A kaleidoscopic view: Studying diverse aspects of experimental animation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the field of experimental animation, offering various definitions and analyzing artists' approaches. The study aims to thoroughly classify different aspects of experimental animation, proposing it as a kaleidoscopic form that incorporates a wide range of elements to create a distinctive yet comprehensive structure. This research builds on the foundational work of experimental and digital cinema scholars, including Robert Russett, Cecile Starr, Paul Wells, Maureen Furniss, Miriam Harris, Paul Taberham, and Corrie Francis Parks. Given the continual advancements in technology and the evolving practices of experimental animation, it is essential to update and redefine its concepts. Experimental animators often eschew convention, developing new techniques and expressions. Consequently, the first section of this paper offers an in-depth analysis of the definitions surrounding experimental animation. It further explores diverse methodologies regarding technique, context, and production processes. The third section reviews emerging platforms for creating and exhibiting experimental animation, emphasizing the importance of establishing appropriate venues for such work. It also highlights the audience's critical role in completing the experiential loop of experimental animation. In conclusion, this research will describe experimental animation as a kaleidoscopic form that integrates diverse elements to create a unique and multifaceted structure. The proposed classification chart will organize methods derived from experimental animation studies, emphasizing categorizing key features and techniques.

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1. Specifying experimental animation

In the context of experimental animation, the term 'experimental' often has a fluid meaning. Experimental animation is sometimes understood as equal to or partially overlapping with the avant-garde, abstract, or expanded forms of animation, as well as new approaches, styles, and expressions in creating animated films. While experimental animation can be either narrative or non-narrative, it is primarily characterized by personal or single authorship of techniques. In outlining the properties of experimental animation, Paul Wells describes the form as interpretative rather than strictly narrative, emphasizing "the presence of the artist" (Wells 1998: 36), in contrast to the artist's relative absence in mainstream or orthodox animation.

To highlight the primary distinction between the role of technique in commercial or industrial animation and experimental animation, commercial animation typically emphasizes content, with new techniques employed to serve the narrative or intended meaning. In contrast, experimental animation tends to explore new materials, devices, settings, and mechanisms, prioritizing aesthetic innovation over conventional narrative concerns.

In *Experimental Animation: An Illustrated Anthology* (1976), Robert Russett and Cecile Starr explore various techniques and attitudes toward experimental animation through multiple approaches. They describe experimental animators as those who, by avoiding the standard animation stand and the production-line methods of commercial studios, personalize their equipment and techniques or offer innovative technical directions to others. Alternatively, some animators construct complex devices or employ sophisticated computer languages rather than relying on conventional methods. According to this book, the primary aim of experimental animation is to diverge from the traditional frameworks of standard animation (Russett and Starr 1976: 7).

To achieve this, experimental animation urges animators to pursue innovation, demonstrate intelligent leadership in their style, align with their expression, and develop new and distinctive techniques. Furthermore, the authors categorize experimental animations as "non-cartoon animations" (ibid.), distancing them from techniques commonly associated with animation or widely employed by Hollywood filmmakers. This distinction arises from the early dominance of cartoon animations in animation cinema, where audiences primarily associated the medium with the fantasy, comedy, and musical genres popularized by studios like Disney and Warner Brothers.

However, this does not imply that experimental animation cannot be enjoyable. On the contrary, experimental animations can provide a fresh perspective on visual and human concepts, often engaging the audience in deeper contemplation and appealing to a more specialized viewership. In their book, Russett and Starr categorized experimental animators up until 1975. Later, in 1988, they wrote:

> These animators, along with other experimenters concerned with the artistic potential of technology, are working with tools and techniques that are patently different from other forms of animation. They have introduced into the field of motion pictures not only a fresh vocabulary of visual images and structures but also new levels of consciousness and intelligence. (Russett and Starr 1988: 179)

Providing a fresh study, *Experimental Animation from Analogue to Digital* (2019) takes a more analytical approach, with scholars identifying new forms of experimental animation in recent years. The articles are organized into four chapters: (1) Definitions, Histories, and Legacies, (2) From Analogue to Digital, (3) Close Analysis of Individual Artists, and (4) Science and the Cosmos. In the first chapter, Paul Taberham (2019) explores various elements of creating experimental animations, including movement, form, color, and sound. In Defining Experimental Animation: A Follow-up (2020), he asserts that:

> [Experimental animations] evoke thoughts rather than present concrete ideas; surface details (such as paintbrush strokes or clay texture) play a more significant role in the experience of the film compared to commercial animation; the materials used may be employed in a way that draws attention to the medium itself; psychologically defined characters with clear motivations and goals are typically absent. (Taberham 2020: 13)

Paul Taberham (2023) further explores the aesthetics of experimental animation, connecting its essence to the process of *medium expansion*. He notes that "experimental animators were the first to explore the possibilities offered by computer technology" (Taberham 2023: 220). For example, John Whitney and Peter Foldes pioneered new fluid visuals by experimenting with early computers and digital technologies. Also, Miriam Harris (2019) compares the overlaps and distinctions between digital and analog experimental animation. She emphasizes that digital media can appear in contrast with its mechanical, cold, and lack of imaginative innovation nature when artists are driven to push boundaries and explore new creative possibilities (Harris 2019).

Paul Wells in *Understanding Animation* (1998) specifies experimental animations as fluid in contrast with the solid essence of commercial, orthodox, industrial, and mainstream films. Comparing 'experimental' and 'commercial' animations, he describes experimental animation as abstract, non-narrative, and interpretative, often based on music and the artist's inner world exploration. In this book, Wells introduces a new category under the rubric of animation called "developmental," which lies between commercial and experimental animation. This category combines elements of both

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commercial and experimental animations and employs various techniques to convey conceptual stories that explore controversial subjects. Despite being rooted in traditional animation approaches, developmental animation pushes the boundaries of storytelling by incorporating individual techniques and innovations (Wells 1998: 51).

Experimental animations illustrate how music can evoke emotions by synchronizing the flow of sound with visual imagery. Paul Wells acknowledges the significant role of music in experimental animation, suggesting that music can manifest as colors and shapes moving through time with varying rhythms, motions, and speeds. He highlights the spiritual and emotional connection between sound and image, facilitated by free-form structures in animation. Wells also asserts that sound is essential in all animated films, but it holds particular importance in experimental works. The use of silence, avant-garde music, unconventional sounds, and other alternative auditory designs in experimental animation starkly contrasts with the dialogues, stereotypical cartoon sound effects, and classical music typically found in commercial animations (ibid.).

From a different perspective, John Halas (1968) defines experimental animation as films that do not fit neatly into any specific category of filmmaking. He argues that these films are often created by non-professional or semi-professional filmmakers who are passionate about filmmaking and seek to advance its technical and artistic dimensions. Halas acknowledges that experimental animation does not follow typical production methods, as many of these films stem from personal enthusiasm, aiming to showcase pure artistic expression or explore the unique potential of animation in specific fields or subjects (Halas and Manvell 1968).

Although Halas's perspective may seem to isolate experimental animators, he acknowledges that the discoveries made by these filmmakers ultimately benefit the film industry. Through ongoing experimentation, experimental animators test the feasibility and success of various techniques, often pioneering new styles that influence mainstream filmmaking.

The root of the word 'experiment' is *experiri*, which means 'to try' in Latin. Andy Buchanan (2016) states that "both linguistically and as a process, this *experiri*, or trying, leads to 'experience' and 'expertise'" (Buchanan 2016: 1). Regarding the meaning of experimentation in experimental animation, Birgitta Hosea (2018) holds that this concerns the animators' pursuit of generative strategies, which may involve exploring materiality or structuring processes. She suggests that the common factor in experimental animations is that "they are created with the intention to investigate rather than to entertain or embellish" (Hosea 2018: 258).

Accordingly, the present study suggests that experimental animation primarily functions as a space for developing new techniques without a fixed identity. It serves as a platform for evaluating their potential in creating new aesthetics and movements, ultimately leading to the definition of their own unique identity (see Diagram 1).

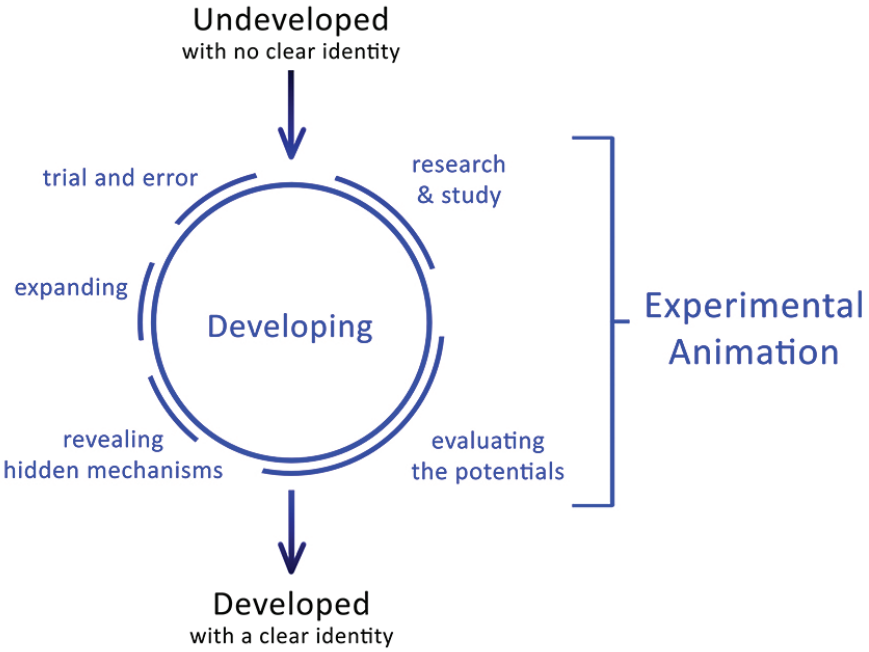

Diagram 1. Areas to study experimental animations

From this perspective, creating an experimental animation can be considered an independent research endeavor to explore innovative concepts and contribute to studying this art form. Tim Barker, drawing on Gene Youngblood's statements in *Expanded Cinema* (1979), compares experimental art to experimental science:

> […] experimental art could be meaningfully considered alongside experimental practices in science, and further, as a part of a larger 'experimental culture'. This is, of course, not to say that experimental practice in science and art consists entirely of interchangeable methods and principles. Instead, we could position science and art within a culture of technological experimentation, where both disciplines converge in their use of new techniques and technologies to reimagine our bodies, minds, and the worlds that we live in. (Barker 2013: 282)

He uses the term *artist-scientist*[1] to highlight that experimental artists design the conditions of an experiment to test new ideas and uncover new connections through hypotheses, constraints, and methods. He further suggests that creativity and experimentalism are closely intertwined, as being creative and introducing novelty into the world necessitates conducting numerous experiments (ibid.).

[1] Gene Youngblood coined this term in *Expanded Cinema* (1979). Moreover, the current article suggests using the term *artist-researcher* to describe experimental artists.

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On the other hand, under the categories of hypothesis, falsifiability, and repeatability, Andy Buchanan (2016) analyzes the differences in priorities and processes between science and art, particularly concerning these terms, and examines their implications for experimental animation. He cautions against adopting a pseudo-scientific approach in the artistic domain (Buchanan 2016). Buchanan also addresses a fundamental question regarding the value of artistic achievements in experimental animation compared to scientific experimentation:

> […] from a practical point of view, visual experiments that do not produce the anticipated valuable visual results might be considered 'falsified' or disproven by simply failing to resonate with the artist in a way that inspires their continued pursuit. There is a natural, informal attrition of these hypotheses, which makes their assessed value quite subjective. (Buchanan 2016: 3)

Buchanan asserts that when creative arts research is compared to other fields that use experimentation to discover new knowledge, there may be a conscious or unconscious bias against these subjective and seemingly undeniable expressions. Such expressions are often considered inadequate because they produce a different stable truth than scientific inquiry (ibid.).

Based on these studies, the current research emphasizes the significance of technical innovations in experimental animation, which arise from using new materials, devices, structures, systems, tools, and mechanisms. The central discussion will focus on distinguishing innovative techniques from creative approaches (or artistic styles) and advancing experimental animation from a term used to describe unknown styles to an animation technique with a clear definition.

According to *Merriam-Webster's* dictionary, in terms of the meanings associated with innovation and creation, innovation is synonymous with novelty, coinage, or the introduction of a new idea, method, or device. To clarify, while creativity seeks to answer 'how to create something new,' innovation addresses 'how to design a new method to create something new.' Furthermore, innovation tends to be more external and practical, focusing on new mechanisms, whereas creativity is more internal, subjective, and related to artistic approaches. In this context, technical innovation, as referenced in this article, pertains to the design of new mechanisms that result in distinct aesthetics, movements, and concepts.

From this perspective, not all experimental animations are technically experimental; some may utilize existing techniques to convey the creator's experiences and thoughts, sharing their inner world with the audience. In *Fluid Frames* (2016), Corrie Francis Parks states:

> Ultimately, the best works are those that use an innovative approach to production, and also relate to the message or emotional tone the film is trying to communicate. Then, the audience is moved emotionally, dazzled visually, and the message, whether commercial or artistic, becomes memorable. The animations that will be shown generation after generation are those that marry innovative animation techniques with meaningful content. (Parks 2016: 2-3)

On the other hand, Parks asserts that experimental animators should adopt an "experimental frame of mind" (ibid.). This phrase refers to the artists' self-expression and ability to showcase their distinctive approaches through creative settings, new materials, or mixed techniques.

From a more holistic perspective, art evolves in response to the circumstances and advancements of its time, leading to a broad range of creative approaches. These approaches often address themes such as personal concerns, social anxieties, fears, nightmares, and mental health disorders, portraying both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind and facilitating a flow of self-expression. These animations bear similarities to postmodern and surrealist expressions, which challenge viewers by subverting their expectations through shifts in plot, characters, and atmosphere. The following section will investigate and gather other experimental approaches.

2. Various approaches to experimental animation

In animation studies, experimental animation appears to resist a concise definition. Norman M. Klein (2005) argues that animation has always retained a fluid quality that does not require a rigid framework. Instead, it invites the audience to see themselves within the story. This fluidity is a defining characteristic of experimental animation, allowing the artist to express the film's underlying narrative through the free flow of thought (M. Klein 2005).

Building on this perspective, rather than seeking a fixed definition of experimental animation, this research proposes investigating the various approaches to creating such works, acknowledging the fluid nature of the medium. When studying experimental animations, it is essential to recognize the importance of creativity and improvisation. Creativity is linked to inner thoughts and emotions, which may be innate or shaped by external influences. For example, James Whitney and Oskar Fischinger incorporated meditation into their creative processes, resulting in distinctive styles. Additionally, creativity can manifest in blending diverse materials and artistic elements to develop a unique concept, ultimately offering a fresh perspective.

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Figure 1. Film strips – comparison between two styles in direct animation:
(Top) *A Color Box* (1935) by Len Lye (reference: https://filmcolors.org/galleries/a-colour-box-1935/)
(Bottom) *Mothlight* (1963) by Stan Brakhage (reference: https://walkerart.org/calendar/2012/rene-gades-vision-evening-stan-brakhage-films)

In experimental animation techniques, artists can apply a single technique across various styles. For instance, artists such as Len Lye, Norman McLaren, Stan Brakhage, and Steven Woloshen have examined film strips through trial and error, each developing a distinct direction and identity (see Figure 1). Additionally, some techniques involve re-experimentation with traditional styles by incorporating modern visuals. *Choros* (2011) by Michael Langan can be seen as a re-experimentation or a digital reinterpretation of Norman McLaren's *Pas De Deux* (1968), offering a new approach to reconstructing old methods or addressing issues identified in earlier experiments.

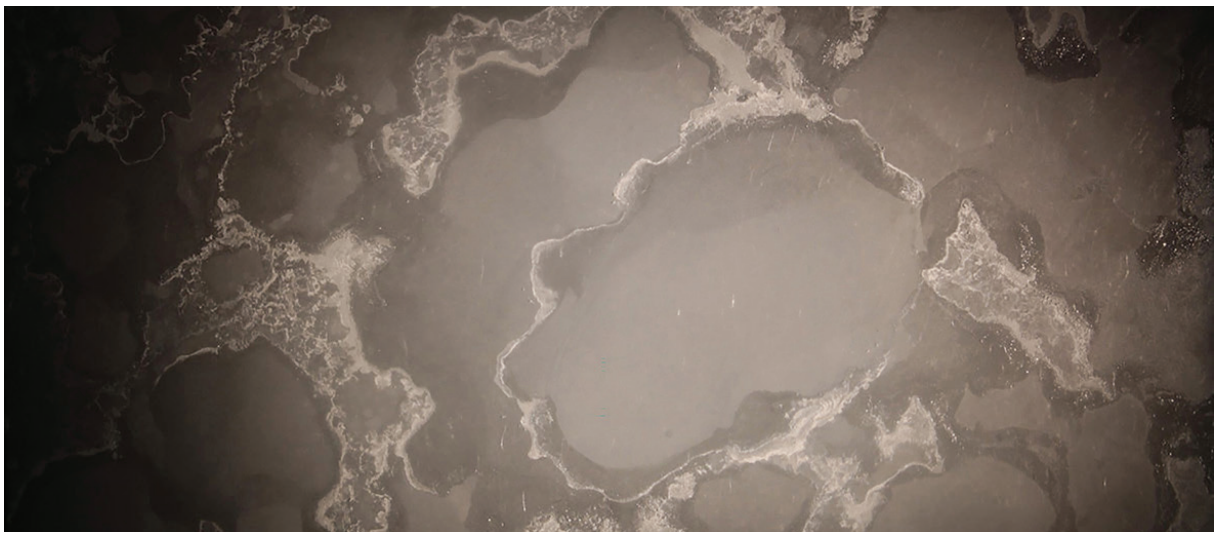

Figure 2. *Motus* (2023) by Nelson Fernandes
(still frame, reference: https://linoleumfest.com/en/program/experimental-animation/events/Motus)

On the other hand, some experimental animations focus on utilizing new materials and establishing distinct settings. For instance, in *Coyote* (2017) by Corrie Francis Parks, while the technique aligns with other under-the-camera methods, she employed various types of grains in different sizes and shapes to create a new visual experience.[2] Similarly, Nelson Fernandes in *Motus* (2023) adopts this approach by uniquely using under-the-camera animation. In this case, the artist employed ethanol as a raw material to create accidental abstract figures on a metal sheet (see Figure 2).

[2] https://medium.com/@corriefrancis/the-individual-grain-7f8b05bc1751#.dh20ryyyj

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As previously discussed, technical innovation is a key characteristic of experimental animation. Artists often employ new mechanisms or devices driven by curiosity to discover unique styles. This approach is evident in artists who embrace emerging mediums to achieve novel styles and expressions in their artwork. Pioneers like Mary Ellen Bute, John Whitney, and Peter Foldes have created exceptional works demonstrating computer technology's potential as a fresh form of artistic expression. These artists primarily produced their works for research purposes, aiming to explore modern art expressions.

In *Choreography for Copy Machine* (1991), Chel White employs a copy machine as an innovative device to create an experimental animation. The film presents a captivating sequence of body parts and objects, using the unique photographic capabilities of a photocopy machine to produce sequential images. On Vimeo, Chel White describes this animation as "humorous and sublime, the ultimate Xerox fetish film."[3] White's artistic vision is brought to life through the seamless combination of black-and-white photocopies and electronic instrumentals, resulting in a surreal and intriguing sequence. His innovative approach highlights his talent and creativity, making this work a notable contribution to experimental animation (see Figure 3).

The most recent development in this approach involves using emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Extended Reality (XR), to explore new ways of expanding animation techniques. *The Orchid and the Bee* (2022) by Frances

Figure 3. Choreography for *Copy Machine* (1991) by Chel White (still frame, reference: https://rarefilmm.com/2021/09/choreography-for-copy-machine-photocopy-cha-cha-1991/)

[3] https://vimeo.com/11252439
[4] https://research.fhstp.ac.at/en/projects/vrinmotion

Figure 4. *The Orchid and the Bee* (1991) by Frances Adair Mckenzie (still frame, reference: https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/the_orchid_and_the_bee/)

Adair Mckenzie (see Figure 4) and *VRinMotion*[4] are two examples of hybrid stop-motion animation projects incorporating VR technology. In the *VRinMotion* research project, led by Franziska Bruckner, experimental artists collaborate to examine the potential of virtual reality in pushing the boundaries of artistic stop-motion animation.

The current article emphasizes the innovative methods used in research projects to advance animation techniques, particularly in adapting these techniques to rapid technological and scientific developments. By investigating cutting-edge methodologies and integrating them with technological advancements, this approach enhances animation's creative potential and provides new perspectives on emerging technologies. The article offers an additional example to illustrate this approach further.

At the Maryland Institute College of Art, scholars collaborate with NASA scientists in a course titled Astro-animation to conduct interdisciplinary research projects. This course explores the synergies between various research methods in astronomy and the development of art projects through experiential education. In *Astro-Animation: A Case Study of Art and Science Education* (2020), the editors describe how small collaborative groups of students create short animations based on scientific investigations, interpreting them through a creative lens and allowing them to experience "science in action" (Arcadias et al. 2020: 2). For instance, by applying NASA Goddard's methodology from the Asuka 12236 Chondrite project, one student developed the *Scientific Method of Animation*, exploring the question, "How does Asuka connect to the themes of life?" which led to the creation of editorial pieces of art (ibid: 15).

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Many artists use computers to merge various methods and achieve their desired expressions. In *Forming Game* (2008), Malcolm Sutherland employed multiple techniques to create black-and-white images with distinct shapes and contrasts. He combined his drawings, archived sports films, and documentaries, using the rotoscoping method to remove backgrounds and create abstract lines and forms. Additionally, Sutherland employed a technique reminiscent of pinboard animation by pressing objects against a curtain to produce shadow effects and embossments. In *A Tangled Tale* (2013), Corrie Francis Parks integrates sand animation with digital layer composition in After Effects. On Vimeo, she describes her approach: "This vibrant, watery underwater world showcases my revolutionary approach to sand animation, a seamless blend of traditionally handcrafted imagery and technological innovation."[5]

Much like early experimental computer animators like Peter Foldes, CG artists continuously experiment with computer mechanisms – including software, programming, and coding – to discover new techniques and push the boundaries of creativity in computer animation. For instance, Nikita Diakur and Redbear Easterman created *Ugly* (2018) using dynamic computer simulation. Diakur explains on Vimeo[6] that many aspects of the animation rely entirely on the computer's calculations. He further notes that he embraced this process based on "accidents" to avoid creative stagnation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Ugly* (2018) by Nikita Diakur and Redbear Easterman
(still frame, reference: https://www.stashmedia.tv/ugly-full-film-nikita-diakur/)

[5] https://vimeo.com/78802560
[6] https://vimeo.com/281529369

Some artists incorporate elements from other art forms to develop a distinctive style. For example, multimedia artists such as Eric Paré and Jeff Frost use stop-motion in combination with long-exposure photography to create hybrid animations. The photography technique known as 'light painting' was first explored by a few artists, including Man Ray, Barbara Morgan, and Pablo Picasso. With the advancement of digital cameras and photography tools, this technique has become more accessible to a broader range of artists. Over the past decade, this has led to the fusion of light painting with stop-motion animation,[7] producing unique visuals in low light or darkness.

In *Light Spin* (2012), Eric Paré used 24 cameras positioned around dancers to create circular strips using the bullet-time technique, light painting, and stop-motion. Unlike a traditional photographer, Paré actively engaged in the performance as an animator. Dressed in all-black clothing, he held lights and rotated them around the performer during the dance, creating dynamic light patterns as part of the animation (see Figure 6).

To provide further examples of expanding animation through other art forms, *Trespass* (2012) and *Uncanny Valley* (2015) by Paul Wenninger stand out. In these animations, Wenninger employs a unique approach to creating pixilation animations, enhancing the aesthetics of stop motion by incorporating elements of theater, performance art, and cinematic decoupage.

Figure 6. *Light Spin* (2012) by Eric Paré (still frame from the video)

[7] Known as: light painting in stop-motion/light painting stop-motion/light painting animation

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Moreover, in *Dont Know What* (2019), Thomas Renoldner employs the method of single-frame editing, focusing primarily on sound and creating a musical composition by experimenting with the human voice and transforming language into sound and music. In this example, realistic film shots evolve into a surreal, structuralist, and abstract film. On Vimeo, Renoldner explains that *Dont Know What* "questions classical rules of different film genres by combining elements of avant-garde film/video art and entertainment cinema."[8]

As previously mentioned, improvisation plays a fundamental role in experimental animation techniques. From the perspective of this research, improvisation involves animating through spontaneous inspiration without relying on structured production pipelines, encouraging artists to avoid rigid planning. In many instances, the influence of improvisation is evident in the form of accidental animated movements and effects. Paul Taberham suggests that creating experimental animations functions as a method of discovery. He further highlights "non-rational intuitions" as a tendency or alternative approach in experimental animation:

> The artist may try to express that which cannot be articulated by spoken word, such as abstract feelings or atmospheres. In a sense, they try to express the inexpressible by calling upon their non-rational intuitions. (Taberham 2019: 24)

In this context, some experimental animators use film as a medium to explore surreal, philosophical, and mystical themes, often centered on self-exploration and non-verbal communication. The imagery in these works frequently reflects the inspirations filmmakers encounter during their creative process. For example, Ishu Patel, Harry Smith, Jordan Belson, and James Whitney created abstract animations influenced by Eastern philosophy, Jungian psychology, alchemy, yoga, Taoism, quantum physics, and surrealism.

Before continuing to explore this approach, it is essential to acknowledge that although live-action films and animations have fundamentally different definitions, experimental and avant-garde cinema appear to follow a similar trajectory. In *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (1993), the author explains that the earliest avant-garde films were a critical response to commercial cinema, giving rise to two key cinematic trends: abstraction and surrealism (MacDonald 1993). These artistic expressions contrast with industrial and commercial cinema, serving as a vehicle for self-knowledge and allowing filmmakers to express their deepest thoughts.

Additionally, MacDonald notes that experimental cinema prioritizes formal and technical concerns, while avant-garde cinema emphasizes critical reactions to societal

[8] https://vimeo.com/412906856

and surrounding issues (ibid.). Consequently, some experimental animations adopt an avant-garde approach. This approach reflects diverse ways of life and explores new processes and ideas that challenge dominant beliefs and reject conventional norms. Moreover, it broadens the medium by providing a platform for marginalized groups, such as black communities, feminists, and LGBTQ+ individuals, to express their unique perspectives.

Another group of experimental animators creates artworks designed to evoke direct emotional responses from the audience. The films of the Quay Brothers serve as a prime example of this approach. Suzanne Buchan (2005) explains how these films deeply immerse the audience in the experience. According to Buchan, the Quay Brothers' animations offer a unique and refreshing art experience, enabling the audience to observe moving objects and abandoned dolls within the scene while attempting to grasp the unfolding events and feel omniscient. Although this task may seem impossible, the Quay Brothers' films convey to the audience that the objects on the screen possess life and motion, regardless of the viewer's acceptance (Buchan 2005).

The final approach to experimental animation has the broadest audience due to its incorporation of elements from folklore and traditional narratives. Notable examples include the masterpieces of Lotte Reiniger and Caroline Leaf, who use folk tales and ancient myths to reinterpret these stories. Their experimental techniques leave a lasting impact on the audience.

Unlike commercial cinema, experimental animation prioritizes artistic expression over audience satisfaction. Giannalberto Bendazzi (1994) notes that many experimental artists are defined primarily by their individualism and unique artistic approach rather than by their popularity with the audience. Len Lye, for example, admits that he does not know who his audience is; perhaps they are like him, drawn to art as a form of self-expression (Bendazzi 1994).

Before fully understanding the crucial impact of the audience on experimental animations, it is essential to examine the production strategies and platforms associated with these works. According to *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (2009), experimental animation comprises personal, abstract, non-linear, and non-narrative films that challenge conventional beliefs. These films are typically limited to private or small screenings and represent alternative ways of life. Furniss notes that experimental works are often produced on low budgets, using unconventional techniques, and are frequently created by artists from marginalized social groups (Furniss 2009).

On the other hand, as experimental techniques and styles have been increasingly utilized in film titles, promotional teasers, and video clips, these platforms have become ideal for showcasing new and avant-garde expressions. Moreover, innovative techniques developed in experimental animation have significantly influenced commercial cinema, contributing to the evolution of filmmaking. In Experimental Animation and its Influence on the Mainstream (2018), the author states:

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> While *Coraline* might be made by a mainstream studio within the Hollywood system, the influences of the experimental stop-motion animations of Svankmajer and the Quay brothers can be seen within the designs of the characters, with puppets having or gaining sharp facial features, the use of sharp teeth and hands, and the appearance of needles as weapons of destruction. (Rouschop 2018: 9)

In this context, independent or government-affiliated organizations allocate dedicated budgets to support experimental animations and related academic and research projects to promote the development of new and diverse styles. The primary objectives of these organizations include:

- Introducing native cultures to international audiences, as the National Film Board of Canada website highlights.
- Addressing contemporary art challenges, as exemplified by art networks such as ARTE and Channel 4 (UK).
- Promoting moral and humanitarian messages, as seen in productions by organizations like Amnesty International and UNICEF.
- Providing educational content, as displayed by networks such as BBC and TED.

Furthermore, it is essential to provide suitable platforms for the audience to engage with experimental animation, promoting its growth and expanding its reach. There are five well-known platforms for connecting the audience with art:

1. Private or public spaces specifically designed for interactive performances, such as museums and galleries.
2. Dedicated festivals, whether experimental or internet-based.
3. Television and home video networks.
4. Screenings in movie theaters.
5. The internet.

In what follows, we explore the role of the audience in experimental animation.

3. The audience of experimental animation

How a film is presented, and the artist's intent can significantly influence the audience's perception. Buchanan notes, "An audience may be considered another site of resonance testing, where subjective aesthetic or institutional appreciation becomes a measure of success of the experimental works" (Buchanan 2016: 3).

In other words, understanding the factors that influenced a film's creation can help the audience engage with and appreciate its unique experience. Just as experimental animators require the right conditions and a calm state of mind to convey their emotions effectively through art, audiences also need an appropriate setting to fully appreciate experimental films' aesthetics.

Regarding avant-garde cinema, Scott MacDonald observes that most viewers have seen hundreds of mainstream films in theaters or on television before ever encountering an avant-garde movie. Their perception of film is shaped from childhood, both consciously and unconsciously, and this understanding is continually reinforced throughout adulthood (MacDonald 1993).

Furthermore, while watching a movie, the audience is affected by various visual and auditory elements. The moving images on screen and sound convey concepts through dialogue and other audio effects, simultaneously engaging the audience's eyes, ears, and mind. As Andy Buchanan (2016) notes, animation offers a broad range of opportunities for artistic exploration. It is a hybrid medium incorporating art, storytelling, sound, photography, handcrafts, drawing, and other processes. These elements, individually or collectively, can serve as platforms for experimentation, yielding innovative results in many aspects of animation. As a result, audiences are exposed to new forms across various fields.

In *Film Appreciation* (1976), Allan Casebier suggests that emotions play a vital role in the cinematic experience beyond visual and auditory elements. He argues that cinematic experiences are influenced by three key components: visual, auditory, and emotional expressions. Casebier emphasizes that emotional expression, shaped by the artist's identity, inner state, philosophy, and perception of societal issues, creates a distinct mode of expression. This expression is also influenced by the artist's aesthetic interpretation of a work of art's visual characteristics.

Additionally, in *From Pictorial Signs to the Text* (1996), Babak Ahmadi[9] emphasizes that tone plays a crucial role in understanding a film. Specific codes within a film create an invisible thread that allows the audience to grasp its expression (Ahmadi 1996). In this respect, the audience of experimental animation needs to be familiar with various techniques and styles, allowing them to comprehend the tones and codes employed in these works fully.

[9] Babak Ahmadi is a well-known Iranian author, translator, art critic and researcher.

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According to Malcolm Le Grice, the content or action of a film is directly connected to the audience's behavior or reaction, enabling viewers to shape their perception of the film's content (Le Grice 2001). In Archeology of a Computer Screen (1995), Lev Manovich examines the evolving relationship between viewers and screens across various media, emphasizing how the viewing experience has shifted with the advent of Virtual Reality (VR):

> [With VR], the spectator is no longer chained, immobilized, anesthetized by the apparatus that serves him the ready-made images; now s/he has to work to speak, in order to see. (Manovich 1995: 22)

Manovich notes that in traditional cinema, the screen functions as a window into another space, fostering strong identification between the viewer and the image while the viewer's body remains still. This creates a division between physical presence and the virtual world. With VR, however, the screen disappears entirely, merging real and virtual spaces into a unified experience (Manovich 1995). In this context, interactive media transforms viewers into participants, allowing them to personalize their experiences rather than passively consume content.

Maureen Furniss (2009) emphasizes the audience's crucial role in interpreting abstract cinema. Abstract films aim to expand our ability to perceive and understand the world, encouraging viewers to actively engage in meaning-making. Furniss argues that experimental works offer the artist and the audience a unique experience, as the artist explores new forms of expression and the audience gains a deeper appreciation of them (Furniss 2009). Ultimately, abstract cinema can be seen as a collaborative effort between the artist and the viewer, contributing to the construction of meaning.

According to Furniss (2009), viewers of abstract art are free to experience a wide range of reactions. This is the essence of the art form: while some may find it perplexing and chaotic, others appreciate its aesthetic value. Furniss suggests that interpreting abstract works engages different parts of the brain. Viewing such art can evoke unease or apprehension because the brain's right hemisphere, which processes abstract concepts and regulates sensations, becomes more active. In contrast, the left hemisphere, responsible for cognitive processing and reasoning, may become less engaged. This shift in brain activity can cause viewers to feel detached from their rational faculties (Furniss 2009).

The audience of experimental animation needs a foundational understanding to grasp the meanings and ideas thoroughly. To facilitate this understanding, the current article suggests that filmmakers provide a more detailed introduction and explanation of the animation before its screening. This enhances the viewing experience, allowing the audience to develop a deeper engagement with the unique qualities of experimental animation and ultimately aiding artists in expanding the medium.

At this point, we propose the term 'experimental audience' to highlight viewers' evolving role in experimental animation. In this context, the audience becomes a co-creator of the artwork. At the same time, the artists transition from creators to observers, much like how Internet Art invites audiences to participate in the creative process by soliciting their preferences. For example, Caroline Robert's *Brainstream* (2021), an online interactive animation, involves the audience in shaping the story (see Figure 7). This suggests that a new form of global communication has emerged through the internet, enabling artists to pursue their creative desires with greater independence.

Figure 7. *Brainstream* (2021) by Caroline Robert (still frame from the website: brainstream.aatoaa.com/en.html).

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4. A kaleidoscopic view

In conclusion, this article contends that experimental animation prioritizes aesthetic innovation over narrative content, resulting in highly individualized and inventive designs. This art form challenges conventional filmmaking by employing mixed media and novel animation techniques to convey unique expressions. Furthermore, it is a powerful medium for communicating ideas shaped by cultural, social, and political contexts.

Experimental animators seek to disrupt mainstream norms and introduce new visual and aesthetic paradigms through unconventional materials, unexplored techniques, and emerging technologies. Experimental animation must be redefined through theoretical and practical lenses as these methods continually evolve. This ongoing redefinition highlights that creating experimental animation can be a research effort, resulting in new insights into animation studies.

This research has examined various approaches to experimental animation by categorizing the methods used to develop new techniques and modes of expression. Additionally, it has highlighted the significance of creating suitable platforms where experimental works can thrive and gain support, allowing the audience to actively shape new interpretations of the films. It can also be concluded that the artist and the audience share an empirical experience by watching (or, better to say, *observing*) an experimental piece of art. In this context, the presentation method and venue are crucial factors.

One of the primary objectives of this study was to establish a more precise definition of experimental animation. The findings suggest that the characteristics of this form can be classified into the following categories:

Context: Non-narrative, nonlinear, abstract, interpretive, metaphorical, and hybrid.

Technique: Innovative and boundary-pushing, often utilizing new technologies, materials, and experimental approaches to create unconventional aesthetics.

Graphics: Form-oriented and dynamic, often accompanied by music. The emphasis is placed on creativity, spontaneity, and aesthetic innovation.

Production Procedures: These are typically low-budget, with the artist playing a prominent role in highlighting individuality. Such works are often shown to niche audiences.

Approach: Cross-disciplinary, Avant-garde, and alternative, often reflecting the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups. The process is inherently linked to self-expression and self-discovery.

Subjects of Interest: Common themes include psychology, philosophy, surrealism, literature, nature, anthropology, and sociopolitical issues.

These categories help comprehend experimental animation, distinguishing it as a dynamic, expressive, and innovative art form. However, as with all art forms, experimental animation continually evolves, making providing a precise definition challenging and ongoing.

The fluidity and dynamism inherent in experimental animation generate constant debate, complicating the establishment of a concise definition. Nevertheless, a core function of experimental animation across eras remains pushing artistic boundaries and aesthetic innovation through individual techniques. We conclude by presenting experimental animation as a kaleidoscopic form that integrates diverse elements into a singular, dynamic visual experience. This is best conceived through the *Kaleidoscopic Experimental Animation Indicator*, a model we designed to offer a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on experimental animation (see Diagram 2).

This diagram is derived from a comprehensive review of previous research and an analysis of key components, including visual aesthetics, narrative structure, and thematic exploration. Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of experimental animation, the objective was to define criteria that effectively capture the complexity and diversity of the approaches and techniques utilized in this art form.

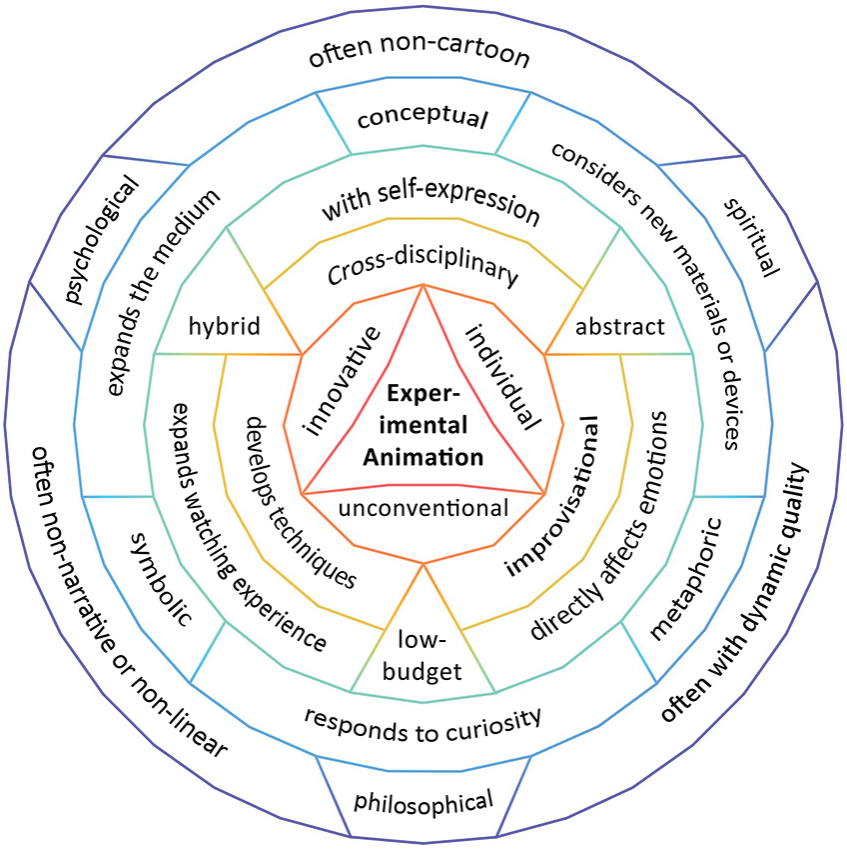

Diagram 2. Experimental Animation Indicator

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