt, as (helpfully) many of the texts I reference have done. In Section 1 I address the opinions of The Walt Disney Company in popular animation literature. Section 2 looks at the critical reception, quality and artistic merit of Disney's short films in comparison to those of Fleischer Studios, Warner Bros. and others during the 1930-60s. Here I also

question what 'animation' can or should be and whether Disney's product fits (or could be used to define) the term in part or completely.

In Section 3 I briefly look at the responsibilities, burdens, or obligations that The Walt Disney Company must shoulder in such a dominant position in the entertainment industry, and the issues of the studios representation of race, sex and class.

In Section 4 I study the recent success of Pixar studios and again question the validity of Alexi Mostrous' statement: “[...] the moment when Pixar toppled Walt finally came to pass.”

I am studying critical and popular opinions of the Walt Disney Company, its continued competition with other studios, and the current climate of the animation industry. It is my hope that in doing this I can reasonably conclude whether the Disney name can be used in the defining of 'animation' and, if relevant to do so, question whether animation can exist *without* Disney.

Section 1: Critical (and not-so-critical) writings on Disney's career and product

The origins of the Walt Disney Company and Walt's early life have been well documented. In this section I want to address the opinion of Disney's product found in popular literature. During the course of my research I have found that a basic level of critical analysis of Disney animation is often overlooked in favour of biography. In omitting comparison with other studios many of those writing on Walt Disney accept his/the studios status as the 'hallmark' of animated achievement, and simply want to tell the story of how this situation came about. Moreover, the majority of what academic criticism *does* exist on animation is dedicated to The Walt Disney Company. In terms of film history, this was certainly the case when Leonard Maltin started writing *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, “General histories of film barely mention animation, reserving what little space there was for Disney and the pioneers of experimental animation [...]

Bugs Bunny did not warrant so much as a passing nod, and neither did his creators.” (Maltin, 1987, Preface vi). Kevin S. Sandler expands upon Maltin's comment in his introduction to *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, “Apart from some essays in the Peary and Peary and Cholodenko collections, and Hugh Kenner's *Chuck Jones: A Flurry of Drawings* (1994), the new wave of critical attention on animation did not extend to Warner Bros., instead focusing mainly on the work of Walt Disney.” (Sandler, 1998, p.4)

Two of the most popular books on animation are Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnson's *The Illusion Of Life* (1981, Hyperion), and Richard Williams' *The Animator's Survival Kit* (2001, Faber and Faber). The content and acclaim of these books reflects the popular opinion of animation professionals, students and fans. *The Illusion Of Life* is seen by many as the definitive account of the philosophies and working processes of the Disney studio during the Golden Age of animation (late 1920-50s). Thomas and Johnson also explain Disney's '12 Basic Principles of Animation' (pp.47-69) (see Appendix 1). The book is identified as 'inspiring', and reads very much as a personal account of the creative and technical accomplishments of those involved in the production of Disney's animated features. The claim that often appears in online customer reviews (Amazon.co.uk, Goodreads.com), that *The Illusion of Life* is the 'animator's bible', is therefore an exaggeration. A nostalgic history of Disney by retired Disney employees is not representative of the overall history of the animation industry, nor does it go into any major depth of evaluation of the actual animated products by those that produced them.

Survival Kit is primarily a workbook. Williams has collected the combined knowledge of Disney's 'Golden Age' animators he was able to work with during his own notable career, and his book successfully examines and distils much of it with concise explanations, well paced examples and practice exercises. Like *The Illusion of Life*, *Survival Kit* is often regarded as animated gospel by consumers and professionals alike. And, like *The Illusion of Life*, it is a Disney-trained animator's

account of what animation was, is and should be. In a brief chapter on the history of the animated industry, Williams' passing mentions of non-Disney animators (Max Fleischer, Tex Avery, and others) come across as slightly condescending, "Surrounding the potent Disney centre were the satellite studios [...] Fed as they were by the knowledge and expertise emanating from the Disney training centre, their much wilder humour was often in reaction to or in rebellion against Disney 'realism' and 'believability'" (Williams, 2001, p.20)

There are two examples of extremely highly regarded books, both of which are written from an almost exclusively Disney point of view. The prospect that many aspiring animators (as well as consumer public in general) might see a history of The Walt Disney Company and a Disney-method workbook as the be all and end all of 'animation' is a worrying one. I do not mean to question the integrity of these authors; I aim to highlight the level of influence the Disney name has on the very term 'animation' and corresponding literature, and reiterate my point that many established texts on animation generally reinforce the popular opinion.

It should be noted that the label of 'animation/animation's bible' is something also caused by lack of specificity of the term 'animation', or at least its usage on the part of consumers. *The Illusion of Life* clearly specifies in its Preface that it is a book about 'Disney character animation', and *The Animator's Survival Kit* is almost entirely made up of character-based exercises. These two books might be more accurately dubbed 'bibles' of *character* animation. The connection between 'Disney' and 'animation' appears far deeper in the minds of the consumer than simply producing a superior product which, it could be argued, Disney might not have always done. Instead, it is more directly a result of the techniques and standards (such as the 12 Basic Principles) established at the Disney studio at the dawn of the Golden Age of Animation.

Section 2: Imitation of and reaction against Disney animation

Included in *Reading the Rabbit* is Timothy R. White's essay, *From Disney to Warner Bros.: The Critical Shift*, which discusses the critical rereading of Disney and Warner Bros. animation that took place in the 1960s, and suggests a more balanced criticism of these competing studios. White concludes his essay with a quote from film writer Jack Ellis, "For better or worse the standard techniques and predominant styles of animation were established at the Disney studios during the thirties. Everything that has happened in animation since has either grown out of that work or been a conscious reaction against it" (White, n.d). This quotation is similar in essence to those of Mostrous and Webster and almost identical to Williams' comment, but can be read as a more neutral conclusion. Without suggesting that Disney animation is superior, Ellis acknowledges the studios successful establishment of 'standard techniques and predominant styles'.

In the context of theatrical shorts of the 1930-60s, it is Ellis' second sentence that is key, backed up by Williams'. The phrase 'grown out of or been a conscious reaction against' affects several of the major studios of the time like Fleischer Studios, MGM, United Productions of America (UPA), and perhaps most importantly, the Warner Bros. studio. In their own right, Max and Dave Fleischer were an important part of the surging growth of the animation industry during the early 1920-30s;

"It was really Fleischer and Disney that monopolised the most popular animated films of the '30s," explains Warner's George Feltenstein, senior vice president of theatrical catalogue marketing. "Mickey Mouse, Popeye and Betty Boop were the biggest cartoon superstars of the '30s, of the sound era. Warner Bros. didn't have Porky Pig until 1935, and he took a while to develop, and Bugs Bunny and Tom & Jerry weren't around until 1940." (Hurwitz 2007, p.1)

The Fleischer's early unique style came from a combination of Max's inventions (such as rotoscoping, the tracing of live-action film), a conscious decision to make the audience laugh with

jokes and gags, and according to film critic Leonard Maltin, “an ethnic sensibility, one that just oozes New York. [...] I always say [Disney's] cartoons took place in barnyards, and the Fleischer cartoons took place in the city” (quoted by Matt Hurwitz, 2007, p.1) The studio took a slightly different approach to the animated short to Disney – as Fleischer historian Leslie Cabarga explains, “Max's philosophy -- and he used to tutor the animators -- was, 'The essence of animation is that you can do anything,' [...] Disney's work was always superior, in a clean, technical aspect, but it was also kind of sanitised.” (quoted by Matt Hurwitz, 2007, p.1). 'Sanitised' may do well to describe Disney's approach to sentiment and the inclusion of a moral in many cartoons of the 1930s. In this sense (or at least in this early period), Ellis' statement applies to the Fleischers only minimally. Even so, Disney's early success and establishment of 'predominant styles' had a lasting effect on the Fleischers, as well as their producer and distributor, Paramount.

Fleischer Studios most successful work was arguably its *Superman* series between 1941-42, the first cartoon of which (*Superman*, 1941) was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Subject: Cartoons in 1942. It eventually lost to Disney's *Lend A Paw*, released the same year. Though the modern viewer obviously has the benefit of hindsight (and fairly easy access to many animated cartoons since in this period), it is nonetheless confusing that the award went to Disney's short. *Lend A Paw* tells of Pluto discovering an abandoned kitten, who becomes the object of his owner Mickey's affections, and the dog's jealous internal struggle and the moral choices about reclaiming his place as Mickey's favourite. It contains a limited sense of originality on Disney's part; it could be described as a 'typical' Disney short of the time. The characters move well of course – it would disappoint if they didn't – but this piece in particular is a fairly bland and sentimental approach to the theatrical short, with only a rare glimpse of any interesting or original use of the animated medium. Paradoxically, while *Superman* made use of Max's own rotoscoping technique (a brief contrary to Ellis' statement) and as such plays out very much as a live-action equivalent might do, it has a distinct and dynamic visual style. The links between the visual language, pace and music result in an impressive finished piece of animation, something that is consistent in the rest of the

series under the control of the Fleischers. Despite a clear talent to visually rich animation, the studio did not have much good fortune when they followed Disney into the realm of the animated feature. *Gulliver's Travels* (1939), was fairly successful critically and financially, but is viewed as inferior to Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* from 1937. The release of *Mr Bug Goes To Town* was delayed to avoid direct competition with Disney's *Dumbo* (released late October of the same year) due to a lack of confidence in the product by Paramount. It was eventually released on the 9th December 1941, two days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, and as a result had disastrous box office results. This led to the firing of Max and Dave by Paramount and the reorganisation of their studio the following year. Had the Fleischers not made the move into feature films and attempted to directly emulate Disney – at the insistence of Paramount who, like Disney, wanted to appeal to a mass audience – it is possible, taking into account the originality and success of their short films like *Superman*, that the Fleischers' and Disney's 'monopoly' may have lasted into the next decade.

Ellis' and Williams' statements ring true for MGM and UPA animation during the 1940s and 50s. Formed primarily by ex-Disney animators, UPA openly broke away from Disney's realistic style and made use of much cheaper 'limited animation' - the use of a more abstract or symbolic aesthetic with limited movement and heavy reuse of drawings. When used as an aesthetic device, limited animation opens up artistic possibilities for animators due to its inherent lower costs and ease of production compared to Disney-style animation. It therefore has implications on the use and defining of the term 'animation' overall. UPA's *Gerald McBoing-Boing*, released in 1950, was awarded the Academy Award for Best Animated Short the same year,

“The award won by a movie powered by limited animation gave legitimacy to the technique in Hollywood circles. It proved that this style of animation is not a hindrance to a quality film, rather content is always king. Eventually, established Hollywood studios such as Warner Brothers and MGM implemented this style in their work.” (Alegre, 2009, p.1)

As Disney had done with feature-length animation, UPA's use of limited animation challenged the contemporary notions of what animation is and what it could be. The awarding of an Oscar signifies animation and its various formats as legitimate an art-form as film. It is therefore unfortunate that the value of this aesthetic is understated; in the shadow narrative driven, realistic feature animation, limited animation became notorious as a 'recipe for disaster and mediocrity' (Alegre, 2009, p.1) when used as cost-cutting technique for televised children's cartoons during the 1960s and 70s.

The theatrical cartoons of MGM and Warner Bros. serve as a potential middle-ground. Less intricate than Disney's features but far more so than UPA's limited animation, the majority were grounded in physical comedy and the exploitation of the visual possibilities of the medium. MGM Animation 'grew out' of Disney's work in the sense that one its founding animators, Chuck Jones, began his animation career under renowned Disney animator Ub Iwerks, who spent most of career working for Disney. Earlier in Jones' career "Disney's doings were regarded with absolute awe, and by no one more than Jones himself, who, once he became director, worked through a long period of Disney-worship" (Kenner, 1994, p.30). Jones 'worked through' his awe and subsequent imitation of Disney at Warner Bros. For Warner Bros. animation, rebelling against Disney's style proved particularly successful;

"Prior to 1940, [Warner Bros.] paid homage to Disney's artistic creations or used them in a light hearted spirit of fun. After 1940, the animators felt free to satirise Disney characters and stories, to assume a position that was, for the most part, intellectually superior to Disney's sentimentality and artfulness. Warner Bros. animation after 1940 is animation with attitude. Wisecracks replace winsomeness. Sharper and sarcasm are now the order of the day." (Walz, n.d, p.63)

During the 1930s and early 40s Warner Bros. and MGM products were popular with audiences, but were regarded by critics as "merely cartoons" while the Disney equivalent was seen as "art".

However, Timothy E. White (n.d, pp.43-45) notes that by the mid-60s the Disney name, "to the

public a guarantee of quality, became, to the critic, a mark of corporate blandness and the absence of expression of the individual artist”, and that “for these critics and scholars, the directors at Warner Bros. and MGM were not just auteurs; they were remarkably like European art film directors”. Animation historian Steve Schneider attributes a similar trend in public opinion to “the anarchic brashness of Warner animation [that] was speaking to a new generation”.

The changes in both popular and critical opinion offer up questions about the definition of animation. Generally, 'Disney animation' can be seen as a close relative of live-action film, due to Walt's desire for realism of aesthetic and character and feature-length, immersive narratives.

Schneider observes that Disney “felt an ever greater need to keep his work within the bounds of straightforward storytelling [...] suppressing the signals that would remind audiences that what they were watching was, in fact, a cartoon” (quoted by White, n.d, p.41-42). In choosing this aesthetic Disney has seen harsh criticism from other animation historians such as Michael Barrier, for its “ultimately parasitic animation, separated by live action only by a leavening of caricature” (quoted by Whitley, 2008, p.5). In contrast, Warner Bros. short films have achieved notoriety and success being polar opposites to Disney-style animation. Tex Avery, though more notable for his work at MGM, heavily influenced a wildly different approach to animation when he joined Warner Bros.;

“Avery and company immediately began to infuse the cartoons with the kind of anarchic irony of anti-intellectual knowingness that has become the hallmark of twentieth-century American humour. Building gags based on contrasts in speed both of motion and speech, puns derived from visual and verbal juxtapositions, and the kind of abstract analysis of the production's own self-admitted theatrical artifice, [...] the cartoons began structuring layers of references and suggesting a world of infinite behavioral possibilities.”

(Putterman, n.d., p.27)

“Self admitted theatrical artifice” is rare (if not impossible) in Disney animation. The success of Disney's early features rely heavily on the audience's complete acceptance of the created world,

narrative and characters; similar to a vast majority of live-action cinema. More often than not, a Warner Bros. “cartoon” is specifically what live-action film cannot be. In being completely aware of their drawn surroundings, characters such as Bugs Bunny can and do break 'the fourth wall'. They defy the laws of physics, survive gunshots, explosions and extreme falls without risk of injury, and can consciously affect continuity. Perhaps most importantly though, they have perfect comedic timing;

“Timing of action, probably more than anything else, was what finally distinguished Warner Bros. animation from its competition, particularly from Disney [...] new forms of eccentrically timed, stop-and-start action that were noticeably nonnaturalistic and pointedly anti-Disney.” (Putterman, n.d., p.29)

Hugh Kenner (1994, p.27) alludes to this open rebellion against a realistic style, “[Avery] remained impervious to any *claim that animation should strive for the Illusion of Life*” (my emphasis).

Kenner clearly identifies the aims of Disney-style animation, and reflects that Avery and Warner Bros. opposed them entirely. This opposition corresponds with opinions of critics and the general public of the time, reflected in box office success and Oscar nominations which “must have, in itself, made a dent in Disney's armour” (Putterman, n.d., p.29)

Warner Bros. and MGM's critical and popular success with gag- and physical comedy-heavy cartoons reveals an inaccuracy in the claims of Mostrous and Webster. Disney does not have the 'final word' in animation here, as the industry has seen major shifts in quality, format and overall popularity since the 1930s – and each of the studios discussed provide overlapping and conflicting responses to what animation can be.

Section 3: Disney as moral educator and appropriator of stories

The Walt Disney Company is one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. As such, its

animated features reach a huge worldwide audience, and have received a high volume of criticism both positive and negative. I cannot examine it all in detail here, nor do I feel it would be particularly useful. There are, however, some noticeable trends of criticism. To summarise some of the issues both created and faced by Disney in such an influential position in popular culture, Annalee R. Ward (2002, p.113) explains,

“That Disney has the cultural presence and resources to dominate the messages children receive raises concerns. Yes, Disney communicates some wonderful messages about morality, including leaving room for spiritual realities, the clear delineation of good and evil, numerous examples that help define these categories, and the importance of open communication – all messages that will teach important lessons.

At the same time, Disney communicates messages about the dominating role of romance in women's lives, about the importance of physical appearance, about the preferred structure of society as patriarchal and hierarchical, about coming to knowledge through feelings, about when to respect authority, and about the need to purchase Disney products. Disney, in acting as a moral educator is socialising people, particularly children, into a Disney worldview with its particular virtues and vices.”

Here, Ward is referencing and concluding her reading of five consecutive Disney features; *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997) and *Mulan* (1998). Her conclusion can also be applied in part to many of Disney's other films such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), which portrays messages about “when to respect authority” in Ariel's disobedience of her father, and about the “dominating role of romance in women's lives” shown in the relinquishing of her voice to 'get' Prince Eric. Ward's conclusion is slightly more neutral than those found in the 52-minute documentary *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Picker, 2001). The implications of racism, stereotyping and sexism are discussed in detail in the short film, along with issues relating to the consumption of Disney products by children. The opinion of many

interviewees in the documentary, in agreement with Ward and many other critics, is that Disney is or has been irresponsible with the messages it sends to children. An example of this, explained by Elizabeth Hadley, is the portrayal of Jasmine in *Aladdin* (1994), “in which there is a scene where she becomes a seductress to distract [Jafar]. This I find very dangerous. [...] again it gives the young girls the idea that's the way that you get what you want. You use your body to manipulate people, specifically men”. Although *Aladdin* was released in 1994, this issue (according to this documentary of 2001) has not been satisfactorily resolved in subsequent Disney features. Other interviewees, such as Dr Henry Giroux, question as Ward has done Disney's appropriation of other cultures stories, legends, and history. Regarding Disney films being such a large part of popular culture, Annalee R. Ward (2002, p.113) also notes that,

“The problem for many critics comes in how [human] minds are being affected or in what children are learning about right and wrong. Disney picks and chooses what it will use from myths, legends, history, and other peoples stories. It “Disneyfies” each plot to fit its formula for commercial success and its perspective on reality. In these films, certain moral lessons are chosen over others, according to Disney's value structure.”

This value structure, and the results of “Disneyfication” of others stories are discussed widely by critics; “Rob Allan has described Disney's treatment of the Kipling story in *The Jungle Book* as akin to taking a sausage, throwing away all the contents except the skin and filling that skin with their own ideas very far away from the original substance” (Whitley, 2008, p.99) is a particularly harsh example. However it is still apparent that through the coining of the term “Disneyfication” critics have established a negative connection to the studio,

“Disneyfication, or Disnification, as it is sometimes spelled, is a term that has reemerged with a vengeance since the release of *Pocahontas* (1995) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) and the battle over a proposed Disney theme park in Virginia. Often used pejoratively, it denotes the company's bowdlerization of literature, myth, and/or history in a

simplified, sentimentalised, programmatic way.” (Walz, 1998, p.51)

What I intend to highlight here is the problem of raising Disney to a status in animation, or Art in general, that glosses over the studios underlying worldview as described by Ward, and glaring faults as described by others such as the 'bowdlerisation of literature'. It is again entirely questionable that Disney can be the 'hallmark of quality' with a history of insensitivity towards race, sex and class. Disney's only saving grace in the contemporary climate, aside from the credit of helping forge a new industry, is the acquisition of Pixar studios. From a purely business point of view, working with Pixar will either boost the Disney's credibility to new heights, or sink it into obscurity, “The purchase of Pixar Animation Studios will, according to sources, give investors much to anticipate over the next few years; this given the fact that many investors have lost interest in Disney over the past two to three years during the company's recent stock stagnation.” (Bynum, 2006, p.1)

Section 4: Contemporary animated features and the rise of Pixar

Opinions of Pixar, both critical and popular, are extremely polarised. The studio is universally praised by critics, having earned numerous awards, including twenty-two Academy Awards. It is also frequently regarded as superior to traditional Disney animation. An article on *Up* (2009) from Total Film reads,

“Cut to May 2009, the Cannes Film Festival. [Pixar's *Up*] premieres to a packed Palais cinema. Two thousand film critics don dark, oversized specs, steeling themselves for 100-minutes of cartoon nonsense while dreaming of the Hanekes, Von Triers and Noés to come. The montage begins. A couple of minutes later, the auditorium is filled with an insectile clacking noise as 2,000 pairs of spectacles are removed to get at those pesky tears. Yes, it's that good. [...] Forget Bambi's mom or Simba's dad... Never, *ever* in the history of animation

has so much emotional devastation been wrought. Or so much beauty, so much companionship, so much *love* communicated. Walt will be weeping in his grave, and beaming too.” (Matthews, 2009, p.120)

As for other popular opinion, all of Pixars 11 feature films have above a 73% or 7.3/10 rating on Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic and Imdb, with several being closer to 90% or 9/10. The majority of negative criticism I could find (taking into consideration the unreliability of some online sources) was unbalanced, irrelevant or unprofessional (see Kilne, 2009 and White, 2009). Regarding this essay, this poses a problem. One way to compare Pixar to Disney as separate studios is to look at the relatively unprecedented success each achieved in a new field in a very short space of time. Disney helped pioneer traditional hand-drawn animation and later made the animated feature commercially viable, and Pixar has since redefined the animated feature and pioneered a whole new process of digital filmmaking.

Pixar has 'grown out of' and 'been a conscious reaction to' Disney in more ways than one. Walt and his brother Roy set up the interdisciplinary California Institute of Arts (Cal Arts) in 1961, and among its notable alumni are Pixar's John Lasseter, Pete Doctor, Andrew Stanton, Brad Bird, and Joe Ranft (directors/co-directors of *Toy Story*, *Monster's Inc.*, *Wall-E*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars*, respectively). Lasseter and Bird graduated from the first programme that taught 'Disney-style character animation' (*The Pixar Story*, Ibwerks, 2007). Strong grounding in Disney's established methods taught at CalArts has contributed to Pixar's success. After watching *Luxo Jr.* (1986), computer scientist Jim Blinn approached John Lasseter;

“Lasseter braced for a question about the shadowing algorithm or some other recondite technical issue that he knew equally little about.

“John,” Blinn asked, “was the big lamp the mother or the father?”

It was true proof, Lasseter realised, that he had succeeded in applying the Disney touch of thought and emotion to his characters.” (Price, 2008, p.92)

The influence of Disney's 12 Principles on Lasseter is clear. However, Disney's approach to animated film is, once again, openly rebelled against by the director;

“We did *not* want to do a musical, we did *not* want to do a fairy tale, we did *not* want to do what Disney was from *The Little Mermaid*, and *Beauty and the Beast* and all those films. They had their thing going, and we wanted to be different.” (Ibwerks, 2007)

Here we see Ellis' statement to be accurate regarding Pixar. Like the Fleischers, UPA, MGM and Warner Bros., Pixar is a studio that should give credit to The Walt Disney Company not only for its positive influences and shared knowledge, but as a base on which to react against and asserate their individual mark on the industry. However, unlike these other studios, Pixar has had consistent success at the box office and during awards season, and is yet to provoke a hostile response from critics for any of the reasons Disney has (and may continue to do). Therefore, I disagree with Alexi Mostrous, when he states 2010 was “the moment when Pixar toppled Walt”, for two reasons. Firstly, considering my findings for this essay and a certain amount of prior knowledge, I would argue that the combined success of Pixar, impressive as it is, is yet to outweigh the massive personal influence Walt Disney himself had on the animation and film industries;

“He had turned commercial animation form a gimmick with 7-minute shorts featuring funny animatics into a medium capable of producing full-length movies of both economic and artistic significance. The animated movie, confidently dismissed as “Disney's Folly” 65 years ago, is now a small but extremely important part of the movie industry, with major animated releases regularly topping the box-office charts.” (Grant, 2001, p.76)

Secondly, I would argue that Pixar (as a studio) 'toppled' The Walt Disney Company several years earlier. The Pixar name is not close to matching the worldwide popularity of Disney, but with Pixar's still-unbroken run of adult-friendly critical, financial and (importantly) original hits, they

have surpassed the successes of its parent company. In doing so, they have also made strong steps to remove the popular assumption that the animated medium is solely for children's entertainment.

Conclusion

Walt's dream of taking the animated feature towards a form of higher art was not in vain. Nearly a century of passion and creativity have forged for animation a stable position in the film industry, **and** as David Whitley (2008, p.7) states, "Disney's single most impressive achievement in the history of animated film was arguably to demonstrate the commercial and artistic viability of the animated feature." A similar length of time spent in meticulously marketing successes and burying failures has cemented Disney's place in popular memory, albeit as a purveyor of children's movies.

As Ellis et al state, Disney can claim a certain responsibility for the professional practice of a major proportion of animators past and present thanks to its 12 Principles. Based on the research I have undertaken into the company and competing studios, I would conclude that The Walt Disney Company **can and should** be used as a benchmark for successful animation practice – in so much as to aim to emulate its innovation and successes, react against its established aesthetic to produce visually interesting work, and especially in trying to avoid the same failures of representation and sensitivity. However, I do think that animation (in its broadest sense) can potentially exist in the future without Disney, or at least outside of its sphere of influence. The proven success of Pixar (on its own terms), and the rise in popularity of other computer animation studios such as Dreamworks and Sony Pictures have outstripped Disney Animations (as separate from Pixar) in quality and entertainment value, but Pixar, the firm popular favourite, still holds Disney's principles dear. In defining 'animation' with regard Disney, I would say Disney **was** one of the most important creators of feature animation in the last century. I emphasise the 'was' because, as the industry stands, I feel this is no longer the case.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Disney's 12 Basic Principles of Animation paraphrased by Nataha Lightfoot from the *The Illusion Of Life* by Frank Thomas & Ollie Johnston.

www.frankandollie.com/PhysicalAnimation.html

[Accessed 27 November 2010]

THE 12 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ANIMATION

#1 SQUASH AND STRETCH

This action gives the illusion of weight and volume to a character as it moves. Also squash and stretch is useful in animating dialogue and doing facial expressions. How extreme the use of squash and stretch is, depends on what is required in animating the scene. Usually it's broader in a short style of picture and subtler in a feature. It is used in all forms of character animation from a bouncing ball to the body weight of a person walking. This is the most important element you will be required to master and will be used often.

#2 ANTICIPATION

This movement prepares the audience for a major action the character is about to perform, such as, starting to run, jump or change expression. A dancer does not just leap off the floor. A backwards motion occurs before the forward action is executed. The backward motion is the anticipation. A comic effect can be done by not using anticipation after a series of gags that used anticipation. Almost all real action has major or minor anticipation such as a pitcher's wind-up or a golfers' back swing. Feature animation is often less broad than short animation unless a scene requires it to develop a characters personality.

#3 STAGING

A pose or action should clearly communicate to the audience the attitude, mood, reaction or idea of the character as it relates to the story and continuity of the story line. The effective use of long, medium, or close up shots, as well as camera angles also helps in telling the story. There is a limited amount of time in a film, so each sequence, scene and frame of film must relate to the overall story. Do not confuse the audience with too many actions at once. Use one action clearly stated to get the idea across, unless you are animating a scene that is to depict clutter and confusion. Staging directs the audience's attention to the story or idea being told. Care must be taken in background design so it isn't obscuring the animation or competing with it due to excess detail behind the animation. Background and animation should work together as a pictorial unit in a scene.

#4 STRAIGHT AHEAD AND POSE TO POSE ANIMATION

Straight ahead animation starts at the first drawing and works drawing to drawing to the end of a scene. You can lose size, volume, and proportions with this method, but it does have spontaneity and freshness. Fast, wild action scenes are done this way. Pose to Pose is more planned out and charted with key drawings done at intervals throughout the scene. Size, volumes, and proportions are controlled better this way, as is the action. The lead animator will turn charting and keys over to his assistant. An assistant can be better used with this method so that the animator doesn't have to draw every drawing in a scene. An animator can do more scenes this way and concentrate on the planning of the animation. Many scenes use a bit of both methods of animation.

#5 FOLLOW THROUGH AND OVERLAPPING ACTION

When the main body of the character stops all other parts continue to catch up to the main mass of the character, such as arms, long hair, clothing, coat tails or a dress, floppy ears or a long tail (these follow the path of action). Nothing stops all at once. This is follow through. Overlapping action is when the character changes direction while his clothes or hair continues forward. The character is going in a new direction, to be followed, a number of frames later, by his clothes in the new direction. "DRAG," in animation, for example, would be when Goofy starts to run, but his head, ears, upper body, and clothes do not keep up with his legs. In features, this type of action is done more subtly. Example: When Snow White starts to dance, her dress does not begin to move with her immediately but catches up a few frames later. Long hair and animal tail will also be handled in the same manner. Timing becomes critical to the effectiveness of drag and the overlapping action.

#6 SLOW-OUT AND SLOW-IN

As action starts, we have more drawings near the starting pose, one or two in the middle, and more drawings near the next pose. Fewer drawings make the action faster and more drawings make the action slower. Slow-ins and slow-outs soften the action, making it more life-like. For a gag action, we may omit some slow-out or slow-ins for shock appeal or the surprise element. This will give more snap to the scene.

#7 ARCS

All actions, with few exceptions (such as the animation of a mechanical device), follow an arc or slightly circular path. This is especially true of the human figure and the action of animals. Arcs give animation a more natural action and better flow. Think of natural movements in the terms of a pendulum swinging. All arm movement, head turns and even eye movements are executed on an arcs.

#8 SECONDARY ACTION

This action adds to and enriches the main action and adds more dimension to the character animation, supplementing and/or re-enforcing the main action. Example: A character is angrily walking toward another character. The walk is forceful, aggressive, and forward leaning. The leg action is just short of a stomping walk. The secondary action is a few strong gestures of the arms working with the walk. Also, the possibility of dialogue being delivered at the same time with tilts and turns of the head to accentuate the walk and dialogue, but not so much as to distract from the walk action. All of these actions should work together in support of one another. Think of the walk as the primary action and arm swings, head bounce and all other actions of the body as secondary or supporting action.

#9 TIMING

Expertise in timing comes best with experience and personal experimentation, using the trial and error method in refining technique. The basics are: more drawings between poses slow and smooth the action. Fewer drawings make the action faster and crisper. A variety of slow and fast timing within a scene adds texture and interest to the movement. Most animation is done on twos (one drawing photographed on two frames of film) or on ones (one drawing photographed on each frame of film). Twos are used most of the time, and ones are used during camera moves such as trucks, pans and occasionally for subtle and quick dialogue animation. Also, there is timing in the acting of a character to establish mood, emotion, and reaction to another character or to a situation. Studying movement of actors and performers on stage and in films is useful when animating human or animal characters. This frame by frame examination of film footage will aid you in understanding timing for animation. This is a great way to learn from the others.

#10 EXAGGERATION

Exaggeration is not extreme distortion of a drawing or extremely broad, violent action all the time. It's like a caricature of facial features, expressions, poses, attitudes and actions. Action traced from live action film can be accurate, but stiff and mechanical. In feature animation, a character must move more broadly to look natural. The same is true of facial expressions, but the action should not be as broad as in a short cartoon style. Exaggeration in a walk or an eye movement or even a head turn will give your film more appeal. Use good taste and common sense to keep from becoming too theatrical and excessively animated.

#11 SOLID DRAWING

The basic principles of drawing form, weight, volume solidity and the illusion of three dimension apply to animation as it does to academic drawing. The way you draw cartoons, you draw in the classical sense, using pencil sketches and drawings for reproduction of life. You transform these into color and movement giving the characters the illusion of three-and four-dimensional life. Three dimensional is movement in space. The fourth dimension is movement in time.

#12 APPEAL

A live performer has charisma. An animated character has appeal. 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, as you will use it, includes an easy to read design, clear drawing, and personality development that will capture and involve the audience's interest. Early cartoons were basically a series of gags strung together on a main theme. Over the years, the artists have learned that to produce a feature there was a need for story continuity, character development and a higher quality of artwork throughout the entire production. Like all forms of story telling, the feature has to appeal to the mind as well as to the eye.

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