
Walt Stanchfield 02

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"WHEN ACTING (DRAWING) IS AN ART"

by Walt Stanchfield

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We have been using pen and ink exclusively in the gesture sketching class. The reasons for this was and is to try to transfer the function of drawing to the mind and away from the hand - to eliminate a tendency to render, and to train the eye to see the gesture at a glance rather than feel it out on the paper with a multitude of searching and superfluous lines. Ultimately, the searching method may be the style you will use in animation, for there will be no model before you to lean on. I have contended that in a model drawing situation the pose is already there so searching is not necessary. Using a pen forces one to distill the essence of the pose in the mind's eye and in turn draw it the way one sees it.

On the other hand using a multitude of lines borders on doodling, which I am not putting down, but which can become a habit and one may come to rely on it for it sometimes accidentally locates things in its meandering lines, from which all one has to do is pick out the best ones. Of course, when there is no model and when a needed gesture is not clear in the mind, by all means start searching.

On the other hand, using our kinetic sense of motion we stressed in the gesture drawing session — the feeling the pose in our own bodies - the “living” the pose — that being at one with the gesture and “knowing” it, will in every sense be a short cut to capturing it on paper. Both methods of drawing are invaluable. But I think it is important to know the difference and be able to use either of them at will.

Stanislavski, in his book, *An Actor Prepares*, said, “...the organic basis on which our art is founded will protect you in the future from going down the wrong path.” The “organic basis” he spoke about is that emotional empathy and those natural body gestures that we are striving to see and know - know in our own bodies, and minds so we can transfer them to paper, for as Stanislavski says, “. . . if we are not living our art, imagination evaporates and is replaced by theatrical claptrap.”

On another page he writes, “. . .in our art you must live the part every moment that you are playing it, and every time.” And on still another page, “. . .you must be very careful in the use of a mirror. It teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside .” In our classroom situation we are not using a mirror, but we are using a model, which is no different than a mirror if we merely copy it.

Stanislavski cautioned, “...never allow yourself externally to portray anything that you have not inwardly experienced and which is not interesting to you.”

Translating all that to drawing from the model: copying or drawing by formula, that is, with anatomical diagrams, symbols of shapes and parts, or copying photographically will simply be drawing by the numbers. There is indeed a kind of universal “body language”, but it differs with each person's (or character's) use of it.

Charlie Chaplin's reaction to some particular stimulus such as grief or joy might be the same, emotionally, as John Wayne's, but would differ greatly gesture—wise. If you attempted to mimic those actors, it would come from your mental image of their gestures, with an adjustment of your own bodily movements to reproduce theirs. This is the very thing we do when drawing a model's gestures, except we don't mimic them with our bodies - we use a pen or pencil.

All the above just to say - see it in the mind, and feel it in the body before trying to draw it on the paper.

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