Chaos, Order and Uncertainty When Writing Narrative for Animation

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Abstract

Advocating rules for inventing stories circumvents the complete experiences of writing. How can the writer best embrace uncertainty, draw on the known and expose their work to enlivening spontaneity? This research examines four animation projects written under different conditions using different approaches to making the narrative. Each work gradually leads to a direct approach, bringing the writing experience closer to the act of animating.

*The Lester Chiselbean Experience*- storyboard frame
Declaration

This thesis contains only original work towards the award for the award of Master of Film and Television (Research). Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all material used to support the work. This thesis meets word length requirement exclusive of figures, tables and bibliography as approved by the Research Higher Degrees Committee.

Robert Stephenson

Date: 26th March 2017
Introduction

Manufacturing narrative for film in Western commercial cinema based on Aristotle’s Arc and Freytag’s Pyramid is regularly visited by student filmmakers, fledgling Western dramatists and screenwriters using popular screenwriting manuals including Syd Field’s *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* and Robert McKee’s *Story*. These structural guides formulated centuries ago have been maintained for industrial repetition in the cinema age and advanced by the desire of filmmakers, critics and theoreticians to unpack the workings of the dramatic narrative. This has become a weighty tradition of powerful conditioning, but implementing regulatory structures to the narrative should not be confused with narrative itself. The triangle or arc does not tell a story, but it does peg out an order, or a container for it which directs the narrative to a defined beginning, middle, end, inciting incident, quest and climax with nothing left open ended or in dispute.¹ This consolidates the storytelling into something that appears orderly, controllable, easy to follow and compacted into a comfortable time frame. Does adopting this narrative paradigm holus bolus across all forms of storytelling for animation shrink the pool of possibilities for the narrative and the audience experience?

Other entertainment industries have made modifications to consolidate and compact their attributes. The invention of T20 cricket was designed to change the narrative of cricket and capture a wider audience by eliminating the slowness and pauses or, “the boring bits”,² found in longer forms of the game. By reducing the length,

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¹ Richard T Allen, "Beginning, Middle, End of an Era: Has Technology Trumped Aristotle?," *Journal of Film and Video* 65, no. 1-2 (2013); ibid. 10.
contriving devices such as power-plays and reducing the risk of rain interruption,³ the
new design achieved a way to end the game quickly and minimise the risk of a draw.

Venerable advisors of writing narrative have dissected and transmitted how
writing narrative as a whole, coherent and explicit article is forged. They are ardent
observers analyzing what has already been written and filmed and aim to account for a
seamless writing method. Out of this come recommendations and paradigms that
sometimes advanced an idea or fresh point of view. Other times the ideas are not about
theories and concepts, but are a collection of truisms sourced from a recurrent cycle of
prevailing information regenerated by industrialist precepts of entertainment
manufacturing. This keeps order and control in the narrative and how it is delivered to
the audience. These instructors seek to help map out story organization from common
dramatic patterns derived from a fixation with historical procedures in writing narrative.
This may not only be about exploring the possibilities of narrative in animation or
cinema in general, but being dutiful to formalist methods that may have been cultivated
through entrenched cultural bias.⁴

Screenwriting instructors who anchor their method to the view that stories are
finite, restricted to a conclusive winner and loser and a protagonist reaching their goal
can get tangled in their own thinking. Hackneyed axioms prevail – “story is king” for
example, is declared the number one rule⁵ in the instructional book Ideas for the
Animated Short. In the foreword John Tarnoff, Head of Show Development at
DreamWorks, acknowledges the existence of established filmmaking rules. However,

³ Dr George Christos, Letter, 2 May 1997.
⁴ Richard M Blumenberg, "Cohesion and Fragmentation in Narrative Screenwriting: A
Prolegomenon toward Perceiving Alternative and Non-Classical Approaches," Journal
⁵ Karen Sullivan, Alexander, Kate, Mintz, Aubry, Besen, Ellen, Ideas for the Animated
Short : Finding and Building Stories, Second edition. ed. (Burlington, MA: Focal Press,
he also states that the filmmaker must not get bogged down by “too many conventions that can be creatively stifling.” 6 He believes that the possibilities, whether narrative or non-narrative, should be endless. Text books that are designed to aid the novice writer can provide mixed advice which highlights the tension between vaguely defined reasoning and attempting to create a measured methodology with which to write. For example, in the preface of *Ideas For the Animated Short*, the author states, “There is no magic formula for story,” 7 yet following in the first chapter the author adds, “Nearly every story told, every feature film produced, follows the same structure and formula with similar characters, themes and conflicts.” 8 Perhaps the real conflict is a system error when trying to avoid creative chaos and unpredictability by locking into one common screenwriting method on the basis of a regard for universality and the pursuit of certainty.

Robert McKee sets out his method for writing stories in *Story*, aimed at novice writers seeking employment in the commercial film industry in the USA. As instructions, they are resolute and clearly laid out but sometimes appear antithetical. For example, he argues the novice writer should follow story principles and not rules. However, the book is a credo peppered with what the writer and story must do, such as “A story must obey its own internal laws of probability” 9 and the protagonist “must be empathetic.” 10 McKee proposes that the starting point for a writer is that they have to be “born with creative power” to tell a story in a way “no-one has ever dreamed” 11.

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6 Ibid. vii.
7 Ibid. xi.
8 Ibid. 9.
10 Ibid. 141.
11 Ibid. 20.
If writing ability is congenital, how will his own advice aid those who don’t have the right genetic code? Will those who have the “creative power” need such a book?

In contrast, Paul Wells writes educative material for readers with differing expectations and across different cultures. In *The Fundamentals of Animation*, he sources key points from a wide range of practitioners. He includes a chapter of “Alternative Methods” that includes animators who work as “auteurist” with a resistance to orthodoxy, whilst in an earlier chapter on scriptwriting he quotes Alan Gilbey’s simple analysis of the orthodox three-act structure. Wells throughout much of his writing provides space for greater deliberation, advocating that “animation possesses the capacity to create new modes of story-telling.”

The act of screenwriting as a method can become procedural, if not subroutine, and can separate the operation of writing text in screenplay format from the input of divergent expression and ideas. This is evident in the separation of the role of the animation artist and animation director from the job of animation writing. Jeffrey Scott has a solid track record in the USA writing screenplays and story editing for commercial television animation including *Superfriends* and *Dragon Tales*. He expresses that producing animation, short or feature length, always begins with a script. Scott refers to the animation screenplay as a complete blueprint for the final production where “nothing is left to the imagination of others.” In Scott's world, the production of visuals, such as the storyboard, work as a response to the screenplay and

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13 Ibid. 73.
16 Ibid. 21.
function to “improve the telling of the story”\textsuperscript{17} through the direction of action. How may this process and outcome differ where the author undertakes the role of both animator and writer?

By examining current and past practice how can an animated project take advantage and advance the progress of an animated film by utilising chaos and uncertainty in writing and development? Under what circumstances would variation, deviation and dispensing with the orthodox method of writing an animated screenplay altogether be beneficial? Whilst acknowledging existing traditions in animation writing, this research project attempts to isolate and combine a selection of procedures in writing narrative for animated film specific to a practice where the animator writes and animates their own projects. Via practice and reflection of creative outputs and previous working history, the project will address and evaluate benefits and limitations of writing an animated film using varied and intersecting methods. The methods encompass outlines, screenplays, animating straight-ahead without a screenplay, storyboarding after the screenplay and storyboarding prior to writing the screenplay.

The project will inform a proposition that animation screenwriting does not always suit a prescribed systematic, utilitarian process of writing given the scope of ideas and varying working conditions and relationships that transpire. If not all projects begin and evolve in an identical setting should the writing procedure be systematic, procedural and unchanging? Can writing narrative for animation benefit from methods that are broken apart, interlocked and applied to varying creative situations with different stresses and interruptions to workflows?

Narrative orthodoxy applies to the act of screenwriting by sequencing development stages that include a premise, a treatment, an outline and multiple drafts in

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 22.
screenplay format. How can the narrative be originated, stimulated and augmented with conceptual sketches and other note taking throughout the writing period? What can be done to achieve improved immediacy from the writing stage to animating with a less corralled but chaotic immersion in an aggregation of dreams, doubts and ideas generated by hands-on activities?

Four different projects with a range of methods, subjects and outcomes are examined. Each work has its own attributes as described below and can be viewed using the associated links. *Lucky for Some* was made prior to the commencement of this research project and is examined and discussed reflectively. All other creative works occurred during the research project period.

Creative Output: -

![Lucky for Some production still](https://vimeo.com/13690104)

*Lucky for Some* - To view, refer to this link: [https://vimeo.com/13690104](https://vimeo.com/13690104)

Two people are interviewed by police over what they found, what they won and what they did in relation to a missing gambler. Stop motion. 14 minutes. An orthodox screenplay with was written, followed by a storyboard during pre-production and re-storyboarding during shooting.
Paris Lakes - production still

Paris Lakes - To view, refer to this link; https://vimeo.com/41529804

A satirical promotional film for a new suburb and new apartment tower.

2D. 5 minutes. A voice over was written, performed and recorded and edited.

Storyboarding was roughly drawn during the production period.

Nightlife- production still

Nightlife- To view, refer to this link; https://vimeo.com/94920573

A night of struggling with sleeplessness from an overactive mind.

Sand animation. 4 minutes. Without a screenplay a narrative evolves through straight-ahead animating.

.
Lester is a sixteen-year old boy who stows away on a rocket bound for a newly found planet to help protect its inhabitants from an invasion from Earth.

A proposal for an animated feature of approximately 80 minutes. From an initial premise, a draft storyboard is roughed out using a straight-ahead method including dialogue and notes but without further editing. An outline was written in response to the draft storyboard.
Chapter 1

Writer or Picture Facilitator? The Animator Navigates a Spectral Identity in a Writer’s World.

In 1991 the Australian Children’s Television Foundation (ACTF) led by Dr. Patricia Edgar was in production with *Lift Off*, an ambitious television series for pre-school to early school audience. During the project’s development phase, multiple weekend think tanks were assembled at Erskine House, an historic guest house in the coastal town of Lorne, Victoria. Present were accomplished educators, philosophers, researchers, screenwriters, authors of children’s books, musicians, puppeteers, illustrators and animators. The purpose was to exchange, debate and ventilate about the show’s guiding educational philosophy based on Howard Gardner’s theory of human intellectual competencies which challenged the classical view of intelligence, particularly in relation to how children learn. Participants actively thrashed out ideas, characters and environments that could shape and inhabit the final product. Experienced practitioners were blended with emergent artists and whilst my own engagement was raw, idiosyncratic and naïve, a producer in one of the first group meetings informed me that animators are not writers. The general view of the animation artist was to rough out some shapes, to illustrate words, to dream up colour and movement and possibly come up with a kooky and likeable character or something from left-field that had general appeal. We were provided with a notebook to freely think up ideas for the show, sometimes individually, but often collaboratively. As part of the contract of engagement, the participants assigned all copyright of ideas to the ACTF.

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included everything in the notebooks; stories, sketches, doodles, jokes and mind maps—whatever was conjured up and noted or expressed in discussions. Dr. Edgar and her team captured a treasure trove of new and some well-formed ideas and characters. In her 2006 memoir she wrote, “Nobody was allowed to leave with their allocated notebook and copyright on all recorded ideas was held by the ACTF. We trawled through what had been written and by the time the week was over we had a set of characters, families and fantasy ideas to work with.”

It was a playful and engaging weekend and people showed their willingness to air new ideas and also expose entrenched views on everything from storytelling to what and how children should learn. Gardner’s theory on multiple intelligences became the show’s framework and philosophical handbook constantly referred to by the ACTF leadership. The weekend hothouse of creative genesis gave Dr Edgar’s executive team a solid creative foundation for the next stage to become an ambitious seventeen-million dollar investment in production.

Screenwriters, directors and segment producers were appointed to take this hothoused material into further months of development to formulate scripts out of the notes, ephemeral ideas, scribbles, storylines and character designs that were in participant’s notebooks and extracted from workshop chronicles. What can be said of the contribution to the final screenplay by way of stick figures, improvised songs and scenarios in the notebooks of all those who attended? Was this writing? Was everyone who attended a contributing writer?

20 Edgar, Bloodbath: A Memoir of Australian Television. 252.
21 Ibid. 251.
Once the show’s key elements were locked in, the ACTF commissioned a number of animation artists, each to create a three-minute animated film for a segment called “Munch Kids.” Each animator was given an audio track where children were interviewed and seemed to talk freely about a gamut of matters pertinent to how this age group sees the world around them.

I was assigned to an episode titled “Threads”,23 that worked with matters of connectedness and community. Although a written script and preliminary visual references were absent from the brief, an edited three-minute recording was supplied. The animator’s job was to respond to the edited audio track with yet to be determined animation. In the case of “Threads,” whatever came to mind, concocting rough and disparate ideas for the animation and considering how the scenes might cut together was storyboarded. At that point, on reflection, the sagest imagery to heighten the meaning of the children’s words or explore any deeper dissection did not surface. Even so, playing with art materials that children used in kindergarten and primary school including newspaper, pencils, paint, plasticine, old photographs and cardboard became an attraction. The children’s art materials share a common ground with materials used for hand-constructed animation as Figure 1.1 partially illustrates.

At the ACTF, Peter Clarke was a senior researcher, writer, producer and interviewer of the segment who also contributed to the pictures by suggesting possibilities such as having an animated hand paint an explanatory diagram. Our discussions together factored into what could be realised. Whilst a printed screenplay or working paper document were absent, the writing was an integration of multiple components. Writing the audio was composed from the choice of questions, the children's responses and performances and the careful editing that took place. The writing for the pictures, the characters and action materialised with the storyboards and an animatic that was timed to the edited audio track. This was further informed by the selection of materials during pre-production. Describing the process like this might indicate that the planning was careful enough to simply implement, but technical and schedule limitations forced adjustments to what took place.
The storyboard for “Threads” was a draft of the script, and some casual doodling, scratching together ideas along the way, sticky-taped into a crumpled dog-eared document provided some further augmentation. Other unresolved scenes were rethought in production. Sequential, narrative images were created osmotically from the delivered stimuli, discussions and feedback and during the physical act of making. Authorship of an animated film in a project like this, where the composition of narrative is created out of its multiple production inputs, is seemingly shared. Paul Wells states that, “the mutuality of the constituent elements of the animated film call attention to themselves as bearers of significant information because of their place within the short form.”

Whilst at the time I was not deemed to be a writer, on reflection the steps taken to complete the narrative were something of a screenplay diploid that amounted from the edited audio and the visual sequence with its order and design of the action. At times it was haphazardly concocted and its use of childlike materials was something of a motley design. I recall appraisal from the wider team of producers and directors that regarded this mixed-bag approach as a flaw of the finished segment. The “Munch Kids” segment was not included in subsequent series of *Lift Off*.

‘Threads’ can be viewed by clicking on this link. [https://vimeo.com/56686238](https://vimeo.com/56686238)

![Still from Lift Off, “Munch Kids”- Threads](image)

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25 Clarke, *Lift Off*. 
Chapter 2

Chaos Does Not Always Lead to Confusion -
The Life of Materials and Sequence Order Brings its Own Cogency.

If narrative is defined as a chain of events in cause-effect relationship over
time \(^{26}\) and telling a story, then narrative in animation has existed since its genesis. The
trick films and lightning sketches of early cinema evolved from “abrupt changes in the
interval between exposures” to “gradual changes.” \(^{27}\) However, animation scholar
Donald Crafton argues that the early lightning sketches of Mieles and Blackton were
prototypical and utilized “stop-action substitution effect” \(^{28}\) and were not bona fide
animated cartoons. Animation has been defined as “art in movement”\(^{29}\) and “frame by
frame” production. \(^{30}\) The technique of substituting or moving an object, altering a
drawing or substituting a drawing during the intervals of film recording is the act of
animation as it brings what is inanimate to life. An animated cartoon comprises of one
drawing substituting another and filming one or several exposures at a time either
interrupting real time recording by stopping and starting or capturing one exposed frame
at a time. The aim is to portray something changing that cannot be captured in real time
and connote a conscious, sentient entity on screen. Although filming the lightning
sketches recorded live-action, they also included animation as described. Something
inanimate in real life appears to come alive in playback.

\(^{26}\) David and Thompson Bordwell, Kristen, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Second ed.
\(^{27}\) Donald Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature and Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton
\(^{28}\) Ibid. 128.
\(^{30}\) Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction*; ibid. 17
Insofar as writing narrative is concerned, Crafton states that the “iconography and primitive narrative structures grew out of this kind of filmmaking.” Even so, there is evidence that shows the narrative structure for animation share a common ancestry with sequential art and early comic strips. Emile Cohl drew sequential comics prior to his first animated cartoon and he employed a similar approach to the narrative for print as he applied to later animation. For example, Cohl drew a comic strip for Judy in 1896 that is a visual pun on a line from the Thomas Campbell poem, “Distant Lens Enchantment to the View.” An elephant gradually transforms from frame to frame into the shape of a camera on a tripod. In today’s animation jargon, this is morphing. Similarly, Winsor Mc Cay, creator of Gertie the Dinosaur had established his career as a cartoonist making sequential strips and utilised the “inherent propensity for timing and action of the narrative.” He explored “metamorphosis and progressive action” that informed his transition to animation. Crafton disagrees with this shared connection by explaining, “Cinema, unlike comics has developed an extensive practical language that enables its technicians to communicate with one another, a descriptive language of production practice that is also available to critics and analysts.” His analysis creates a schism between the development of the two narrative worlds believing that linking their ancestry may be superficial and misleading. He finds there is a hidden agenda for critics of comics to argue a “simultaneous genesis.” Whilst it is true that comic strips and animated films have their own language, technical restrictions, conventions and

32 Ibid. 72.
34 Ibid. 32.
35 Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature and Film*. 230.
36 Ibid. 231.
constructs, evidence exists where artists transfer their skills to new and different fields. Artists who work across illustration, comics, animation and live action, whilst occasional, is well recognised. In recent times, film producers have used comic books as a highly productive source for filmmaking where the narrative material is “aligned to the logics of Hollywood.” 37 Comic book artists and writers such as Frank Miller and Neil Gaiman have successfully transitioned their material and occupation to film writing. Although not suited to every comic writer or artist, Gaiman states that it seems “so natural that anybody who writes comics could also write novels, television or movies.” 38

The evidence of the connection between Cohl’s work in comics and animation exist in his graphic narratives. Many of his comic strips are absurd in narrative and design as is the case in his first animated cartoon, *Fantasmagorie*, 39 where events and transformations occur with surprises. As Crafton perceptively unpacks the narrative of *Fantasmagorie* in detail, he states that the images flow without “logical connection” that defies “attempts at rationalization.” 40 Crafton may be leaning his assessment too heavily on Cohl’s membership of the reactionary collective, The Incoherents, 41 which was a group of counter-Salon artists playfully mocking the seriousness of the art world with absurd, paradoxical and burlesque artworks and events. 42 Working in what may appear to be spontaneous, not adhering to rules and creating narratives with unexpected

37 Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (University of Toronto Press, 2012). 217
39 Emile Cohl, "Fantasmagorie," (France1908).
40 Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature and Film*, 265.
action does not mean the result is illogical. Crafton perhaps confuses logic with expectation. Whilst the narrative is chaotic and dreamlike, the film is sequenced with cause and effect. A woman with a big hat sits in front of the man in the theatre. The man gets upset and rips off the hat and sets her hair on fire. Further actions flow quickly to the end where the man waves good-bye to the audience. The narrative is all about action and reaction which contains a logic specific to the events within it. Whilst the narrative appears unusual and impossible, it is logical in its own arena and is similar in logic to the Chuck Jones film, *Duck Amuck* (1953). Neil Cohn’s assigning of five core narrative phases for sequential imagery, (table 2.1), can be applied to *Fantasmagorie*. It appears to share common ground with Freytag’s narrative analysis.43

Table 2.1 Cohn’s Visual Narrative Structure

<table>
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<th>Core</th>
<th>Constituents</th>
<th>Applied to <em>Fantasmagorie</em></th>
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<tr>
<td>Establisher (E)</td>
<td>Sets up an interaction without acting upon it.</td>
<td>A character is drawn and sits down in a theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial (I)</td>
<td>Initiates the tension of the narrative arc.</td>
<td>A woman with a big hat sits in front of him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolongation (L)</td>
<td>Marks a medial state of extension, often the trajectory of a path.</td>
<td>Man rips off hat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak (P)</td>
<td>Marks the height of narrative tension and point of maximal event structure.</td>
<td>Man lights cigar and sets her hair on fire and morphs into a bubble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release (R)</td>
<td>Releases the tension of the interaction.</td>
<td>A clown appears inside the bubble.</td>
</tr>
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Granted, the evolving and linked actions in *Fantasmagorie* are bizarre and unpredictable. Crafton states that few people would have “grasped the content of a single showing.” Yet, how can we know this? With the advent of this kind of new cinema, the audience may see this film as a spectacle rather than having an expectation of traditional narrative. The narrative works as a flurry of connected events that, paradoxically, Crafton manages to make a detailed account of in narrative and symbolic contexts. Cohl’s former colleagues at The Incoherents might be surprised to see that this film is sufficiently coherent.

Whatever planning may have occurred when making *Fantasmagorie*, the anticipated results may give the impression that it is made entirely spontaneously and Crafton notes that it is “reminiscent of the arbitrary technique of Joliet’s Incoherent novel” or a precursor to the Surrealist “automatic writing.” On first impressions it is hard to disagree, but as an experiment it is not conclusive that there was no preparation or in-process planning which is common to the animation practitioner. Crafton contests Cohl’s claim that the film contains 1872 drawings stating that, “a close look reveals that only 700 drawings were really used,” but there may be an error in this analysis. The final film may only show 700 drawings, but how many were done in preparation to filming? What was thrown out or re-done prior to or during shooting? The final number of drawings in the film from first to last frame does not often represent the total number in the creation of the whole work. Planning may have been loose, but this does not mean it was absent and that the subsequent narrative is only the result of animating arbitrarily. Planning and playfulness, order and improvisation, exploration of creative

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44 Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature and Film*. 258.
45 Ibid. 265.
46 Ibid. 121.
and technical concepts coupled with humour seems to be mistaken for being flippant, erratic and irrational.

A cogent action and narrative can stem from improvisation and be generated from a preliminary sketch. What occupies one frame can trigger a plan for incoming frames. As Cohl was breaking new ground, a library of prior filmmaking narrative knowledge was technically limited to previous experiments in an animation context. However, he had been previously employed on live action productions and therefore had some informed filmmaking grammar and structure to draw upon. As an animator develops a sequence in a straight-ahead manner, new information comes to hand that can foster the next step. This means each mark is premeditated. If this way of working results in confusion in the narrative then the definition of narrative could be extended to what Neil Cohn describes a method of conveying concepts that should be applicable beyond just storytelling, where the stories are only a prototypical instance of narrative structure, and “good stories are only a case of rhetorical skill.” 47 The narrative as concept or story may reveal itself in the frame to frame making. Instinctual play and analysis of results can show where to go with the next move or drawing.

The Quay Brothers frame their working method in the world of magic, irrationality and theatre. In their self-directed interview project, *On Deciphering the Pharmacist’s Prescription for Lip Reading Puppets*, an imaginary ghost interviewer exposes their approach to animated puppet narratives, where the puppet as an object presents possibilities of “thaumaturgical murmurings, pathological drifts, cartographies and voyages of no return.” 48 They state they don’t think exclusively in terms of

47 Cohn, "Visual Narrative Structure." 7.
narrative but also “the parentheses that lay hidden behind the narrative” where the subject could “pulsate with unknown possibilities.” 49This is not necessarily an obfuscation of process with florid language but a description of the extension of narrative beyond the predictable, to allow for chaos and giving room for the narrative to show itself through the handling of materials in production. In reference to their film In Absentia (2000), they state that the premise of the film could not be scripted on paper and “no flight of any alphabet could have incited words at the level of a scenario for what was inevitably forged directly under the camera with the main actor being ‘light’ itself.” 50The Quay Brothers acknowledge their films require some deciphering by the audience but this is inherent when creating unpredictable narratives of “worlds yet to be known.” 51 It is difficult to create these worlds when hitched to safe narrative mooring.

49 Ibid. 25.
50 Ibid. 26.
51 Ibid. 27.
Chapter 3
Ownership, Forged Partnerships, Order and Control.
The Influence of Enterprise on Making Narrative for Animation.

Authorship of story and screenplay is an instrument of ownership and control. It begins the demarcation of roles in filmmaking but, in early cinema, screenplays were vague outlines or in absentia. In the formative years at Gaumont Studios, where Cohl was employed making live action films for three years, there were not any screenplays and the directors and actors were deemed as the scenarists to come up with a basic storyline and improvise as they filmed. Creating documented, formally written stories or screenplays denotes authorship and ownership of the story. Studio owner Leon Gaumont did not like paying royalties to the scenarists and so they were encouraged to make it up as they went along provided they “remained within general parameters.” 52 Otto Messmer never used a script for *Felix the Cat* (1919). He did it “all in his head”. 53 Al Eugster, one of Messmer’s former assistants explains in an interview that he would start with some preliminary sketches and present new ideas as he thought out aloud during production. 54 In the 1930s at Universal Pictures, where Walter Lantz was producing cartoons such as *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* (1927), a story department did not exist and the narratives were assembled from gags contributed by employees. A selection of them were invited to a story meeting where, according to animator Leo Salkin, the animators were in “a competition to be funny.” 55

52 Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature and Film*. 118.
54 Crafton, *Before Mickey - the Animated Film 1898-1928*. 112.
When Warner Brothers bought Leo Schlesinger’s animation studio in 1944 they installed a new system borne out of economic frugality that drove the limitations of what each cartoon could entail. Warner Brothers hired producer Eddie Selzer to oversee the production of the *Loony Toons* short films and he demanded to see scripts but he soon found that only storyboards were used. Without screenplays, these studios successfully functioned with collaborative development able to implement conventional narrative for animation, but for business owners trying to monitor who was responsible for the story and create a predictable model of operation, it was deemed unwieldy in a high volume and competitive environment. This change in operating models had less to do with writing cartoons and more to do with ownership and control of the narrative.

As early as the 1920’s the demand and competition for mass-produced animation in the USA required larger and cheaper workforces. Both Bray Studios and Fleischer Studios implemented their production operations based on so-called Taylorist principles in management efficiency. In the new hierarchies of animation studios, the placement of storywriters varied from studio to studio, but Disney formalised the operation of Story Departments and placed them high up the pecking order that enabled the authorship of story to assert ownership and centralise control of the production. Disney owned and controlled the narrative of the film and only brought in animators once the employed team of writers had completed a story and synopsis to Disney's approval. Fleischer Studios also set up a Story Department with a similar authority, but the Story Department at Fleischer's was not the only author of narrative as head

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59 Ibid. 6.
animators and supervisors from the Animation Department contributed to stories with drawings and conferences.\textsuperscript{60} Under this hierarchy, the Animation Department found the rank of the Story Department to be a threat to their authorship and their own creative and political power in the studio. Clarifying the roles and rules of operation at Fleischer Studios was in part resolved with the writing of the \textit{Standard Production Reference} in 1940 (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).\textsuperscript{61} Its primary function was maintaining quality control and building to a price point to make the “best results with the least amount of work.”\textsuperscript{62} This was a codification of studio rules and technical operations that became a prototype of what current film studios refer to as “The Bible” that "implicitly controlled power relationships.”\textsuperscript{63}

Fig. 3.1 Front page of Fleischer’s \textit{Standard Production Reference}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{61} Seymour Kneitel and Isidore Sparber, "Standard Production Reference," (Miami, Florida, USA1940).
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. Foreword.
\textsuperscript{63} Langer, "Institutional Power and the Fleischer Studios: The ‘Standard Production Reference.’"
Devising a highly prescriptive set of production controls and measures to strictly order the management of creative content is no guarantee that the business is immune to chaos, confusion, conflict and entropy. Within two years of the *Standard Production Reference* being documented, the studios had ousted its founders, debts rose and the Fleischer Studios closed. In 1942 they re-located and rebadged as Famous Studios.64

Models of business and creative administration that are homologous to the *Standard Production Reference* continue today carrying on the separation of story from animation. Formally separating the animator from the ownership and responsibility of screenplay and engaging screenwriters experienced with long form story telling can be assessed as having a purpose to expand the depth of talent and have team members

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64 Ibid.13.
working to their own strengths. It also accommodates having a Story Department working across multiple projects and on varying timelines to an Animation Department enabling a frequent roll-off of content. This is clearly not the end of the writing. Studios utilise artists to work hands-on with images and models but it creates a more distant space between the text and the act of animating.

During the early stages of narrative development at Pixar, a team is comprised of a director, a writer and visual artists including storyboarders. After a screenplay is written various storyboard and story reel iterations are created to further develop and improve. Whilst the animators, designers and storyboard artists are uncredited to the writing of the movie, their hands-on activity contribute to the narrative. The resulting authorship of the final story is due to the aggregation and transmission of ideas and works from all creative personnel.

Pixar president, Ed Catmull stated that, “every single member of the 200-to-250-person production group makes suggestions…The leaders sort through a mass of ideas to find the ones that fit into a coherent whole- that support the story- which is a very difficult task.” This does not mean that it freewheels when it comes to writing narrative. Pixar actively encourages peer review across its workforce and Catmull believes that all contributors should be given creative ownership of every activity. However, the ideas have to fit into their story making system and evidence of Pixar’s

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66 Ibid. 6.
67 Ibid. 3.
68 Ibid. 9.
screenwriting tenets have subsequently surfaced. Pixar director Andrew Stanton, has created a set of advisory guidelines, listed below:

1. Empathize with your main character, even if you don't like all of his/her motivations or qualities. (For example, Woody in *Toy Story* initially masked his selfish desires as being selfless.)

2. Unity of opposites. Each character must have clear goals that oppose each other.

3. You should have something to say. Not a message, per se, but some perspective, some experiential truth.

4. Have a key image, almost like a visual logline, to encapsulate the essence of the story; that represents the emotional core on which everything hangs. (For example, Marlin in *Finding Nemo*, looking over the last remaining fish egg in the nest.)

5. Cast actors with an appealing voice, and whom the microphone loves. Test their voice performance with animation to see if it fits.

6. Know your world and the rules of it. (Such as in *Monsters, Inc.*)

7. The crux of the story should be on inner, not outer, conflicts.

8. Developing the story is like an archaeological dig. Pick a site where you think the story is buried, and keep digging to find it.

9. Animation should be interpretive, not realistic.

10. Just say “no” to flashbacks. Only tell what's vital, and tell it linearly.

11. Consider music as a character to anchor the film. Music is a keeper of the emotional truth.

Stanton manages to augment distilled writing aphorisms with some dreamy, mystifying notions such as “music being the keeper of emotional truth.”

Emma Coats, a storyboard artist who worked at Pixar wrote an assortment of writing tips coined as “22 Story Basics” garnered from writers, directors and other co-

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workers whilst working there. The reductive entries on the list are couched as a blend of writing folklore with gentle self-help language. They include:

- A fill-in-the-blanks methodology; “Once upon a time there was_. Every day, _. One day_. Because of that, _. Until finally_.”

- An approach to working order; “Come up with your endings before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.”

- Things to avoid; “Give your characters’ opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you but it’s poison to the audience.”

- And, something to soothe the animation writer from self-doubt when done; “Finish your story, let go even if it’s not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.”

Whilst these lists are not part of an official Pixar codification of narrative construction, it does identify an institutionalised precept that is intended to uncover some of the enigma of narrative for animation and act as a guide for the novice and employee. The stipulations also set limitations, such as avoiding flashbacks and including characters with goals similar to each other. By approaching script writing under these guidelines sees the on-screen result characteristic of programmatic uniformity or formula. This is a measure to provide quality control for the creative culture of the enterprise.

The division of labour, separation and integration of text and image, and controlling measures of enterprise is a familiar setting for makers of comic books and graphic novels. Similar to animation, the origination and development of narrative in

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comic books and graphic novels is quite varied and even with such variation, methodological orthodoxy as codified practice is espoused through industrial expectations and instructional text books. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott Mc Cloud states that “visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics” and “closure is its grammar.” 72 He concludes that “comics are closure” 73 as he compounds a growing definition. He lists a “categorization” of craft styles to try to “unravel the invisible art of comics storytelling”. 74 Although he employs bar charts to demonstrate quantifiable use of his inventory by a wide range of artists, he admits that it is an “inexact science at best.” 75 In the final chapter, he adds that comics continue to evolve and the “possibilities are endless.” 76 The comics breakdown is continued in *Making Comics* where he resolves that the writer should have two goals: that the reader should be able to “understand” and “care” about the story.77 This is achieved with “clarity” that is broken down into the utilisation of five “choices…moment, frame, image word and flow”. 78 The analysis is personal and, as in *Understanding Comics*, used as an overlay when discussing how other artists work. It is aimed to assist novice comics authors find their way into the industry, but would the book have benefitted from points of view from other authors of comics?

The author may be both the drawer and the writer or it could be a team of a drawer and a writer having separate roles. Frank Miller first worked as a drawer, penciling *Twilight Zone* stories for Gold Key comics, where in the “factory system” 79

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73 Ibid. 74.
74 Ibid. 74.
75 Ibid. 74.
76 Ibid. 215.
78 Ibid. 9 - 10.
79 Salisbury, *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting*, 188.
one person was the writer and the other, the artist. Miller gradually progressed to be both the writer and the drawer and Miller claimed he was once confronted by a more senior writer at Marvel comics asking, “Artists draw, writers write. What do you think you are doing?” ⁸⁰ Miller saw the separation of the two disciplines as “patently silly” and refers to himself as a cartoonist where the role of writer and drawer interconnect and that the “pictures themselves are an act of writing.” ⁸¹ Neil Gaiman stated that when working as a comic book writer who teams up with a visual artist, the writer is the director and the artist is the cameraman, yet in the act of writing the narrative Gaiman has done both. When making a dummy version of a comic he would draw and write as he went along using drawing as a problem-solving device and to advance the story. ⁸²

Managerial locking in and carving up roles of creative responsibility can divide, obscure and inflame the activities in creating the narrative. Comics are not a simple “coupling of word and picture.” ⁸³ Similarly writing animated films use words and pictures to interpenetrate one another, conflating all the creative activity and manoeuvring to find and express the narrative.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 188.
⁸¹ Ibid. 189.
⁸² Ibid. 105.
⁸³ Harvey, The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History. 9.
Chapter 4

Lucky for Some. Codified Practice Makes Room for Hand Made Events.

“One side of us believes that hands left on their own will invite themselves into the amplitude of ‘play’. They are capable of obeying, but as renegades they also think entirely of their own accord and for that reason we follow them willingly.” Quay Brothers 84

The idea for Lucky for Some (2004) generated from an intersection of various news reports regarding crimes committed in and around casinos 85 and a simple observation on a beach during summer. Close to sunset, when the beach was nearing empty, men walked along the beach with metal detectors salvaging lost belongings hidden in the sand. Is one person’s lost belongings fair game for someone else to find? Is a gambler’s loss at a casino a valid opportunity for another gambler, and the house, to take? As an observer, attending beaches and gaming venues I took notes on human activity, atmosphere, architecture, smells and sounds. I was also reminded of my own family’s history with an attraction to gaming machines. My mother would claim it is a cheap night out and my grandmother expressed how much she liked the mystery of the numbers whilst playing Keno. They both knew the house would rarely pay out a substantial win but the promise of El Dorado was lured in front of them and the machines soaked up their pensions. In part, this research stage was to assess how this

84 Quay Brothers, Quay Brothers-on Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription for Lip Reading Puppets. 26.
idea could be explored in a short animated film and whether it was feasible as a stop motion production with a self-funded budget.

A short story was written that evolved into an outline regarding two people who are interviewed by police over the death of a casino patron. Each character constructs a false narrative which at the same time exposes their own fixation with chance. Multiple drafts of a conventional screenplay with action and dialogue was written. Clare Larman and Daryl Pellizzer vocal performances followed the text adding emotion, timing, breaths and nuances that guided the physical actions of the puppets, thereby influencing action of the narrative from the text.

Writing, directing, animating and constructing models and sets single-handedly allowed for an easy interplay between all the production parts. Although the construction of the puppets was intended to enable all the scripted action to take place, the resulting puppets did not live up to the ambitions in the text. The final construction created limitations that became more exposed to their fragility during the shooting. Whilst some problems were mitigated with puppet modifications, it became possible to alter the script to suit the shortcomings of the puppets. This decision impacted on framing, action and editing. Additionally, as the puppets began to inhabit the stage, new ideas emerged that altered and augmented the story. Re-working the storyboard soon followed.

Construction of the stage elements, such as the gaming machines, also fed back into the writing the narrative. Gaming venues have complex machinery and lighting and it was obvious that I would not be able to reproduce a realistic looking gaming machine given the budget. But what could be achieved to make it convincing if not realistic? The problem required a different response to guide the design. The objective was to create something that might, at least, feel authentic and present a particular viewpoint. Real
gaming machines use motifs of mythical adventure or exotica such as, “El Dorado,” “Monte Carlo,” “Tropical” or “Pirate”. Yet, no matter what the visuals are, or what synthetic musical loop plays, the odds of winning are the same. As these make no difference to the betting outcome, I decided to eliminate the themes altogether by reducing it down to building a simple box where a player puts a coin in a slot then waits to see the result (Fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1. Lucky for Some - casino set

The models of the gaming machines were made to resemble having a steel plate to cover the screen and hide the seductive stimuli. When a player inserted a coin and a flame appeared out of the chimney on top, it was a pointer to a lost wager. The result was not technical realism, but it did represent a truth of the gaming world.

Limited shooting space required one set at a time to be filmed. This meant that the interval between set builds was sometimes several months. The process of building and shooting one set informed the ideas for the following set and subsequently triggered additional reworking of the storyboard.
For example, the small set where the male gambler counts his winnings and puts the cash into a kettle was informed by set builds for scenes on either side of where this takes place in the narrative. This scene was not in the original screenplay or storyboard. (Fig. 4.2).

The realisation of each scene, combined with lengthy intervals between sets, provided time for extended reflection on how the film was coming together in process and what modifications would both disentangle some problems and throw new light on the narrative. The screenplay and storyboard (Fig. 4.3) would look quite different if it were written again after the film was made, which is probably not an unusual circumstance for many films.
Lucky for Some began without a schedule one might find in a commercial environment with target dates and milestones for timetabled production activity. The completion date was unknown. Without the opportunity or inclination to make the film twice it is difficult to compare what the result would be if it were made with imposed controls on deadlines for each stage of production. The opportunity to continue writing through the stages of production would have been more restrictive and provide less time for review. In a deadline free working environment decisions are finalised when the act of writing and making is completed or when resources run out and not at the end of a
predetermined delivery schedule. Whilst *Lucky for Some* began as a free-wheeling project, a new set of responsibilities, approval and a deadline and a new stage of review arose out of investment from the Australian Film Commission (AFC) to assist with the costs of post-production. The assessment for funding was based upon a script and a rough cut. The AFC required a reviewing process with input from an assigned project officer. In one instance the project officer provided critical feedback that related to the clarity of two scenes that had the effect of altering the original ending. (Fig. 4.4- 4.6).

Fig. 4.4. *Lucky for Some* storyboard of original ending (1)
Fig. 4.5 - Lucky for Some storyboard of original ending (2)

Fig. 4.6 - Lucky for Some - storyboard of original ending (3)
Although the story was set, the additional budget enabled roles for an external editor, a sound designer and a re-recording mixer each contributing to the impact of the audience experience of the narrative. For example, the detailed sound design played a significant role in reshaping the experience of the staged environments and helped define a mood that was not achieved in the storyboard or screenplay. Separate to the pictures the additional audio entailed a narrative of its own. Wells states that sound does not “merely operate as a signifier of authentic atmospheres and environments but delineate specific narrative information” with a “collective aural vocabulary.” 86 Whilst it could be argued that these contributions and additions are not the act of screenwriting, this post-production activity impacts on the writing of the filmed narrative by responding to a different production reference point and altering how the narrative is seen, heard and felt.

Despite being a lengthy and interrupted production that blended codified practice with various deviations along the way, the narrative altered and grew yet maintained an orientation to the guiding idea at inception. There was no major order to seek approval other than responsibilities set by post production investment, but this did not curtail any creative decision making- it refreshed it. In contrast, a commercial team-based production where authorship is company owned and where roles of creative authority are delimited, there can be turf wars over what can be altered or introduced as fresh material. On a feature length scale, Aardman Animation partnered with DreamWorks to make the film *Chicken Run* (2000). Aardman director, Nick Park, found the collaboration to be weighted in favour of DreamWorks producers creating a strained relationship involving a process over many years referring to focus groups and receiving updates and instructions from studio executives about how something would

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work in “middle America.” Working mostly solo I did not face these encumbrances yet, similarly, Park’s experience illustrates that with even large scale commercial productions the narrative alters from hands-on activity, interruptions and intermissions. Working it out as-you-go, negotiating change during production and being impacted upon by other vested interests results in both order and chaos.

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Chapter 5

Paris Lakes: Unity from Narration and Vignettes.

"I spent about six months getting to a nearly completed storyboard, but found I really wanted to get on with making the film." Run Wrake 88

Observing the burgeoning urban sprawl around Melbourne's fringes and the corresponding swelling of bulk, height and density in the inner city, a heightened optimism appears evident from the alacrity in carte blanche development. It is powered by what Clive Hamilton refers to as “growth fetish,” 89 where marketers and politicians persuade us to find an identity through greater consumption and where growth is sustained by unhappiness. Presenting a pitch to lure people into a world of hopeful promises populates the real estate industry lexicon. Victorian State Government policies, such as Melbourne 2030, intended to provide a picture of how Melbourne should accommodate its urban growth through medium to high density housing, but it did little for how developer opportunists could be drawn away from their affection for the “McMansion” and what the Planning Minister, Justin Madden referred to in 2007 as “housing obesity.” 90 The sprawl had no design ethics attached and the result is what Robin Boyd referred to as “nervous architectural chattering avoiding any mention of the landscape” 91 where “overstuffed housing estates rise from scrubby plains.” 92

Advertising images of new homes resemble propaganda advertising used by China during the 1950s and 60s (Fig. 5.1- 5.4) and inspired the family model design for the Paris Lakes (Fig. 5.5).

89 Dr Clive Hamilton, "Consumer Capitalism. Is This as Good as It Gets?," in Maurice Blackburn Oration (Coburg Town Hall: Moreland City Council, 2004). 16.
92 Dubecki, "Swimming against the Tide." 1.
The material seeks a belief in these proposed environments and communities and to place trust in what will be provided: happiness, prosperity and safety.

Fig. 5.1 - Chairman Mao Gives Us a Happy Life. 1954- Xin Liliang 93

Fig. 5.2 - Become A Red Seedling- strike up root and bear seeds in the places the motherland needs it most.1965.- Ha Qiongwen 94

93 Xin Liliang, Chairman Mao Gives Us a Happy Life, 1954. poster, 78 x 53cm. Chinese Poster Foundation.
94 Ha Qiongwen, Become a Red Seedling- Strike Root, Sprout Flower and Bear Seed in the Places Motherland Needs It Most, 1965. Poster, 77cm x 53 cm. Shanghai remin meishu chubanashe 上海人民美术出版社.
Fig. 5.3 Metricon Web Advertisement  

Fig. 5.4 Stockland Web Advertisement

Fig. 5.5 Paris Lakes- food court scene

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A single image attempts to tell a story of what life will be like in this world. This observation and commentary provided the foundation to make a film in the guise of a caricatured television advertisement turned inside out. Amplify what is already obvious; that the width of the urban sprawl epidemic and the altitude of the tallest apartment block represent a “mad scramble” 97 for a fulfilment placebo.

A voice over was written and recorded in the style of a commercial television or snake-oil salesperson and performed by David Swann. The audio was edited and adjusted to tempo subsequently creating an audio track a little over four minutes. (Fig 5.6- 5.7). The intention was to marry absurdist images to the audio for ironic effect. The collaboration is a partnership of text, performance and design, each element having impact on and authorship of the narrative. Performance can provide more than a reference to play out the action. The recorded voices in Aardman’s Creature Comforts provided unexpected results, as they were never going to be sure of what an interviewee would provide. Wells states that they utilized the “dynamics of the monologue” for “juxtapositional tonal and thematic effect”. 98 It can then be argued that its interviewees were also contributing authors of the work, even though they may not have been aware of the final result.

Visits to suburbs under construction provided a source for reference photographs and preliminary sketches together with photographs and 3D models sourced from developers’ websites. A simple fragmented and rough, mutable storyboard evolved resembling self-contained vignettes rather than a story with a three-ply structure (Fig. 5.8).

97 Hamilton, "Consumer Capitalism. Is This as Good as It Gets?."16. 
98 Wells, Understanding Animation. 60.
The endangered Peewee frog lives peacefully in perfect harmony with nature taking from it only what it needs.

But what if it wanted more?
Peace, harmony
And a five-bedroom home with a six-car garage
Life is too short to live like a frog
Life means living and its time to live beyond your means.
Make your postcode a postcard paradise.
Discover Paris Lakes.

PAUSE
As convenient as pre-sliced cheese, Paris Lakes is only minutes from the city.
where you will discover an exclusive oasis with luxurious amenities.
Choose from state of the art architecturally simulated creations with options to suit your cup-noodle, self-sooking, microwave lifestyle.
This is a paradise paradox where you have the room to breed and can enjoy a garden big enough for four more cars.
Smell the coffee from your doorknoke as you drink the cafe-latte, golf buggy, boot toasting community.

Join a club.
Promenade around the lake.
Fondle your European appliances.
or simply enjoy the view of the house next door.
Paris Lakes lets you enjoy family values at affordable prices.
Explore the new shopping centre where you can enjoy an hour in a steaming car with your family.
and room for hours in hypnotic rapture giving your credit card a new lease on your life.
Built in high definition concrete, this is a vacuum packed experience.

Like a poem riding a cloud, nothing could be more meaningless.
So what are you waiting for?
Don't bother driving out all the way; go straight to our website.
Click on 'I want change'.
Select the house of your dreams.
Click on the loan calculator from Happy Lender.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Enter your bank details and passport number.</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And the name of your first born child</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Double click 'I Want It'.</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Add to cart.</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Click 'I Agree', and then submit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It couldn't be any easier.</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do it today and go into the draw for a sensational second home</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>of understated arrogance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The historic Duncan estate</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>set amongst ancient forests.</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>abundant wildlife</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>and native seaside meadows.</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>has been delightfully obliterated to make room for the superior</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>splendour.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>New Park Tower</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Make a statement and enjoy an elevated lifestyle of undisputed</td>
<td>3.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>pleasure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>With 24 hour everything you can relish the boutique executive</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>lifestyle appointments with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>all fantasies at the flick of a switch.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Be thrilled with 96 kilometres of car park.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Pump up in the member only gymnasium.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Purge your pores in the private health spa.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Unwind with life-like friends in the grand café.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Or avoid all human touch in your personal air-conditioned bubble.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Indulge endlessly at the fine dining venues.</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>New Park Tower and rise above your friends.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>This is modern living.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>To vie for this superior transformation</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>throw yourself into Paris Lakes today.</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Fulfillment is never enough.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5.7 Paris Lakes - second page of narration with estimated timing
Paris Lakes was made part-time on a fragmented open-ended timeline. The film’s progress fitted in and around the limitations guided by work and family commitments allowing for late nights and weekends to chip away one scene at a time. The effects of dedicating time for writing and animating in the recesses around
employment and family commitments and personal ebbs and flows isn’t filling chapters in books on writing and animation. The discourse on writing conditions and environments focusses on the writer's tools-of-trade. Sometimes it ventures into managing creative phases and workflows, conquering blank pages, discussing and censuring habits and routines such as dictating when it is best to write; early morning or after having a glass of wine at night? Jeffrey Scott meets this matter with suspicion. “I’ve been practicing my entire career. So you are free to believe you can only get good ideas after deep breathing and yoga, or after sex, or whenever, but you're only going to limit your creativity.” 99

Sometimes the remit of the discussion extends to the working qualities of the writer, identifying the manner of the struggling writer who McKee defines as someone “dreams up an idea, noodles on it for a while then rushes straight to the keyboard.” 100 McKee states that, a confident writer should “create far more material than he can use, then destroy it.” 101 This contrasts with Scott's position to not spend too much time rewriting material “over and over.” 102 He prefers to write many different scripts than keep on reworking the same one. Continuing with the divergent views, McKee expects the writer to achieve “five to ten pages a day.” 103 For Scott it’s “five pages an hour.” 104 Instructional books have a role to prescribe methods, but the opinions and advice could be tempered with not only writing what writers should do but by observing and writing accounts of what writers actually do to demonstrate the variation of different conditions of working. Novelist and screenwriter Elmore Leonard wrote nine hours a day with

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100 McKee, *Story*. 410.
101 Ibid. 413.
104 Scott, *How to Write for Animation*. 192.
little interruption as he felt that if a day goes by without having done anything it is
difficult to “get back to the rhythm of it.” 105 Leonard didn't start by adhering to a
structure and by mapping out any plots. He began with a character, put it in a situation,
began writing and then, “one thing leads to another”. 106

Making *Paris Lakes* in short fragmented spurts of activity provided conditions
to circumvent making multiple storyboards and animatics. Trying to pick up the thread
after each suspension of production was not always easy, but it needed to keep moving
with whatever time was available. The approach involved slicing the voice-over into
free-standing scenes, then designing, animating and colouring one scene at a time,
mostly in order of the voice over. It meant that in one short bracket of production time,
a whole scene could be completed. The rhythm of working was contained to this
method. When one scene was finished, a reference was made to the scrappy draft
storyboard as either the plan for the scene or as a provocation to come up with an
alternative. Similar to the making of *Lucky for Some*, the interval between scenes and
the response to each completed scene informed what followed and this subsequently
reshaped the narrative.

The final setting, writing and timing of action was detailed in the layout, scene
by scene. This method does not concur with the staged order of animation production
under commercial observance nor does it attempt to use the “tactics of temporal and
spatial cohesion” 107 sought by the traditions of the tripartite structured storytelling.
This does not mean that the method was ill-considered or without practical benefit.

Guild Theatre, Beverley Hills, USA. 4.
106 Ibid. 6.
107 Blumenberg, "Cohesion and Fragmentation in Narrative Screenwriting: A
Prolegomenon toward Perceiving Alternative and Non-Classical Approaches." 61.
Designing the layout and animating sequentially from scene to scene developed the visual narrative and created its own order in a reactive way that contributed to further editing. In the first rough cut, some scenes were trimmed to better serve the flow of the images and this resulted in the final pictures running shorter than the voice over. The body rising to the surface in the lake (Fig. 5.9) was the final shot in the first cut but was later moved to scene 6 at the 44-second mark to time with the first mention in the voice over of the phrase ‘Paris Lakes’. This move created a gap at the end and triggered a rethink of what the final scene should be. I went back to some housing references and decided upon a more positive image than the derisive scene of body in a lake. A scene of a girl jumping on a trampoline in the front yard with Dad watching from a window was animated and put in place. (Fig. 29).

![Fig. 5.9 Paris Lakes- final scene in first edit](image_url)
Fig. 5.10 Paris Lakes- penultimate scene in final edit

Once this new ending was cut in, I felt the story needed some other kind of quieter space but with elements collected from previous scenes, not so much a last act, or conclusion to a non-existent plot, but a pictographic epilogue or postscript. Reflecting on how the film came together at that point, it looks chaotic and messy. Should a practitioner invest in a film without knowing how it will end? Making the ending was a final emotive response to the changing urban landscape. I didn't have a reference image, but wanted to get a wide view, to show the whole landscape. I ended up drawing an aerial view or map of ‘Paris Lakes’ that, as a rough sketch, looked like a pizza (Fig. 5.11). Although it was not intended to have a meta-message, its messy network bears some similarity to the film's wayward development as if it were drawn like a mind map. It’s a pizza of sorts, with the narratives’ ingredients thrown together hopefully to provide a united form and flavour. The closing of the pizza box was one way of identifying the end of the story, like closing a book’s last page. The misplaced French salutation, “Bon Appetit” on the lid (Fig. 5.12) is the final paradox, and was intended to match the ridiculous translations of the houses catalogued with French names and the cheap, duplicitous words of the voice over. (Fig. 5.13- 5.14).
Compared with multiple drafting and re-working scenes, the production progressed more rapidly by making design and narrative decisions whilst drawing the layout and in the act of animating. Like Run Wrake, I was keen to just get on with animating.
On balance, the satirical and absurd visuals, the deceptive optimism of the euphonic voice over and the uneasy feeling from the aural landscape created a confluence of activity that shaped each scene into its own discrete article. Acting on ideas shifted from scene to scene with various flaws left in place. Whilst the whole picture wasn't always resolved in the planning or throughout the production phase, the final narrative has an ordered unity despite these conditions.

Fig. 5.13 Paris Lakes- Misère de Classe Moyenne (middle class misery)

Fig. 5.14 Paris Lakes- Le Travetissement (the travesty)
CHAPTER 6

Nightlife- Straight Ahead Animation Records the First Draft

“The film began with Koji sketching ideas around a narrative theme. Since the film was made from many episodes I didn’t feel the need to make an all involving storyboard, deciding instead to concentrate on short sections of narrative that could be pieced together in the final edit. In this way, ideas could be produced continuously while the process of animating went on simultaneously. Koji Yamamura”108

It may seem unusual to write a screenplay after the pictures have been made given a common practice is to do the text first, then the pictures. Films translated into different languages use phrase replacement, modify ambiguous gestures and delete inappropriate slang to cater for a different language and culture.109 Does this modification alter the experience of the narrative? Would foreign language films created without a screenplay or translation be more open to greater variation in deciphering and interpretation of the narrative? As discussed in Chapter 1, there have been many films made without traditional text screenplays. Stories and screenplays, as instructions and designs for action can be created with storyboards and schematics. They can also come from audio recordings. In writing the script for World of Tomorrow, animator Don Hertzfeldt assembled audio recordings of his five-year old niece Winona whilst they were playing together. He did not storyboard the film. Animating at a pace of one scene a day he allowed room for “no fuss” spontaneity and immediacy working on the design

108 Selby, Animation in Process. 27.
“from the ground up”. The recorded and edited audio supplied the dialogue script, and the action in the script was decided at the inception of animating.

Using hands-on drawing and animating, William Kentridge similarly identifies with writing of ideas in-the-moment. The physical action that takes place in between taking exposures, walking around and thinking about the next step, informs what will take place in the narrative. Sometimes the mark on the paper will suggest a new idea to act upon immediately and sometimes the idea will be applied later in the film. This identifies that notes and instructions for images, transition and action are retained as a transitory plan for future use. Kentridge arrives at the narrative through intimate and personally felt action through drawing, ruminating and animating, with the final result open for the viewer to translate.

Similarly, Nightlife began as a personal response to insomnia with the idea to jump straight to animation without a screenplay or storyboard. The technique involves animating directly by drawing into sand that is on a flat backlit surface. The density of applied sand created the tone. Each image drawn into the sand is altered frame by frame and each shot is destroyed at its conclusion. The narrative was unpredictable, and so were the animated images that were to convey it.

Initially each scene simply started with what came to mind at the commencement of each shot. The narrative revealed itself in the making through the progression of the animation. New ideas and augmentations were implemented in the frame with each scene informing the one that preceded it. There were not any

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identifiable middle or end points. With this kind of uncertainty, the end came when it looked like the job was done and the narrative was told.

The production was unscheduled making progress as uncertain as the images created on any day of animating. Something so unplanned and uncertain can be described as chaotic, non-procedural, and perhaps unprofessional but what does the chaos and wayward method show in the finished film? How does the method of making it up as you go impact on the viewer’s response to the narrative? The narrative method and sand technique resembled the fragile and uncertain state of not knowing when you will fall asleep, or for how long. The fragility and volatility of the materials suited the loss of control, being unable to switch off to sleep. Trying to sleep without success is like a sky diver jumping without a parachute where all you can do is change your body position (Fig. 6.1). The night passes by, negotiating a battle in the mind, tossing about, getting up, drinking tea, watching TV listening to the radio all without any feeling of satisfaction, not ever knowing how the night will fare except that it will end.

Whilst animating each shot it was difficult to judge the effectiveness and clarity of the action until the video playback gave evidence of its effectiveness. If the image and action was clear enough to be read and understood in the context of the whole scene, then it was satisfactory and time to finish it and move on to the next scene.

The practice of animating a scene all the way through to see if it works is a common practice in animation. A drawing or a position in stop-motion part way through an action can be difficult to judge insofar as its position and timing in the continuum. When the action is completely played out, it is much easier to identify shapes and measures that need adjusting or deleting.
Fig. 6.1 *Nightlife*- sequence.
No method of writing narrative comes with a guarantee of non-taxing cohesion and harmony, and with this method, there is potential for diegetic disorientation by committing straight to production without the fragments of scenes and actions in a prescribed place with predetermined plot points. However, the consequence of materials, the picture and sound, realign the narrative so that it achieves its own rationality.\textsuperscript{112} Apart from re-shooting the title and trimming the heads and tails of each shot, there was not any further refinement in the completed action. The sound design, as with \textit{Lucky for Some}, contains a narrative of its own with its sophisticated layering and effecting that coalesces with the animation to make the story and the subject matter more greatly felt.

The result of this project is a completed film that bypassed a text screenplay, storyboard, design templates and schedule. \textit{Nightlife} was made with immediacy, developing the narrative from scene to scene. Although the text screenplay is absent it can be commented on as though one does exist in the context of its final form. Without a written screenplay, what exists in \textit{Nightlife} is the script, the materials and the animated action executed with the same stroke.

\textsuperscript{112} Blumenberg, "Cohesion and Fragmentation in Narrative Screenwriting: A Prolegomenon toward Perceiving Alternative and Non-Classical Approaches." 5.
Chapter 7

_The Lester Chiselbean Experience - Straight Ahead Storyboarding and Uncertainty Exposes the Narrative to New and Stock Standard Ideas._

“When I draw, I get sucked into the scene, so when I’m sucked into the scene I start to visualize other opportunities.” Ridley Scott 113

This project takes an idea expressed in a rudimentary outline to a rough draft storyboard. A second outline is written in response to the storyboard. It is difficult to nail down the exact starting point for any animation project- a day dream, a newspaper article, a story overheard, a simple observation or a concoction from many things. For this component of the project, its development was comprised from a combination of reading articles about exploration of Mars, Virgin Atlantic’s passenger space-liner ‘Galactic’ and remembering films and books that involved crackpot invention and misadventure such as Richard Lester’s 1963 comedy, _The Mouse in the Moon_, Blake Edwards’s film _The Great Race_ (1965) and Ken Hughes’s film _Chitty Chitty Bang Bang_ (1968). Each film shows the follies of invention by dreamy and aspiring bucket engineers and wishful visionaries in competition with the experts. Whilst there is an objective in the plot for the characters to chase down, the greater objective is adventure for adventure’s sake and the risible effect of the absurd.

For this project there were a number of false starts with casual doodles, rough sketches of character prototypes and notes of possible plots. The intention was an exercise in attempting to conceive a narrative without the main character having a clear

external objective. This can be difficult to avoid in writing narrative. The view was similar to that of someone swimming the English Channel. The objective may be to reach the other side, but that can be done in a boat. The real objective is adventure and to find out something about oneself - something internal. What follows is the defective thumbnail outline, written as a haphazard prologue.

“Lester Chiselbean is a 15 or 16 year-old, very small for his age and lives in a small town in far north Queensland in a dilapidated house set in the jungle. He left school early because he is sick of being teased and beaten up by the school jocks (maybe he just hates school, bored with it, school leaver with traineeship, crap job). His parents are bucket scientists with a track record of failure but clumsily invent a radar made out of junk. They believe that it receives signals from life on Mars. No-one believes them, except Lester.

There is a space race between two private companies to reach Mars first and develop it as real estate to sell off to various governments. Far North Queensland is the location for these two companies to take advantage of the orbital speed for launching close to the equator (check that this is true/does it matter?). Lester works at one of the companies, ZedJet, as a bottle-washing lab assistant for the lab that is using animals, monkeys, dogs and rats for test pilots and plans to send its first rocket with monkeys and rats. The animals would be left there to die and then dissected later for tests. Their rivals are sending a rocket with robots who are assigned to kill anything that moves. Lester believes his parents claims and goes on an adventure to meet the Martians and warn them about the invasion from Earth. He steals (or stows away) on the rocket. The Martians live underground. Lester wants to escape his own world, and go on an adventure, and defend his klutzy parents (bring them home? Live with them on Mars?) Is it funny or just stupid?”
The outline contains a paradoxical idea that Lester goes off to save Mars from invasion, but then he and his parents are also invaders. Human invasion, whether as subjugators or as saviours, might be unstoppable and this theme remained as a guide.

The story outline is an orthodox practice to get the screenwriting underway. Such orthodoxy would follow with a revised story outline, rough conceptual sketches, a treatment, a screenplay and a storyboard in response to the screenplay and all steps with various revisions. However, going with this sketchy, somewhat derivative and conventional idea, the next step taken was to start storyboarding, to see what, if any, invention or narrative development might come along by drawing from one panel to the next.

Pixar cycle from script to storyboard and back to script updating each one from draft to draft. Enrico Casarosa, a storyboard artist for *Ratatouille* (2007), described the method as re-writing and re-boarding. On previous films he was instructed to visualise the script, but on this occasion he commenced from a synopsis and early forms of the script. When recounting storyboarding for *The Incredibles* (2004), Brad Bird scripted some scenes in text to completion if he was lucid on what the narrative required. Other times he would rely on storyboarding in a collaborative setting. Bird claimed, “If you just pin it down to writing, your limiting it too much.”

For *The Lester Chiselbean Experience*, a roughed out straight-ahead storyboard from the draft outline was the result as method to get ideas down readily (Fig. 7.1 – 7.8). A place, an event, or an action came to mind, then drawn, which triggered an idea for

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114 Brad Bird, *Ratatouille* (Burbank, CA, USA: E02020 Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
116 Brad Bird, *The Incredibles (Deleted Scenes)* (USA: Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.
the next with some minor re-working along the way. Occasionally, something was crossed out or modified in the frame, but the aim was to get a storyboard of the whole film in place before considering any major re-working. The effect is a release from a responsibility to solve all the problems that presented themselves—just keep moving and ensure was the narrative was built through pictures and resist the temptation to branch off with descriptive text. To read the following storyboard extract, read top to bottom, then right to left.

Fig. 7.1 *Lester Chiselbean Experience*- storyboard extract (1)
Fig 7.2 Lester Chiselbean Experience- storyboard extract (2)

Fig. 7.3 Lester Chiselbean Experience- storyboard extract (3)
Fig. 7.4 Lester Chiselbean Experience - storyboard extract (4)

Fig. 7.5 Lester Chiselbean Experience - storyboard extract (5)
Fig. 7.6 Lester Chiselbean Experience - storyboard extract (6)

Fig. 7.7 Lester Chiselbean Experience - storyboard extract (7)
There have been many studies regarding the literacy development of children in primary schools by examining the positive effect on writing by drawing first.  

Dyson’s two-year case study of primary school children presented the benefits of drawing and social interaction as an integral part of story creation. There are findings that drawing is effective in rehearsing, testing and integrating ideas before writing begins. Mind mapping and visual writing have become utilized by those in preparation across a range of disciplines seeking to find clarity on the goals and flows of a project where the writing becomes difficult or lost in the process. These exercises help

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the writer bring together disparate properties and attune to where the writing may be leading as its shape reveals itself.120

When Terry Gilliam storyboards, he changes the script when he finds new ideas coming out of what he describes as the “business of drawing.”121 He has a reactive interchange with the images as he sketches them. Ridley Scott believes that the storyboard provides the first draft of the film.122 If storyboarding has the capacity to initiate ideas that text cannot, then it can be used to create the narrative’s first inscription and not only act as a visualization of the screenplay.

Gilliam mentions that a storyboard should be a dynamic document that can change further in production. It can be a danger to lock into, but if no further ideas come to hand there is a narrative that will show what cuts together. Not all live-action practitioners are comfortable with this, believing that a storyboard locks them in too early into a particular look. Michael Chapman, cinematographer for *Taxi Driver* (1976), contradictorily describes the problem of being anchored to storyboards but also how they can work as a good starting point for discussion with the director.

“To me, real storyboards are the death of the movies. You might as well just publish them and forget the movie. Scorsese drew his storyboards for *Taxi Driver* as a rough thing for the two of us to work from, and they're a good example of what storyboards should accomplish - act as suggestions, give you the minimum you need to shoot the scene. But you should be able to go from there, where the scene leads you; if an actor makes some gesture, you should be

122 Scott, "The Art of Storyboarding with Ridley Scott."
able to go with it - not be trapped by the storyboard. That's why it's good if the storyboard is sketchy.\textsuperscript{123}.

The storyboard for \textit{The Lester Chiselbean Experience} amounted to 1406 panels created in notebooks with printed 5.6cm x 4.25cm frames. The line work was done in ink, without pencil roughs, so that the commitment to paper was immediate. There are some frames that were crossed out and reworked into the next frame, but nothing was erased. As anticipated, the storyboarding created some departures from the narrative in the initial outline, including:

- There is no background regarding Lester's school bullying;
- Initially, Lester does not believe his parents invention works;
- Mars is replaced with a fictional planet called Oatis, located close to Earth, but was hidden, seemingly invisible, due to its planar shape and mysterious orbit. The name Oatis is derived from oats used for porridge which is a frivolous link to what is termed as the Goldilocks Zone, an area that is close enough to the sun to be habitable.
- He does not travel to Oatis to save his parents, but only to help them defend the inhabitants from further invasion.
- The inhabitants on Oatis look like rats on Earth and they visit Earth regularly.
- The underground world is the opposite to the surface. It is lush and verdant.
- The company Lester works for goes bust, but their rivals survive.
- At the end Lester deflects the invasion and returns home, but their rivals from Earth prepare to invade again.

There were times when the narrative was drawn into a dead-end. At that point there was either resistance to spontaneity or stimulus from the outgoing scene. It failed to trigger the next thought. These moments led to a period of an extended pause until the next action or scene arrived. Faced with uncertainty, hackneyed ideas comprising stereotypical events and actions were contrived to keep the project moving. There is an inventory of story pathways that are well-established and drawn upon. For example, a story thread in this project is erratically and unintentionally aligned with the narrative pattern that Joseph Campbell delineates in the chapter, ‘The Adventure of the Hero’ in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Lester departs from home, goes on a quest and returns home with new knowledge. However, it’s conclusion does not line up with Campbell’s notion of the hero returning with a “boon” to restore the world.\(^{124}\) Lester returns to the world in a state of flux indicating the story may continue after the film is finished.

Although one objective was to make the storyboard with quick unconstrained thought and action from frame to frame, there were interruptions and pauses. This study does not cover the efficacy of taking breaks or passive interludes as a relative measure, as this is likely to be idiosyncratic to the each and every writer and drawer. In this project, interruptions and delays provided both periods of frustration and resolution. It allowed more time for evaluation of the work to be done in-process and to re-navigate. Editing was done during the thinking, selecting and omitting ideas as they came to hand and long intervals allowed for the ideas to be tossed around and trialled in thought and sporadically discussed with others. This conflicts with the initial idea of maintaining a spontaneous spirit, especially if spontaneity is defined as working without any prompts.

In this case, internal and external deliberation from the interludes, and the eventual commitment to drawing each panel did provide a prompt for the next panel.

The resulting narrative has some cohesion and consistent internal logic, but the action moves along as though there are no moments of characters pausing to think and exist in between the events and situations. What looks absent are scenes of nothingness, silence and cutting away. The technique of quickly drawing to keep the world moving along drove the idea that whenever there is a new storyboard panel it must have either action or dialogue. The result is excessively character centric. The narrative is only interested in what happens to the main characters and does not expand on the shape of the world, the properties of the environment. The dampness of the Australian tropics or the breeze that blows in subterranean Oatis is not intimated or felt. Reviewing the storyboard made this lack of slowness and silence and the pre-occupation with action obvious. Of course this can be addressed in subsequent drafts, but it is of interest that the instincts in working in this way directed the hand to commit to action, to compress time, rather than include time for slowness, natural space and quietude. The storyboarding ended when the narrative funneled to a conclusion of some kind with some character objectives met. It seemed logical that once Lester returned to Earth the story was unfinished, but the adventure was over.

The aim for film length was between seventy and ninety minutes, but as a storyboard only, the way to measure this with some accuracy is by making a timed animatic. It could be argued that writing a text-based screenplay would reveal its length, but measures in text for animation are not always certain. An orthodox screenwriter’s dictum measures text screenplays at one minute per page, but with animation there is often greater variation. Jeffrey Scott states that animation scripts for television are twenty seconds shorter per page than live action scripts because animation scripts
include more detail in the description of the action to the point that the writer becomes the director. He states that most storyboard artists just translate words into images and “a writer can never be certain that a board person will see the visuals or interpret the action or comedic timing correctly.”¹²⁵ So the writer has to put all the tone and screen direction in there. Oddly, in Scott’s view, and without explanation, feature animation writing remains at one minute per page. In contrast, John Kricfalusi asserts that animation screenplays should be two minutes per page, by keeping the descriptions short. “Animation scripts are always too long and storyboard artists have to draw hundreds of extra scenes just to have them cut out by the studio when they figure out that the show is too long.”¹²⁶

Both Scott and Kricfalusi have worked as writers and creators for commercial animated television and web series and this disparity of opinion may illustrate the differing method and expectations of Scott as the text-only screenwriter and Kricfalusi as the animator, director and writer. The text-only writer is nervous about the storyboard artist not delivering what is required and the animator-writer wants to leave directing to the storyboarding.

The storyboard for the *Lester Chiselbean Experience* is the primary script and the result is a wayward concoction of farce and whimsy. With an objective to keep the process moving in a straight-ahead fashion there is evidence of narrative invention, but also visible, from occasions of uncertainty is the unmistakable reliance on convention.

**Conclusion**

The productions in this research project used stop motion puppets, digital 2D, sand and storyboard and in simple terms observed different subject matter: gambling, urban sprawl, insomnia and adventure. Despite the differences in subject matter and technique, the writing of the narrative in these projects shared some common results: -

- Screenplay was not the only instrument for making narrative for animation.
- Pre-production and production activity such as, storyboarding, model making and animating were used as a means to make narrative or create change in the course of existing narrative.
- Narratives were invented or altered by reaction to preceding elements made in the pre-production, animating and editing.
- The impact of the narratives was modified by contributors of production elements such as audio and performance. The effect was a dual narrative of sound and picture. Sound consolidated the overall story whilst carrying its own narrative.
- The narratives were created reactively which meant the final narrative result was uncertain until all on screen elements were completed.
- Timelines were interrupted, at times disorganised and fragmented allowing for review and repair.
- There was a proclivity to draw upon trite ideas when writing progress stalled.
- The solo animator, as writer and director, who takes on multiple production tasks, utilises the multifaceted inputs and processes through continuous review and adjustment. This adds to the sum of the finished narrative.
Chaos has been defined as “formless, disorder and utter confusion”\textsuperscript{127} and it is true that all of these productions have been faced with this definition due to overreaching, doubt, confusion and disorganisation. However, what appears more relevant is where chaos is defined in the sphere of physics as “changes in a system due to being highly sensitive to small changes in conditions.”\textsuperscript{128} If we approach narrative with this in mind it empowers the author to be open to changes outside a predictive control. The development of the narrative moves forward using whatever starting point or materials and is impacted by changing conditions. Perhaps the discourse around writing narrative for animation can not only be about utilizing predetermined beacons to guide us, but be ready to re-navigate on open territory with live interaction of the elements as they arrive. It is clear that narrative for animation is impacted by the role the author undertakes in setting their objectives and approach, but also is affected by the intrinsic motivators, behaviours, conventions and changing conditions of a creative working environment. Not all will agree.

It is understandable to look at nature for cause and effect, to measure how and why it changes and to try to control it. However, nature is dynamic, fragmented, chaotic and not always predictable. The folly of the scientist is to provide an explanation of nature by reducing it to its most basic components and to posit that an understanding can be achieved by fitting these components back together like a jigsaw puzzle.\textsuperscript{129} A similar disconnection with nature occurs when trying to concoct an understanding of the narrative by treating it like a machine that is pulled apart to get the intelligence on how

it works when its constituents have arisen in an unpredictable manner. Locking into the
effects of Aristotle’s ‘Poetics’ and Campbell’s ‘Monomyth’, the rules of the writers
playground\textsuperscript{130} or rules feigned as principles, \textsuperscript{131} can corral the writer into repetitious
construction. Perhaps an uncertain artist with a desire for spontaneity and invention can
be ensnared into a similar stockade as they seek conventions to react against.

Authors of narrative instruction may be sincere in their evaluation and advice,
but whenever they record an interview with an animator, storyboard artist or
screenwriter, there is often a clear conflict of deduction. It is this conflict that needs to
be core to the discourse of writing narrative for animation. Books like \textit{Story} offer
helpful jump-start advice for the novice to help them avoid a farrago of structure and
ideas- but when taken as rule-making, they are myopic. \textit{Ideas for the Animated Short}
contains interviews with practitioners that demonstrate varied ways of working with
contradictions to the rules, whereas \textit{Story} breaks down examples of screenwriting
without interviews with practitioners. It appears as though McKee is primarily
dedicated to a measured narrative configuration than the creative variability that
consumes the writer.

Curiously, in reference to writers being dialectical thinkers, McKee quotes from
Jean Cocteau, “The spirit of creation is the spirit of contradiction – the breakthrough of
appearances towards an unknown reality.” \textsuperscript{132} Cocteau also said that art is the marriage
of the conscious and unconscious and questioned whether genius is an “at present un-
discovered form of memory.”\textsuperscript{133} This coalesces the act of planning and doing with
whatever nature brings to the sum. Authors of these screenwriting aids need to base

\textsuperscript{130} Sullivan, \textit{Ideas for the Animated Short : Finding and Building Stories}. 31
\textsuperscript{131} McKee, \textit{Story}. 3.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. 177.
\textsuperscript{133} William Fifield, "Jean Cocteau, the Art of Fiction No.34," 1963 1964. 5.
their postulations not only from an external viewpoint, but from the mysteries, inconsistencies, chaotic and contradictory forces of nature encountered by the practitioner.

Popular resources for teaching how to write narrative for animation and filmmaking have often been driven by rhetoric purporting to underscore all storytelling. Writing lists of story-making regulations with ecclesiastical admiration may raise the spirits of the past, however it is an idealized view of reality. In reality the writer, the animator and the director is reactive to the writing environment and the implementation of varied methodologies where uncertainty can’t be avoided and chance plays a part. Uncertainties can lead to applied spontaneity or a proclivity for well-worn narrative attributes. However, well-intended planning affected by shifting goals, interruptions, doubts and inputs borne through partnerships and collaborations is highly influential in the final result.

Writing a screenplay for animation in a time fragmented practice will benefit from applying multiple and overlapping methods and seeing what comes to light out of the act of doing. Working this way takes advantage of conscious and unconscious idea formation, effects of chaos through play, review and renewal through fragmentation and interruption. It utilises the more direct conscious configuration of narrative patterning and referencing.

Some final points for consideration. Writing a conventional screenplay is not mandatorily required when working solo. Drawing straight-ahead, loose diagrams and doodling can be generated at the first stage, even resulting as first draft of the film. A storyboard combined with a shot list can be enough to work directly into the film given that the narrative is open to further alteration.
A commercial production company is likely to uphold the traditional screenplay format as the global creative document that its team can share. Even so, the screenplay on its own is not likely to suffice the requirements to go into further development towards production. According to Screen Australia’s ‘Terms of Trade’, a conventionally prepared screenplay is a requirement when applying for investment in script development. However, they request that the director convey the visual style and clearly express their approach to design, camera and editing which are functions that are effectively expressed with a storyboard and other visuals. Additionally, they require notes outlining their choices on sound and score. They posit that submissions need to move “beyond the scope of writer’s notes” and that these additional documents on vision and sound are of “increasing relevance as a script nears completion.” In other words, they acknowledge that writing the narrative continues outside the capacity of a screenplay. They require the director to work through the uncertainty of the screenplay by applying multiple approaches to visualizing and hearing the narrative. They must show evidence of development by being flexible and reactive and not by locking into a solitary and limited mode of narrative composition.

135 Ibid.
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