Character Acting:
A Case for Better Animation Reference

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Reference? What’s that?

- Some animators simply sit down and start drawing (or posing)
  - Works well for quickly getting ideas on paper
  - But... susceptible to cliché, repetition of ideas, and incorrect assumptions about movement and emotions

- Gathering reference involves:
  - Studying/drawing from life
  - Sifting through relevant visual material
  - Recording someone acting out your character’s performance

(Navone, 2004)
You really think you know better?

• Buddy, you’ve got some nerve. Just look at all the quality animation that’s out there. We’ve been doing this for years and I think we’ve worked it out pretty damned well.

• Perhaps, but consider this:
  • Most animators are not trained actors
  • Animators act out their own reference
  • Most animation lacks emotionally-connected performances.
  • Emotional acting is difficult even for trained actors
Video Reference

- A loose blueprint of acting choices used to provide additional inspiration and guidance to physically and emotionally complex movements.
Acting for Live-Action vs Animation

**Actor**
- Performance flows naturally
- Actor is own instrument
- Creates a performance on its own
- Does not focus on specific gestures
- Spontaneity
- Organic interactions with a cast (natural chemistry)
- Immediate feedback

**Animated Character**
- Animator injects performance
- Functionally useless by itself
- Specifically crafted gestures to tell story
- Illusion of spontaneity
- Each performance constructed separately by animator
- Delayed feedback
Appropriateness of Method

• Emotionally-connected reference would best serve an animation that necessarily involves a large emotional range.

• Many animations do not have such requirements and can subsist off of superficial acting

• Character-driven stories are also good candidates
Acting “Methods”

- Stanislavski “method acting” most common among animators with some acting training
  - Too often leads to recall of emotions rather than active engagement with emotions
  - Actor can lose awareness of personal reality while trying to operate within a specific method technique
- Morris’ *BEING* technique provides a better foundation for creating emotionally-centred reference for animation
  - Dynamic engagement with emotions
  - Active and unpredictable, just like life