

Proposed question for Independent Inquiry: “How
Does Narrative Psychology Impact on Illustration and
Concept Art?”

Keywords: Characterisation, Symbolism, Space

Student Number: 1801394

BA Course: Illustration

Word Count: 2440

Tutors Name: Louise Burston

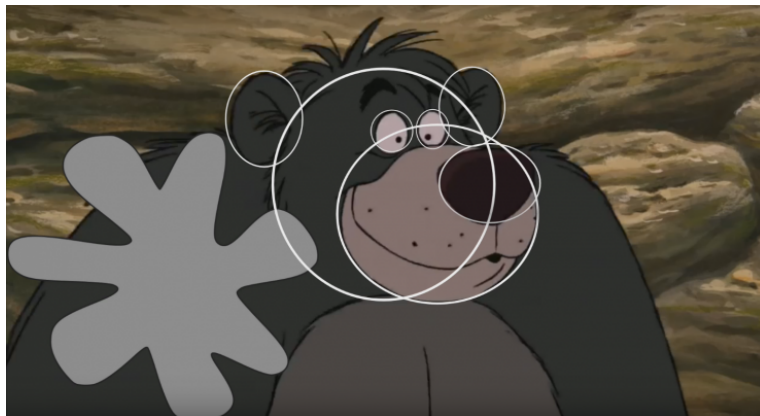
In this proposal, I will be exploring narrative within the context of concept art. The use of this technique is important during the design process as it allows to convey further information to the viewer. Due to this I have decided to discuss three areas in which you can apply narrative thinking within concept art. These areas include *characterisation*, *symbolism*, and *space*.

1. Characterisation

There are many ways to apply narrative thinking in concept art. One way is to consider the use of shapes within the character itself. According to an article from the Daily Mail, “The reason why cinematographers create characters with different shapes is because our brain link shapes with certain meanings” (Liberatore, 2016). As such considering the use of shapes allows more information to be conveyed to the viewer through visual cues. These simple forms can convey traits such as good or evil, strong, or weak and more. Illustrator Bryan Tillman, states that “Depending on what shapes you use, you might be telling a different story with your character designs than you think you are” (Tillman, 2011). Therefore, it is important to consider exactly which you use to ensure what you want to be portrayed can reach the viewer accurately. Shapes have psychological meanings behind them and represent many different things, like colours they can express various traits and emotions. There are three main shapes often used in character design and these are circles, squares, and triangles.

Circles represent a myriad of meanings. Physically they are a never-ending shape, and that physicality often symbolises “completeness”, “balance” and “endlessness” (Renee, 2016) like wedding rings and the yin and yang symbol. Furthermore, we can even make connections of curves and rounded things from nature such as flowers, planets, stars, the curves of a human

body and even pregnancies (Renee, 2016). Due to these circles represent 'soft, nonthreatening and natural' (Renee, 2016). Circular characters are often seen as good beings, those who are "appealing, cute and cuddly" according to Tom Bancroft, a Disney animator. (Bancroft, 2006). Characters who are made with circles often portray a sense of joy and happiness. An example of this character design is Baloo from 'The Jungle Book'.



Jack Nugent (2016) Now You See It. [Online image] Available from:

<https://nofilmschool.com/2016/10/how-cinematographers-use-geometric-shapes-tell-stories-visuals>

As seen in the image above Baloo is made with a myriad of circles from head to toe. This portrays a lively and jolly character.

Squares are then often conveyed as characters who are dependable, masculine, and strong (Tillman, 2011). Often you find these characters have broad square like shoulders portraying a sense of strength and power. Sturdy shapes give a sense of reliability, they won't change or warp and so these character traits are conveyed when applied. Squares are the opposite of circles and according to 'nofilmsschool.com' most often represents the 'unnatural or

manmade' (Renee, 2016). This is because unlike circles there are very few rectangular things that appear in nature. Physically a square has equal sides and so because of this it portrays stability and even old fashion. An example of the use of squares within a character is Superman.



Martina Pastrello, Superman PNG. [online image] Available from:

https://www.pngitem.com/middle/iimbih_transparent-superman-cartoon-png-superman-clipart-png-download/

As seen in the top image Superman's face and body resemble that of a square and rectangle, he is a reliable and strong superhero. Due to this character's traits they needed to ensure his strength and power was portrayed accurately thus making his design square-like.

Triangles, however, are the opposite, they portray a sense of danger. Physically, they are spiked at each corner and so because of their "Pointy-ness" they "elicit fear, distrust and suspicion" (Renee, 2016). Furthermore, triangles often portray aggression, sneakiness,

conflict, and tension (Tillman, 2011). Due to our human nature in which we know pointy objects like knives are dangerous, one would not want to trust a character designed with sharp angles. Villains in animated movies will almost always have “plenty of points and angles with very few rounded edges” (Renee, 2016). An example of this is the villain Jafar from ‘Aladdin’.



Walt Disney Pictures (2019) Jafar Aladdin. [Online image] Available from:

<https://collider.com/best-disney-villains/>

From the above image you can see that Jafar is riddled with triangular points and angles. This includes his facial shape, features such as the eyebrows, nose, and mouth. Even his torso tapers and is triangular along with his shoulder pads. Looking within his pet parrot, you can also see his beak tapers to a point. This character’s personality trait is evil and sneaky and so it is further conveyed through the pointed shapes used within his character.

Shapes do not necessarily need to be portrayed through the entire body alone, they can appear as hints through clothing, hair, props, make-up and more. In addition, combining

shapes will allow the portrayal of a variety of character traits. This is portrayed though more recent animated movies such as the character Maui from 'Moana'.



Walt Disney Pictures (2016) Moana and Maui exult over his new fishing hook. [Online image] Available from: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/11/22/13713820/moana-review-disney-dwayne-johnson-lin-manuel-miranda>

Maui's character includes all three shapes, a square like body to show power and strength, a circular head for his lovable and lively trait and finally the weapon he carries tapers to a point and is triangular. This combination shows that although he is a powerful being he is a good character with good morals. Furthermore, his body shape and weapon show that he is a fighter, a fighter of justice.

Concept artists also need to consider the interaction of characters. As this can allow the contrast between them stand out even further due to the shape they are designed with. An example of this is in the movie 'Up'.



Walt Disney Pictures (2021) Up. [Online image] Available from:

<https://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a36164002/up-original-story-revealed-disney-pixar/>

Russel's character mainly uses round shapes and shows a youthful young boy whereas Carl's character revolves around squares which 'represents the stasis and isolation' (Renee, 2016) Like the layout of a cubicle, there are no surprises, and everything is the same. This high contrast between the two characters allows them both to stand out as there are always conflicts to grab the viewers attention.

2. Symbolism

Symbolism is an important aspect to consider within illustration and concept art. Incorporating this only furthers the information gained by the viewer. There are many different types of symbolism within colour psychology and its use in illustration and concept art. This allows for a more interesting illustration as colours influence the viewers and experience. As stated in 'Effects of Colour and Emotion in Illustration' (Chung-Yun Chen, 2013), it is important to understand symbolic meaning and its emotional and psychological

impact to ensure a successful illustration. Colours are used to enhance an emotional expression or atmosphere and further ensures a more memorable experience which further increases the viewers engagement (Chung-Yun Chen, 2013).

Each colour has its own meaning and set of emotions behind it, however, it is important to understand that not everyone will be triggered by the same colour and its psychological effects and that a colour meaning in one country will not necessarily be the same in a different one (Schacker, 2018).

There are many colours that influence us, warm colours tend to intensify emotions and cool colours calm them down. Starting off with red, this colour is a symbolism for passion, aggression, and affection. Using this colour can represent love, however, can also represent anger (Taste, 2018). Within concept art, the latter is more often used. Red can be used to show a character's anger through adding warm colours to the face to showing their frustration. Red also grabs the attention of the viewer like a stop sign or red traffic light. Orange is also considered a "Strong, energetic colour" (Taste, 2018). Its use evokes energy and enthusiasm and is why many advertisers use this colour. This colour is often linked with sunsets, autumn, and Halloween (Cherry, 2019). Like red and orange, yellow is also a bright and an intense colour and although it appears warm and bright, it can lead to visual fatigue (Cherry, 2020). Yellow is a cheerful colour and can link to "feelings of delight and warmth, much like the sun" (Taste, 2018). This colour is the "epitome of joy, happiness and optimism" and is the colour to use to lift one's spirit. However, it is important to know that exposure to too much yellow can lead to self-esteem issues, fear, and anxiety (Hauff, 2018).

Cool colours are often described as calming colours, but some can also elicit feelings of sadness and indifference (Cherry, 2020). Green is a natural colour found in nature and so it can portray feelings of peace and balance. Green is another colour used to relieve stress and even reflect on life (Hauff, 2018). The colour blue is often found naturally within the sky and ocean. Due to this, it is often described as calm and serene. Blue can also be seen in colder areas and can seem icy, distant, and cold (Cherry, 2020). Blue can also create feelings of sadness, like the saying 'Feeling blue' is used because of the colour's psychological effects (Cherry, 2020). Purple is a colour that evokes creativity, feelings of luxury and even relaxation" (Taste, 2018). It is also a mysterious and spiritual colour, often used in fantasy to portray mystery (Hauff, 2018). Although these colours have a wide variety of meanings with some colours symbolising multiple things, in the right context one will be able to use them to further portray information and emotions.



Devin Elle Kurtz (2020) I Knew You'd Come. [Online image] Available from:

<https://www.devinellekurtz.com/>

An artist who incorporates and considers the use of colour psychology in her work is illustrator Devin Elle Kurtz. From her artwork above, she uses a variety of warm and cool colours. The overall lighting, she has used are combinations of yellows and oranges, from our research it shows us that it may have been used to elicit feelings of energy and warmth, like a warm sunny day. Furthermore, there is a lot of greens used for the plants and overgrown nature. This may have been used to portray peace and balance. Lastly, I can see the use of purples, which may have been used to convey a sense of relaxation and even mystery. What is truly outside that window? and why is the fox waiting by the table? This combination of colours allows for more experience and engagement. It lures the viewer in.

3. Space

When considering a character's personal space, whether it be their home, office, workplace, base, spacecraft, castle, etc Illustrators need to consider the psychological impacts space has on that character (Harrouk, 2020). Space psychology is the interaction between "people and the spaces they inhabit". This includes areas such as layout, scale, colours, lighting, materials used and more. (Harrouk, 2020). A character's home "says a lot about (their) personality and mood" (Divani, 2020). This means that when creating a character's space, one must also consider their personality. What do they use? What does that character do in their spare time? Do they have a cluttered or clean room? "decoration influences (their) moods" (Divani, 2020) and so a girly, frilly character shouldn't have a bedroom filled with gym equipment, that would make no sense in relation to that character's personality. According to 'The Psychological Impacts of Our Habitat', they state that "space and mood are intimately connected" (Divani, 2020) and so that is why illustrators need to apply this psychology to the

characters interior space as it considers their personal characteristics and allow the viewer an in-depth view of who that character is.

Here are a few examples of the connection between space and mood. An open-space interior often symbolises “rest and tranquillity” (Divani, 2020). This type of space would bode well with characters who advocate for meditation and even yoga. This is because the large openness of space ensures less distraction. A complex space signifies a sense of purpose and shows the character overcoming challenges (Divani, 2020). For example, a room filled with books, notepads and paper shows a character who is smart and is currently looking for information, it shows that there is a challenge to be overcome and that is their current goal. Consistency within a space allows for a pleasant and comforting feeling and is also aesthetically pleasing (Divani, 2020). An example would be a themed room such as plants and nature, and thus could incorporate natural colours such as greens and shades of browns. Characters that show consistency within their space can further portray that they are reliable and organised. They don’t just pick up whatever they see, they are able to shop around and find that perfect match. Furthermore, being in that space further brings them closer to nature and so therefore, closer to peace.

Artist and illustrator currently known as Oop4g incorporates this space psychology in her piece below. From the research conducted, that space conforms to the ‘complexity’ space in which it portrays the character overcoming a challenge. As you can see the space itself is filled to the brim with items such as books, baskets and more. Even if you were to take the character ‘Ghostbur’ out, you will still be able to recognise that he was gathering information. This is shown from the piled-up books, lit up candles and its overall ‘up all night’ mood.



Oop4g (2020) Ghostbur Library. [Online image] Available from:

<https://www.redbubble.com/i/art-board-print/Ghostbur-Library-by-oop4g/64265061.TR477>

Another artist that incorporates space psychology is a prop illustrator known as 'Brittnie'. In her artwork below you can see that this space incorporates a 'complex' as well as a 'consistent' type of space. This is because, you can see that the current challenge in the piece is preparing meals and so the illustrator has incorporated a part of the kitchen, dining table and even props such as a cookbooks and food being prepared. The 'consistent' is shown through the theme and her use of the plants decorating the kitchen and dining room. Lastly, the use of the colour green on the walls further adds the consistency of the space.



Brittnie (2021) Cook Book. [Online image] Available from:

<https://www.inprnt.com/gallery/evergreenqveen/cook-book/canvas/>

From the research I have gathered about characterisation, symbolism, and space, I can conclude that there are a variety of ways to incorporate the use of narrative thinking. From considering the use of shapes within characters, use of colour psychology and even space psychology to ensure as much narrative is portrayed through the illustration. Doing this may make an illustration stand out and allow the viewer a more engaging experience, therefore a memorable one. And so, the question I have come up with is “How Does Narrative Psychology Impact on Illustration and Concept Art?”

Bibliography

- Bancroft, T., 2006. Creating Charactes with Personality . In: *Creating Charactes with Personality* . s.l.:Watson-Guptill, p. 34.
- Cherry, K., 2019. *The Color Psychology of Orange*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-color-psychology-of-orange-2795818>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Cherry, K., 2020. *Color Psychology: Does It Affect How You Feel?*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/color-psychology-2795824>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Cherry, K., 2020. *The Color Psychology of Yellow*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-color-psychology-of-yellow-2795823>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Cherry, K., 2020. *The Color Psychology of Blue*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-color-psychology-of-blue-2795815>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Chung-Yun Chen, D. L. T. C. V. C., 2013. *Effects of Colour and Emotion in Illustration*. Leeds: White Rose.
- Divani, M., 2020. *Show Me Your Home And I Will Tell You Who You Are*. [Online]
Available at: <https://decoholic.org/the-psychology-of-space/>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Harrouk, C., 2020. *Psychology of Space: How Interiors Impact our Behaviour?*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.archdaily.com/936027/psychology-of-space-how-interiors-impact-our-behavior>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Hauff, A., 2018. *The Know It All Guide To Color Psychology In Marketing*. [Online]
Available at: <https://coschedule.com/blog/color-psychology-marketing#blue>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Liberatore, S., 2016. *Why baddies are always triangular and the good guys round*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3833481/Why-baddies-triangular-good-guys-round-Mathematician-reveals-hidden-geometry-hit-films.html>
[Accessed 1 May 2021].
- Renee, V., 2016. *How Cinematographers use Geometric Shapes to Tell Stories with Visuals*. [Online]
Available at: <https://nofilmschool.com/2016/10/how-cinematographers-use-geometric-shapes-tell-stories-visuals>
[Accessed 1 May 2021].
- Schacker, M., 2018. *The Phycology of Colour in Art and Animation*. [Online]
Available at: <https://maxthemutt.com/2018/06/26/the-psychology-of-colour-in-art-and-animation/>
[Accessed 3 May 2021].
- Taste, I. G., 2018. *The science of Colour Explained by Art*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/colors-and-emotions/>
[Accessed 3 May 2020].
- Tillman, B., 2011. Shapes and Sillhouettes. In: *Creative Character Design*. Oxford: Elsevier, p. 73.

Image References:

Jack Nugent (2016) Now You See It. [Online image] Available from:
<https://nofilmschool.com/2016/10/how-cinematographers-use-geometric-shapes-tell-stories-visuals>

Martina Pastrello, Superman PNG. [online image] Available from:
https://www.pngitem.com/middle/iimbih_transparent-superman-cartoon-png-superman-clipart-png-download/

Walt Disney Pictures (2019) Jafar Aladdin. [Online image] Available from:
<https://collider.com/best-disney-villains/>

Walt Disney Pictures (2016) Moana and Maui exult over his new fishing hook. [Online image] Available from: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/11/22/13713820/moana-review-disney-dwayne-johnson-lin-manuel-miranda>

Walt Disney Pictures (2021) Up. [Online image] Available from:
<https://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a36164002/up-original-story-revealed-disney-pixar/>

Devin Elle Kurtz (2020) I Knew You'd Come. [Online image] Available from:
<https://www.devinellekurtz.com/>

Oop4g (2020) Ghostbur Library. [Online image] Available from:
<https://www.redbubble.com/i/art-board-print/Ghostbur-Library-by-oop4g/64265061.TR477>

Brittnie (2021) Cook Book. [Online image] Available from:
<https://www.inprnt.com/gallery/evergreenqveen/cook-book/canvas/>