
Walt Stanchfield 23

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"A Drawing Style for Animation"

by Walt Stanchfield

A DRAWING STYLE APPROPRIATE FOR ANIMATION

Have you ever said, “Oh, if I could just draw well.” Ah, yes, you could express yourself to the nth degree. You could animate or cleanup scenes that would evoke oohs and aahs. Work wouldn’t be so much like work.

You could get it all down on paper and leave at 5:00 o’clock feeling good.

Most of you draw well. A lot of you draw better than I do. And in all the years I’ve been in the business, I’ve never seen a more industrious and devoted staff of artists. It makes my job of trying to help you better yourself, a pleasure.

I got a late start in life. The first 5 or 6 years in the business were a “walk through.” I was a dilettante, toying with poetry, painting, singing and socializing. Then 10 years as Lounsbery’s assistant, and 10 years as Johnston’s assistant helped me to “center” myself. Those guys worked hard and were completely devoted to their jobs - that taught me to work hard (and study hard to catch up). The next 20 years were not easy but were very satisfying.

Sometimes I wish I had a magic wand that I could wave over you and say, “You are now learned artists - go and draw to your hearts content.” But maybe it’s better that you do it yourself - become your own self starter. The learning process should be fun. One thing that it does is it tears down a lot of false pride. To seek help is a kind of humbling experience, a very necessary one, in as much as animation should be thought of and practiced as a group effort. I consider a person who is not ashamed to seek help, a wise person.

In the “Illusion Of Life”, Ollie or Frank had written a paragraph on cleanup people which lists some of the functions of a cleanup person which coincide with some of the things I keep stressing in the drawing class - a crisp line against a soft shape (using angles), designing shapes that work with the action rather than copying, emphasizing squash and stretch, and drawing detail only as it furthers the action and the drawing. Especially, “telling the story” whether it’s a scene of animation or a still drawing.

The quote, reprinted here in full, refers to cleanup people but it could as well refer to animators and inbetweeners. All of the above classifications make drawings that go into a scene and so the same training is necessary for all.

“They studied line drawing, training on Holbein, Degas, Daumier, Da Vinci; they watched drapery in movement, noting the difference between filmy scarves, woolen skirts, flowing capes, and even baggy pants; they learned the value of a sharp, crisp line against a large, soft shape; they knew how to keep a design in the free-flowing changing shapes of animation rather than make a rigid copy. They always extended the arcs of the movement, squashed the characters more, stretched him more - refining while emphasizing both the action and the drawings. They understood the business of the scene, what it was supposed to achieve, worked closely with the animator in deciding which parts were developing well and which parts needed a little help, and they could see the characters start to live as they “rolled” the drawings on the pegs. This required a special kind of talent as well as study - not every artist could master it.”

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So you see, there is something special about the thinking that goes into animation drawing. Don't ease up on your search - success is just around the proverbial corner. I am reprinting some ruff animation drawings to remind you of the style of drawing that seems to serve the purposes of the animators best. I am constantly apologizing for maybe interfering with your style of drawing, but if you are serious about making animation your life's work - it behooves you to take as many tips from the pros as you can. Try to use this kind of an approach when drawing from the model. then you won't have to make an unnatural switch in styles when working on animation.

Draw ideas, not things; action, not poses; gestures not anatomical structures.



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FRANK THOMAS



OLLIE JOHNSTON



MILT KAHL



MARK HENN



FRED MOORE



MILT KAHL

A DRAWING STYLE FOR ANIMATION PART II

Last week I reprinted some roughs as examples of a style of drawing appropriate for animation, which I knew at the time was not fully explaining my point. They showed some beautifully drawn roughs which were loose and expressive, but didn't explain or even give a hint at how they were arrived at.

Let's take one of the drawings from last weeks "handout" and analyze it. The animator, Mark Henn was not interested in parts, but only in telling the part of the story that occurred on that particular frame of film.



If he were interested in parts and the audience were too, this kind of thing would have satisfied both:



Animators are not just recorders of facts, they are story tellers, using their drawing vocabulary instead of words to spin a tale. They have at their disposal many exciting and dramatic ways to make expressive drawings, some of which are squash and stretch, twisting, contrast, angles, tensions perspective, and thrust. These are not physical things but they are what gives life to physical things. (I underline "life" because without those things in a drawing it would be stiff, dull, and as I often point out in the drawing class, "too straight up and down.")

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You can be sure this drawing wasn't started with a detail of the head, or some other part of the body, (as some of you are still tempted to do when drawing from the model)..



It was started with a simple sketch of the whole action, then (and only then) were the details and finishing touches added.



At some point after the initial gesture is established, certain tensions and forces important to the gesture should be chosen, including all parts involved, and worked on as units of action. Every drawing will have a weight distribution or a stress or a thrust or a twist; a squash and stretch a pull, a push, a drag, some action or actions that you will want to emphasize.

Choose those themes or story points or gesture topics or whatever you want to call them and with all your awareness concentrate on them - accentuating them, "pressing home" their importance in what you are trying to say, in a word, caricaturing them.

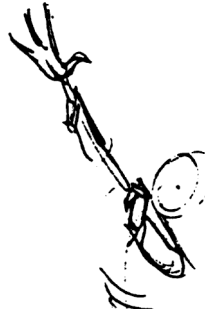
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For instance, in Mark's drawing, Basil is yakking about something as he goes through a flurry of putting on his coat. At this point in the action he has thrust his right arm through the arm hole, causing a stretch and is pulling it over his shoulder with his left hand. That is one unit of action - the two hands pulling away from each other. There are others: the lower jaw pulling away from the nose area, the left foot pulling away from the right foot, the corner of the cloak swinging away from his body. They are all part of the action, but they directly relate to one another.

So, in order to get the most out of these areas of action, you work one of the related parts against the other - never draw one part of the unit alone - out concomitantly the whole unit. For instance you wouldn't draw 2 unrelated parts such as his left arm and his left leg.



Rather you would work his left arm against his right arm.



Then (but not necessarily in that order) you would draw the two feet which work as a unit, pulling away from each other.



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Then you would concentrate on the action of the corner of the cape as it stretches out away from his torso.



Then the head thrust which is set up by the sum total of all the other parts. Notice how the nose direction is a continuation or rather a culmination of the whole body action - clear from the left toe, but also the belt line, the cape line; and the straight lines of the arms is almost like a “sounding ‘board” for the yakking that is going on.



Some of the subtle poses that our models assume may be less extreme or dramatic but all the more reason for us to be cognizant of the importance of those vital elements in gesture drawing. It is so easy for a subtle pose to become another one of those “straight up and down”, self conscious postures. On the other hand it is “goose bump” time when those eloquent, meaningful, story-telling gestures come through in your drawings.

May the forces and stretches and angles and all other drawing helps be with you.

Walt