
Walt Stanchfield 52

Notes from Walt Stanchfield's Disney Drawing Classes

"Stick to the Theme"

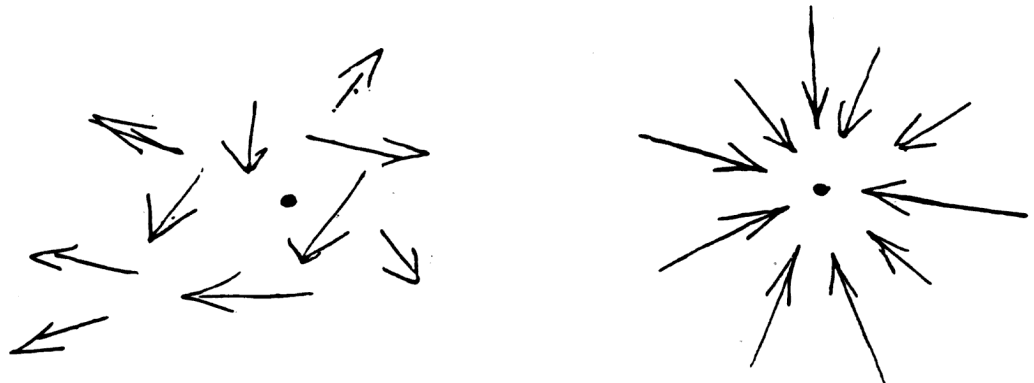
by Walt Stanchfield

STICK TO THE THEME

An orchestra conductor, in a discussion on conducting Mahler's 1st symphony, said he had to be careful not to have too many climaxes in the performance. It is a relatively long symphony, 55 minutes in length, and is full of delightful passages that could be featured each in their own right. But there needs be control over such a temptation so that the overall theme of each of the 3 movements shall prevail.

Drawing is like that. We are the conductors who are tempted also to feature the many interesting passages on the model. Some passages - a wrinkle, a belt buckle, a hair do, are sensuous to the point where we want to render them into little masterpieces of nonessential detail. Usually, a drawing has but one theme, and that theme must be featured or the drawing disintegrates into a montage of unrelated climaxes.

There is a story to be told in drawing whether it is one drawing of a model, or many drawings in a scene of animation. True, in both cases there are secondary actions and costuming that must be dealt with, but the story (theme) is all important, while all else must be kept in a subordinate role. Subordinate doesn't mean unimportant. Everything on the drawing is there to help stress the story. Every line drawn should help direct the eye to the theme.



An obvious example, but to the point. (pun meant).

Every scene of animation and every single drawing has a theme upon which the viewers attention should be directed. Every line in the drawing must help.

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It is much more difficult in music and literature. To keep a central motif going in music for 55 minutes takes some advanced know how and discipline. An author has a similar problem. Whether writing a love story or a psychic thriller, the words chosen are like the lines we use in drawing - they help reveal and build the substance of the theme. A wrong choice of words or phrases will spoil the mood. Things that are not basic to the story (plot, mood or gesture) have to be left out.

On the following page are two sketches from the drawing class that illustrate the "centering down", the "gathering of the forces", the aggregation of certain elements crucial to telling the story. (I like that word aggregate it means: a mass of distinct things gathered together - a total).

The first sketch if carried further would have been a good drawing in the sense the artist would have finished it with a certain amount of expertise.

The second drawing immediately centers your attention on the story. A sailor has tossed a line to some destination. You feel the force of the toss. The secondary action of the held end of the rope indicates that it has not reached its destination yet - which is commensurate with the throwing arm still at its extreme position. His body is bent forward and down from the forward thrust of the toss, causing another secondary action, the belly-hanging-over-the-belt-bit. The straight of the right leg plus the force exerted by the left leg, along with the open "channel" set up by the two arms and the payed out rope, and even the unseen face, open a "passage" (one of Don Graham's favorite words) for the attention of the viewer to dwell on, or pass through. That is where the story is being told, and every line in the drawing is contributing to it.

So drawing is not just recording a leg here, an arm there, a head and hands, etc. A drawing is like a parable, which is a story told to convey a lesson. If the story reveals the meaning of the lesson it is a success, but if it is just a cute story, it falls short of its reason for being.

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