

## Digital Craft Assessment

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Everywhere we look, things move. From the tiny Samsung- animations on your phone screen when you turn it on, to the big video mappings on buildings. Nowadays, animation is everywhere and indispensable from our world.



*Videomapping on the cathedral in Oaxaca* - "VIDEO MAPPING CATEDRAL OAXACA SHOW 2." YouTube. YouTube. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kRrYwaZM6o>>.

I am proud to say: my discipline is animation. Animation is actually all about capturing movement. Most people think it is only about learning software or just drawing, but it is basically about moving images and the illusion of bringing things to life (which normally can be just regular objects). Animation is a discipline which is very young and really something of the last 30 years. But when you take a close look, animation was born much earlier and has nowadays so many different forms.

The most frequent used tools for my craft are (in my case) paper, pencils, a light box, tablet or cintiq and the most used software: TVPaint, Photoshop and After Effects. I sometimes used the game engine Unreal Engine 4 too, when I made a game with my classmate once. But actually, the most important tools are our eyes and hands. They are able to see movement, to study how something moves. For example: how a horse runs or which muscles do you use in that one pose? And with your hands, you're able to (re)create movements. I don't think you have to be a good drawing artist to create animation, as long as you have the drive to visualize your ideas and you're able to set up strong poses and impactful movements you can make a good animation. A lot of animators follow acting lessons to learn to understand a human body and get a better understanding of movements. As I have been an actress myself for a while, I think that this is an excellent way to get a better understanding of how a human body works. I am convinced that, if you want to show movements convincingly, you have to feel them yourself first. Actual acting is used now too in Motion Capture, which I will write about later on.

Because animation is such a young profession, and really is something from the past 30 years (in the earlier years, most of the animations were from Disney) it's hard to find specific inspiring historical animation artists in this profession. The first fully animated CGI movie (Toy Story) is just 20 years old. Also, animation is now finally seen as an artistic interpretation, but it used to be seen as just an entertainment form. Although animation is so young, the aim to capture movements and tell

stories through images goes way back to the prehistory. About 40.000 years ago, people found ways to tell stories as well. People then drew images of wild animals to exorcise their fear of them. These drawn images can be seen as the very first animation studies. It shows that people always had the drive to visualize events through moving images. Also the images on very old Greek vases can be seen as old studies of animation.



Cave drawings in the southern Ardeche, France - "Jean-Marie Chauvet Ontdekt Eeuwenoude Grottekeningen." *Nieuwsdossier*. N.p., 8 May 2007. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.nieuwsdossier.nl/algemeen/jean-marie-chauvet-ontdekt-eeuwenoude-grottekeningen>>.



Old Greek Vase - "Art History at College at Potsdam - StudyBlue." *StudyBlue*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2016. <<https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/art-history/deck/15460437>>.

The first real animations are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. People started to develop systems to show moving drawings. There are quite a few, but I think the most important ones are the Phenakistoscope, the Zoetrope and the Praxinoscope.



*Phenakistoscope - Eadweard Muybridge (1893) (source untraceable) Walt Disney with his zoetrope (source untraceable)*



*A Praxinoscope (maker and year unknown)*

What's so interesting is that these old forms of animation have led to what animation is now and that actually not so much has changed, but there's still something magic about it after all this time. Modern artists even still make these original sets, because it's such a clear explanation animation.

All these old forms of animation and the invention of the film camera finally led to the first traditional 2D animation. With the arrival of the technical revolution, traditional 2D animation suddenly became digital 2D animation and we acquainted with 3D animation. And from that moment, animations in all forms became interactive, applicable and interesting for the technical industry.





*Zoetrope from the Ghibli Museum, Japan - Pinterest. N.p., 2014. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.*  
 <<https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/247275835763748040/>>.



*Pixar's Zoetrope from the Pixar Exhibition*  
 "Pixar's Zoetrope." *YouTube*. YouTube, 27 Mar. 2010. Web. 03 Feb. 2016.  
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5khDGKGv088>>.

As I wrote earlier, live action acting is now often used as a way to capture movements for animation. We call it 'Motion Capture'. With motion capture, actors are being tracked by cameras placed all around in a room which capture the actor's special suit. Even the face can now be tracked by placing dots on the skin and a camera in front of the face.



*Motion capturing Benedict Cumberbatch performing Smaug for The Hobbit - "Larger than Life Motion Captured Characters That Have Graced the Silver-screen." AnimationXpress. 2015. Web. 1 Feb. 2016.*  
<<http://www.animationxpress.com/index.php/latest-news/larger-than-life-motion-captured-characters-that-have-graced-the-silver-screen>>.

I am worried about this certain way of animation. Is this way of capturing movements still can be called animation? Animation, as I see it, is more like observing the world through your own eyes and create something with your own imagination. I also believe that people have their own style and way of animating.

But motion capture is actually the moving, live action actor connected to a model in the computer. What I find a pity is that in this medium the most craftsmanship is now gone. There is no style we can see, no direct 'signature' of somebody. Craftsmanship is something I find really important for animation as an art form. I see motion capture as a kind of 'easy' (easy because there is almost no work for the animation, but still technically difficult) copying. It is still capturing movements, but the most work is done by the computer. By this technique, I am slightly worried about the future of animation. Will there still be hand drawn animations in 100 years or will it all be computer generated? Will animation still be seen as an art form or is it just going to be a commercial way to give people easy entertainment? Will people in the future still see that animation doesn't need to be high tech to move us? I think it is a good thing that animation technology develops further overtime, but after all, technology has to be in service of the story. You can have great modern graphics, but as long as the story is bad, the public will not be satisfied. I believe (and hope) that not very much will change. I don't see CGI (computer generated image) as a bad thing. I think 3D at itself is more like puppet play, but although motion capture is also in 3D, I don't think it is the same thing and that it is a step further. I don't think motion capture is animation, but I do see it as a new medium. Something between animation and live-action, or a combination. I think that people always will fall back on the story at first. The graphics will always come second, I believe. The graphics need to serve the story, otherwise you just have great graphics, but the overall movie will be worthless and non-enjoying to watch.

What I do find negative about CG (computer generated) animation is that a lot of the real life sets made for films are now being replaced by CG environments. I think that in the future, actors have to act without the environment and just have to act in a completely green room. This happened before on the set of The Hobbit. Ian McKellen was acting in a completely green room and burst into

tears as he said: 'This is not why I became an actor'<sup>1</sup>. I think that is sad and the negative side of CG animation. Props disappear, sets disappear and now even animation is limited. In the time when filmmakers made movies like Jurassic Park, people actually had to use film props and animatronics, and after making the movie, people had a full fleapit with props from the movie.



Ian McKellen crying on the set of *The Hobbit* - "Lonely Ian McKellen." *Imgur*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. <<http://imgur.com/gallery/HXQ42ml>>.

In the world of gaming I already see the same happening as in movies. Creators more and more grab onto motion capture. And with that, there are a lot buyers who choose game resolution and graphics quality over the concept of a game, and a lot of buyers are disappointed after buying such a game with high quality graphics. Game developers can now make a game that will look so good that the buyers will forget to look critical to the story behind all those graphics, and that is abusing your powers as an 'animator' I would say. And there isn't much exaggeration, which is also often used in animation. You can say that the animations stay plain and decent, and there isn't much creativity left in the actual animation.

On the positive side, motion capture still needs some craftsmanship and knowledge of animation. You don't necessarily see someone's signature, but the knowledge of animation, to correct wrong captured data, is still required. You can see results very quickly, which can be profitable for the makers, because you can win time with that. Next to that, actors are still involved in movies, and besides that, also games now can make use of actors too, which can also improve the marketing of a game. It's a good way to save money. And let's not forget that thanks to mocap, a lot of well-known film creatures exist, like Gollum from *Lord of The Rings*, Davy Jones from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Pulver, Andrew. "The Hobbit's Gandalf Almost Proved a Greenscreen Too Far for Ian McKellen." *The Guardian*. N.p., 20 Nov. 2013. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/nov/20/the-hobbit-gandalf-ian-mckellen-almost-quit-acting>>.



monkeys from Planet of the Apes and many more. And after all, that is the essence of mocap after all. Motion capture opened a lot of doors, however I still feel it's a bit impersonal.



The motion capture of Gollum - "Larger than Life Motion Captured Characters That Have Graced the Silver-screen."  
*AnimationXpress*. 2015. Web. 1 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.animationxpress.com/index.php/latest-news/larger-than-life-motion-captured-characters-that-have-graced-the-silver-screen>>.

I think that in animation a lot is left yet to be explored. There are still lots of opportunities waiting in this craft. Animation is a young discipline, and although that animation has a lot of opportunities about showing on different platforms, most animations are still shown in cinema's and computer and TV screens. I think that at this moment, the world of the Virtual Reality is experiencing an amazing growth. I think that is also interesting from an ethical point of view. I think that at a certain point, people don't even have to leave their houses to see something outside. On the other side, people who are not able to leave their houses for some reason I think are soon able to see the outside world. Also games get a new platform and gaming becomes more and more a complete experience, instead of just pushing buttons in a game with a very simple story like it used to be. I think games will be more like a complete experience together with virtual reality. I think that virtual reality will develop further with touch and movement experiences, but with still the craftsmanship of 3D.

What moves me is that I can turn my own world and fantasy into something tangible, something visual. Share my fantasy and make it reachable for others. For me, animation is a little bit like magic; everything is possible within this medium, without restrictions. In animation, you can bring anything to life. I also never stand still by the same medium or style, I think animation is not defined by style and I always aim to try new ways to show animation, driven by visualizing my imagination.

Animation is a lot of work and if we think about it, it's kind of silly that we, as animators, work so hard for (as others say) the same result as with audiovisual images. So why do I animate? I think it's the different dimension and the fascination by creating something unique. Drawings that can walk, talk and think, things that come to live which are normally lifeless and animals that suddenly can talk.

Because for me the most important thing about animation is capturing the movement, I decided to make experiments with animation and to explore what it actually means to bring things to life. Dive into my craft and see what the powers are of being an animator, besides only using the standard 2D animation, which I normally work with. I want to explore different angles of animation.

There are a couple of projects that inspired me on this way. For example the 'Strandbeest' and the 'Wishbone'. These are typical inventions which are older forms of animation: animatronics. The Strandbeest was made by Theo Jansen.

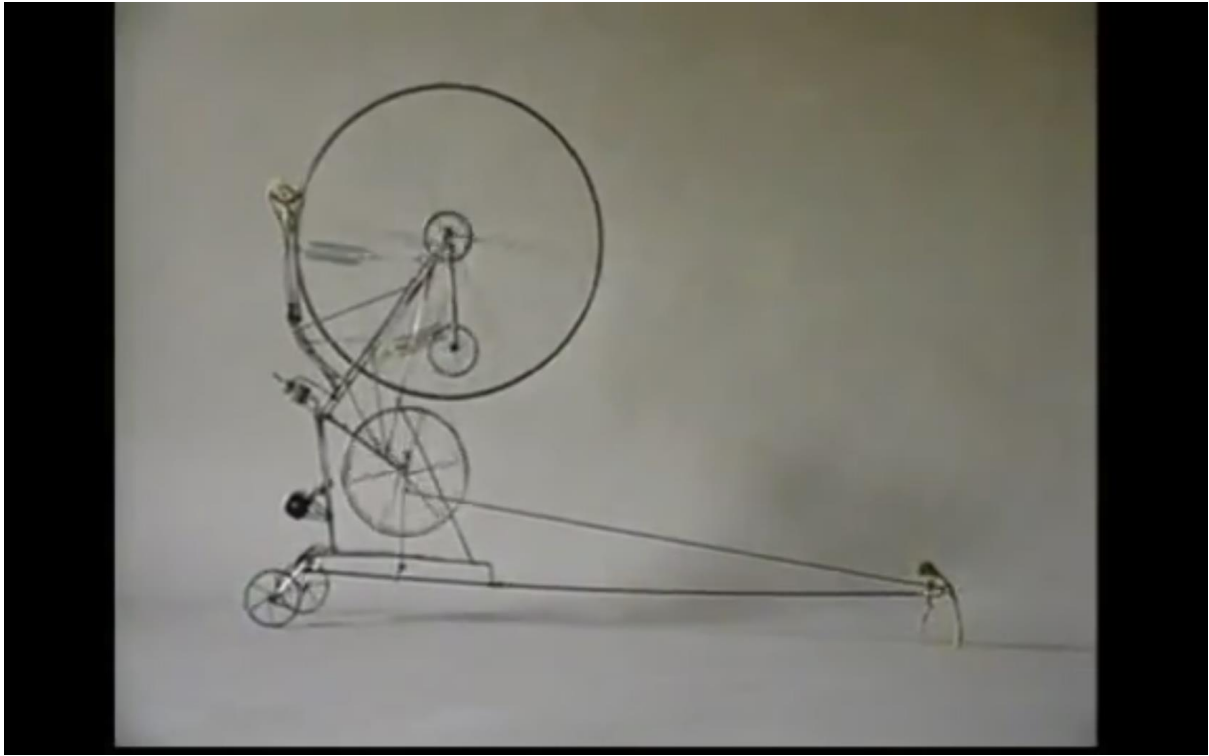
Theo Jansen studied at the Technical University at Delft and has a background with art and technology. He started making multiple 'Strandbeesten' since 1990. His inventions are mostly made of PVC pipes and able to move forward by using air pressure. What I find so interesting about this is the movement. He is able to create movement with nothing but air pressure; he isn't using technology or power to make it move forward. As I said, animatronics are one of the oldest forms of animation, and those used to be made to be moved without the help of technology back in the older days.



<https://www.google.nl/search?q=strandbeest+theo+jansen&source=images&tbm=vid&sa=X&vedr=0ahUKEvj0465pVKAHwBuIQIBP5A6QAUICg>  
A Strandbeest by Theo Jansen - "Mini Beasts | Books Beast Photos Events Theo Jansen Contact." *STRANDBEEST*. Web. 29 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.strandbeest.com/>>.

Another example of such an invention is the 'Machine with Wishbone', except this one is moving with the help of technology. This art piece was made by Arthur Ganson, who is famous by his so called 'kinetic sculptures'. It looks like the wishbone is pulling the machine, but actually the machine pushes the wishbone in a certain way. Again, how this piece is moving, animating, is what is interesting for me.





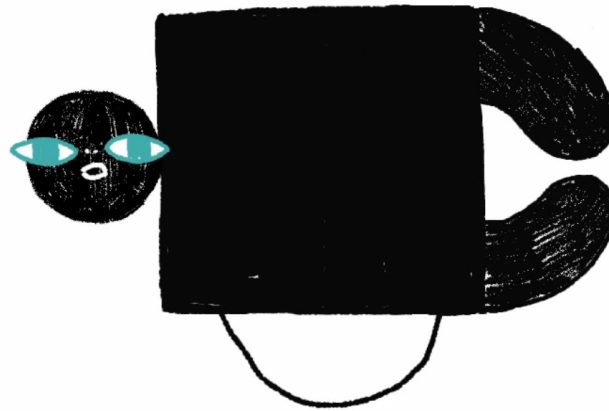
"Machine with Wishbone - Arthur Ganson." *YouTube*. YouTube. Web. 30 Jan. 2016.  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pZXoayEL78>>.

An artist which I find very inspiring too is Alexander Calder. Although he was mostly known for his mobiles and sculptures/statues, he also made puppets and portraits from simple materials such as iron wire, cork and wood. For example his 'Circus', he made a puppet play around a circus with small puppets which he could control and which would move around. I really like this simple and yet so experimental and playful. His drive was to connect abstraction and movement with each other.



"Alexander Calder Performs His "Circus" - Whitney Museum." *YouTube*. YouTube. Web. 29 Jan. 2016.  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6jwnu8lzy0>>.

I strolled past this animation on Vimeo once. It was a colorful and playful animation about animals. The maker of this animation is Lara Lee, she made this animation for her final year project for her graphic design bachelor. She interviewed several children about their favorite animal and she recorded all these interviews. With these recordings, she made children's drawings come to life through animation. She took she descriptions literally, and went crazy on the animal's designs. The children only discussed few of the details of their animals. This means that she could animate them without most of the boundaries.



My Favourite Animal by Lara Lee - "My Favourite Animal (Full Ver.)." *Vimeo*. Web. 01 Feb. 2016. <<https://vimeo.com/16376288>>.

When I was browsing on the internet, I found this GIF animation which I found really interesting and inspiring. It is a real simple animated GIF, but I find it inspiring how such easy additions can create such a new layer to a non-interesting existing footage.



"Love Story • /r/gifs." *Reddit*. Web. 01 Feb. 2016. <[https://www.reddit.com/r/gifs/comments/3617zy/love\\_story/](https://www.reddit.com/r/gifs/comments/3617zy/love_story/)>.

All these different inspiration sources motivated me to explore different angles of animation. I usually use 2D animation, so it would be a journey to make something meaningful within my craft.

With starting my project, I didn't really know where to begin, so I began with multiple experiments. In this experiment, I used a chair as an example. I made 3 different tests on animation with a chair as the subject. I made a 2D animation of a chair, a pixilation of a chair and an animated GIF of a chair, based on my inspiration sources as a starting point. Below you can see still images of the results. I was so fascinated with the animated GIFS, and this one was the most fun to produce, so I decided to make more of them, with different objects.





GIFs of Punching a pillow and turning a chair - Nedermeijer, Denise. "User:Shinysheep/Tools of the Trade." - *OpenSource Wiki*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Feb. 2016. <[http://opensource.wdka.nl/wiki/User:Shinysheep/Tools\\_of\\_the\\_Trade](http://opensource.wdka.nl/wiki/User:Shinysheep/Tools_of_the_Trade)>.

Although making animated GIFS was fun to do and experiment with, and indeed added a new layer to audiovisual films: just adding arms and a face to an objects doesn't necessarily mean that thing come to life. So I decided to seek for more options to make things come to life. So I had to look better.

I see my imagination as one of my powers as an animator. To have such a fascination for moving things, there has to be something in our minds that is a little bit odd. Therefore I thought it would be interesting to make an animation experiment to show the difference between the reality and my imagination. In this experiment I show the difference between footages. In the first footage you see me doing something pointless. But in the second footage you see that it actually makes sense.

I wanted to make something like an animatronic too, because that is one of the oldest forms of animation. Also a few my inspiration sources are based on projects with animatronics too.

I chose to do some more experiments to illuminate different kinds of 'bringing things to life' with existing material. First of all, I took this painting, and decided that I could make it come alive. Paintings used to be the early representation of the daily life, the reproduction of memories, like we use photography, film and animation. But people couldn't capture moving data back in that time, but I can make it move now, to give a painting new life so it would really become a reproduction of a memory that you can actually see moving in front of your own eyes.

Finally I wanted to make a story out of my old photographs. As I am writing this down, I am still busy with my project, because I need to do a resit. I take old photographs of my own youth, and transform them into a new story.

It almost seems like a need for people, to capture everything we see. Maybe for the posterity, saving a memory for later, for sharing the fun with others, to express feelings.. Wherever we go, we see people with phones and cameras. At concerts, for example, people rather film and photograph around than actually enjoy the concert itself. Most of them say it is for saving a memory. But if they spend the moment taking pictures, what is it exactly that they'll remember?

People used to make photographs for posterity, to portray special events. Making photo's used to be serious business. Nowadays, people literally film and photograph everything, especially with the rise of the smartphones and action camera's. Instead of just taking in the moment, people immediately grab their phones or cameras.



People at a concert, filming and photographing on their phones, camera's and tablets - "What Does The New Instagram Video Mean For Live Music?" *Tone Deaf What Does The New Instagram Video Mean For Live Music Comments*. 2013. Web. 01 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.toned deaf.com.au/318405/what-does-the-new-instagram-video-mean-for-live-music.htm>>.

A phrase which goes around on internet a lot, is: 'Pic's or didn't happen'. Which means that people somehow want to prove others that they've been at a certain event (like a concert, tourist spots, vacation countries, etc.) by sharing it via social media.

We want to define ourselves by posting and sharing parts of our lives. We want to feel more involved in the world and make entertaining posts. It makes you feel like you belong to the society and makes you feel satisfied by talking about yourself. Actually, it feels like if you don't participate in the social network, it seems like you don't participate in the world's society and you almost don't count as a person. It is narcissistic behaviour, people feel the urge to constantly talk about themselves and post parts of their lives constantly.

Nowadays you see people sharing their video's more and more with 'fun' intentions. To twist reality with our imaginations to escape the dull daily life or maybe even from boredom.

Photography used to be such a special thing. When the photo camera was just invented, people wouldn't make just a photo for fun, people wanted to make it a perfect photo, because it wasn't easy to make one. People would specially dress and pose for one picture, while people nowadays just make pictures of everything.

That's why I think bringing back old pictures to life is important. To give them new life, because they're forgotten in this digital era, where everything is saved on computers, hard disks and phones instead of photo albums. I also want to show the powers of animation. To tell another story with these pictures and give these pictures new intentions and a new layer.

For me, personally, making my work is important for me, because it is to let my feelings out. I can let my fantasies run wild and transform them into actual movements so others can see my imagination too. I want to share a piece of my imagination and let others see what you can accomplish with your imaginations. Especially with animation I think it's great that you can make moving images from a blank page. This journey was very personal for me, because it was about exploring different sides of animation first, but ended up with my own old pictures.

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