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.

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