Courtesy of the Dan F. McLaughlin, Jr. Collection

CHAPTER 1

IDEA[1]

"Until you go too far, you don't know how far you can go."

Tex Avery[2]

"What interests me most in the production of animated film is that the person who creates it is the only one who can express what he feels, like a painter."

Animator Kihachiro Kawamoto[3]

"All true creation is a thing born of nothing."

Artist Paul Klee[4]

What Is an Idea?

Before the storyboard comes the idea. A quality idea is the most important part of your film. A simple formula is: good idea = a good film; bad idea = a bad film; no idea = a waste of film. Not only do you need a good idea to make a good film, but also, for the ease of production, your idea must be clear to you before starting the film. By idea, I mean the mental concept that is the creative core of your film. I prefer to use the word "idea" to encompass the entire range of

1. As mentioned in the Acknowledgements, the author completed the manuscript sometime around 2007 and the text has not been updated for accuracy. All statements reflect the belief of the author at the time of authorship and may, or may not, reflect current reality.
2. I was unable to find a source of this quote.
3. I was unable to find a source of this quote.
4. I was unable to find a source of this quote.

animation, from narrative to experimental. Other terms are more closely associated with the narrative form alone. Here are definitions of some of the terms that often overlap with "idea:"

Concept. A generalized idea of a thing or class of things.
Content. The substance of the film as opposed to the style of it. What the film is about.
Story. The sequence of events in the film that express the idea, content, concept, theme and moral.
Premise. The basis or basic argument for your film.
Theme. The topic or subject of your film and how you treat that subject. It should unify the entire film.
Moral. The message you want your audience to take away with them after seeing your film.

If your idea is character driven, narrative with character or animation narrative with strong character, then the character is part of the idea and just as important. The character must connect with the audience for the idea to be totally successful; the character has to pull in the audience. The audience must believe in and relate with the character or characters. Disney called this appeal. Appeal can be just as important for the antagonist as the protagonist. How many films owe much of their success to the evil character? The stepmother in *Snow White* comes to mind. The character can be the idea.

The idea can start with a question. In *WALL-E,* Pixar (2008), that question was reported to have been, "What if humanity left the Earth but forgot to turn the last robot off?" The full idea was worked out in the script. "Irrational love defeats life's programming" was the theme according to the writer/director, Andrew Stanton.[5] "What If" can be a good way to get an idea.

Reading the idea (concepts, content, stories, premises, themes, morals) behind any film is a good exercise because it can reveal the clarity and quality of the filmmaker's original idea. I can speak with complete assurance only about the ideas behind my films. In the examples that follow, I have used the filmmakers' description of their films, or my own and others' readings of them:

The Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote series, Chuck Jones, (fig. 2-40), Warner Brothers, 1949-1964. According to its director, Chuck Jones, the idea behind the series was to do a silent parody of chase cartoons. Later, when he developed the Coyote's character to carry the idea, Chuck used this quote from George Santayana to explain his character: "A fanatic is someone who redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim."

Daffy's Southern Exposure (Daffy Duck, fig. 1-1), by Norm McCabe, 1942. Chuck Jones's analysis of McCabe's idea was a refusal to fly south. In other words, we all want to be individualists, especially Daffy (fig. 1-1).

5. Personal communication to the author?

In their book, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston describe the story idea for *Dumbo*: "A baby elephant is considered a freak because of his enormous ears, until an enterprising mouse discovers a way to turn this liability into a startling asset."[6] (fig. 2-53) More simply put, if you find the right circumstances or have the right attitude, what appears to be a negative can be turned into a positive.

Tom and Jerry, Tweety and Sylvester and *Bugs Bunny* (fig. 2-40). MGM and Warner Brothers, 1940s-present, various directors. My reading of the idea behind these three theatrical series is: By sheer cunning, the small, the weak and appealing defeat the big and strong.

Allegretto, Oskar Fischinger, German, 1936. A typical example of his work. Fischinger used the term "Absolute Animation" to describe his approach. By "absolute," he meant animation reduced to the absolute essentials of non-representational movement and form, as in modern abstract painting. Beauty without narrative.

Begone Dull Care, Norman McLaren, NFB, Canada, 1949. McLaren reduced animation to what he considered its essentials by drawing directly onto the clear film. The idea was that all you need is an artist and a little celluloid film to do animation.

Snow White, 1937; *Pinocchio*, 1940*; Dumbo*, 1941; *Bambi*, 1942*; Sleeping Beauty*, 1959*; Cinderella,* 1950 - In Disney's early features, the event that sets the film in motion is the loss or absence of the mother figure: a powerful theme in children's literature, perhaps the most powerful fear in a young child's mind.

Examples of the ideas behind my films:

Claude (1963). When the parents turn off the child, the child will turn off the parents (fig. 1-2). *God is Dog Spelled Backwards (1967)*. A Structuralist experiment in what is the shortest time the eye and mind can recognize continuously projected images. One-twelfth of a second or a new image every two frames is the answer -- or in a humorous vein, if I took the Western World's greatest images with its greatest music, I should have the Western World's greatest film (fig. 1-3). *No Idea* (2000). You can be sitting on a great idea, but you will not accept it because you do not recognize any new ideas (fig. 1-4).[7]

When the idea for a film is written down, it should be no more than one or two sentences. Preston Sturges, the great live-action director from the 1930s and 1940s, would read a script only if it conformed to a certain format. The first page presented the title. If Sturges liked it, he then turned to the second page, which contained the idea for the film in a single sentence. If he liked the idea, he went on to the third page, containing a paragraph that elaborated

---

6. I am assuming the author is referring to Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life.* Abbeville Press, 1981. I cannot locate this quote in the book, however.

7. To listen to the author talk about these films, please go to http://danmclaughlin.info/talk.html. You can also purchase these films for your viewing pleasure from the DVD *11 Films by Dan McLaughlin* (2004), Pyramid Media.

the idea. Only after Sturges had read and liked the first three pages would he read the entire script. Similarly, in a pitch session, where you are trying to sell an animated series or feature to potential backers, you begin by telling them very succinctly the idea. The idea is the concept of the film that you can say in one sentence.

Many of the ideas behind film and TV today are formulaic ideas. For example, the tried and true "Boy meets Girl, Boy loses Girl, Boy gets Girl." Formulaic ideas will be discussed in the next chapter. But teaching the formulae, they are easy enough to learn, only teaches you to make formulae films. Which becomes boring. It is much better to make original films from original ideas.

A Question of Creativity

Where do quality ideas come from? In the Greek and Roman worlds, from Plato and Aristotle respectively, creativity was attributed to inspiration or imitation. In Western society, the source of inspiration has been attributed at various times to the gods, God, the muses, the subconscious, the universal unconscious, the zeitgeist, abuse of substances, impending deadlines, and so it goes. The artist is basically a telephone waiting for inspiration to call with a creative message to pass along to the rest of us. But in his *Poetics,* Aristotle allowed for the genius within -- creativity that comes from within, in other words. That is, some artists are more talented than others in their imitation of nature. This point of view, putting the individual at the center of existence, has been especially important in the last 500 years of Western society. The artist's inner turmoil and catastrophes, his ever-evolving states of mind, provide a source for creative outpouring in the arts. His theories of art, politics, religion or anything else, for that matter, influence the artist's vision. You don't have to specify a single source of creativity. Your job is to recognize a good idea.

A good idea often bursts upon you. This can be referred to as the "ah so" or "click" moment. As in: "Ah, so that is the answer." Or: "Click, that's it." The moment can be the genesis of an original concept or a solution to an existing dilemma. There is a story that Jack Warner once told a screenwriter named John Huston that he could direct the movie *The Maltese Falcon* if he could come up with a script by the next morning. Several attempts had already been made to turn Dashiell Hammett's 1929 mystery novel into a screenplay, and all had failed. How to come up with a script? Then the "click:" Huston called in his secretary and told her to hire as many people as needed to take all the dialogue in the book (and only the dialogue), put it into script form, and have it done by the next morning. She did; Huston gave the script to Warner; he loved it; and the next day John Huston became director of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). Huston also had the good sense to give the lead role of Sam Spade to a former dancer with a

slight lisp and a funny name.[8]

In the last analysis, creativity may *be* a mystery, and for many artists, discussion of it is taboo because they believe they will jinx the creative process by examining it too closely. But understanding, at least a little, may help you unlock your creative juices. Finding out how to be creative allows you to be more creative.

Inspiration can be a definite high that I hope readers of this book have experienced and are now ready to put into concrete form. But there is an old saying that art is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration. I would amend that saying and claim that art is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration. Constantly seek inspiration, but keep moving forward with analysis and deduction and inspiration will come.

Why do you need both inspiration and rational deductive thought to do an animated film? Because each contributes something the other does not. Inspiration can reveal new, surprising, exciting, original perspectives. But it can desert you at any time. Though it is a major contributor at the beginning of your film and can be fun, during the long course of production, inspiration is unpredictable and fleeting. Rational thought is more reliable. It can solve problems, as well as give a structure and schedule to your work. Backed by the discipline and principles of animation, rational thought allows you to move forward. It will get you through the long haul, the 8- to 16-hour days.

A Matter of Intuition

Why is Wallace in *Wallace and Gromit* mad about cheese? Is it because cheese just seems right for the character? And what if the moon was really made of cheese? Why is "Meep, Meep" the right sound for the Road Runner? (Actually, as Jones and the other members of the creative team were sitting around one day discussing the need for the Road Runner to have some sort of voice, Paul Julian, a background artist at the studio, was coming down the hall outside with a large stack of backgrounds in his arms. Because he could not see around them, he was going 'beep beep' to warn people to stay out of his way. The boys in the office heard this and Meep Meep was born.)[9] Intuition can provide such small, unexplained moments of perception. Unlike inspiration, it is a hunch, a sixth sense about something. Unlike rational thought, it does not provide an explanation for artistic choices that you make. When asked why, you reply simply, "I just like it that way." That's because intuition is counter-analytical. I caution you that relying on intuition alone can prove to be a weakness. I have seen students overuse it to justify their choices. That being said, if you have a strong feeling or hunch, go with it. You won't be happy if you don't, and if you aren't happy your work will suffer. At any

8. Again, I don't know where he got this story.

9. I assume this was a personal communication to the author.

point in the production process, all things being equal, intuition can help you on your way.

The same goes for taste. You like blue and you don't like red, so you choose blue. You like certain shapes. Taste is clearly allied to personal psychology.

Emerging Ideas

An idea can emerge fully blown. I call this working from the inside out. You have to expand the essential idea from the innermost core. When Michelangelo was furiously putting hammer to chisel, trying to release David from the marble, he had to know what he wanted. It would be impossible to change the position of David's hand or the tilt of his head after it was set in stone. But an idea also can emerge from a fragmented view of something wonderful. To realize it fully, you have to discover it step by step, through process. I call this working from the outside in. You have to keep molding, stripping and changing the outside until you get to the core. You find your complete idea through manipulation of the medium. That's what Picasso did in his later periods. He would start with a blank canvas and let the painting emerge, working from the outside in.

If you're in the tradition of Picasso, you'll have to rethink your creative process when you enter animation. Michelangelo provides a better model. In animation, you should have the complete idea by the end of the storyboard stage (fig. 2-8). Constantly revising images during the production stage would waste an inordinate amount of time and money, resulting in personal frustration and confusion. There are exceptions, of course. James Whitney took seven years experimenting and working through the production stage to complete his experimental animated film *Lapis (1966)*. And it was worth it. Whitney was committed to being an independent artist, and was quite willing to make the sacrifice of time and effort. However, in the traditional animation process, independent or commercial, the sooner you have your complete idea, the better off you will be.

At the very beginning, you should express your idea quickly in either a visual or written form. If in a written form, the visuals should be introduced as soon as possible. Animation is the on-screen performance of the created image. Small, rough drawings to get the idea down are called "thumbnails," and I recommend that you do many of them. Then start putting the thumbnails into a film structure, using rectangular panels with any dialogue or narration written below. You are now in the "storyboard" phase.[10]

In some forms of animation, where the concept and character design already exist and the action is mainly dialogue-driven (a TV series with a 'bible', for example), a script is written before the visuals of the storyboard. The format of writing an animation script for a TV series is discussed in Addendum Two.

---

10. To be discussed at great length in Chapter 2, Storyboards.

The Right Environment for Coming Up With Good Ideas

Some people think most creatively when they wake up in the morning. Others take hot showers, walk on the beach, write down random thoughts, research a specific area in depth, browse through libraries, bounce ideas off another person or group to get feedback (talking it over with a friend you respect is one of the best ways), get in the creative environment of a concert, poetry reading, art gallery or museum, or simply people-watch. When Disney handed out a new assignment, he would give the artist the next day off to think about the assignment in a relaxed and stress-free environment. Maybe a hike in the mountains would do the trick, or a visit to the zoo, drawing the animals, or just sitting around and staring at the wall. The old way of just sitting down and working on coming up with an idea, drawing and writing until you got it, still works. You will always be coming up with ideas during production, but make sure they are good ones before you use them.

A cautionary note here. If you think you get your best ideas when you're in an altered state, you're sure to be disappointed when you return to normal. The novelist and screenwriter Curt Siodmak (*Donovan's Brain,* 1953) told me this story. He was searching for an alternative to hard work and heard that drugs were the answer. So he locked himself in his studio, put a tall stack of blank paper next to his typewriter and ingested a fair amount of opium. Suddenly he had the world's greatest novel in his head. He knew the truth. Furiously, he typed through the night until the stack of paper was gone and then, exhausted, he fell asleep. Siodmak awoke hours later and rushed to the typewriter. The stack of paper was untouched, and the original single sheet was still in the typewriter. These words were written on it: "Life Is A Green Banana."

The most popular way to get an idea in the entertainment industry is to steal it. Dorothy Parker once observed cynically: "The only 'ism' Hollywood believes in is plagiarism."[11] It often results in a pale imitation, inevitable perhaps in a situation where turnover is rapid and the pressure is intense. How many times have Tex Avery's best gags been used by other people? (fig. 1-7) Which came first, *The Honeymooners* or *The Flintstones*? When my film, *Dog is God Spelled Backwards* (fig.1-3) was first shown on *The Glenn Campbell Summer Show* in 1968, kinestasis, the technique I invented, inspired a host of imitations that continue to this day. Be prepared for theft of creative output.

When is stealing not stealing? When it is called "paying homage to." The distinction is a difficult case to prove, as ongoing lawsuits in the industry attest. Still, there are films that deliberately evoke another filmmaker's work, and everyone is supposed to appreciate the reference. And it can be argued that, when you are setting out, the influence of another's style or approach can prove an educational experience. Just as a novice artist during the Renaissance was apprenticed to an established artist to learn his techniques, you can study your favorite animator's films, find out how and why they succeed, discover what you like,

11. Found this one. http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/32051.html

then incorporate your observations into your developing work.

The other side of the coin is how to protect your ideas. They cannot be copyrighted. Only the form of expression of an idea is protected. (See Addendum One (fig. add 1-1) on copyright and Chapter 12 Making a Living, the section on Ethics.) But you first must have an idea before someone can steal it.

PROBLEM SOLVING

John Dewey, the philosopher of education, created a six-step problem-solving method he called "reflective thinking." His method can be useful in the preliminary stage of developing your idea in animation. This analytical method can also be used when your idea is at the storyboard stage or in any other part of production:

- Define the problem by asking key questions. For example:

  What is the film about?

  What do I want to say with this film?

  Why am I making this film?
- Clarify the idea. Do further research and analysis.
- Develop possible solutions. Make lists. Do thumbnails (fig. 2-1) (small rough drawings). Use specific problem-solving techniques (see below).
- Choose the best possible solution and do a rough storyboard. (fig.2-9)
- Test this solution. Test this board by first reviewing it yourself. Imagine it as a finished film. Be critical and find where it is weak. Then show it to others and get their reactions. Ascertain which of their reactions is most useful. Decide if the storyboard is good.
- If you are not satisfied, start over.

Other techniques that can be used to clarify a problem or develop a solution are:

- Make a list of all of the objectives of your film. Then rank them in order, making sure that the events in your board reflect the order of their importance.
- Make a list of points of information the audience needs to understand your film (fig. 2-63). Then, within the time frame of the film, do a graph of the release of this information to the audience. Use the graph to make sure all your story-points are released at the proper time. Do not have all the information at the beginning or at the end. That will produce a flat and boring film. Think of yourself as a magician revealing one story-point after another to an amazed audience.

- Research how others have approached similar problems. This usually means looking at other films. Use them as inspiration. Analyze and see what they did wrong or right so you can apply that knowledge to your film.
- Try out any of these different exercises on your idea:
  Use different combinations of people, places and time.
  Reverse gender.
  Substitute a dog for a man, the future for now.
  Change the levels of a character's intelligence.
  Put in silly ideas.
  Make fun of your idea.
  Break everything down into its basic elements and see if you can recombine them.
  Spit out ten or twenty ideas as fast as you can.
  Make the representational art abstract, or, if the art is abstract, make it representational.
  Free associate with your friends; brainstorm with people who know animation. Act it out; perform it.
  Take a rest; take a break.
  Try something different. Felix Salten, the Austrian author of *Bambi (1942)*, also wrote the immensely popular adult erotic novel *The Memoirs of Josephine Mutzenbacher*.
- Try shaping your idea as:
  an analogy - which is showing a similarity between two different things
  a metaphor - a figure of speech in which one idea or object is substituted for another (for example, the life of a carrot becomes a metaphor for human life)
  a parody - which is imitating the style of another work for comic effect or ridicule
  a parable - a story that contains a moral
  a satire - a work where the vices, follies, stupidities, abuses, etc. of human nature are held up to ridicule, contempt, sarcasm or irony
  irony - where a deliberate contrast is made between apparent and intended meaning for humorous effect (for example, "I really can't watch grass growing because it is too exciting")
  a drama, a comedy, a farce, an absurdist statement, an existential melodrama (fig. 1-5).
- Make the storyboard as short as possible. Just put down the basic idea: KISS, or keep it simple, stupid. Then add the embellishments you need to interest an audience.
- Show your board to another person and have that person tell a third person. Then have the third person tell you his or her version of your board and see how closely it resembles your original. Did you get your main points across?

- Always find a creative solution to a technical problem. This applies to all aspects of animation production. But, particularly in the early stage of developing your idea, do not let technical considerations, such as lack of resources, inhibit you. Create a way to do your idea without resources. Often it will make a better film.
- Do you really believe in your idea? Are you ready to fight for it? You must believe and fully commit to your idea. If not, it will be a hard film to make.

Bear in mind that there are three audiences involved in a work and that they all want something different. The first audience is the one that looks at it first, the creator or creators, who want to make a great film and achieve fame, fortune, love and personal satisfaction. The second audience has a personal or economic interest in the film and includes distributors, critics, exhibitors, marketing people, computer hardware and software companies, popcorn sellers, ticket-takers and DVD makers. (Filmmakers provide an income for thousands.) The third audience is the public or viewing audience, and what this audience wants or needs has long been debated: Is it entertainment, morality, escapism, beauty, catharsis, idealism or the filmmaker's blood? As you are developing your idea, you want to keep in mind the viewing audience and what you want it to think and feel.

When to Stop

There is an old story that it takes two people to create: one to sit at the piano and compose and the other to hit the composer on the head with a large hammer the second the work is done. Knowing the second your idea is complete is essential. It's easy to mistrust an idea and keep adding and changing until you turn it into an unholy mess.

When Not to Stop

It is very easy to stop before you have an ending or closure. But you mustn't; just don't let the film stop without closure. An idea can have a good opening without an ending. For years, I have carried around an idea about a little man named Harry who, one day, in the mail, gets the answer to all the world's problems. Unfortunately, I never got the answer myself on how to end his story and I never made the film (fig. 1-6). A good opening idea without an ending is like a single-panel cartoon without a punch line below.

If you don't have the ending now, it is very hard to get a good one during production. Do not leave the idea stage until you have an ending that completely realizes your idea.

QUALITY

The quality or excellence of your idea will determine the quality or excellence of your film.

Every form of art or entertainment possesses varying degrees of quality. Classical music can be good or bad; so can rock, jazz and all other forms of music. Go to museums, concert halls, the theater, library and movie house, where you will find the best of the best examples that possess the highest moral as well as aesthetic quality. Ultimately, as artist and creator of your own film, you are the arbitrator. I remember once an old high school friend looked at one of my paintings and said, "Dan, I have to tell you this, I don't like your painting." I replied, "That's perfectly all right, Gordon, because it wasn't painted for you."[12] The founder of the UCLA Animation Workshop and a former Disney animator, Bill Shull, used to say, "Everybody likes their own brand of corn."

When your work is judged in public, don't let other people tell you what is good or bad. Often, their opinions are contradictory. Listen to them if they can help you, but never let them judge the entire work. A two-time Academy Award winner for best supporting actor, Thomas Mitchell, once said to me: "You can't believe them when they tell you you are good because then you have to believe them when they tell you you are bad."[13]

ANIMATION IDEAS VS. LIVE ACTION IDEAS

Animation is not live action. I have become famous for a comment I often make at the end of a student's storyboard presentation. "Shoot it in live action. It would probably be cheaper, quicker and more group fun." What I mean is, animation and live action are two different realities. If you don't use the special unique strengths and characteristics of animation and just copy live action, there's a 99 percent chance you will waste film.

Narrative is the most common form in animation, and it shares with live action the same narrative techniques: the continuity of storyline and editing (cutting, dissolves, wipes, fade-ins and –outs). There *are* at least two forms of narrative particularly suited to animation: bringing inanimate objects to life such as the toys in *Toy Story*, and giving animals human characteristics such as Bugs Bunny (fig.2-24), Daffy Duck (figs. 1-1, 2-24), Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, among many others.

Following a long tradition in the literature of satire that is too disturbing for live action, human characters may be animated, as in the TV series *The Simpsons* or *South Park*. The distancing from reality that is part of animation allows the audience to accept comments on the human condition that would be unacceptable in live action. If live-action film is one step away from reality, the animated film is two steps away. This natural distancing makes art the main ingredient in the work.

Caroline Leaf's film *The Street* (taken from a well-known short story by Mordecai Richler, 1976)

12. Sorry, I don't know who Gordon was.

13. This story I remember the author telling.

makes its own unique artistic contribution to the narrative. Because the images were painted on glass while being shot, frame by frame, they metamorphose into one other. The flow of the narrative is continuous. The concept's complex. The art is beautiful.

Animation and Live Action Together

Since the early days of film, animation has incorporated live-action. In Disney's *Little Alice* series (1924), a real little girl interacts with the animation. And predominantly live action films have incorporated animation. *The Lost World* (1925) uses stop motion dinosaurs. Today, it is common for the line between live action and animation to be blurred, resulting in a new genre, a hybrid film. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) is a good example.

If you plan to use live action in your film and you do not have a lot of live-action experience, get the best script, live-action director and actors that you can find. This is just what live-action producers would do if they were going to use animation in their film. Make sure that your reason for combining animation and live action is a solid one.

THE THREE SPHERES OF CREATIVITY

All animators should choose where to work and create. Not knowing your role can lead to frustration. There are three major areas in which you can be creative:

- You can be part of a larger whole (an ensemble) as an actor, musician or, in the traditional classifications of animation, as an animator, layout artist, character designer, background artist, etc. You are creative within the circumscribed role that you play.
- You create the overall structure for ensemble performance. Shakespeare wrote plays for a company of actors to perform. Beethoven composed symphonies for chamber groups and orchestras to play. There are no direct parallels to these roles in animation, but a studio, especially the early Disney studio, functioned as an ensemble and Walt was composer/playwright.
- You work alone, creating and doing the whole ball of wax, as Yeats, Cezanne and Joyce did in poetry, painting and literature. In animation, this kind of individual artist has become legendary: Norman McLaren, the filmmaker who started the animation unit of the National Film Board of Canada; Oskar Fischinger, the independent abstract animator, who worked in Germany and the United States; Frédéric Back, who made independent animated films for Radio Canada, the French arm of the national public broadcasting system; Jan Svankmajer, the Czechoslovakian Surrealist stop motion animator; James Whitney, independent American filmmaker . . . and maybe you in the future (fig.6-16).

Limits

Normally, when you start an animated film, two avenues are open to you. You can make either an independent or a sponsored film. If you become an independent, you will experience few or no limits to your creativity. But you will have to concern yourself with money. Shirley Clarke, who was a leading independent filmmaker (*The Connection (*1961*), Portrait of Jason (*1967*))*, used to say, if you want to make independent films, you have to be born rich or marry rich.[14] Clarke belonged in both categories. Other less-fortunate filmmakers have to hold down a second job, put a second mortgage on their house, teach, beg or starve in a garret. But, then, again, they did get to make their own films.

The more traveled path for an animator is that of the sponsored film (which I refer to generally as the "Hollywood" film). It comes with limits, especially on choice of idea or quality of work. In Hollywood, quality simply means a box-office hit, money means on budget and time means on schedule. You'll be lucky to achieve even one of the above. They tend to cancel each other out. Also, you can run into personal crassness and commercialism that can ruin the best intentions. I have always liked the story of the producer who, at the beginning of the Second World War, called Tex Avery (*Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck)* into his office. Tex (fig. 1-7) had been doing films that cast Hitler in a negative manner (as only Tex could do). The producer told Tex not to do any more films that would "make Mr. Hitler mad, as we don't know who is going to win the war, do we?" (fig. 1-7) [15]

In the Hollywood film, the premise is usually given to you. You will have to be creative in turning someone else's good or bad idea into a quality storyboard and film. In this case, the problem-solving techniques that I outlined earlier in the chapter can come in handy. Bob Kurtz, a well-respected director of animated commercials, told me that his job was "to steal a good film" from the sponsor and ad agency. He described himself as a "Ninja animator."

RANDOM THOUGHTS

The important thing about having an idea is that it gives you direction and purpose in your work. You can have funny ideas (fig. 2-16), visual ideas, conceptual ideas, verbal ideas, money-making ideas, sexy ideas, erotic ideas, good ideas, bad ideas, emotional ideas, big ideas, little ideas, universal ideas, local ideas, cosmic ideas, political ideas (fig. 1-8), practical ideas, moral ideas, ethnic ideas, happy ideas, sad ideas, evil ideas, noble ideas, religious ideas, new ideas, old ideas, spiritual ideas, hateful ideas, loving ideas, negative ideas, scientific ideas,

14. I'm guessing as this is something she said to him, or what he remembers her saying to him.

15. Again, I have no idea where this story came from.

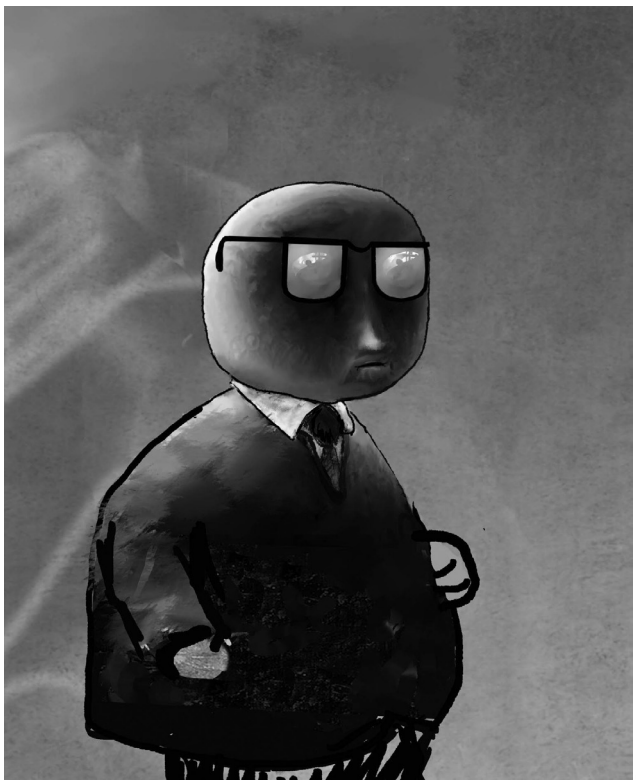
educational ideas (fig. 2-52), positive ideas, among a whole host of others. Ideas are fun and can lead to more ideas.

When people say there's nothing new under the sun, it usually means these people have never had any new ideas. Work on the problem, and the ideas will come.

If you have more than one idea and you have no preference, do the easiest. My personal belief is that if your idea does not make a positive statement about life, it should not be done.

What viewers take away from your film may not be what you intended. You cannot control response. If they love your film for the wrong reasons, do not mention your original idea. At least they got something out of your film.

There's no substitute for genius. Back in the '80's, when Artificial Intelligence was the hope of the future, I was invited to a conference on AI at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The conference sponsors were interested in developing AI programs for creating funny cartoons, and so they invited me to lecture on what made Bugs Bunny funny. They were expecting a formula. But when I stood up to speak, I announced, "What makes Bugs Bunny funny is very simple! It's two words: Tex Avery." I was never invited back.



(fig. 5-40)

OTHERS WHO HAD THOUGHTS ON CREATIVITY:

"Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction."
Picasso[16]

But is an act of destruction an act of creation? Think about it.
The Author

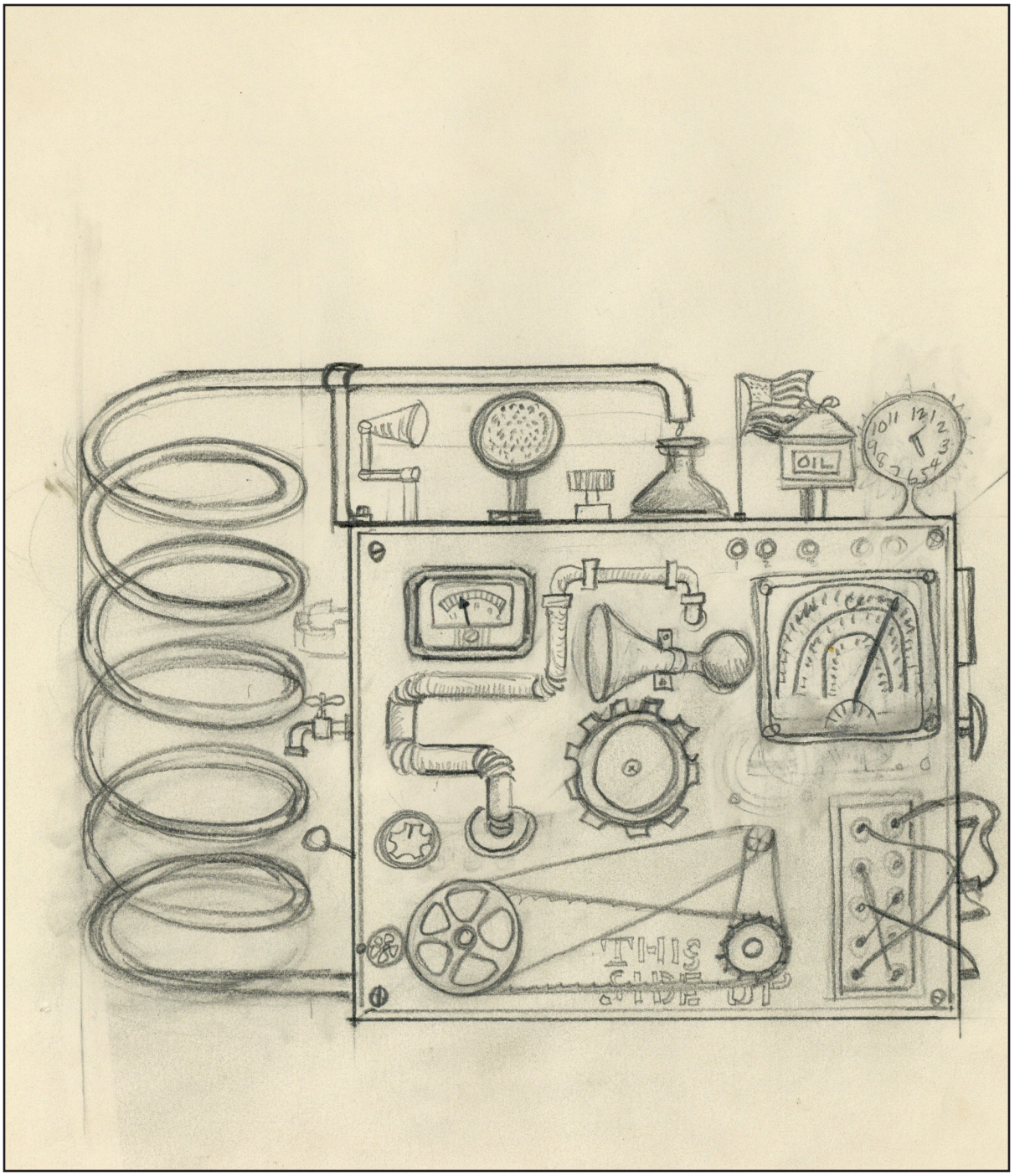
"The vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my vision's greatest enemy . . .
Thine is the friend of all mankind
Mine speaks in parables to the blind."
William Blake[17]

In other words, do not accept the obvious. The individual artist finds a unique vision.
The Author

"Love and patience are the elements to create miracles."
Frédéric Back, Animator[18]

Don't believe in miracles -- rely on them.
The Author

16. "Pablo Picasso." BrainyQuote.com. Explore Inc., 2016. 5 August 2016.
17. Blake, William. "58. The Everlasting Gospel." Bartleby.com. n.d.Web.
18. I was unable to find a source of this quote.



(fig. 5-28)

c 2017 estate of Dan F. McLaughlin, Jr.