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Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"A Simple Approach to Drapery"

by Walt Stanchfield

USING A SIMPLE (BUT LOGICAL) APPROACH TO DRAPERY

The draped figure will be one of the many problems that will follow you like a heel fly throughout your career. The best thing for you to do (to keep your sanity) is strive to handle it in the most simple way possible. This is not to suggest simplicity is easy - just less frustrating. Think of the character as the star of the scene, and the garment as a subordinate actor chosen to make the star look good. The director of a stage play doesn't have to plan action for drapery, what the actor does will take care of it. But you as an animator must do just that. You have to act out the character's role, plus the costume's, which should be done in such a way as to compliment the action of the actor.

It is important, also, to drape a figure to emphasize the type of character that is being portrayed. Is it a woman or a man; is it a neat person or a slob? Is the dress formal or casual; is it supposed to flatter the actor or make it look ridiculous?

A clear understanding of drapery plus a general understanding of the types of garment construction would be helpful. There is a book called, 'The Complete Book Of Fashion Illustration', by Sharon Lee Tate and Mona Shafer Edwards, (Harper & Row, publishers) that gives a very helpful view of drawing the figure with clothes on. I recommend it.

Glenn Vilppu has made a video tape on drapery wherein he simplifies it very succinctly. He has broken down the folds of cloth into 7 basic categories, which should help you to make logical what often appears to be haphazard.

No.1 he calls the "**pipe fold**". It occurs when cloth hangs from just one point.



No.2 is when cloth hangs from two points causing a "**diaper fold**".



No. 3 happens when a hinging bit of cloth is allowed to fold up on the floor as the cloth is lowered at an angle, and is called the "**zigzag fold**".



No.4 is a "**spiral fold**". This results from cloth as it wraps around shapes such as arms, legs or other parts of the body.



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No.5 is the “**half-lock fold**”, which manifests itself at the knee when the leg is bent, also at the elbow when the arm is bent. When the knee or elbow is bent to more extremes there occurs what Glenn calls the “complete-lock fold”.



No.6 is the “**falling fold**”. This will develop when some hanging cloth is allowed to bunch up on some surface.



No.7 is the “**inert fold**”. This is the only fold which seems to have no potential for energy, it just lies there, inactive.



Being aware of these somewhat simple categories of folds will help you to interpret what happens to drapery under certain conditions. Also, the more complex actions and poses will cause those categories to overlap and produce a hybrid fold, which, without the benefit of knowing the origin of the contributing folds, might prove to be slightly bewildering.

So when you see a fold that is hard to categorize, with the help of this list, you can search out its origins and, lo, erudition shall prevail. Identifying the types of folds will be harder when drawing from the model, for natural drapery doesn't always just lay it all out in simple terms. However, when drawing on your own, such as in animation, you can use more simplified forms of drapery - those that match the action or enhance the pose. With the help of Vilppu's list of folds it will be easier to spot and identify such problem areas as you are forming your “first impression”.

It might also help to develop a vocabulary of “drapery action terms” such as: hang, suspend, dangle, swing freely, be pendent, adhere to, sag, revolve around, drape, incline, bend, droop, descend, incline, sway, dip, settle, plunge, drag, trail, hang over, drape over, envelope, wrap, adorn, enshroud. Each of these suggest an individualized action that helps to get you involved in what is happening to the drapery. It is good to be aware of the vast number of possibilities that are always present - especially if you are academy award winning scene-conscious.

Here are 3 extreme drawings by Milt Kahi. They show how directly he went at drawing the figure and they demonstrate how, in spite of using folds in the girls skirt, it is basically treated as a shape. Glance from one drawing to another and observe how the overlap on the skirt embellishes the action.



DRAPERY--ITS ROLE IN DRAWING

Drawing from a model with clothing or costume can be a real challenge. Wrinkles, folds, seams, belts, pleats, ruffles and shirring all seem so important and at times, downright overwhelming. Their importance cannot be denied, but their reason for being there and looking the way they do must be carefully considered lest we find ourselves drawing lines, lumps, pieces of cloth and incidental paraphernalia rather than a human being presenting us with a gesture to draw, who is incidentally wearing some clothes or a costume.

For our purposes, the clothed figure suits our needs--forces us to the brink of our drawing capabilities. Our job as animators (layout, story, etc.) is to be surrogate actors for our cartoon characters who will be wearing countless kinds of costumes. Let's face it, clothes cannot act. If clothes seem to act it is because the body underneath is acting (posing or gesturing). The clothes will react in a like manner and will even enhance the gesture. But if the drawing has not captured the gesture, all the manipulation of wrinkles, lumps, bulges, folds, seams and superficial incidentals one can dream up will not bring off the drawing. A real solid, expressive, sparkley drawing is one where the clothing is doing what the body is causing it to do.

Reasons ! Reasons! Reasons! Always look for logical reasons for the shapes of the clothing or drapery--and the reason will always be found in the bodily gestures.

It helps to mentally take the clothing apart to see how it is constructed. For instance a sleeve--how big around is the shoulder opening; how is it attached to the bodice; does it taper; does the shoulder seam attach at or below the shoulder? Ward Kimball's great observation is very apropos here. He said if he could take something apart and put it back together again, he could draw it.

For the sake of studying the figure for animation, lines of clothing should not be sketched in just for an impression--they should be logical. If you were to use that drawing in a scene, those drapery lines would have to animate as a secondary action--the primary action being the body itself.

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Here are some beautiful examples of how the clothing can be handled in a simple way, yet be effective in complimenting the action.



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