

Chapter 1: Go for the Truth

Observe, Observe, Observe

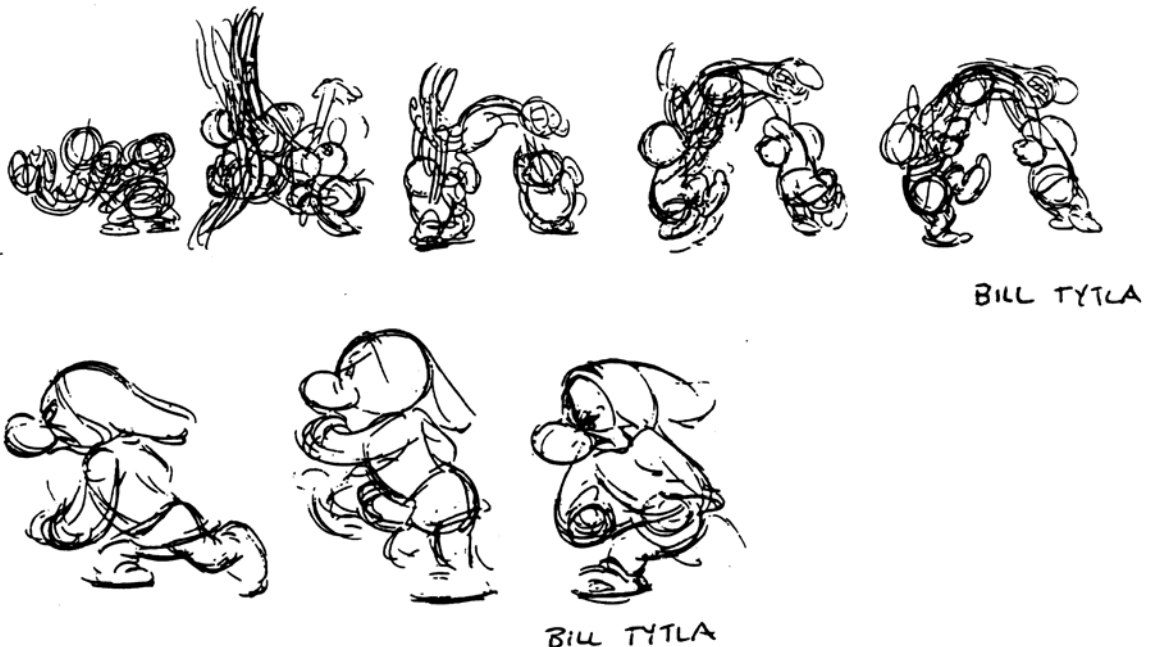
Animation! This is the vehicle you have chosen to express yourself in. A whole list of "tools" are required: drawing, timing, phrasing, action, acting, pantomime, staging, imagination, observation, interpretation, logic, caricature, creativity, clarity, empathy, and so on – a mind boggling array of prerequisites.

Rest at ease. You were born with all of them. Some of them may need a little sharpening, others may need to be awakened as from a deep sleep, but they are as much a part of you as arms, legs, eyes, kidneys, hemoglobin, and speech.

Reading and observing are two emancipators of the dormant areas of the mind. Read the classics, biographies, humor, mysteries and comic books. Observe, observe, observe. Be like a sponge – suck up everything you can lay your eyes on. Look for the unusual, the common, characters, situations, compositions, attitudes. Study shapes, features, personalities, activities, details, etc.

Draw ideas, not things; action, not poses; gestures, not anatomical structures.

I am reprinting some ruff animation drawings to remind you of the style of drawing that seems to serve the purposes of the animators best – loose and expressive.



Gesture Drawing For Animation



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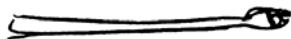


MILT KAHN

Lead to the Emotion

A well constructed drawing should have all the parts and they should be put together beautifully, but that is not what you should see when you look at the drawing. What you should see is the emotion. In a drawing of a starving man you should see fear and hunger and despair, and you should feel this, plus pity and revulsion and anger. All gestures won't be quite that dramatic, but all gestures are certainly more than their parts.

Do this experiment: get a wooden match and look at it. That represents your model or character in animation. Then light it and let it burn half way. Now it represents your model or character in gesture.



It has been transformed from the anatomical match into a burnt match. If you had to draw a burnt match you wouldn't say to yourself, "Okay, this is the anatomy of a match." No, you would say, "This is a match whose anatomy has been burnt and twisted into an agonizing shape. A shape that if I imagine myself being in that state – if I feel what has happened to that match has happened also to me – then this is the feeling that I have to draw, to portray."

We must be emotional about our subject whether it has to do with serious matters or with humor. We cannot back off from our emotions – if we do the result will be a mere anatomical reproduction. A drawing or a scene is not final when a material representation has been made; it is final when a sensitive depiction of an emotion has been made.

The significance is not in the story alone, but in the illustration that makes that story come alive. Yes, there is anatomy, form, construction, model and two or three lines of etceteras, but only in so far as those things are expressive of the story.

Give Them the Experience

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 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.

The parts of the figure must be put together in a manner that will portray or caricature the meaning of the pose. Otherwise it will be just a drawing. What a horrible fate – to be just a drawing.

Here are some animation drawings that have transcended the anatomy and model of the characters. They are good drawings, but not just drawings.



The Driving Force Behind the Action

In drawing sessions, I try to direct the students' 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 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 animators, we have to feel within ourselves 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. . . . 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.’)

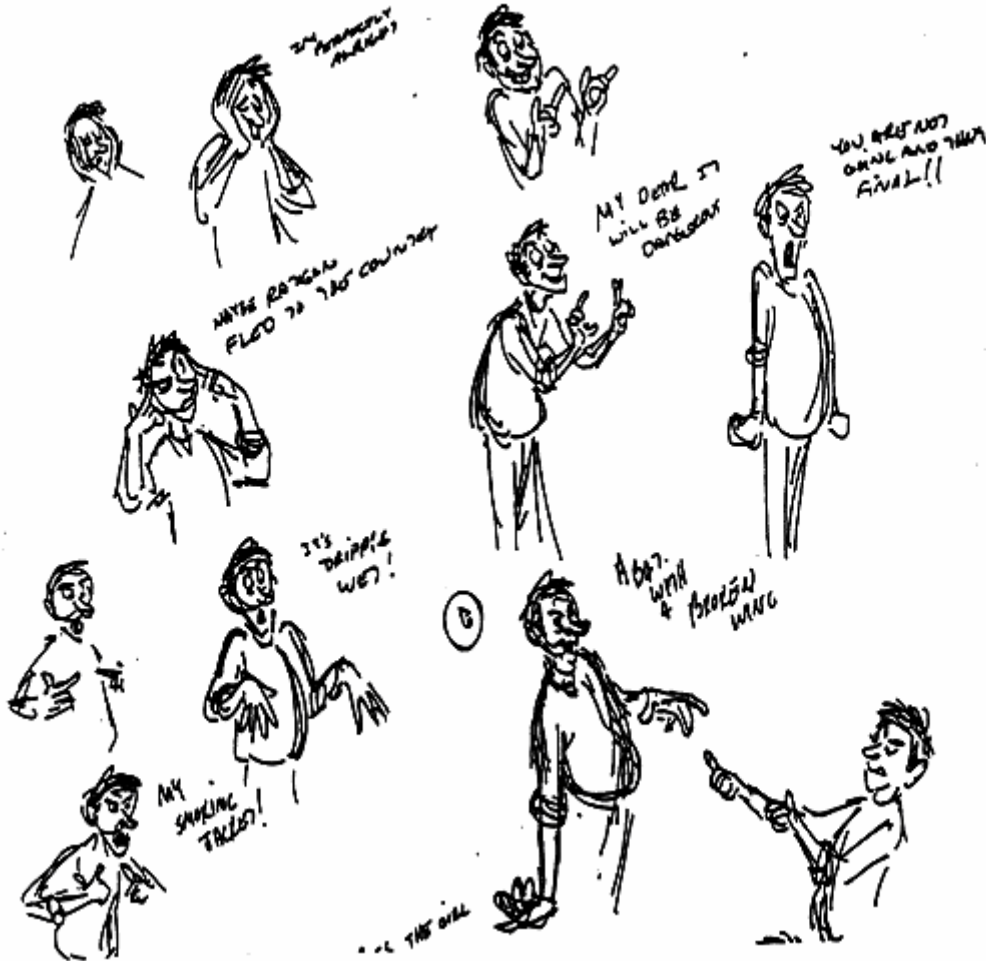
Leonardo da Vinci wrote: ‘Build a figure in such a way that its pose tells what is in the soul of it. A gesture is a movement not of a body but of a soul.’ Walt Disney reminded us of this when he spoke of the driving force behind the action: ‘In other words, in most instances, the driving force behind 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.”

Gesture Drawing For Animation

On the following page are some excellent examples of what Walt must have meant when he said, “....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.





Gesture

Gesture is the vehicle used in fitting a character into the role it is called upon to act out. We have drawn variously, dogs, mice, owls, elephants, cats, people, and so on; each distinct characters with distinct bodily shapes and bodily gestures. To approach a model with the idea of copying a human figure plus its clothing could be called a waste of time. Our interest is in seeing the differences in each personality and their individualistic gestures and, like a good caricaturist, capture the essence of those differences.

When we review the cast of characters in our past films we realize the need to place these individual characteristics with the proper character and to be consistent in their depiction. Holmes' actions had to be different and distinct from Dawson's, or their personalities would become a blur. Mickey Mouse had his own personality – his own movements and gestures, consistent with his body structure and the personality given him. Goofy, a hundredfold different in all ways from Mickey, was Goofy because of the same principles used in different ways.

Gesture Drawing For Animation

There are really only a few principles of drawing but an infinite number of personality traits and gestures. To “hole in” after learning the body structures is to miss the excitement and the satisfaction of using that information to tell the story of life through the nuances of gesture.



The Essence

The word *essence* to me is almost philosophical in meaning: "That in being which underlies all outward manifestations ..." Applied to drawing it is the motive, mood or emotion as displayed through the gestures of the physical body.

Anatomy and mechanics are always present too, but in the end the essence of each pose must prevail if we want to win the award for best animated scene ('scuse me - scenes). Lots of things to think about: proportion, anatomy, line, structure, weight, negative space, angles, squash and stretch, perspective, and more, but you can be off in lots of those areas if you have the essence of the pose.

A little study each day spent on one or another of them will net wondrous results. Hopefully, there will soon, suddenly, constantly appear in your drawings all of these elements in a satisfying blend. You will be pleased and much prospered when they all start to fit together and the exhausting battle with each separate one is over.

We are all at different stages of development so must search out our own weak areas and concentrate on those. Let's hear it for the spirit of search and discovery. Anytime is a time to be adventurous if it spurs you on to some worthy goal.

I have Xeroxed some drawings that Frederich Banbery did for the book, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* by Dickens, that I think are an excellent example of "Essence Drawings." There is a minimum of line and rendering, but a maximum of gesture and feeling. And they radiate the type of humor the story calls for.





Go For The Truth!

We actually create nothing of our ourselves—we merely use the creative force that activates us. And when we draw we are not using the left brain to record facts, we have shifted gears and are now using the right brain to create a little one picture story. With, of course, the facts that the left brain collected and named and itemized in former study periods. This is not a study period; this is a show and tell period (time we are not studying).

Do you feel that you are too limited in knowledge? Robert Henri, that great teacher of art said that anyone could paint a masterpiece with what limited knowledge they have. It would be a matter of using that limited knowledge in the right (creative) way. Have you ever seen the "knowledge" or drawing ability of that great painter Albert Ryder? Probably not. But when you look at his nebulous paintings of ships at sea or skeletons riding around with nothing on, you sense the drama and have a feeling a story in being told. If it's facts you want, pick up a Sears mail order catalogue.

I'm not advocating abandoning the study of the figure. Anatomy is a vital tool in drawing—but don't mesmerize yourself into thinking that knowing the figure is going to make an artist of you. What is going to make an artist out of you is a combination of a few basic facts about the body, a few basic principles of drawing and an extensive, obsessive desire and urge to express your feelings and impressions.

Yehudi Menuin, the violinist started out at the "top" of his profession. He played in concerts at a very young age and in his late teens was world famous. Suddenly (if late teens is sudden) he realized he'd never taken a lesson—he didn't know how he was playing the violin (the right brain hadn't been discovered then).

He worried that if that inspired way of playing ever left him, he'd not be able to play. So he took lessons and learned music (finally getting the left brain into the art). It didn't alter his playing ability but it bought him some insurance.

I'm suggesting that somehow he had early on tapped the creative force and bypassed the ponderous study period, like all geniuses seem to do. I have a Mozart piano piece that he wrote when he was around 9 years old. I've been working on it for years and still can't play it. Who does he think he is anyway? I've been studying piano for umpteen years and I still don't know the key signatures. The left side of the brain is absolutely numb. But when I set down to play the piano, sometimes that creative force takes my hands and extracts a hint of emotional sound out of the music. That's all I really care about.

My sketching is the same way. I don't know a scapula from a sternum but when I venture out into the world with my sketch book, I am able to distill my impressions into a one-frame story that totally tells my version of what I saw. When my wife Dee and I go on a vacation, she takes the photos and I sketch. She records the facts—I record the truth.

Shift gears! With the few facts you have—go for the truth!