Entertainment V

ACTION: ITS CHARACTER AND TEXTURE
We tell our stories through action. It reflects the emotions our characters experience to give that illusion of life we must put on the screen. We are not in the business of just making drawings move, though the fact they can and do, is still a fascination. We are in the business of entertainment, making believable personalities become manifest in linear drawings -alive in a fantasy world.

Action is a manifestation of force — something caused it. This we must understand before we can interpret it in our drawings.

Action is easily thought of as movement. But it is more than that. Action has character, too.If it is what we term primary (P. 4 - 2/11/81 notes), it is motivated by emotional dictations, brought about through the "thought process" created by varied situations and circumstances our character finds himself in.

If the action is secondary (P. 5 — 2/11/81 notes) - an action resulting from a primary action — it could still have "character." It might be in the swirling movement of a full, loose skirt — a reaction to a primary action of maybe a dancer in a graceful pivoting motion. The weight of the skirt fabric, be it silk, cotton, wool or whatever, plus the speed of the dancer's pivot, will dictate the flow and the opening and closing patterns in the cloth's movement. A heavy fabric will have more flare and accent in its movement than would a light-weight cloth, such as silk. Consequently it will be a much more exciting action.

> As a personal experiment, take two three foot lengths of heavy string and at the end of one attach a slight weight. Then, holding both with thumb and finger, begin a simple wrist movement which will force each string into a figure "8" pattern and check which of the two gives the better visual and rhythmic show. The weighted one will, undoubtedly. The arcs in the action will be full and the timing between the extreme positions will have a much livelier flow; more entertainment.

As we attempt to identify and clarify the "character" and "texture" of action, we will be a bit repetitive inasmuch as the discussion of the one might well overlap the other at times. As a starter, however, we should ask ourselves some questions pertinent to the "action" our animated character is to go through: First — what is it? Second — why is it? Third — how will it best be done?

Because two of these questions, "what" and "why", would be prompted by an emotion (happiness, fear, jealousy, anxiety, anger, etc.) we would consider them to be in the "character" of action. Walt cautioned us that, "In most instances, the driving force behind the action is the mood, the personality, the attitude of the character — or all three." Now we must consider the way our animated character will perform, it being prompted by the "what" and "why" query we made, and we realize that that performance must have texture - a physical display! This might well be the "how" of our query and would hinge upon the physical make—up of our animated character, his size, weight, agility, etc. (See 2/11/81 notes on "Our Character" P. 4, 5 and 6.)

Consider: Given the same reason for their anger, wouldn't the big, burly bully react differently than the defiant, cocky little guy?

Let's think of action as an expression of the body. In his memo to Don Graham, December 23, 1935, Walt chided us saying: "The animators go through animation and don't make the positions of the body express anything." How often do we do that? We just make 'em move and accept that as being animation. It's certainly difficult to express a positive thought when we move a character all over the screen, failing to accept the fact that such action so often destroys personality, making it impossible for the audience to appreciate and relate to our animated character's emotions.

As in all things, there are exceptions. The Araquan bird, for example, could not be too confined. When he moved, he covered much of the screen. That movement, that nervous energy, was his character, his whole personality.

In the pattern of their flights, the winged horses in FANTASIA'S "pastoral", used the whole field making good use of graceful arcs and turns to give a gracious, poetic quality to their flight. Without space to move the desired result could not have been achieved. The flight over London in PETER PAN with Pan and the children, would have lacked appeal and fantasy if we had not made use of the full field and camera moves in and out to give the desired perspective and dramatic effects in the flight design.

Countless things excite an emotion and dictate the action resulting from it. An angered Friar Tuck, frustrated and steaming mad, tried to push the obnoxious Sheriff out of his church by defiantly bumping him with his big, fat belly. An adamant bear in SONG OF THE SOUTH, bent on knocking Brer Rabbit's "head clean off", walked right over Brer Fox. Donald Duck has usually given vent to his outrage in childish tantrums. A character might "sneak" up on a victim with a long, stealthy stride, using maybe 32 frames per step to have time for the deliberate reach in the step and the moving of the body cautiously forward as the weight moves onto the extended leg. The action could suggest a sinister or a playful attitude and to enhance the mood, a short pause or a furtive look might be added. But then again, a "sneak" might suggest a joyous anticipation of things to be, using short, excited phrases of "tippy—toe" action like the wolf did as he approached the little pigs' houses.

Laughter, like all emotion, has many expressions and actions, all resulting from the inward feelings of the character at the time. Think of the innocent, childish laughter of little Thumper as he rolled on the ground, almost beside himself, because Bambi had called the little skunk a flower and in great contrast the forced, sneering laugh of Maleficent standing before King Stefan and his court sarcastically noting that she wasn't invited to the christening of the little Princess Aurora. And then there's the outward, exhilarating joyof the King in CINDERELLA at the thought of being a grandfather. Because of the action this was most contagious and spilled over into the audience.

Each scene we animate is a new challenge and any character in a given mood and in a given situation in that scene we know demands our serious study and analysis. This we cannot ignore.

Let's consider the "how" of action. Call it texture —the fiber, the structure, the strength and vitality, the reality and spirit of what we put on the screen. This is the showmanship we, the animators, display. To accomplish our goal all the "basics" we have talked about, over and over, come into use. Here, we might list and review some of them briefly.

> Observation - weight and balance - squash and stretch (change of, shapes) - reverses.

Others such as movement, rhythm, anticipation timing (phrasing), drawing, volume, staging, arcs, silhouette, caricature and pantomime will be considered separately.

OBSERVATION: (See notes 7/22/82 P. 1 & 2)

Without observation our scope would be as limited as that of a horse wearing blinders. Our sense of what goes on around us, be it real or pictured or written, would be minimal. Our springboard into imagination would be static. Observation is often prompted by curiosity. Let's keep a wide open eye and mind. The Disney philosophy of animation is "to give a caricature of life and action." And, if you remember, Walt added to this with: "Our study of the actual is not so that we may be able to accomplish the actual, but so that we may have a basis upon which to go into the fantastic, the unreal, the imaginative — and yet to let it have a foundation of fact in order that it may more richly possess sincerity and <u>contact</u> with the <u>public</u>. I definitely feel that we cannot do the fantastic things based on the real, unless we first know the real."

We must think of observation as a way of "coming to know"; a way of broadening our horizons.

Observation is a personal experience and how we use it is up to each of us. But one thing is certain — it's the personal observation and how we use it that inspires variety, strength and "character" to our animation, keeping it out of the "stock stream." Walt used to ask: "Isn't there another way to do that action?" And there is, for somewhere along the way we have observed an applicable action that, if we use it as a base and caricature, will give us something different and entertaining and will not be "stock." We must keep our eyes open and our ears alert for we never know just when, how, where or why we will have reason to use, with proper analysis and caricature, our observations in the scenes we animate.

ANALYSIS: (See P. 3 of 3/20/81 notes)

How do we put that which we have observed to work? What is its inspiration? Where and how might it fit in? What does it suggest that would be entertaining? Does it offer a new thought on character personality — on humor — on drama — on caricature? Does it suggest an interesting, funny walk, an unusual body attitude and expression, a strange way to swing a tennis racquet, a golf club?

We observe and study an animal trait and movement and probably apply it mostly in an animal action. But, too, more often than not, we find reason to adapt it to a human. The old saying, "mean as an old bear," has some significance. We observe a child in a tantrum and 10 and behold, that childish explosion in detail and caricature becomes an expression of personality and mood in a small animal and we are deep in the world of fantasy.

And there's the "waddle" of the duck. How many variations might we make of it? And all in keeping with the physical make—up of our character and the emotional stimulant that might prompt his action; Chaplin created a most memorable caricature with his "Little Tramp." The duck waddle in his walk is most apparent, timed and tuned to the gait of a carefree, sympathetic little fellow. Whenever you have the opportunity to view the "Little Tramp," regardless of the picture, sit back and concentrate on the richness of Chaplin's caricature and how simply he presents it Ah, simplicity! A word and meaning we so often sidestep and ignore!

IMAGINATION: (See 7/22/81 notes — P. 2 & 3)
We once mentioned that perhaps imagination is where ideas begin to take leave of reality and perform believably in a world of fantasy. Reality, that which we know regardless of how we have come by it, is the stimuli to the imagination and imagination might well be considered one of the very important needs in our animation — drawing being another. Our degree of success may well be dependent on the richness and scope of our imagination and our ability to draw and bring to life that which we imagine. As Stanislavsky pointed out, imagination is more than a gift — it is a talent, a very special talent, that "must be cultivated and developed — it must be alert, rich and active." And he reminds us that this talent can grow only as fast and successfully as we, ourselves, may want it to. No one can do it for us, but never forget, good discussions and the exchange of ideas with other people are certainly a very valuable source of inspiration and part of our growing experience.

We often say we want more fantasy - more whimsy - in our pictures. And we really mean it. Both, more often than not, find their "roots" in reality, as our consideration of FANTASIA pointed out (7/22/81 P. 3). We reach for them in the unusual, the ethereal, the dramatic. Remember Snow White's nightmare after the huntsman sent her into the woods? And in deep contrast, the whimsy in the pouty, jealous, unpredictable antics of a little one like Tinker Bell?

Certainly our animation shows off as we add touches of the unusual to the simplest of actions. Did you ever take note of the "exotic" foot actions possible within the unordinary walk of the Goof, which in his. case because he is the Goof, is the ordinary? Maybe we pay little attention, but if those little extra twists of those big feet swiveling on those ankles were not there as he steps, it just wouldn't be Goofy's walk, would it? We would lose a lot
of entertainment!

Let's think back on some everyday situations and actions which, through imagination, became gems of entertainment. Remember Thumper's problems with Bambi on the ice? "Sasha", the bird, in PETER AND THE WOLF? The meeting of Donald Duck, Carioca and Panchito in THREE CABALLEROS? Snow White and the animals cleaning up the kitchen? Imagination — without it we fail.

We have to remember that the animator's world is a fanciful one, as unlimited as his imagination and other talents will allow him to make it. Think about it: Elephants can dance the ballet — musical instruments can be made to walk and talk - animals can take on human personalities and think, act, sing and talk. Maybe imagination is to the animator what the pole is to the pole vaulter; the success of his jump depends greatly on how good it is. Let's give it some thought.

WEIGHT AND BALANCE:
As animators, we have the power to defy gravity but when that power is used, it should be with purpose and reason and with entertainment in mind.

In our work we strive for weight and balance - for sincerity, with caricature, in movement and pose, giving our characters believability. We lose all this if, in a normal walk for instance, our character "floats" giving us a lack of weight as he moves along. There are those times, however, when a "floating" or "soaring" action makes for part of the "spirit" in a scene. The old Owl in BAMBI, giving his views on "twitter— pated," visually was "walking on air" to warn Bambi, Thumper and Flower of the effect love would have on its victims.Pecos Bill's gal Sue bounced "clean to the moon." And remember the love chase of Bambi and Faline through the clouds? The contacts each made with the "ground," though on a fleecy surface, had weight. Their push-offs for the next leaps were strong and then, for the heavenly effect they both went into a long "float" before the next landing. This defiance of gravity put emphasis on the emotional feelings of the two.

Every normal action needs weight. Every pose needs weight. We sit in a chair; our posture will suggest weight and balance We lean on a table and there's body weight on the arm and hand in contact with the table, giving balance. We lift a heavy object and prove it's heavy through the points of tension and shifts within the lifter's body, suggesting the changes of balance needed to counter the weight of the object being lifted off the ground.

Weight and balance mean that our characters stand firmly on the "ground" or sit solidly in the "chair." It's just as easy to do this convincingly as it is to make weightless wonders out of them — so weightless that they might be blown away with the slightest puff.

SQUASH AND STRETCH: (The change of shapes)
In descriptive wording, "squash and stretch" might well be called the visual needs of animation life. Close attention and application of them in all our work is our responsibility.

Animation is a change of shapes, which in turn, gives meaningful movement and personality to our linear drawings on the screen. We take our cue from reality and caricature it. In every move things change shape. Our arm bends at the elbow in anticipation before it straightens out to reach for something A round ball, hit by a bat, flattens into an oval on contact. Our face explodes from anger into laughter. You name it —if it moves it changes shape — it animates - it's alive! That life we want to put on the screen may sometimes seem complicated. But it really isn't. The problem may be in that we fail to appreciate the tools we have to work with and how best to use them.

To drive a nail, we position it right and hit it on the head with a hammer. A very simple action. To take a normal step we reach out for that step with a straight leg. On contact the leg bends as the body weight, moving forward, is put upon it, then to move into the next step the bent leg straightens to give the body the needed push to lift it into the up position preparatory to reaching out for that next step.

This example, by all measures, is downright simple but what we note of consequence, is that to display that step, the leg had to change shape in order to show the "reach," the body "weight and balance" and the "energy" needed to keep the action going. Naturally this action would have a positive effect on the whole body and we have to carefully
analyze the character of the walk we're doing to know just what that effect will be and how we're going to handle it.

We have to be ever aware of the make-up of the body (human and animal) and how these "parts" work in bringing about the "change of shapes" so necessary, to show movement and expression in real life and the animated drawing. Let's consider them briefly: we have shoulders, elbows, wrists, finger and toe joints, hips, knees and ankles. They bend, turn and twist. We have a head that rotates easily on the neck, which in itself, is flexible. On it, the head moves side to side, rolls backward and forward and tilts at angles. We have eyes that can open wide, close or shift; eye—brows that knit in anger or curiosity and lift high in surprise. We have a nose that wrinkles up in disgust or laughter and a mouth that obligingly changes shape as the emotion and expression might demand. To compliment the mouth action, our cheeks broaden with the mouth in a smile or pull down as the mouth opens wide in fright. Hair and ears (remember Dopey) play their part too. The point, Don Graham insisted, is that we must remember that our characters have all these common things to work with and we must make good use of all of them. As we do, shapes change convincingly, we get squash and stretch in our action — we get believability. We put life, into our animation: We create entertainment!

REVERSES:

Reverses in life often mean getting kicked in the teeth, but reverses in our drawings - well, that's good: They give emphasis and strength to an action and pose. They are a part of the "change of shapes" we've discussed. Consider the reverses that would be used in this simple action:

> Goofy, way off balance, is leaning into a strong wind. His steps, as he digs in, are short and labored. (The arc of the body action is way forward.) A big gust of wind sweeps Goofy into a strong, off balance pose. (His body becomes a completely reversed curve.) He desperately back— paddles to keep from being blown over. Suddenly he is successful and, in control, throws himself into a forward pose, again desperately fighting the wind.

We have used this wind idea before, but it offers a good visual use of "reverses" in our work. Here, within a limited space, without moving our character all over the screen, we create a very graphic, active picture of a guy with problems — his fight against a very persistent wind.

The use of "reverses" brings out the rhythm and attitude in our poses. Thinking and working from reverse to reverse adds immeasurable strength and sincerity to an action - all well staged within limited areas so the audience readily understands what is going on.

Fred Moore was a master at many things, among them the use of "reverses." Beautiful, indeed, were his poses -simple, vibrant, appealing — all because the flow in the action line from his character's feet, through the body to the head or outstretched arms was never broken.

How much strength in "reverses?" We might try to answer that with this simple exercise: Let's draw a straight vertical line, the top of it suggesting our character's "head" position; the bottom being his "feet," the center being his "fanny" or "belly." Keeping the "foot" position fixed, let's bend our line to the right, throwing the"head" out beyond the "feet" and for balance, moving the center point in our line (the "fanny") well to the left of the "foot" position. We now have a flowing line of action, swinging left from the "foot" position to the "fanny" and then to the "head" position giving a graceful curve from the "foot," passing through the "fanny" position and out into the "head."

A   B   C
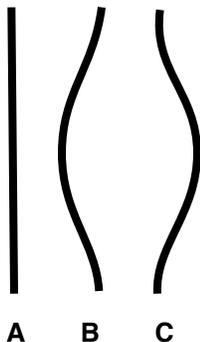
Now let's reverse the action line and, keeping the "feet" in the fixed position, move the "fanny" area to the right of the "feet" and the "bead" to the left of the "feet," giving a complete reversal in our action line with the flow going to the right from the "feet," through the "fanny" and then gracefully left up to the "head."

In analysis, attitude wise the straight line we first drew might suggest our character in normal, erect pose. The first curve of action to the right, might suggest his looking questioningly at something off stage. The second action curve, to the left, (a complete reverse) might suggest a take or fear reaction to what he saw. So, in the most direct manner, we see the positive value of "reverses" — another way of changing shapes.

Eric Larson