

Art Animation: Creative Storytelling and Abstract Expression **Chapter 1**

Conceptual Approaches

This chapter aims to foster creative problem solving and the ability to think "outside the box" when developing concepts for animations. The information provided will help you create thought provoking, emotive and conceptually original animations and avoid developing works that are cliché, predictable and uninspiring. You will be encouraged to do pose questions, challenge initial ideas, brainstorm, research, keep notebooks, use sketchbooks, and take risks in an attempt to elicit more expressive and meaningful content. Animation that are literal and lack deeper meaning are often less engaging and memorable than animations that challenge the viewer to use their own imagination. Through the understanding and use of metaphor, symbolism and associative connections, you will be able to affect the viewer on a psychological, emotive, and intellectual level. In an attempt to stimulate creative thinking, this chapter concludes with a discussion about habits and environments that enhance creativity.



1.0 Koji Yamamura, *Mt. Head*, 2002, Japan, 10:01

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NMLiFc91s>

Koji Yamamura's animation portrays the woes of a greedy man who eats the pit of a cherry causing a tree to grow on the top of his head. As children we are told that a watermelon will grow in our stomach if we eat the seeds but we all know it isn't true. Yet our imagination ponders what would happen if it were true. Koji defies realistic expectations and explores the impossible as

crowds of people gather on the character's head to enjoy the tree. The man becomes annoyed at the crowds and tears the tree off his head, resulting in a crater that fills with water to create a lake. Again his head becomes a gathering spot for leisure-seeking crowds. The deeper meaning may hint at the consequences of being greedy but the animation's creative genius is derived from bizarre combination of human emotion, reality and the impossible. Mt. Head was nominated for an Oscar in 2002 and won numerous international awards.

Communication

All animation communicates with the viewer but what it specifically conveys varies widely. Animators express their ideas and feelings either by **poetic**, **abstract** or **descriptive** means. Pixar, Disney and TV animation have embraced a descriptive form of communication, thus plot-based narrative dominates this domain. When developing descriptive-based animations, a story structure typically follows specific cinematic and literary guidelines. Chapter 6 focuses on storytelling and explains how to structure a series of descriptive events. Animations do not have to tell a story but instead can focus on poetic or abstract expression with the goal of emotionally and psychologically affecting the viewer. For instance, stylized art animations bring the viewer on an emotional journey through the use of color, sound and movement. VJs use animation to visually respond to and enhance the accompanying music. These animations attempt to evoke deeper meaning beyond the self-evident details of a story.

Animation can be used as an artistic medium to express emotion and ideas similar to how painting and music does. Music without lyrics and paintings without recognizable subject matter speak to the listener/viewer on a subconscious level. Animations without literal stories trigger the imagination and communicate in a manner that is open to interpretation. Before beginning an animation it is important to know what you want to communicate and which type of animation, descriptive, poetic or abstract, will allow you to accomplish your goal. It is important to watch a wide variety of animations in an effort to broaden your awareness of how all types of animation can communicate with the viewer.

Three types of animation

1) Descriptive Animation (narrative)

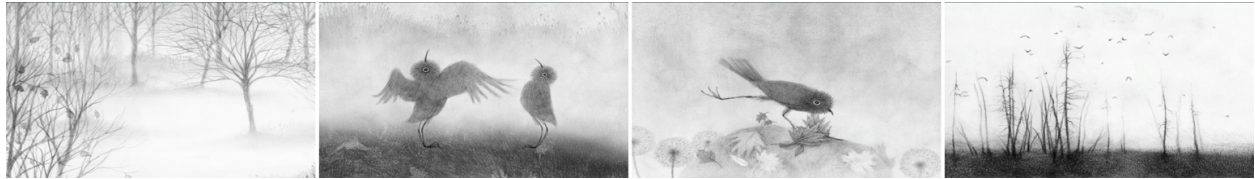


- 1.1 **Julien Bocabeille, Francois-Xavier Chanioux, Olivier Delabarre, Theirry March and Quentin Marmier, Emud Mokhberi, *Octapodi*, 2007, France, 02:28**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhQu4HqT7y8>

Octapodi traces the wild and comical adventures of two love-struck octopi. The animation begins by illuminating the attraction between the two the octopi and quickly evolves into a chase scene after the female octopus is purchased and loaded into a truck

to be taken away and chopped into bits. The driver of the truck crazily drives through a city while trying to fight off the abduction of his cargo. In the end, he not only loses the octopus but also his entire truck plunges to the sea. But the story is not over... As the octopi were about to reunite, a seagull scoops up the male. The female takes off in pursuit of the male as the animation ends. This series of descriptive events enables us to sympathize with the octopi and laugh as the bizarre extremes of the chase unfold.

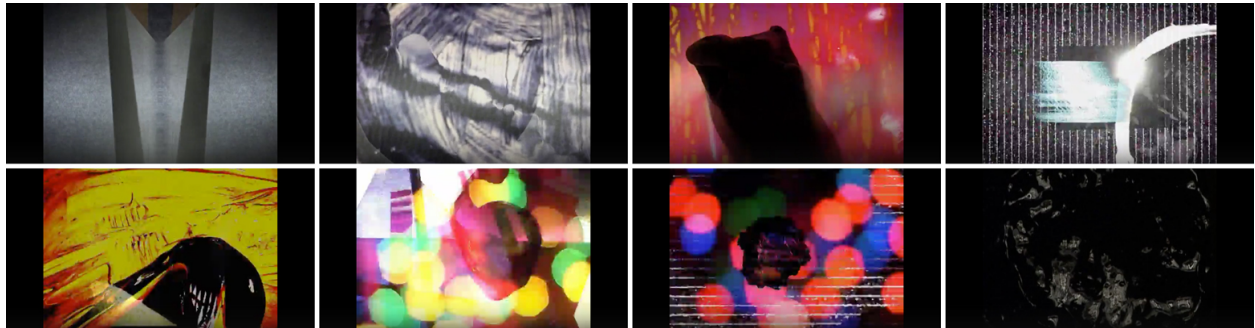
2) Poetic Animation



1.2 Linde Faas, *Volgens de Vogels*, 2008, The Netherlands, 05:26
<https://vimeo.com/channels/lievensbergkunstkanaal/59519788>

Sometimes animations include recognizable objects and characters yet they do not tell a story in the traditional sense. Similar to a poem that uses recognizable words yet avoids literal interpretation, poetic animations typically provide enough information to trigger the imagination while keeping the interpretation open. *Volgens de Vogels* looks at the world through the personal experience of birds.

3) Abstract Animation



1.3 Olga Wroniewicz, *1-39-C*, 2004, Poland, 6:30
https://vk.com/video-41953059_456239043?list=18145bec8380a8cea1

It has been said that all art, including photography, is an abstraction of the real world. Our world is so complex that our attempt to represent it always falls short. Abstract animation often derives its inspiration from nature and man-made objects yet the visual elements are distorted, exaggerated, simplified or re-interpreted to focus on the emotional, psychological or conceptual aspects of the original source. *1-39-C* uses texture, repetition and abstract sounds to create an engaging yet haunting audio/visual experience. The piece uses a tripartite structure, similar to a musical composition.

Where Do Good Ideas Come From?

'Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."' *Alice in Wonderland*.

Some people are amazingly proficient at coming up with good ideas. They seem to have an innate psychological capacity for creative thought. How do they do it? Similar to learning how to draw, there are strategies and techniques that can be learned to improve ideation. With a lot of practice, you can become quite skilled at creative thinking and capturing ideas before they slip away. Creativity is not a personality trait nor is it magic; it is merely the act of combining or

modifying existing ideas in innovative ways. No idea is entirely unique; it consists of bits and pieces of existing information around us. Often, good ideas surface when people with different backgrounds share experiences, philosophies and information.

Unique concepts typically don't appear suddenly like the apple falling from a tree and hitting Sir Isaac Newton on the head (the birth of the idea of the Universal Law of Gravitation). Everybody has had an "Aha" or "Eureka" moment when suddenly a great idea pops into their minds. But if you trace the origins of that idea, you would most likely discover that it has links to other experiences and knowledge. Ideas often brew and simmer and then surface when the conditions are right. It is difficult to control exactly when that "great" idea will pop into the mind but by practicing a few simple creativity-boosting exercises and providing a conducive environment, generating innovative ideas are possible.

The human brain is an amazing organism and is working constantly, even while we sleep. Dreams invite us to experience the impossible. You can harness the power of your subconscious by relaxing and not forcing yourself to solve the problem right away. Have you ever tried to come up with a good idea and couldn't, and then when you weren't thinking about it, the solution mysteriously popped into your mind? Although the conscious mind has stopped working on the problem, the subconscious is still secretly kerning away seeking possible solutions. The subconscious, as evidenced in dreams, has the ability to juxtapose disparate elements and cultivate novel solutions. Intuition is also a byproduct of the subconscious and can lead you in directions your rational mind would not.

Children often have vivid imaginations and scribble lines on paper and tell detailed stories about them. They are allowed and encouraged to imagine fantastical worlds and use their imaginations to interpret non-representative elements. As they get older, they are told that their drawings should be as realistic as possible and using their imagination to conjure up fantastical creatures is impractical. It is typically around the age of 9 or 10 that children choose to pursue or abandon art because of this expectation. As adult artists, it would be wonderful if we could rediscover the freedom to use our imagination to believe in the impossible again. Animation gives us the ability to bring the impossible to life.



1.3 **Jan Švankmajer, *Darkness/Light/Darkness (Tma/Svetlo/Tmo)*, 1989, Czechoslovakia, 07:31** – 9 images
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwrDenV7iLU>

Darkness/Light/Darkness takes place in a small room. When the light turns on a severed clay arm enters a small room. This arm encounters other body parts and entities that knock on the door and he progressively uses them to construct a human figure.

Did you know?

Jan Švankmajer's *Darkness/Light/Darkness* employs the use of allegory—images that represent hidden meaning. The animation has been interpreted by some viewers to symbolize the futility of life in Eastern Europe during the mid 20th century, and the struggle artists go through to achieve beauty and meaning.

Idea Generation

When formulating an idea for an animation, the natural inclination is to try to develop a story. You often labor over what will happen first, then what will happen next, and so on. By starting with a narrative you eliminate a vast array of opportunities to create incredible artistic animations that convey ideas and emotions in a provocative way. Instead, begin by distancing yourself from the literal aspects of the piece—avoid addressing the descriptive elements such as the plot, color, technique, and unfolding of events over time.

By avoiding the concrete aspects of the animation you will free yourself from the physical constraints of the real world and be able to think more creatively. First, figure out what you want to say or the issue you wish to explore. This could be as simple as "I would like to express my love of the color green" or as complex as "What is reality?" Sometimes this is called the **Premise** of the story but it is a bit more basic than that. After you dig deep enough to discover the core idea, then you can go back and figure out the best way to convey it.

It is a good idea to come up with a number of possible ideas that interest you and then continue to work on them until they become unique concepts. This chapter will introduce you to a variety of techniques that you can use to generate idea possibilities. Remember, the goal is to keep an open mind and push the limits of your imagination to create work that is expressively unique.



1.5 Jules Janaud, Raphael Martinez-Bachel, François Roisin, 90°, 2005, France, 08:48
<https://vimeo.com/12877171>

This animation was created by a team of students at Supinfocom in France. It is clearly a story of a geometric yet human-like form being created from cubes who goes on a quest to find his head. The way in which the animation unfolds over time is incredibly creative. Throughout most of the animation, the character chases after his head in his rapidly transforming and challenging environment. As the animation progresses, the character begins to transform into a human form. After falling into a strangely serene environment and retrieving his head, he becomes engulfed in a cocoon only to transform back into a basic geometric form. The unique aspect of this animation is how the animators use geometric shapes and timing to tell the story. A traffic jam is nothing more than a stack of cubes but we feel the intensity of the situation. The human emotions of the character are conveyed through the use of anticipation and the pace of the editing and animated elements.

Divergent Thinking

"Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen."
John Steinbeck

Creative thinking depends heavily upon fluid ideation. Divergent thinking is the ability to visualize several solutions to a problem, redefine the problem multiple ways and consider alternative approaches. In the 1970s, Ellis Paul Torrance developed a method to measure divergent thinking and called it the *Torrance Tests of Creativity*. In the original version he tested people on how many responses they had, how flexible and original their answers were and how much detail they provided when given a set of questions, situations or images. The test was expanded to look for the abstractness of the responses, resistance to premature closure, emotional expressiveness, internal visualization, expressiveness of titles, extending or breaking of boundaries, richness of imagery, etc. Children were given a variety of tasks that fit into categories such as impossibility tasks, consequence tasks, "just suppose" tasks, situations tasks, unusual uses, creative design tasks, etc.

This approach can be reversed and these criteria can be used to improve divergent thinking. For instance, you could play a game of "just suppose" and think of as many emotionally expressive, detailed, abstract ideas as possible in a limited time based on a given prompt. Don't be afraid to come up with strange and unusual responses. Be careful not to judge ideas as they come to mind. Strive for quantity and not quality and begin to question the prompt itself. After you have generated as many possibilities as you can, then you can begin to sort through them and select the best ideas. This type of brainstorming is a great way to build divergent thinking skills.



1.6 Santiago 'Bou' Grasso, *El Empleo*, 2008, Argentina, 06:27
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxUuU1jwMgM>

Lateral Thinking

In order for you to be an effective divergent thinker you must be able to think laterally. Typically in school students are taught to think vertically—select the correct answer and you receive an A on the test. Vertical thinking is providing the expected answer whereas lateral thinking involves generating creative, unique or novel solutions that break conventional ways of thinking and introduce unexpected results. There are a number of different methods you can use to induce lateral thinking:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| • Alter your perspective | Look at the idea differently by taking another person's point of view. |
| • Take an opposing view | Deliberately state the opposite of what you think. |

• Demented outlook	Think of the most outlandish, crazy, distorted ideas you can.
• Use juxtaposition	Make unusual connections between things that are typically unrelated.
• Randomization	Search online for a large list of items and then randomly pick from the list.
• Exaggeration	Distort the size, shape, color, or behavior of something in your animation.
• Time distortion	Consider time differently. What if it were cyclic, stuttered, suddenly stopped or repeated itself? What if artifacts from the present mixed with the past or future?
• Redefined usage	Take a common element such as a cup and come up with as many new and unusual uses for it as possible.
• Ask questions	State something and then ask “why?”. Answer it then ask “why?” again. Keep repeating this process.
• Mix disciplines	Incorporate elements from fields such as science, philosophy, music, sports, art, and popular culture together.

When seeking a creative idea for an animation, typically an animator keeps trying harder in the same direction to find that "perfect" idea. Instead of trying harder, approach the problem differently. If you allow for spontaneous discovery, you will begin to see the problem with fresh eyes. Some ideas may seem crazy at first thought, but they might be exactly what you need to make your animation stand out from the rest.



1.7 Joanna Priestley, *Voices*, 1985, United States, 04:10 - 12 images
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RInn7ERY3sA>

A wonderful example of lateral thinking is how Joanna Priestley illustrates the thoughts going through her mind as she shares her personal thoughts and fears. Some of the images are direct representations of what is going on in her mind. For example, she worries about growing old and her hair becomes grey and her skin develops wrinkles. Other times she creatively transforms her body into cartoons, aliens, works of art, and the planet Earth for no apparent reason. It is the freedom from conventional and literal representation that makes this animation so remarkable.

Brainstorming

"When driving for ideas you can go further if you keep your foot off the brake"

Alex Osborn, *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving*, 1957

Creative thinking depends on the ability to brainstorm. The more ideas you come up with, the better the possibility you will produce a desirable result. When brainstorming, it is important to allow fluency of thought and generate as many ideas as possible. Capture any and everything that pops into your mind by writing it down or making a sketch. Resist the urge to evaluate and filter out the ideas as they emerge. Although unconventional and irrelevant ideas may not ultimately end up being the preferred solution, they can foster free expression and ignite imaginative thinking. By allowing yourself to let loose of your inhibitions, it relieves the stress of having to come up with all good ideas. While brainstorming, there is no right answer, no idea is stupid or worthless.

When multiple people participate in a brainstorming activity they bring their personal experiences, biases, and unique philosophical views to the problem. Group brainstorming only works when there is mutual respect amongst participants; it must be a psychologically safe environment to be expressive. To contribute positively to a group brainstorming session, follow the guidelines below:

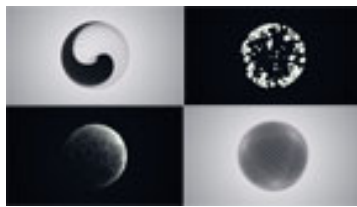
- Contribute to the discussion by offering a variety of ideas
- Do not dominate the discussion. Allow others to contribute
- Encourage and allow shy or reluctant participants to engage
- Never criticize or laugh at other people's ideas in a derogatory manner
- Respect all participants and acknowledge their contribution in a positive manner

One way of expanding the number of ideas is to draw a mind map. This is a great way to visualize and generate connections between ideas. Start by writing a word or phrase or drawing a picture in the middle of the page then draw a circle or rectangle around it. For every thought you have related to main topic, draw a line from the center outward and label it. If one of these new words inspires another idea, draw a line that branches off of the new line and label it. This branching structure continues to expand as new ideas are generated. Essentially, mind mapping is a non-linear approach to brainstorming in that you can easily go back to any previous idea and expand upon it or deviate from it.

Creative ideas are typically not generated in the initial stages of brainstorming. Initial thoughts and responses are typically quite common approaches or are derived from fixed beliefs and biases. As a brainstorming session progresses, the ideas become more original and interesting. Novel ideas often emerge in the later half of the brainstorming session so it is very important not to stop after your first few good ideas. Eventually you will need to evaluate the ideas generated during the brainstorming session. The section on "Selecting the best idea" will help you evaluate which ideas might result in more thought-provoking and emotively strong animations.

Experimentation

One of the wonderful things about working on a computer is the capability to “undo” just about anything. The ability to use “trial and error” when exploring ideas has spawned a new generation of fearless artists and become a valuable heuristic approach. By allowing yourself to take risks and make mistakes in the development process, you often discover stylistic approaches, techniques, and story ideas you never knew existed. The only thing you can lose is time but what you gain is knowledge and experience that will eventually point you in the right direction. An educated guess is also a heuristic and forms the basis of most of the decisions we make in life. Some animators are afraid to start until they resolve all the issues while others intuitively start animating. In both cases they will still need to make revisions to their ideas, visual style and technical approach before the animation is complete.



1.9 Ion Lucin, *Spherikal*, 2012, Moldavia, 02:37
<https://vimeo.com/39792837>

Observation

Becoming more aware of the visual nuances of our surroundings enables an animator to create works that re-contextualize familiar experiences and elements in a novel way. Similar to learning to draw, an animator must carefully observe form, light and motion in the world around them. By looking at an object closely or altering your angle of view, you may notice something that would make a great subject for your animation. Some animators have created works that were influenced by microscopic elements and how they move. Others have taken common movements and objects and animated them from a different perspective to draw attention to elements we often overlook.



1.10 Concept art from Ryan Larkin, *Walking*, 1972, Canada, 08:46
<https://www.nfb.ca/film/walking/>

In 1968, Ryan Larkin, a Canadian animator became fascinated and obsessed with how people walk. He closely observed the differences between male and female gait as well as that of young children. He noted that personalities affected a person's stride and body language. He analyzed the visual elements of a profile, frontal, and anterior walk as well as a person striding in perspective. This careful observation translated into an amazing film called "Walking" directed by Ryan Larkin in 1968 and produced by the National Film Board of Canada.

Escaping Reality

"Most people look at things the way they are and ask 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

George Bernard Shaw, from the play, *Back to Methuselah*

<http://www.quotecounterquote.com/2011/07/i-dream-things-that-never-were-and-say.html>

The strength of animation is that the medium is not bound to the physics of the real world. While videography is useful for more accurately representing reality, animation provides the freedom to create anything the imagination can conjure up. When an animator creates work that looks nearly identical to something that people have seen before, people will compare it to the referential source and will find it difficult to consider the new work "creative". They will instead place comparative judgment on the work— is it better or worse than the original source? If you attempt to create realistic characters, especially using computer graphics, people will notice every little wink and movement of the fingers that does not perfectly mimic its real-world source. Instead, if you create stylistically unique or hybrid creatures, the audience will not notice if it moves correctly.

This also applies to the unfolding of actions over time. If you attempt to depict realistic events in sequential order, they are bound to what people acknowledge to be "true". If anything varies from this "truth", the audience will question your abilities. You may develop the technical skills necessary to replicate styles, including realistic action and forms, but if you want your animation to be recognized for its creativity, it is best not to attempt to replicate reality but instead, expand upon it. The imagination is a powerful thing and when freed from the constraints of reality, it can be used to develop animations that are provocative and memorable.



1.11 Roze Stiebra –director, Maija Brence – animator, *Sed uz Sliksna Pasacina*, 2010, Latvia, 04:05
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8gCB1bUZcA>

Expressing Meaningful Issues

The more experience you have, the more you have to draw on when seeking an idea for your animation. Think back to your childhood, vacations, previous classes, relationships, situations at home, work you have done, etc. But don't stop there. What are your philosophical, political, and social viewpoints? What are your likes and dislikes? Ask other people to share their experiences and stories with you. Read books, magazine, newspapers, and blogs. Surf the internet for images, animation, stories, opinions and facts. Look around you and observe people, places and animals. You are living in a world that is rich with ideas.

The problem is that not all topics are as meaningful as others. There are many animations that are well done but in the end the audience is left with a "so what?" response. If you want your piece to be memorable and your audience to be moved, you will need to do more than just pick randomly from your experiences. Ideally, an animation will have substance and will address issues that others are able to relate to. There are a number of topics that are more effective at capturing your audience's heart and remaining in their mind.



1.12 Karen Aqua, *Twist of Fate*, 2009, USA, 08:40 – 1 image

<http://karenaqua.com/twist.html>



1.13 Martine Chartrand, *Black Soul*, 2001, Canada, 09:39 – 1 image

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yg_FJrFZyQ

List of Meaningful Topics

Humanity

Animations that deal with universal topics that we as humans can all relate to are the most powerful. Exploring human issues such as embarrassment, love, futility, loss, and misjudgment are successful because we can relate— it has happened to everyone. Animations that focus on things we may be less familiar with, such as microscopic creatures, may be interesting but do not affect us in the same way as animations that deal with the human condition. This is why animators often personify inanimate objects or nonhuman animals. It should be noted, however, that subject material dealing with humanity does not have to be serious or even representational. For example, abstract animation that used high contrast red and black diagonal lines with intense music could reconnect the audience to moments where they felt fear.

Personal

When someone bares their soul in an animation, the audience feels an intimate connection to the animator. It takes a lot of bravery to reveal personal experiences and feelings in publicly-viewed work. For many artists it is a release of tension or an attempt to discover more about themselves. For others, personal stories, feelings or ideas instill the work with a sense of “truth” that captivates the audience. Personal animations can be any type of genre, including drama, humor, action, situational, biographical, etc. When a topic is outside of an animator’s personal experience, they can personalize it by taking a philosophical stand on the issue.

Social, Cultural and Political

Animations that deal with social and political issues are especially relevant during the time period in which the problem exists. For instance, immigration is a hot topic when new immigration laws are being proposed. If addressing a contemporary issue, you must acknowledge that in 10 years the issue may not be understood or will be looked upon as “historical” by future audiences. In the same way, local issues will also not be fully understood by an international audience. Despite these limitations, it is still important to capture and communicate the essence of the times. Other social issues such as homelessness and poverty are universal and timeless. A global audience will understand the nature of the problem and emotionally respond to the piece.

Environmental

Animation has the ability to both communicate a concept and provoke a response. This is why so many public service announcements are animated. Throughout the world, people are faced with the effects of the changing climate as well as pollution, water scarcity, earthquakes, extinction of certain species, overpopulation and resource depletion. It is often more effective to talk about serious issues such as these in a humorous or less realistic manner or by embedding the issue into a broader story or using metaphor.

Metaphor

Animations that are literal and answer all possible questions leave no room for the viewer's imagination. Movies that incorporate imagery or situations that can be interpreted to mean different things, leave a viewer thinking about the movie long after it is finished. When working with narrative, it is important to try to move beyond a merely descriptive sequence of actions. You should instill the scenes with meaningful metaphors to add extra layers of significance. A metaphor is a way of talking about one thing by using something else. By associating one thing with another, the imagination of the viewer must work to create the meaning.

If you want to metaphorically represent a person that is raging mad in an animation, your character could morph into a bull and charge the camera. Or another example, a little less literal, might be that your character is struggling emotionally about whether to finish school or drop out and help their ailing mother. In the animation the character has to climb seven flights of stairs to get to school. The physical exertion necessary to reach the classroom metaphorically represents the character’s emotional struggle to reach a decision. Thought-provoking animations typically employ the use of metaphor or deeper meaning to entice the audience to intellectually engage with the piece. As you watch animations, try to find the hidden meaning or metaphors– not all

animations will have them. Keep in mind that the interpretation of a metaphoric animation is often very personal and relies upon past experiences and personal philosophies so the meaning of the piece may differ from person to person.



1.14 Jérémy Clapin, *Skhizein*, 2008, France, 13:38

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig-nyjaB1x4>



1.15 Christoph and Wolfgang Lauenstein, *Balance*, 1989, Germany, 07:41

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PADVHR-wOs>

Avoiding Clichés

Any idea, image, story or audio that is overused and lacks originality can be considered a cliché. What is considered cliché changes over time. The influence of movies, television, video games, and new technologies can profoundly affect the classification of what is considered cliché. The French *March of the Penguin* nature documentary triggered a slew of penguin animations. 2D morphing software spawned an over abundance of animations that transformed one image into another. Story endings can also be cliché. Avoid “it was only a dream” conclusions and ending up exactly where the animation began.

The problem with clichés is that instead of conveying an interesting, unique message, they trigger the “not that again” response in the mind of the viewer. It is difficult as a beginning animator to know what is cliché unless you spend a lot of time studying popular culture. As you become more familiar with contemporary media, as well as modern and historical animation, you will begin to pick out motifs, plots, expressions, approaches, sayings, and styles that are repeated over and over. It is wise to avoid adding one more animation to the huge collection of works that have employed that particular element.

ILLUSTRATIONS – some of the following

- Its only a dream (alarm clock)
- Boy tries to impress girl
- Killing the character
- Toilet humor
- Exaggerated gasp
- eyes in the dark
- over exaggerated female figures
- robots
- space scenes
- lens flare

Formal Approaches

Art is a visual language that is composed of elements such as line, shape, and texture with principles such as balance and unity that guide it. The purely visual aspects of an art animation are often referred to as its formal properties. Formal animations are often appreciated for their structure, beauty or technical construction. The color, composition or style of the animation can be the main subject matter thus shaping the meaning of the piece. An animation could be primarily about the color red and all its intensities. Colors have psychological as well as cultural meaning but can also be celebrated for their own inherent significance. When developing ideas for an animation, consider doing a piece that explores contrast, line quality, position, rotation, scale or the perception of space? Focus in on a certain element or principle and explore it thoroughly to uncover interesting aspects of it. You can juxtapose formal elements together to discover unusual relationships. For instance, *simultaneous contrast* is the way in which two colors, when placed side by side, affect the viewer's perception. An animation that explored this phenomenon might feature a yellow box within a larger box that changed color over time. To add interest, the animation might move on to investigate other optical illusions.

The technique of an animation could also be the primary subject matter. The characteristics and limitations of a medium or style are sometimes so intriguing that they make an excellent topic to animate. For instance, metamorphosis is a technique where one object slowly transforms into another shape. There are numerous 'morph' animations that do not attempt to tell a story but instead bring us on a journey through the transformative possibilities of shape.



1.17 Paul Prudence, *Chromophore*, 2013, UK, 03:51 – 1 image
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyUSYt8IUUc>

Ideas That Expand Beyond the Screen

Animation does not have to be confined to the screen. Artists often produce animations as a part of an immersive art installation or a projection-map onto a building. Other times they construct interactive animated objects. The environment in which an animation is shown can vary widely—from a movie theater to a living room, gallery, outdoor environment, or storefront. Animations can also be viewed on a screen or projected onto a wide range of surfaces including buildings, water fountains and cloth.

The final display of the work and the environment in which it will be shown can steer the concept of the work. For instance, many festivals and art exhibits ask for site-specific works. At the *Vivid Sydney, Festival of Light, Music & Ideas*, in Australia, animators design works to connect with a specific architectural structure such as the renowned Sydney Opera House, the waterfront, or the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Oftentimes an artists researches the history of the specific place and creates works that symbolically connect to its past. Similarly, an animation's

concept can be defined and expressed through customized environments. For example, if an animator is interested in revealing things that are typically not seen, they could create small boxes with hinged doors. A stylized animation of a microscopic fantastical creature could dance and play on a digital frame embedded in the back of the box. Only when the viewer opens the door and peeks inside would they be able to view this hidden world.



1.18 Candaş Şişman, *Flux*, 2010, Turkey, 04:44
<https://vimeo.com/15395471>

Improving Creative Thinking Skills

If you create the right conditions for creativity it will happen.

Creative Environments

One of the most effective ways to be creative is to find or create an inspiring environment in which to work. As humans, we are the most productive when we are in a safe environment that is devoid of distractions. If people are interrupting you, you are receiving notifications on your phone or computer, or you keep checking social media sites, it will be hard to focus. Most often it is best to separate yourself from other people and find a quiet place to think. You can then give your mind “room to breathe” and you will be able to develop your thoughts fully. Alternatively, places like coffee shops are known for spawning creative ideas. It might be the stimulation from the coffee itself or perhaps the inspiration comes from surrounding yourself with the thinkers and creatives that gather here. Either way, situating yourself in a place where you can discuss ideas with a group of people can be helpful when you need a fresh perspective. More private places like showers and beds have been hosts to some of the most brilliant ideas. Other times it is useful to take a hike in nature, walk down a city street, visit a mall, go to the library, lounge in a park, visit an art gallery or explore a science museum.

Creative Habits

Keep a sketchbook and use it
Jot ideas into notebooks
Give yourself time to daydream
Philosophically and critically analyze things
Become more curiosity about things
Stay positive and confident and have fun
Keep an open mind and be willing to take risks
Always strive to better an idea
Discuss your ideas with others
Listen closely to feedback
Set goals and meet deadlines

Be motivated and don't procrastinate Escape your normal environment Watch an independent animation a day
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Practices that Inhibit Great Ideas

Being too critical of the ideas Fear of failure or not finding the “right” idea Too easily satisfied with solutions Obsession with copy existing ideas Looking for the easiest solution Not willing to consider creative alternatives Inability to work with others Applying judgment too soon Lack of or too much confidence Negative attitude Procrastination Not getting enough sleep Trying to do too many things at once Working too hard without taking a break
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Selecting the Best Idea

There are an infinite number of extraordinary animation ideas out there, the challenge is to choose one and execute it well. Use the “6Cs” method below to help focus in on that one perfect concept.

Categorize

After generating a number of potential ideas for an animation, the first step is to begin to organize the options. Begin by combining similar proposals and grouping the concepts into logical categories.

Clarify

Many ideas may need to be elaborated on to determine if they are feasible. For instance, if the idea will end up being a narrative story, how does it end? If the idea will be an abstract animation, what colors could be used? This level of detail will help to determine if the idea has merit.

Combine

Juxtaposition is the placing together of two or more different ideas for the purpose of establishing contrast or a comparison. You may have a number of ideas that, by themselves, are not very interesting but when combined might be quite novel. Even seemingly bad ideas can be modified and turned into great animations.

Criticize

Question the premise and why you might want to go this direction. If it is a story, will it provoke an emotional or intellectual response from the viewer? If it is a poetic or abstract animation, is the idea something that the audience will be able to relate to or will it be visually interesting? Break down the idea and question how effective the components might be.

Consider

Share your favorite ideas with others and take into consideration their opinion. Carefully consider both the practical aspects of the idea and how the audience will respond to it. Is the idea creative or unique? Will it look good when finished?

Cull

Some ideas are just not feasible. Do you have the time and means to do it? Some ideas may require too much time, hard to access equipment, or a higher skill level than you have. Other ideas are cliché, over-used, or not that interesting. There are ideas that you intuitively drawn to and others that do not excite you so much. You should rank the ideas and then eliminate the ones with the least potential.

The Final Selection

At this point you must apply the most important criteria: Are you passionate enough about the idea to work on it for a very long time?

Animator Profile

This section will include an interview with Erick Oh from Pixar.



1.21 Erick Oh, *Symphony*, 2008, Korea, 05:18
<https://vimeo.com/1763329>



1.22 Erick Oh, *Heart*, 2010, South Korea/USA, 08:36
<https://vimeo.com/52369262>



1.23 Erick Oh, *How to Eat Your Apple*, 2011, Korea, 01:14
<https://vimeo.com/29081666>

Did You Know?

Did you know that Pixar allows any of their employees to propose ideas for stories? Employees also can provide feedback on in-progress animations whether or not they are involved in the project. Pixar has never bought or produced animation ideas from non-employees.