Character animation

**Goal**: make characters that move in a convincing way to communicate personality and mood.

Walt Disney developed a number of principles.

Computer graphics animators have adapted them to 3D animation.

Animation Principles

The following are a set of principles to keep in mind:

1. Squash and stretch
2. Staging
3. Timing
4. Anticipation
5. Follow through
6. Overlapping action
7. Secondary action
8. Straight-ahead vs. pose-to-pose vs. blocking
9. Arches
10. Slow in, slow out
11. Exaggeration
12. Appeal

We will consider each...
Squash and stretch

**Squash:** flatten an object or character by pressure or by its own power.

**Stretch:** used to increase the sense of speed and emphasize the squash by contrast.

Note: keep volume constant!

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**Squash and stretch (cont’d)**

**FIGURE 2.** Squash & stretch in bouncing ball.

**FIGURE 3.** Squash & stretch in Luxo Jr’s hop.

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**Squash and stretch (cont’d)**

**FIGURE 4a.** In slow action, an object’s position overlaps from frame to frame which gives the action a smooth appearance to the eye.

**FIGURE 4b.** Strobing occurs in a faster action when the object’s positions do not overlap and the eye perceives separate images.

**FIGURE 4c.** Stretching the object so that its positions overlap again will relieve the strobing effect.

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**Squash and stretch (cont’d)**

1928 — Oswald shows determination by slapping his chest while on his back and runs to back. While the gesture is easily recognizable, it is little more than a diagram of the action.

**Anonymous.** More Ferguson — Shanghaied

1938 — Peg Leg Pete does the same gesture, only now there is more bulk than China involved. This broad, ex-action gives the impression of a round, solid character and the viewer sees a part of his life and spirit — and fun.

**Anonymous.** Jack Campbell — The Kiter.

1940 — The gesture has been done so often by this character that he is now known by it itself. An action this broad leaves realism, but gains a type of comedy.

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Squash and stretch (cont’d)

Timing

An action generally consists of anticipation, the action, and the reaction. Don't dwell too long on any of these.

Timing also reflects the weight of an object:

- light objects move quickly
- heavier objects move more slowly

Timing can completely change the meaning of an action.

Staging

Present the idea so it is unmistakably clear.

Audience can only see one thing at a time.

Useful guide: stage actions in silhouette.

In dialogue, characters face 3/4 towards the camera, not right at each other.

Timing (cont’d)

The many meanings of a simple head turn:

- NO inbetweens hit by a tremendous force.
- ONE inbetween hit by a brick, frying pan.
- TWO inbetweens nervous tic, muscle spasm.
- THREE inbetweens dodging a thrown brick.
- FOUR inbetweens giving a crisp order (move it!)
- FIVE inbetweens a more friendly order (c’mon!)
- SIX inbetweens sees a sportscar he always wanted
- SEVEN inbetweens trying to get a better look...
- EIGHT inbetweens searching for something on shelf
- NINE inbetweens considering thoughtfully
- TEN inbetweens stretching a sore muscle

[Thomas and Johnston]
Timing (cont’d)

Animation by Ken Perlin.

Anticipation

An action has three parts: anticipation, action, reaction.

Anatomical motivation: a muscle must extend before it can contract.

Prepares audience for action so they know what to expect.

Directs audience’s attention.

Anticipation (cont’d)

Amount of anticipation (combined with timing) can affect perception of speed or weight.

Follow through

Actions seldom come to an abrupt stop.

Physical motivation: inertia
Follow through (cont’d)

Overlapping action

One part initiates (“leads”) the move. Others follow in turn.

Hip leads legs, but eyes often lead the head.

Loose parts move slower and drag behind (sometimes called “secondary motion”).

Overlaps can apply to intentions. Example: settling into the house at night.

- Close the door
- Lock the door
- Take off the coat
- etc...

Each action doesn’t come to a complete finish before the next starts.

Secondary action

An action that emphasizes the main point but is secondary to it.

Straight-ahead vs. pose-to-pose vs. blocking

Straight ahead: proceed from frame to frame without planning where you want to be in ten frames. Can be wild, spontaneous.

Pose-to-pose: Define keyframes and "inbetweens".

Blocking: Computer graphics animators adaptation

- Start key-framing at the top of the hierarchy.
- Refine level by level.
- Keyframes for different parts need not happen at the same time.
Straight-ahead vs. pose-to-pose vs. blocking (cont’d)

Archs
Avoid straight lines since most things in nature move in arcs.

Slow in and slow out
An extreme pose can be emphasized by slowing down as you get to it (and as you leave it).

In practice, many things do not move abruptly but start and stop gradually.

Exaggeration
Get to the heart of the idea and emphasize it so the audience can see it.
Appeal

The character must interest the viewer.

It doesn’t have to be cute and cuddly. Design, simplicity, behavior all affect appeal.

Example: Luxo, Jr. is made to appear childlike.

Appeal (cont’d)

Note: avoid perfect symmetries.

Animation Artifact

Guidelines

- Aim for **30 - 60 seconds**…shorter is usually better. Don’t make an animation that feels like “slow motion”!
- Try to use some of the principles from this lecture.
- See project page for pointer to video creation.
- Audio is permitted, though optional.

Turn in

- One artifact per person
- Submit **representative image**, in addition to final video
- Due Thursday, June 13, at **12pm sharp**.

Grading

- The course staff will grade your artifact based on technical and artistic merit.
Animation Artifact

Non-anonymous, in-class voting on Thursday, June 13.

Prizes! (and extra credit)
- Runners-up: mystery prizes!
- 2nd place: “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” Blu-ray
- 1st place: “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” Blu-ray… + extra special mystery prize!

Animation production

More broadly animation is about making “movies” and encompasses:
- Story
- Art design
- Modeling
- Cinematography
- Motion
- Rendering