
Walt Stanchfield 29

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"The Seriousness of Head Sketching"

by Walt Stanchfield

A NEW PHRASE, “BODY SYNTAX”

Try to keep from getting too serious while head sketching. After all, you are in the cartoon business and most of the Disney characters are somewhat comical, and if not comical then at least they are caricatures of serious beings. Usually when a person takes himself too seriously he is in our eyes a "comedian". He is ripe for caricature. So if cartoons are not somewhat caricatures of reality they may be taken too seriously and lose that special spark of humor needed in cartoons. Very few, if any, of the animators I've known found drawing easy. One of Ollie Johnston's sayings, "It ain't easy", became a studio quip. Drawing funny cartoons was and is a serious business. It seems like the funniest scenes were the ones that were "sweat over" most. They were serious matters that required the animator to never forget (in all his gropings and mental anguish) that the result he was after was to make the audience smile.

Yea, try to keep from getting too serious while head sketching. Museums and living rooms are full of serious portraits that are just dying to be retouched with a little humor. But, of course, portraits were not invented to make people smile--cartoons were. If you think the world is all so serious, you should be a historian or a philosopher, but if you desire to bring a little humor into the lives of those humor-hungry people "out there", then be a cartoonist and be serious about losing some of that seriousness.

There is an insistent tendency to look at the model in a serious, even detached way--as if it were a still life devoid of feeling and personality we look at the model to pick a starting point, we draw it. We look back to see if we did it right, make a few more dabs at it to reassure ourselves, we look up for another line to add--perhaps connected to the first one, perhaps somewhere else in some unrelated area. We look down, sketch in the new line tentatively. Reinforce it, after another look at the model, with several swipes of the pen. The gesture goes unrecognized. The more unrelated lines that get put down, the farther from our grasp goes the gesture.

Imagine yourself drawing a simple shape like a circle or a square. Do you see yourself sketching a bit here or there, going over what you have done, then on to another section, seeing only those small sections of line you are putting down. No! Of course not. You see a circle and the size you want to make it and in as few lines as possible--wham!, down it goes. A human body is more complicated, granted, but the act of drawing its gesture is much the same. You must see the whole, and wham! (over a longer period of time, of course), down it goes. You have hardly looked at the details. They influence and enhance the pose (gesture) out are somewhat incidental to it. The model could strike the same pose while wearing any number of different outfits. If its outfits you are interested in, invest in a Sears catalogue. If it is gesture you are interested in, then look beyond those extraneous, sometimes, gesture destroying details.

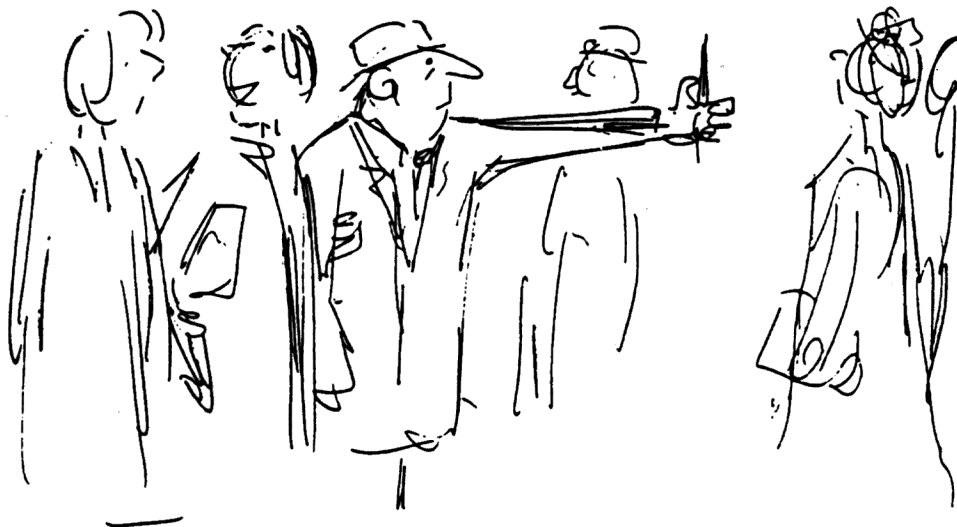
I love to read. I love the way authors put their words together. I love syntax. I love the way the words reveal the plot and the personalities of the protagonists that carry me along in the plot. But if I'm not careful, I get caught up in admiring the details and how the story is being told, getting behind in what the story is about. We have been having some terrific models whose "details" (body syntax) are fascinating to the point of distraction. It seems like the more interesting the details, the more difficult it is to see the simplicity of the gesture. So, as it takes a special effort on my part to read for the story, so it is with most of us--we have to make a special effort to draw for the gesture..

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Imagine yourself a pilot landing a plane. Some weird phenomenon has blotted out all but a tiny detail of the field. Right--MAYDAY! MAYDAY! You need the whole field so you can make a good judgment of the situation. If you try to put down on that little detail - it might be a section way at the end of the runway, two feet from the fence. Okay, the same with drawing--you need the whole body (the field) to keep your judgment of the gesture true.

Earlier I mentioned body syntax. That's a phrase worth coining. The non-grammatical meaning of syntax is: "Connected system or order; orderly arrangement." What is a pose or gesture but an orderly arrangement of body parts to display a mood, demeanor, attitude, mannerism, expression, emotion--whatever. That phrase "orderly arrangement(body syntax), is worth ruminating over. An orderly arrangement of body parts. I love it. Even the sentence places arrangement before parts..

I apologize for the over-abundance of text here, out since drawing is largely mental I m trying to reason along these lines. Once the physical faculties of manipulating a pen or pencil to one's satisfaction is conquered, that side of drawing is taken care of and from there on it is mental. It's then the ability to analyze, imagine; to caricature, to assemble and organize all the separate elements of story telling into one drawing or into a series of drawings(animation). As we have come to realize since Dr. Betty Edwards, drawing is a right brain activity. The left brain is a serious namer of things, while the right brain uses all that -seriousness for some creative purpose. The left and right sides of the brain are the "odd couple" of toe cerebral community-the right side being the slightly less serious.



"He can't draw but he likes to size people up."

THE HEAD IN GESTURE

We have spent some months now sketching the figure with special emphasis on gesture. In my estimation it has been a rewarding experience. I have stressed the inclusion of all parts of the body including the hands and feet because they are such an important part of any pose or gesture. No parts of the body have been isolated as more important than another simply because body language entails all of the parts. An exception to that rule occurs in animation where close-ups or waist-shots are featured. Because of this, it behooves us to spend some time in a study of heads and the upper torso. The emphasis should still be on gesture, and as we did with the full figure, ignore the details as much as possible. A very simple symbol for the head shape, eyes, nose and mouth will suffice to "nail down" the gesture or expression. We are all at different stages of drawing ability, so some may feel it unnecessary to start with such simple shapes. If so, try to treat it like a refresher course and spend a little time at it.

Basically, the head from a front view is an egg shape, and from the side it is two egg shapes. (see illustrations that follow). This is an oversimplification, but is useful in laying out the first stages of a drawing. Head shapes vary in many ways and once an individual's variances are discovered, they can be exploited to acquire a likeness or if desired, carry them farther into caricature. A person's real head and feature shapes cannot really be known until we have seen that person from different angles and in different moods and circumstances such as laughter, anger, fear, clowning, seriousness, strain, etc.

In animation most heads have been built on the circle. cheeks have been added or mouse ears or duck bills have been added and suddenly there is a universally appealing character. I said suddenly, but the truth of the matter is, many months of intensive search and experimentation have preceded the final acceptance of most character models.

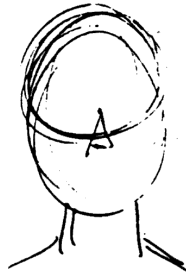
Some, such as Mickey mouse and Donald Duck have been under continual evolution for their entire lifetime. Because many characters are built somewhat on the same basic formula great care must be taken to retain the subtleties that distinguish one from another. Animation allows the characters to be freely caricatured in action but though the shapes are stretched and squashed to unbelievable limits, they must be recognizable as that character at all times. A good model is one that has shapes that can be animated into various poses and expressions without losing its character. The general shape of the head and its individual features must be established in its normal state first so that squashes and stretches will be recognized as such. In other words, a thoroughly recognizable norm will serve to emphasize any deviation from it, giving added punch and authority to special expressions. On the other hand, since we have already enjoined the audience to suspend their disbelief in such beings as talking mice and temperamental ducks, it is important to sustain this newly created plausibility by keeping the characters consistent. Studying the model and people in general with this in mind gives us purpose and hopefully the added incentive to do so.

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PROFILE - TWO OVALS



FRONT ON - A CIRCLE AND AN OVAL



3/4 VIEW - OVAL AND MODIFIED OVAL



APPROXIMATE LIMITATIONS OF LOOKING UP AND DOWN AND SIDE WAYS USING NECK



LOOKING UP AND DOWN NOT USING NECK

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Some of your drawings from the class are suggestive of the way I think the head studies might go. They are simple enough to allow the expression to beam through not weighted down with tons of ostentatious falderal!

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