Entertainment X

"Pose to Pose & Straight Ahead Animation" by Eric Larson

The "pose" has always been a telling visual statement. Its purpose is to say something positively and for a reason.

In the art class the model assumes a pose — and we draw it.

The Director in the theater demands an attitude and the actor responds.

In the ballet it's the "pose" that the ballerina gracefully pirouettes into.

The policeman's command is "Freeze!"

And in animation it's pose after pose after pose — for the sake of making linear drawings act.

We recall Ham Luske's thoughts on poses:

> *"Your animation is only as good as your poses. You can have good timing, good overlapping action, good follow through — but, if your poses are not strong and to the point (telling the story) you do not have good animation."*

In the days of the old melodrama where movement of plot and action prevailed over personality development, the physical attitudes were dominant and found their strength in poses — poses that were crisp and telegraphic. Subtleties were purposely avoided in order to present the dramatics in the simplest form and mood. It was great fun, but it did not awaken a sympathy in the audience nor did it arouse it to a deep hatred. After all, the melodrama was not designed to touch an emotional chord; it was designed as a caricature of life, using only surface entertainment and having no time for the personality and character development an audience could take to its heart.

In our animated pictures we have tried to develop characters and personalities with a sincerity that will appeal to the audience and make them acceptable as being alive and real. Even inanimate subjects come to life in our pictures and perform with excellence and the audience feels a warmth and understanding toward and with them, whether it's an old chair, a little toaster or a boyish tug boat.

As animators we work to create, in the Disney tradition, characters and personalities our audience can relate to and will remember — and we begin to do this by making drawings in poses that are expressive and tell the story. In every scene we do there will be need for many such drawings and poses — and then a careful attention to the action's mood and movement — the timing, the overlap and the follow through.

Early in Disney animation the value of the "pose" was realized. To create the action needed, drawings were made inbetween to carry the movement from pose to pose. This procedure worked but it also restricted the action since it, the action, was contained within two "extreme poses." It was like stretching a strand of barbed wire tightly between two posts — it didn't "give." It exhibited a certain tight, mechanical feeling, with everything being moved the same distance at the same time, with no concern for looseness, overlap or follow through.

But the need for such embellishments was quickly realized and the value of "straight ahead" animation was rediscovered — it being the first approach to action in the infancy of the animated art. The "straight ahead" style was somewhat like the Mad Hatter's philosophy: "Start out to where you want to go and when you get there — stop" It allowed for fluid action but it lacked a degree of control and positivity and, in its way, was as limiting in its results as was the "pose to pose" approach.

"Pose to pose" suggests a move from number one pose to number two pose to number three pose etc., paying due attention to the timing and overlapping action inbetween. "Straight ahead" suggests that in the action, thought is given to all the incidental or detailed actions and attitudes which might or could add life and believability to the performance. For instance: How else might we work through the action of juggling the hat in a "take" by someone like W.C. Fields, or get the needed fluidity in an action like the Stag and Bambi racing through the burning forest or the pack of dogs threatening Faline?

Certainly we should not be as zealots, insisting that this approach or that approach is the way. Disney animation is not tied down to a way — it's tied to spirit and performance in our characters, good drawing, creative imagination and the application of proven basics in good animation; weight, balance, squash and stretch, change of shapes, etc. So, the combination of so called approaches, letting one compliment another makes good sense. This allows the animator to get the dramatic strength and control desired in working out his action in poses and then to make good use of the fluidity of the "straight ahead" method in the unfolding of the action.

Poses, as we've so often discussed, express attitudes, moods, etc. But they serve other purposes too. They keep us aware of the correct relative size and perspective changes in our character as we take him through the action patterns in our scenes.

EXAMPLE:
If our character is walking away from camera or walking toward it, we would do well to plan the action with a series of drawings on a single sheet of paper, noting the depth of the perspective with ruled lines showing the desired path of action in that perspective and indicating the relative increase in the height and volume of the character from distance to foreground or vice versa. The bottom line would control the foot placements in the walk and the top line would indicate his normal height increase as he comes toward camera. Quick sketches, showing the desired body attitude and the progress of the character in each step are necessary. This planning will keep the length of each step in comfortable relationship to the body size. We would make as many sketches between the distant and foreground poses as we would need to plan the length of each step and the size increase of the body — all this on one sheet of paper, assuring complete control of the action and the figure size in our scene. In such a graph the relationship of the up (stretch) and the down (squash) positions in the walk would be indicated by graph lines, in proper perspective, above and below the line indicating the normal height of our character.

If the idea of "planning" on a single sheet of paper seems mechanical, rest assured that it is, but consider it as a good way to get perspective control of the action through our scenes. In animation, few things are more embarrassing than a character not properly changing size as he comes into or goes away from the camera or taking steps that are too long or too short for his body height.

It is well that we remember that action is "telegraphed" through the character's body. The whole body doesn't go into action all at once. Some part of the body leads out. It may be a turn of the head, a roll of the shoulders, a lift of an arm or a body twist. In any case, some part of the body will initiate the action. To become a "believer" one might well intensify his observation and even study himself in action before a mirror. It will soon become clear that out of a "pose" position some part of the body will trigger the action to follow.

To repeat, there is no given way to begin an action. The mood and situation our character is in will suggest a way. But, one thing is certain, that way must feel sincere and natural. An awkward start immediately gives the feeling of off balance — of unnatural relationships within the body — of being inconsistent with the normal movement. The animator is the actor. The "show" is his. Hopefully he will have fully envisioned, in detail, the action he is to put on the screen, beginning with the first move and on through the completed phrasing.

In search of strong, simple examples of "pose to pose" and the "straight ahead" approaches to animation, we might look at THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE. In this instance the "straight ahead" we will refer to is a secondary action, but it illustrates very visually the "straight ahead" idea, regardless of when, where and how it's used.

The Hare, himself, was all pose and speed. Being a big showoff, everything he did, up to the final action, (his desperate effort at the finish line), displayed confidence, arrogance and self esteem, It would have been impossible for Ham Luske to have arrived at the strong, expressive poses he put the Hare in if he had animated "straight ahead." Without that "pose to pose" strength the picture would have been ordinary.

This picture was considered a great breakthrough for pose, caricature and timing, and though too strong for most of our feature subtleties, the Hare drawings were an inspiration toward getting more life and strength in the poses for all of our animation. To give added emphasis to the Hare poses, the action going from one pose to another was crisp and direct, complete in overlap and follow-through. As a result the character and his personality screamed: "Look at me! I'm the greatest!"

The animation of the trees and fence in reaction to the Hare's initial burst of speed, was a "straight ahead" approach. There were no extreme poses made except the two showing the trees and fence as they were before the Hare raced by. In the animated action there were no inbetweens as such. The animator made every drawing "straight ahead", after carefully planning the action. The effect of the "suction" on the trees and the fence was progressive.

On the trees, some leaves low on the trunks began to move first. They were at the center of the force. Suddenly the trees were reacting and whipping violently in the direction the Hare had gone, as if in a strong wind. The fence began to lose pickets at the end first to feel the "pull" of the Hare's speed. Quickly all the pickets were ripped loose and the destruction was apparent.

The force and erratic character in these actions could never have been captured in a "pose to pose" approach.

Within our action we must search for meaningful mannerisms and movements that can add entertainment. Consider a walk. Though we have planned it out in poses to get the basic attitudes and definition of steps, the real personality in the walk and what it has to say begins to surface as we work and rework "straight ahead" to get the "life" we must put into it; things like the roll of shoulders — the hip rolls — head perspectives and expressions — the arm movement and gestures. Our character may wipe his brow — adjust his hat — shake his fist or whatever the mood and situation may demand. Too, there's the overlap of his coat-tails — the use of a prop he might be carrying (a cane, an umbrella, a box or whatever). Is there a hop or a quick step or an obstacle to hurdle as he walks? All such as this cannot be successfully planned "pose to pose". The extremes in such "straight ahead" actions will often fall within the timed action between two key body poses.

Mannerisms, attitudes, gestures — all add life and personality to our character on the screen, but first we should work out a very basic plan for our action — know what our movement and dialogue patterns are — and then add the subtleties. In short, we plan thoroughly and simply — and then add to. We shouldn't put the roof on the house before we pour the foundation.

How often have we found, as we worked straight ahead within a planned action, that the pose we made as an extreme was no longer strong enough and it became usable as a "slow in" drawing into a new, more expressive pose we had to make beyond the original? If we've worked our scenes properly, this will have happened quite often because as incidental personality touches, be they facial expressions, a tilt of the head, a twist in the body, the position of an arm, the angle of the shoulders or the reach or tension in the legs, are meshed into an action that which we, in the beginning, thought was a final pose in the action or dialogue phrase is going to demand improvement.

"Pose to pose" and "straight ahead" work together and the combining of the two in our animation is vital to our success.

Eric Larson

Entertainment XI

"Angles, Straight Lines and Curves" by Eric Larson

The story is told of a learned man who, being questioned by a colleague about an obvious truth, replied disgustedly: "Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face!"

To each of us the need and use of "Angles, Straight Lines and Curves" in our animation drawings should be just that - as plain as the nose on our face - because, properly used, they, the "Angles, Straight Lines, and Curves," create the change of shapes we need to bring about the illusion of life our linear drawn characters must have as they "live" on the screen. This we know. So it's very obvious, even in a simple action such as the bending and straightening of our little finger.

In moving from the straight finger to the bent (angled) finger and back to the straight, the action is very visual and alive, isn't it? There-in is a "change of shapes." It's animation.

Often in the analysis and execution of our action we're not making the best use of the change of shapes found in those "Angles, Straight Lines, and Curves," and in such cases our characters lack the weight, balance, silhouette, rhythm, and personality we desire in our drawings.

"Angles, Straight Lines, and Curves" suggest emotional or physical expression. An "angle" suggests tension. The "straight line" suggests thrust, strength, emphasis or force. A "curved line" gives movement, flow and rhythm. It's an "action" line.

Tension (the "angle") shows in various parts of the body in every move we make. It might be in the knit and furrowed brows exhibited in the expression of anger or deep thought. It might be in a bent elbow or knee in a given action.

> *For instance:* As we jump from a chair onto the floor and our downward movement is suddenly stopped as our feet contact the floor, what happens? The body shape changes, doesn't it? Our knees bend as a result of our weight and the sudden jolt of the contact. Our body bends forward from the hips and the fanny moves backward giving an angular pose, the total picture being a strong statement of weight, balance and tension. We come up out of this position into another pose and attitude or we might lift to full height in anticipation to walk away.

Never think of the "angle" as being unimportant. If an elbow or knee bends be sure it's a positive bend and that there's a <u>reason</u> for it! Too, we might just want to rest a <u>hand</u> on that bent <u>knee</u> in a given pose so the <u>shape</u> and <u>form</u> of that <u>knee</u> should be well defined.

The flexibility of the wrist allows the hand to move with fluidity and its position, relative to the forearm, can constantly change as the action might dictate and in such action we find good, visual "angles." With this flexibility the hand becomes a graceful expression of mood and movement. As an example, consider the dance routines. The use of the hands is a major contribution to the whole. Take a look at the "ballet" or the "hula," for instance, and in them, note the rhythmic grace and charm the hand movements portray. The Hawaiians recognize this when they suggest in the song that you "keep your eyes on the hands" - at least try to. Hands are so very expressive, but would they be if the wrists were not functional?

The ankle is another little usable gem and the positions it allows the foot to get into, or move through, are so much a part of the action - action like walking, running, jumping, kicking, etc. If the foot moves, the ankle is involved and an "angle" is formed. Every joint in the body is for a purpose and in the functioning of the same, "angles" of one degree or another appear - all useful and an important part of our animated action.

We've mentioned knees, elbows, ankles and wrists but the body, human or animal, has many "joints" which, when used, add life and strength to our animation. Head moves (rolls and tilts) suggest attitudes and expressions. Hips, shoulders and fingers are flexible and the possibilities they offer in action are endless. The point is, we must be aware of these "parts and joints", know what they have to say, and try to make good use of them to improve the quality of our animation.

Even inanimate "characters" (chairs, tables, musical instruments, boats, a piece of string - the list might be endless) we bring to "life" on the screen will have imaginary "joints" to use in bringing about the action our story might require.

The "curved line" is an undulating line and it says: "Movement, rhythm, flow, energy." We see it in graceful moves and body attitudes in the ballet. We see it in the swift patterned flight of the gazelle. We see it in the rise and fall of the ocean swells. We see it in the body twist as the action flows from the toes, up through the body and into the head or the outstretched arms, giving the pose life and meaning.

A pose becomes very brittle and lifeless if the whole body is in one perspective - with head, chest, waist, arms and legs, all facing in the same direction. It will have even less appeal than the famous "cigar store" indian of years ago. Twists through the body - perspective changes if you will - are necessary to keep a pose interesting. Even the most quiet pose will have an interesting action line - just look for it.

As we check around and make note of how people sit, how they stand, how they walk - we'll not find static poses. Movement is a definite part of every attitude, regardless of how gentile or strong that attitude is. And in all that "curved line" is most evident and so very important.

The reverses that take place in the "curved line" as body changes and poses change present dramatic "changes of shapes." The old cartoon gag of the guy being chased by a dog is a simple, graphic illustration of this. The first panel of the action shows the man running at top speed, body bent way forward, arms extended, in an effort to out run the dog. But, the dog gains on the guy and snaps at him. The second panel shows the man frantically running, his fanny "tucked in" and his body bent way backward, legs lifting high, clearly reversing the "curved" line of the body action in the first pose. In panel one the man's fanny is a good, clear target - in the second panel the man tries to pull his fanny out of the dog's reach. In the latter his running speed appears more frantic because his high stepping action gives a driving piston-like movement in his legs and his body is bent way backward in a <u>reverse</u> curve in his effort to keep out of the dog's reach. The tempo of the man's run in the dog and the man situation might be the same in both poses, but as the action progresses the body attitude dramatically changes and the man's emotions are visually simplified - simply because of the strong <u>reversal</u> of the action line in the body attitude. The man's action and attitude in the beginning suggests extreme anxiety which, in the second panel, suddenly bursts into terror!

Have you ever observed a beginner on ice skates? If so, you saw a wonderful exhibition of the "change of shapes" we talk about, and in that change the "curved line" was most evident in defining those shapes. The frightening job of trying for balance found the skater's body in many and varied rhythmical shapes - almost as a contortionist - often ending in a pratfall. If we were to study those positions as extreme drawings we would find exceptionally strong action lines through each pose - action in which one part of the body would be frantically trying to balance another, but going too far and having to adjust or fall. Action that never could be expressed without "curved lines."

In animation, the "curved line" is always visible - always expressive - always powerful in what it says. It is always changing giving a pleasant, fluid relationship of various body forms, one to another. In all areas of art there is no greater opportunity to use the "curved line" than in the animated picture where movement and rhythm must make strong, positive statements.

We have noted that the "straight line" gives strength, emphasis, force and direction to our poses. If we fail to use them to get the desired accents in our drawings and the visual strength so needed in all our action, our work will show only insincerity and mushiness. We can't afford that!

The "straight line" is present in almost everything. Imagine, if you will, a building in the grand style with stately columns being a little less than stately because they zigzag up from the base to the top in an undulating pattern. Would you feel that the building was well supported? Could it come tumbling down? Whatever it might do or however it might look, it, the building, would lose its awesomeness because the visual strength of the straight line, accepted and needed in such architectural pillars, would be missing.

The "Taj Mahal," probably one of the most impressive man-made structures in the world is magnificently replete with a combination of "straight lines, curved lines, and angles." So well is it designed with shapes and areas in constant harmony that, viewed from any and every angle, it is most inspiring.

The "straight line" is everywhere in the creations of man and nature but, like the "angle" and the "curved line," it has to be related to another shape if it's going to be expressive. The "straight line," obvious in the drawing of the arm as we <u>reach</u> for an object on a table, will have a relationship to a body shaped by "curved lines" and "angles."

In a walk, the <u>straight</u> leg needed to show the reach into a step and the contact of the foot touching the ground is preceded and followed by the varied angles the bent knee forms as the leg is pulled through into the step and following the foot contact, showing the body weight on the leg.

To feel the tension in a rope pulled taut we would have to see a relationship of the pull (a "straight line") to the sag in the rope (a "curved line") prior to the pull. Again, as with the leg action, the strength of that straight line in the action is shown through the "change of shapes."

The considerate use of "Angles, Straight Lines and Curves" in our drawings will make them more crisp, appealing and communicative. To repeat: We must understand their value, use and relationship, one to another, and that understanding comes only through our constant awareness and application of them in all that we do.

Eric Larson

Entertainment III

"Acting for Animation" By Eric Larson

Acting for Animation

Entertainment Series III - By Eric Larson

Acting:

How much thought has each of us given to our acting career? Sometimes we even forget we have one! But, we have - each and every one of us - and our "roles" are of great variety and every one makes a great demand: "GET INTO CHARACTER."

Getting into character is no small assignment. It's like changing dress for different moods of the day, but not quite so easy. It can't be done with a brew such as Dr. Jekyll used to create Mr. Hyde. It isn't physical transformation - it's an image born of observation and imagination.

That big sheet of clean white paper on our drawing board is just waiting for something to happen. The question is - will it be something exciting and entertaining or will it be - just something?

We've explored and planned the "scene business" with or thumbnail sketches. We have thought well on it and know what we want to do and to get the best results we review some very basic things, such as the quality of our drawing and the need for weight, balance, rhythm and attitude in it - we review the need for proportions and personality in our character - the phrasing of action and dialogue - caricature - silhouette - arcs - perspective - timing (pacing) - pantomime - staging and of course, acting!

Goofy might insist that "acting is just pretending." Well, maybe so, but when we, as animators, "pretend," we really act. We want that linear character of ours to be as alive as life itself!

Walt practiced what he preached in acting out the "business," as he saw it, in story discussions or in the critical analysis of the animators' scenes in the rough showings in sweatbox - and, too, sometimes in the hallway or parking lot - wherever he was, he "lived" it. He pantomimed action and "rehearsed" dialogue attitudes and phrasing. He put on a real show - and it was positive, constructive and entertaining. IN the old studio on Hyperion Street in Los Angeles, each animation room was equipped with a full length mirror, usually mounted on the door, before which one could act out, for himself, the business routines in his scenes. On a wing, attached to the animation desk, was fastened a large mirror in which the artist could see himself acting out the desired facial expressions and dialogue, suggesting the emotions and feelings of his animated character, be it Mickey, Pluto, a Dwarf , Stromboli or whoever. We have long held on to the desk mirror, but the full-length one gradually disappeared.

The Physical Properties of a character

We've been reminded time and again, that to make our animated character act and emote sincerely we must know his physical possibilities, his emotional range and depth, his sensitivity, etc. For instance, we could hardly expect Dopey to get as involved in a situation as would Grumpy. Neither could we expect "Friar Tuck" or "The Tortoise" to run the "hurdle" course with the same ease and skill with which the "hare" would do it.

The reward in animation comes with knowing and studying the traits and mannerisms of our characters - analyzing the possibilities each presents in whatever "role" the story places them - putting ourselves in their places and acting out the action and dialogue, phrase by phrase, for ourselves and then, with thought, putting it all down on paper and timing it for "life." Many of the early animators , Ham Luske, Norm Ferguson , Fred Moore , Bill Tytla and others, who carved out the Disney tradition in the early and mid-thirties , made good use of those mirrors we mentioned. They did some pretty good acting in front of them. they acted it all out - analyzed and planned the business carefully - then put it down on the board.

In those days, an assistant, working within a tight animation unit, might be asked to assume poses , move into and out of them , do a "type" of walk, turn, react in surprise or fear or do a "skip." Endless were the requests and as they were performed the animator, observing carefully such important things as body attitude, weight shift, balance and strength of pose, made his quick sketches for inspiration - all is the search for better animation.

Today, as then, the person in the next room may be helpful.[1] Maybe he's a bit more of a "ham" than we are - less self-conscious Let's get him or her to "act it out" for us. The performance will not be "professional" perhaps, but we're bound to get ideas from it, and we're searching for ideas - some we will keep and use, others we will discard.

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[1] "You are only as fgood as your materials lend you to be ! Don't forget animators should be social creatures as well - so also , animators can be good "material" to use."

We are at our best as actors when we can visualize clearly in our minds exactly what our character must do and how he's going to do it. We close our eyes and "see" the action as it passes in review.

We "see" our character , robust and arrogant , stomp and gesture his way through the planned action.

We "see" Grecian Gods, reciting their incantation, summoning the four winds to playfully wreak havoc upon a mortal world.

We "see" Taran , frightened but resolute, as he meets the Horned King.

We "see" little Hen Wen as she tenses and playfully challenges Taran to "watch after her."

Or we may be doing a little Chaplin like character, and after studying the Chaplin films, we "build" on the little shuffle walk, the little hops which often lead into his walks, the twirl of his cane, the tipping of his derby, the little happy side to side motion on his head and all else our character will have to do be a caricature of Chaplin who, as the "Little Tramp" is indeed, a great caricature of a personality.

Action Analysis

Acting doesn't have to be complicated or emotional to deserve our close attention, A simple thing like descending a stairway calls for us to actually do it slowly and analytically to find out just what happens. Let's try it:

On step one, we contact the stair tread with a straight leg and foot - we squash , as needed, for weight - then lift up to the height we need to pull our opposite leg through in anticipation of our next step down we drop into our step , contact the tread - squash for weight and again into the up anticipation to pull the opposite leg through - step down to the tread - squash for weight, and so continuing to the bottom of the stairs. Basically descending the stairs has quite the same pattern as does a walk on a smooth surface with its positive ups and downs, squashes and stretches .If we forget to use these basics we lose weight and believability, We slide down the stairs, the mood and situation our character is in will dictate our timing. He may be happy and bounce down the stairs. He may be deep in thought and drop into each step with a dejected attitude. In any case, the lift and fall in the step pattern must be positive.

Our acting abilities improve as our imagination expands and becomes more and more exciting. It comes about through interest, dedication and work. Remember Stanislavsky's advice? "Imagination ," he said, "must be cultivated and developed; it must be alert, rich and active." He was talking to actors - he also talks directly to us. We should be involved in this pursuit every waking hour of every day.   So much is going on around us! Let's not let it go by unobserved.

But back to our acting, with some thought to this little problem: Maybe the character in our scene is a swashbuckling swordsman - a daredevil with talent and skill. We research the great romantics - the Flynns, the Doug Fairbanks, etc. We study their heroic actions, moods and poses. With what ease and flair they move! With what disdain they look upon the adversary! So far so good - we're getting to know what makes this character tick.

The Goof

Now the challenge. It so happens that the Goof is our daredevil swordsman. Now what? Caricature, that's what! So we now take a good look at the Goof and his manners and ways. In the early nineteen-thirties Ted Sears, one of the best storymen the Studio ever had, put down and analysis of the Goof:

" He is on the silly side and always harmless. he tries to do things in a way he considers clever - he always does them wrong, and ends up with a foolish apologetic laugh, He seldom loses his temper. Always have him go about an action in his own, particularly Goofy way. He does practically everything backwards and is amused at the results, even though he suffers from it. The Goof laughs at his mistakes or makes the most of an incidental happening."

Later, in 1939 in "Goofy and Wilbur" the Goof took on a very warm, emotional charm, so he does have his moments of pathos.

Now we have the Goof in the role of the romantic, daring swordsman, ready to exhibit his skills. He must be the Goof and he must have the movement and show of a Flynn of Fairbanks - but in his own Goofy way.

The Goofy challenge is not unlike those we face every day. In our work we, as animators, are constantly challenged to be consistently creative and entertaining. Maybe yesterday we were Mickey or Donald Duck or Jiminy Cricket. Today we might be Eilonwy, Taran, Scrooge, Willie the Giant or Gurgi - or even an inanimate chair come to life. Tomorrow maybe a Thumper, an ostrich, a dog, a Cinderella or a Captain Hook. Who knows? But whoever or whatever the character and the role, we must make it and its acting an important part of us. We are expected to no less and to perform with taste and sincerity.

So to the front must come our acting abilities to combine with all the other essential talents good animation demands. All are mst important to our success and that of the picture we're working on.

Eric Larson

9-29-81

Entertainment V

"The Character & Texture of Action in Animation" by Eric Larson

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 joy of 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 <u>texture</u> —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:
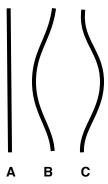
> Goofy, way off balance, is leaning into a strong wind. His steps, as he digs in, are short and labored. (The arc of the body action is way forward.) A big gust of wind sweeps Goofy into a strong, off balance pose. (His body becomes a completely reversed curve.) He desperately back— paddles to keep 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

Entertainment VI

"Movement, Rhythm, and Timing for Animation" by Eric Larson

Good pantomimists have always insisted that action should be simple and direct - it should not be overdone. This thought was given emphasis by Ham Luske and others in the mid-thirties when the character and meaning of Disney animation was beginning to find its place in the field of entertainment.

How often do we give thought to the inward sensation we experience as we view something in motion be it human, bird or animal — be it trees or grasses pushed by the wind - or water cascading down a canyon wall or ominous cloud formations gathering in a threatening storm pattern? Wherever we look there's something in motion and most of it is exciting. Why then shouldn't the movement and rhythm we put into our scenes, regardless of nature or content, be a satisfying experience for our audience?

In our action the big moves may move us from place to place, suggesting the spirit and emotion in our character, but the smaller moves, the embellishments within the big moves, magnify the attitude and emotion and add dimension and sincerity, keeping our action from being Just ordinary or passable.

Do you remember seeing a frollicking colt, running pell-mell across an open field, suddenly jumping into the air, wildly tossing his head side to side, giving an exuberant kick with his back legs, landing and then right back into full stride, never missing a step? Or a baby crawling hurriedly across the floor, all 'fours' working feverishly, his little rump and shoulders rolling from side to side, his whole body alive in great anticipation of "getting there"?

These actions are not just ordinary or passable. The big movements in the run of the colt and the baby's crawling, provide the excitement or "being". The little happenings within the big moves add strength and emotion - they pull the audience into the scene.

Our inward feelings are often expressed in minimal moves

— little things like the downward roll of the head in disappointment or sadness — the sharp lift of it in arrogance or contempt — the roll to the side that questions or wonders — the hips and shoulders which move and roll forward and back to help arms and legs function properly and with rhythm. All are relatively limited moves, but are a vital part of bigger body moves. We cannot successfully consider the most simple or the most complex moves without a thorough analysis of the workings of every part of the body, one with or counter to another, and then making good use of them in our action.

Even in the simplest of walks, perhaps a cycle, we can present an interesting action if we accept and use little basic "things" that really happen in a walk, "things" like the normal move of the body forward and backward giving it the needed balance, the logical involvement of the shoulders and hips as the arms swing forward and back and the legs lift and kick out into the next step and the reaction of the head to the over-all body movement. But we should remember that all the movement in the world will not pay off for us if we lose its rhythm and flow through bad timing and poorly planned patterns of action and attitudes that are rigid and uninteresting.

RHYTHM:

Of rhythm and its meaning, Walt said: (Memo to Don Graham).

"I think a good study of music would be indispensable to the animator - a study of rhythm — the various rhythms that enter into our lives every day — how rhythmical the body really is and how well balanced the body really is. There are things in life that we do to rhythm that come natural to us. Notice how rhythmic an action like pounding with a hammer is. There's a reason for that. You must have rhythm or you can't carry out the action completely. Also sawing a board see how necessary it is to have a good rhythm for that. Also walking — if you walked without rhythm. where would you get? You'd have to be thinking all the time what to do next. You'd have to set your mind to walking rhythmically instead of doing it naturally."

TIMING:

When Walt speaks of rhythm in simple actions like the hammering of a nail and the sawing of a board, he's talking about the timing and phrasing, the change of pace, so necessary in every action we do, to make that action crisp, alive and exciting.

Timing is, in theory, a very simple little trick that, skillfully done, creates rhythm, pacing and vitality in our animation. We crowd drawings close together to create and define mood and attitude and we space them apart to give emphasis. How we space and use all those drawings, determines the life and tempo in our scenes.

We must understand the value of a "second of time" (24 frames of film) upon that movie screen. We must know just how much "time" (seconds or parts of) it might take for us to make our story message known to our audience. We must capably break our action down into "seconds" and "frames" — one second being 24 frames — one-half second being 12 frames — one third second being 8 frames, etc, We must mentally calculate all this. We have to feel and know the value and relationship of frames and seconds and drawings in order to express ourselves fully.

It's interesting to note that when a beat rhythm is broken by a mis-move or an illogical interruption, it may take a number of beats to get back into it. In the course of doing so, even the simplest action could go awry.

As is always desired in our action, the path and design of the hammering and sawing actions were positive. In each, the anticipation would be in a slight, upward arc; the hammering an over arc — the sawing an under arc. The action down into the hit or sawing would be in the same arc, moving in the opposite direction. The force or power in the overall move is gotten through the reversal of movement on the same line of action. If we get Out of that "line of action" going either way, the strength and rhythm of the action will be off balance.

The reversal of direction on a given line has power.

We were illustrating this years ago when we used to say: "Go one way before you go another" when discussing anticipation. With this in mind let's consider a brutal example. If we're going to punch someone in the nose, we best draw our fist straight back on a direct line to his face in anticipation and then come forward at the poor guy with all our might, moving fast on that same straight line and into the hit. That's a very visual force.

The "flow" of the action line is all important.

We must always have a reason for it. The straight line often suggests strength. The undulating line, often more interesting, gives a poetic feeling and movement to the action. Even in a simple run we may add interest if we gradually lean our character into a forward attitude, then pull back into a more erect position for his "second wind" and then faster into a more determined lean forward, never breaking stride, but suggesting an increased emotional feeling within our character. With the changing body attitudes and our timing in and out of them, we get an interesting pacing but we do not vary or change the beat or tempo of the run. In our pattern of action we strive to avoid rigidity. "Stiff as a board" has nothing in common with animation, unless used to point up a given gag or story point.

The rhythm and timing of animation is like a good musical score — it builds to crescendos and drops into quiet — it surges and it slows — it lifts and it falls. An audience needs that change. It must have periods of excitement and periods of rest. Our action must have variety and vitality in timing lest it becomes monotonous and irritating. Action, like emotion, needs change to get and keep the viewer's interest. it has to be alive. We might say it has to be moody, impulsive, sprinkled with surprises. It has to have zest, humor, drama and meaning. How? Through expressive drawings, movement patterns and our timing and acting skills!

Think back, if you will, on the scenes of Medusa in her boutique shop, on the phone with the bungling Snoops on the other end of the line. What an exercise in character analysis, thought processes, action patterns and timing. All so crisp, sensitive, entertaining and alive, running the gamut of emotions.

Consider the "Nutcracker Suite" in FANTASIA — A beautiful, exciting experience in entertainment with the pictorial thrust being design, color and movement. The Snow Fairies and the Mushroom dances are outstanding examples of delightful movement patterns and timing.

"Timing" is visual and emotional. The Raindrop sequence in BAMBI is a charming illustration of a storm in the forest from its beginning to its end, made alive by the reactions of the forest creatures. and nature's own moods, sounds and beauty.

And there's the extravagant comedy, so beautifully timed, in the doings of the Bear and King Louie in JUNGLE BOOK; The appeal of Lady and the Tramp having dinner at Tony's; The fun—filled meeting of Jose, Donald and Panchito in THREE CABALLEROS. All are timing masterpieces - well worth our study.

As Disney does it, the animated film is an art form that entertains and inspires people, young and old everywhere - generation after generation. And we are all a part of it.

ANTICIPATION:

Anticipation is a vital part of timing. It tells an audience that something is about to happen. It adds definition and life to an action. It sets up the rhythm.

Let's think on this for a moment. Do we, or do we not, anticipate the many actions we might go through in our daily routines? Do we get directly up out of a chair? Do we move directly into a walk from a still position? Do we pick an object up off the table without an anticipation of some kind? Having a ball in our hand, will we start bouncing it without first anticipating the action?

Because an anticipation to an action is so normal, we're often apt to overlook our doing it. Of course, we may each anticipate a given action just a little differently. Let's say we're sitting in a chair and something startles us. We might excitedly grab the arms of the chair — lift our feet — plant them on the floor — push our body forward directly over our feet for balance and move forward and upward into a standing position, That suggests a lot of anticipation before we actually get to our feet, doesn't it? But the situation might justify it. Normally, just to get up from a chair, we'wouldn't go through such a "wind-up" anticipation. We would probably just lean forward, getting our body bent over our legs and then, with hands on the chair arms, push ourselves forward and up into a standing position, ready to walk away.

Sometime try kicking an object like a soccer ball or a tin can without anticipating the action. It will feel and look clumsy and awkward and the total distance the ball or can might travel will be less because the body and the kicking foot would not have had the "wind-up" or built-in rhythm an anticipation would supply.

Starting from a still position, try moving directly into the first step of a walk. The move will not feel right because we have not prepared for the lift and reach of the leg which is to start the action. We need that anticipation; that something that automatically says: "Let's go."

A walk anticipation may be no more than a body lift and that ,just naturally helps get the starting foot off the ground. It's all done as habit. Too, the anticipation may be just a body twist within a short backward move. Or it might be a big, show-off thing in the form of a body bowing, pushing the fanny back for balance and then moving forward, "pushing" the body into an up position with the stepping foot lifting and reaching out into the first step - and the walk is on its way. If the walk is to be one of great spirit, the "bowing" anticipation might be embellished (and made more of) by several little quick steps backward as the "bowing" is taking place. Really, there is as much variety in anticipation as our imaginations will allow.

The nature and ways of anticipation go on and on, and regardless of how or why, it's a part of everything we do, and must be a part of all we animate.

The character on our drawing board cannot get by without anticipation anymore than we, ourselves, can. His will be caricatured and more visual and more fun — but anticipation must be a part of him just as it is a part — a natural part — of us.

Eric Larson

Entertainment VII

"Staging, Anticipation, and Silhouette for Animation" by Eric Larson

Thought: *"After all our studies, we acquire only that which we put into practice."*
                                                                        Goethe

How often have we been deeply moved by a certain picture hanging in a gallery and have taken time to sit and study it hour after hour? If we so desired, we could go back again and again, sit before it and "listen" to its message. It might have been alive with movement, color and design — full of interesting detail — dramatic in the grouping of human or animal figures — restful in its echoing of nature's moods. Whatever the appeal, the picture communicated with us — a message visually and emotionally presented through the artists creative abilities, not least of which was his talent for "staging" and making known his deep convictions. And we responded.

How different the gallery presentation to the viewer and that of the animated picture. In our films we have but seconds, or portions thereof, to present our story to our audience. If our message has not gotten over in the alloted time, that's Just too bad We can t say we're sorry and obligingly run the film back so our audience can take a second or a third look in order to enjoy that which we have laboriously created.

And therein lies our challenge. In the short time we have for our presentation on the screen, we must be sure our message is well staged — clearly and quickly stated. This means that the business and character(s) in every scene must be carefully considered and presented. In an article in "Psychology Today" for June '82, the point was made that "Youngsters remember what they see twice as well as what they hear." Perhaps this might go for youngsters of all ages, five to ninety-five. The famed writer-humorist, Alexander Woollcott, made it clear to us in 1939 when he warned that "animation, being basically a pantomime art, should be expressive and visual."

How can we best respond to Mr. Woollcott's admonition? There certainly is no one, two, three and that's it approach. But let's start with our drawing — our visual statement up there on the screen. Standing apart from other considerations, is it quickly readable and delivering our message? Is the "silhouette" good or somewhat vague with arms or legs crammed in in front of the face or body, destroying definition? Is the body attitude complimenting the character's expression or gesture? In short, as we have to always ask ourselves, is our drawing alive and does it say what we want it to say? Perhaps this is rule one in staging.

More often than not, our staging problem is challenged by the movement of our character(s) and our job is to make sure the attention of the audience is focused right where we want it to be. For example: In ONCE UPON A WINTERTIME, one scene depicted twelve or fourteen characters, in couples, skating on a pond. The spirit was a happy one. Being a "crowd shot" the fielding was kept at a maximum and constant. The entrances and exits of couples, the use of perspective (characters going away from and returning into camera), the skating paths which clearly displayed the grace and rhythmic patterns of the skaters and the effort to keep couples in the clear, never allowing one to cover up or overlap another, except in passing, kept the scene pictorially interesting.

Scenes of this kind are not common in our pictures, but when we do use them and if we plan them well, the audience will react very favorably to them. They offer a pleasant "change" in our story continuity. Remember the "mushroom" dance in FANTASIA - a most charming interweaving of characters into a very entertaining routine. In working out such scenes, a perspective and path pattern of all action might well be planned on one sheet of paper, and within the fielding (camera) bounds, before any animation is done. This approach is proper planning — our only assurance of staging and figure size control.

We should have a reason for what we do. We have something to say, maybe in action, maybe in a still pose. Beyond our drawing, what can we do?

First, let's consider a camera position, or the field size, we might need. Is the full figure important in the problem before us? Will a waist shot serve us better — or do we need a good close-up on our character? Do we need to pinpoint something he's holding in his hand? Whatever the need, camera fielding is part of the answer.

"Fielding" helps us to be visual — to be specific. The camera opens wide to help us with locale — whether the beauty of the countryside - the warmth of a village street — the menace of a gathering storm — the thriving industrial complex, shrouded in a haze, kept alive by giant stacks belching out their heavy smoke. The camera can be dramatic with its high and low angles and its versatility. It zooms or cuts in or — pulls or cuts back to punctuate emotions. But before the camera is useful to us, we must know how to use it to help us in what we have to say.

It is well to have a good idea of the fielding we might need before we animate, but regardless of the camera bounds, we will do well to draw beyond the borders of our anticipated camera field so we may have a leeway with our camera position just in case we might want to make a slight adjustment after seeing our first test.

We may find it desirable to be with our character(s) throughout a given action, as in Peter Pan's flight with the children over London. In those scenes we were not only following the action with the camera but, to add vitality to the perspective effort put into the animation, we were also moving in and out on the characters with the camera for added scope and dramatic effect. Again, let's keep in mind the fact that the camera should work for us, that we are in control of its placement and movements and that it's a valuable asset in getting our best pictorial results. Whatever is happening on the screen must be clearly understood. Remember, a picture is for communication and the camera will help us make it so.

Summing up: A scene, even if a moving composition, must be understood, or there's no sense in animating it. The story it tells is new to the audience, so let's put ourselves in the viewer's place and check whether or not we have communicated.

We think of ourselves as pantomimists — and maybe, in a way, we are magicians, too. The mystical babble and gesturing the magician uses to invoke his magic is the anticipation and staging for his act. It gets the attention of his audience. It commands viewers to watch and his performance goes on with enigmatic, but fascinating showmanship, caricatured to high heaven and the audience is bug-eyed, lest it loses out on some little mystical happening.

Well, we, too, have a little thing we do to get attention and we call it "anticipation." (See 7/1/82 notes pages 8, 9 and 10.) Sometimes it can be rather simple — sometimes involved — but whichever or however, its purpose is to prepare the audience for the action we are about to present and for best results it, the anticipation, must be easily seen, graceful, eye-catching and positive. It's got to be staged for show.

In our animation "arcs," as we know and use them, we stage the grace and clarity of movement. Nature, at times, gives illustration of this when gusty winds rock a big, heavily leafed tree, bending it mercilessly to the ground and whipping it back in anticipation of another onslaught. The big "arcs" the tree's action follows are full and expressive of force and the "whip" (the overlap) of the leafed branches as they surge into the reverse move adds a strength and excitement to the action.

To repeat: The "arcs" we use to define our actions become a very valid part of our scene's staging. It's through them (the "arcs") that we graphically display what our character is doing and how he's doing it. A gesture cannot be really alive and meaningful without the rhythmical strength an "arc" can give it. All "arcs" are not equal in scope or design, so we might consider any action "off the straight line" as being "arc" in nature. The "arc" gives finesse to an action. It's showmanship, it's positive and graceful. Perhaps we might add, even poetic.

It's interesting to note that while acting in live action films has become less involved with expressive gestures, stage presentations still feel the need for pantomime. Pantomime, of course, is even more obvious in musical comedy shows. Some comics play strongly with gestures, using big "arcs" for the flourish that helps their act, while others have nothing to gesture or emote about.

The old melodrama said it all. The actors were "hams" and pantomimists at heart and their caricatured acting, in pure fun, was very, very visual. Animation is that kind of entertainment — positive, expressive and visual. It's worthy of the best staging we can give it.

Simplicity is so necessary in staging, and a good silhouette in drawing is one helpful way of achieving that simplicity. The old cliche "black it all in and see if it reads" is very applicable here. We may blacken in the drawing only in our imagination, but whether imaginary or really blacked in, we should get a prompt "yes" or "no" verdict as to how clearly the drawing reads and we ask ourselves: Are we making our best statement of the body stance and attitude? Have we lost strength and meaning in the pose by ignoring definition of arms or legs? Have we let expressive hands get lost within the silhouette of the body shape? Are we striving for good silhouette in our action? (See "On Being Definite" Page 4 & 5 of 3/20/81 notes.) In the action referred to in those notes, Mickey's action and phrasing are planned to be direct — easy to read. Within the action patterns noted, we would create additional interest by introducing distinguishing traits and mannerisms our character might have — the how's and the why's he would do things.

It's like building a building — we start with a good foundation and build upward — not start with the roof and build down. It's easy and tempting to think of little subtleties that might go into an action even before we have fully planned the design of that action. 1'rue, we must not discard or overlook those subtleties but should jot them all down to be considered and used later, in proper place and time, to punctuate our character's movements and personality. All in all, whatever we animate will be much more entertaining if we give it the silhouette look.

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