

A SHORT HISTORY OF ANIMATED CARTOONS

The first record of action as well as outline, is as old as art itself. On the walls of caves near Altamira, Spain, are crude drawings of animals in which the illusion of motion is given by several pairs of legs. These drawings are at least 30,000 years old.

Ever since a cave man drew a picture of a wild boar with four pairs of legs, men have endeavored to make their drawings depict motion. Twenty-thousand years of progress have culminated in such masterpieces as "Snow White" and "Fantasia", with still unknown works to come in a field where the human imagination is the only limit to accomplishment.

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In 1831 another Frenchman, Joseph Antoine Plateau, invented the first of a series of contrivances using Pascal's principle to produce motion in drawings. The most famous of these was the "wheel of life", in which a series of pictures were shown in a rapid succession, giving the illusion of motion.

By
James N. Marsden
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The urge to make pictures move, to leave a permanent record of action as well as outline, is as old as art itself. On the walls of caves near Altamira, Spain, are crude drawings of animals in which the illusion of motion is given by several pairs of legs. These drawings are at least 20,000 years old.

Variations of this idea continued to appear through the centuries until, in 1824, Peter Mark Roget discovered "persistence of vision", a principle which made possible all forms of moving pictures. "Roget's Top", the first device to utilize this principle, did not produce motion but consisted of a disc mounted on a spindle. On one side of the disc was painted a bird and on the other side a cage, rapid rotation of the disc making the bird appear to be inside the cage.

In 1831 another Frenchman, Joseph Antoine Plateau, invented the first of a series of contrivances using Roget's principle to produce motion in drawings. The most commonly known device of this type was the "wheel of life", invented by William Lincoln, which was the

first successful "motion picture" to be made in America. All of these devices consisted of a series of pictures moved rapidly before the eye, and a row of slits or shutter openings synchronized to allow one picture to be viewed at a time. The pictures showed progressive positions in some cycle of action.

The closest approach to the present-day animated cartoon to be made before the advent of photography was known as the "Praxinoscope". This development by Emile Reynaud, in 1877, combined the use of the "magic lantern", which had been invented by a German, Anthonasius Kircher in 1640, with pictures drawn on a strip of transparent "Crystaloid". Reynaud was the first man to present bits of dramatic action in the form of plays projected on a screen.

In 1906 Thomas Edison photographed more than 3000 cartoons to produce the first animated cartoon on motion picture film. James S. Blackton, who was at that time a cartoonist for the New York Evening World, was assigned to interview Edison on his motion picture experi-

ments. A few quick sketches made of the inventor were so good that Edison asked him to make drawings for the cartoon. This "Daddy" of all animated cartoons was released under the title of "Humerous Phases of Funny Faces", and scored such an instantaneous hit, particularly one scene in which a man smoked a cigar and blew smoke-rings at his eye-rolling girl friend, that Edison produced nine more cartoons.

Emile Cohl, in France, and Winsor McCay, in America, were the proponents of the present trends in animated cartooning. McCay produced the first feature-length cartoon in 1918, entitled "The Sinking of the Lusitania". This cartoon, composed of 25,000 drawings, was the longest cartoon made before Disney's "Snow White".

Today there are seven major studios releasing animated cartoons in the United States. The largest of these is Walt Disney Productions, whose staff numbers nearly a thousand men and women. The others are, in approximate order of size, Fleischer Studios, Terry-Toons, Inc., M.G.M. Cartoon Division, Walter Lantz

Productions, Leon Schlesinger Productions, and Screen Gems, Inc.. These studios produced 192 cartoons a year before the war, and the Disney studios produce one feature-length film each year in addition to eighteen shorts.

Disney's creations of "Snow White", "Fantasia", and "Bambi" are leading the way to an era of serious artistic endeavor in the field of animated cartooning, not replacing but supplementing the motive of pure humor which has dominated the industry in the past.

Reference:

How to Make Animated Cartoons, by Nat Falk
Foundation Books, New York.