
Walt Stanchfield 03

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"Action Analysis"

by Walt Stanchfield

Action Analysis

FOR THE ACTION ANALYSIS CLASS

Here is a sheet of figures drawn by Glen Vilppu, life drawing instructor and layout man. This is an excellent simplistic approach to sketching the figure for animation purposes. I suggest you study them and for the purpose of the action analysis class tonight (and next week) try to emulate them. The model will be clothed but I am suggesting that you think of the structure and attitude of the body rather than the clothing.

After capturing the pose - then begin to consider what effect that pose has on the costume. The idea being that you don't animate clothing running around doing its thing - you animate a character which is a body, which just happens to have some clothes on. it.

If you want to experiment and use a cartoon character in place of the human figure that is fine. In any event try to caricature the pose, meaning go a little farther with the pose than the model has done (or even could do - not being a cartoon character).

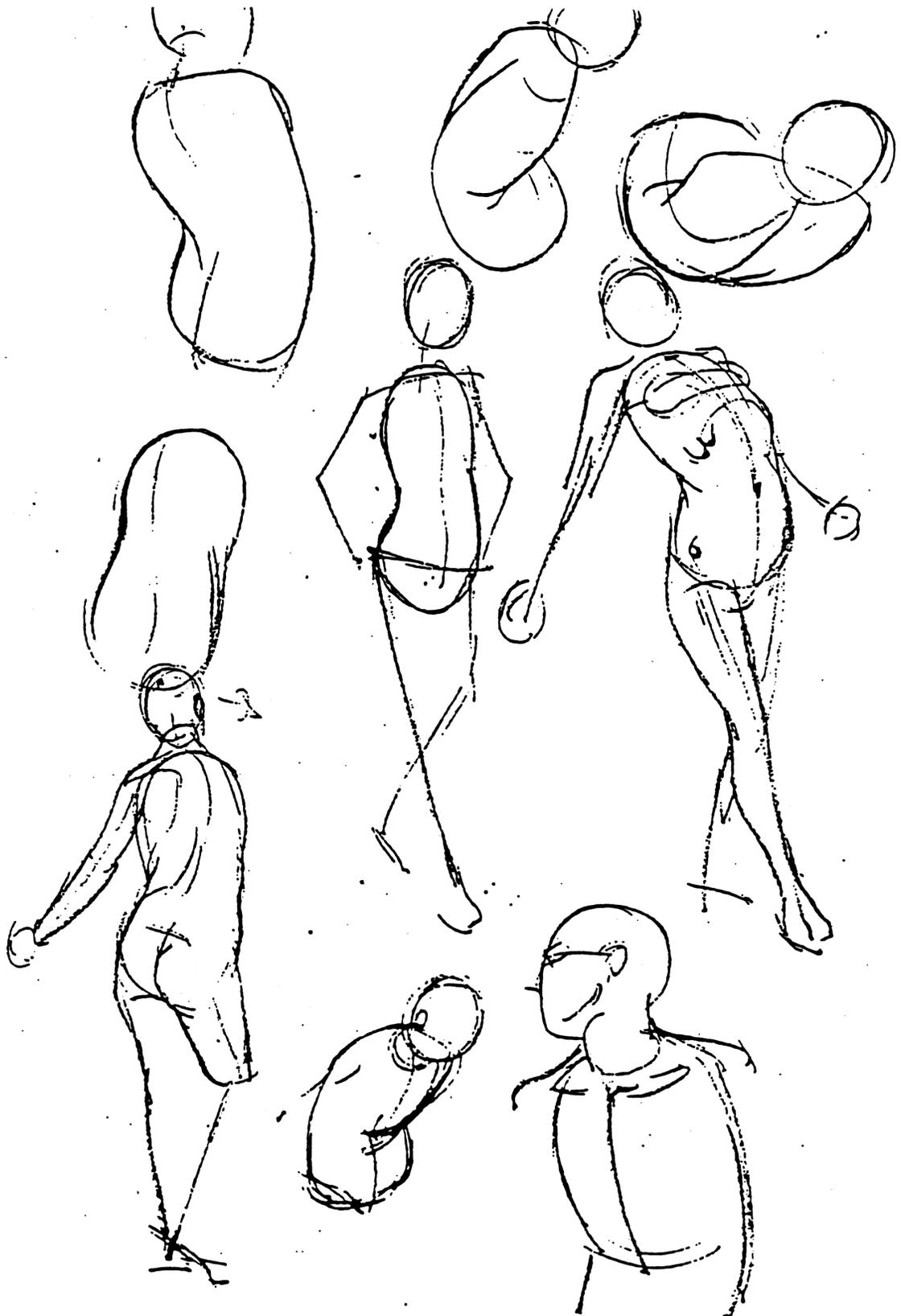
If you've taken life drawing classes you're probably used to copying poses or attempting to locate the muscles and bones and depicting them as realistically as possible. But for the action study's sake forget the muscles, forget the realism and go for the action. I say action rather than pose because although we use poses in animation, every pose is in reality an action. No one ever just does nothing especially in animation. If there is a pose it is either because something has just happened or is about to happen. If something funny has just happened give the audience an additional thrill by ending up with a funny pose. If something is about to happen, give the audience that superior feeling that they have figured out that something is about to happen. In true life the wheels of the mind turn undetected by observers; in cartoons that thinking process has to be caricatured. The story line takes care of a lot of that but the bulk of it is done visually. That is why we have such broad anticipations, "takes", squashes and stretches, arcs, slow-ins and slow-outs, follow throughs and overlaps, and long moving holds where you want to build up to some situation or let down from one - some pose you want to "milk" for all its worth.

So for the purposes of studying life drawing for animation, one pose does not tell enough, because seldom will the animator be faced with just a one pose scene. So ideally there should be at least three poses to study and portray each action:

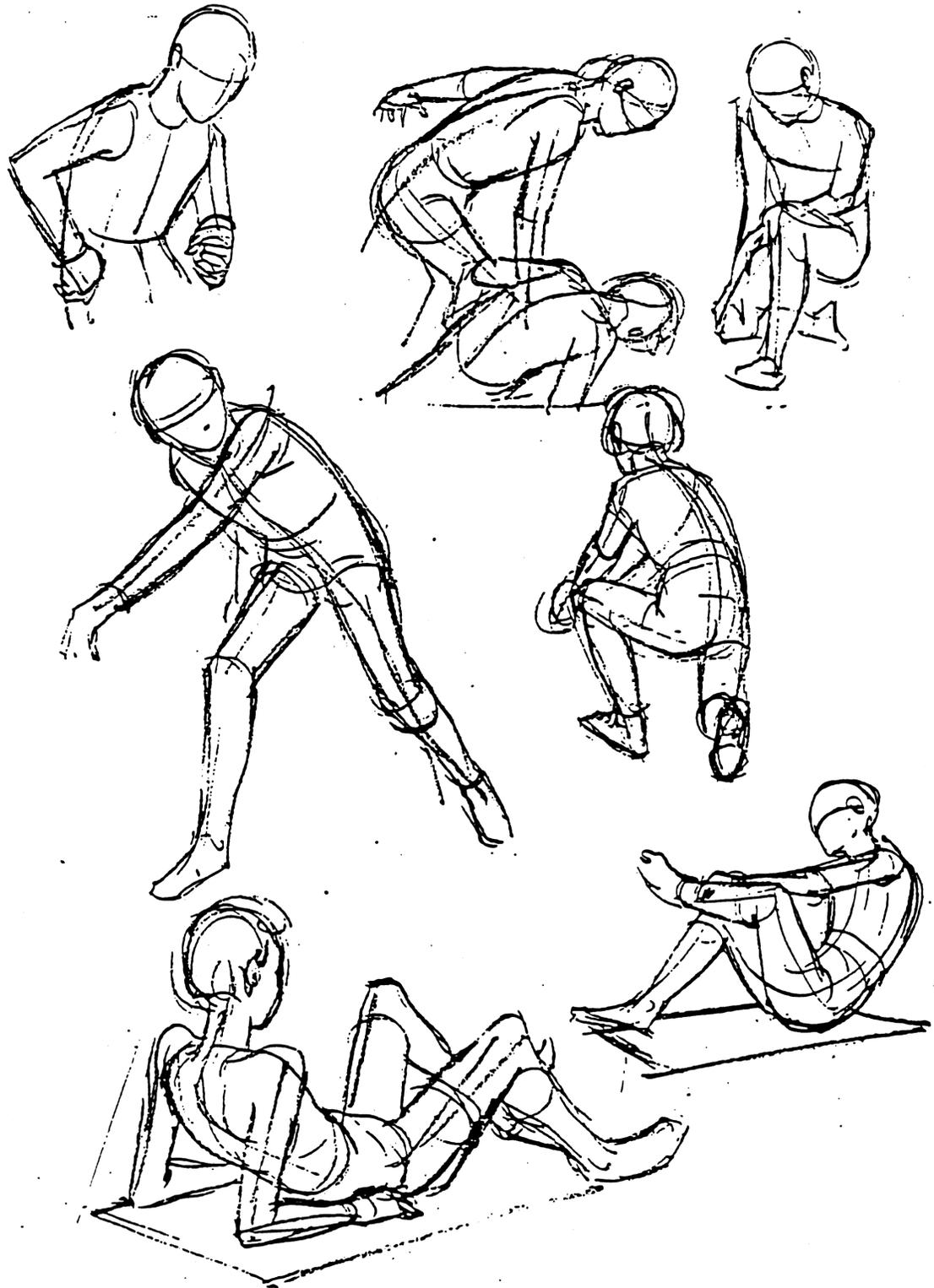
1. The Preparation - telling the audience something is going to happen,
2. The Anticipation - gathering the forces to carry through with the action, and
3. The Action - carrying out of the intended action.

Plus, of course, all the follow-through, overlap and resulting residuals - dust, smoke, wind, destroyed property, chaos whatever.

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The action is the thing here. There is absolutely no sense in trying to get a likeness, that is, a cosmetic likeness, or a personality likeness. The essence of femininity, yes, the essence of a coy or seductive pose, yes.

Don't be shackled by the model. If the model is short and you want to draw a tall girl - draw a tall girl; if the model's hair is short and you want long hair - draw long hair. If the model strikes a pose you think you could improve by altering a little here or there - do it on your drawing

Take a moment before you start to see the pose. Feel yourself experiencing the pose subconsciously. Actually feel the tension of a reach, the folding up sensation of a squash; feel the pressure on the leg that the body is standing on, the weight of the body on that foot; feel the relaxation of the other leg show it relaxed to emphasize the tension and weight on the other side. The model's head is turned to the right, turn your own head to the right - feel the wrinkling of the skin as the chin squashes against the right shoulder - feel the left side of the neck stretch. That is what you want to draw - that squash and stretch.

Drawing for animation is not just copying a model onto paper you could do that better with a camera. Drawing for animation is translating an action (in this case a pose) into drawing form so an audience can retranslate those drawings back into an experience of that action. You don't just want to show the audience an action for them to look at it you want to visualize an action for them to see - that is, to experience. That way you have them in your grasp, your power, and then the story can go on and the audience goes on with it, because they are involved. You have allowed them to experience it.

I have xeroxed some sketches I made at the airport, the underground and a museum to show the possibilities of a direct approach to capturing a pose with a minimum of line. Notice the emphasis of putting the weight on one leg in the standing poses; the emphasis on relaxation in the sitting poses. There was no penciling in first - they were done directly in ink



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DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE ACTION

In the evening drawing sessions I try to direct your thoughts to the gesture rather than to the physical presence of the models and their sartorial trappings. It seems the less the model wears, the more the thinking is directed to anatomy, while the more the model wears, the more the thinking goes into drawing the costume. It's a deadlock that you can only break by shifting mental gears (there's that phrase again) from the "secondary" (details) to the "primary" (motive or driving force behind the pose.) Remember, the drawing you are doing in class should be thought of as a refining process for your animation drawing skills.

I found something in Eric Larson's first lecture on Entertainment which may be of help to you. Please bear with the length of the quote, it is put so well I couldn't edit it without losing some of the meaning. As you read it-keep your mind on gesture drawing.

"....As we begin the 'ruffing out' of our scene, we become concerned with the believability of the character and the action we've planned and we give some thought to the observation of Constantin Stanislavsky. 'In every physical action,' he wrote, 'there is always something psychological and vice versa. There is no inner experience without external physical expression.' In other words, what is our character thinking to make it act, behave and move as it does? As the animator, we have to feel within ourself every move and mood we want our drawings to exhibit. They are the image of our thoughts.

"In striving for entertainment, our imagination must have neither limits nor bounds. It has always been a basic need in creative efforts. 'Imagination,' wrote Stanislavsky, 'must be cultivated and developed; it must be alert, rich and active. An actor (animator) must learn to think on any theme. He must observe people (and animals) and their behavior - try to understand their mentality.'

"To one degree or another, people in our audience are aware of human and animal behavior. They may have seen, experienced or read about it. Because they have, their knowledge, though limited, acts as a common denominator, and as we add to and enlarge upon said traits and behavior and bring them to the screen, "caricatured and alive," there blossoms a responsive relationship of the audience to the screen character - and that spells "entertainment. "

"How well we search out every little peculiarity and mannerism of our character and how well and with what "life" we move and draw it, will determine the sincerity of it and its entertainment value, we want the audience to view our character on the screen and say: 'I know that guy!' (or in the case of gesture drawing: 'I know what that person is doing, what he or she is thinking.') Leonardo da Vinci wrote: 'Build a figure in such a way that its pose tells what is in the soul of it. A gesture is a movement not of a body but of a soul.' Walt (Disney) reminded us of this when he spoke of the driving force behind the action: 'In other words, in most instances, the driving force behind the action is the mood, the personality, the attitude of the character - or all three.'

"Let's think of ourselves as pantomimists because animation is really a pantomime art. A good pantomimist, having a thorough knowledge of human behavior, will, in a very simple action, give a positive and entertaining performance. There will be exaggeration in his anticipations, attitudes, expressions and movements to make it all very visual.

"The pantomimist, working within human physical limitations, will do his best to caricature his action and emotions, keep the action in good silhouette, do one thing at a time and so present his act in a positive and simple manner for maximum visual strength. But we, as animators, interpreting life in linear drawings, have the opportunity to be much stronger in our caricature of mood and movement, always keeping in mind, as the pantomimist, the value and power of simplicity."

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On the following page are some excellent examples of what Walt must have meant by, “...the driving force behind the action is the mood, the personality, the attitude of the character ...” They are sketches Mark Henn did while at a recording session for the Great Mouse Detective.

Walt

