
Walt Stanchfield 61

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"The Value of Action/ Gesture Analysis Study"

by Walt Stanchfield

THE VALUE OF AN ACTION/GESTURE ANALYSIS STUDY

It is a personal pleasure to have watched the progress you people have made in the evening drawing sessions. I think it is time to remind you that the ability to be aware of the various gestures, emotions, and general body language, and being able to capture them in a drawing, is a vital step in becoming a good animator. You should realize that those beautiful, expressive gesture drawings you have been making are the very backbone of a scene of animated action. Of course, along with this, there must be the ability to incorporate acting, timing, and all those myriad details like squash and stretch, anticipation, interpretation of dialogue, etc. So in addition to the gesture sketching, lectures, films and discussions with knowledgeable coworkers, I recommend that you study the Art Of Animation by Don Graham and the lectures by Eric Larson. If you don't have a copy of either, see Bill Matthews or myself and we will see that a copy is made available. This is not to suggest that any one or two sources of information will, transform you suddenly into a master, but certainly the process of learning is an ongoing one and we have to remain active in our search.

In the past Walt Disney and Don Graham made some important discoveries through an intense search for the then new art form, animation. We can't go back to that original mode of discovery but we can avail ourselves of the findings, the knowledge and wisdom that has been documented. That nucleus of artists of 40 or 50 years ago were no more talented than you people today. They had to go to art school to learn to draw, they had to read, study, search; they had to discover for themselves what they had to offer. They too had to devote a major part of their lives to harness that great creative energy.

Our efforts here in the gesture analysis class is one of the necessary areas of study that inches us closer to our goal. Read What Eric says in his chapter on caricature, "Since we are challenged to put "Drawings that Live" on the screen, our animated characters, human, animal or in-animate, must be sincere and governed by believable traits and mannerisms. They are linear drawings made alive by the animator through his imaginative analysis of thought processes, emotions and actions."

And in the same chapter, "All our great characters (Pinocchio, Bambi, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Mickey, etc.) have been the result of the successful caricature of reality, and our knowledge and use of reality has been gained from an analysis and application of that which we have observed, read about, been told about, discussed and perhaps even dreamed about. It is the sum total of all this that will make our linear- characters. entertaining and have meaningful, harmonic relationships with the audience."

Don Graham, in his book "The Art Of Animation", speaks of those early attempts to study action and gesture analysis. Here is a quote from his chapter on "Analysis of Action": "If, now, the human figure could be drawn not just frozen in an action pose but as a caricature of the action idea, a new understanding of drawing was inevitable." Also, "...early animators were familiar with action and loved it. They could clearly visualize a jump, a run, a throw, because they had experienced such actions physically. Once the action was visualized, the trouble of drawing the action had been greatly reduced."

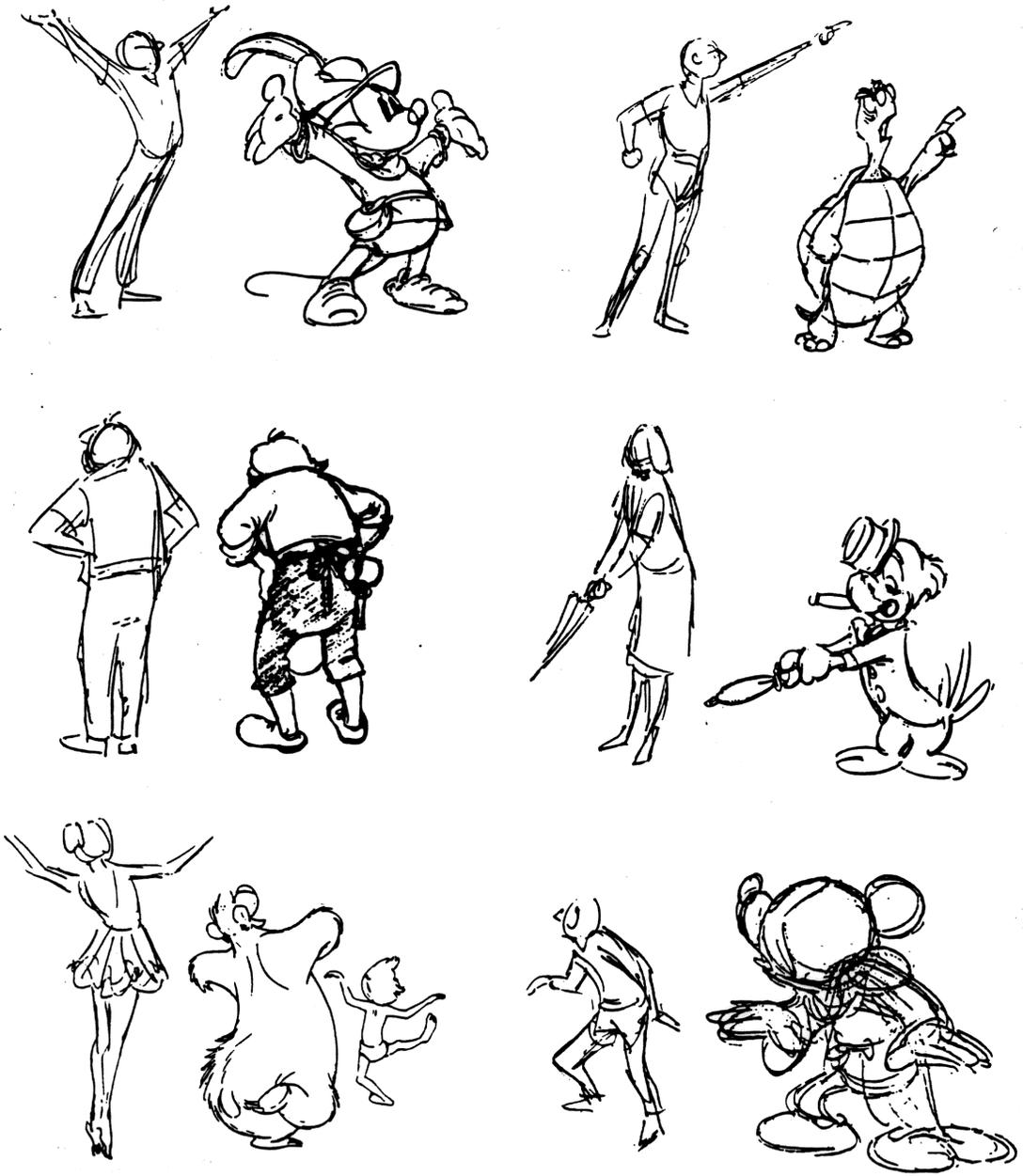
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I submit that even though a person is not athletically inclined, there is a muscular sense that allows him to experience muscular action within his mind or imagination. This is called kinetics or kinesthesia, the perception of notion. You can see people using it while watching a ball game or a murder mystery. They'll yell, "Throw the ball!" and up goes their throwing arm. When someone is shot in a movie, there is often a physical reaction. If the picture is vivid enough, there could even be pain. I'll never forget a shooting in the cowboy picture, "Shane". The blast from the gun knocked the victim from a boardwalk. The whole audience jumped a foot. Sometimes while watching or sketching a boxing match, I notice one of the boxers drop his guard and my arm muscles twitch as I go for the opening.

Through this sense, the animator creates the limitless actions and gestures he is called upon to draw. And this is the thing we are striving to develop here in our action/gesture analysis class.

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Some "fabricated" quick sketches to suggest how the study of poses and gestures can and will help in solving animation drawing problems.