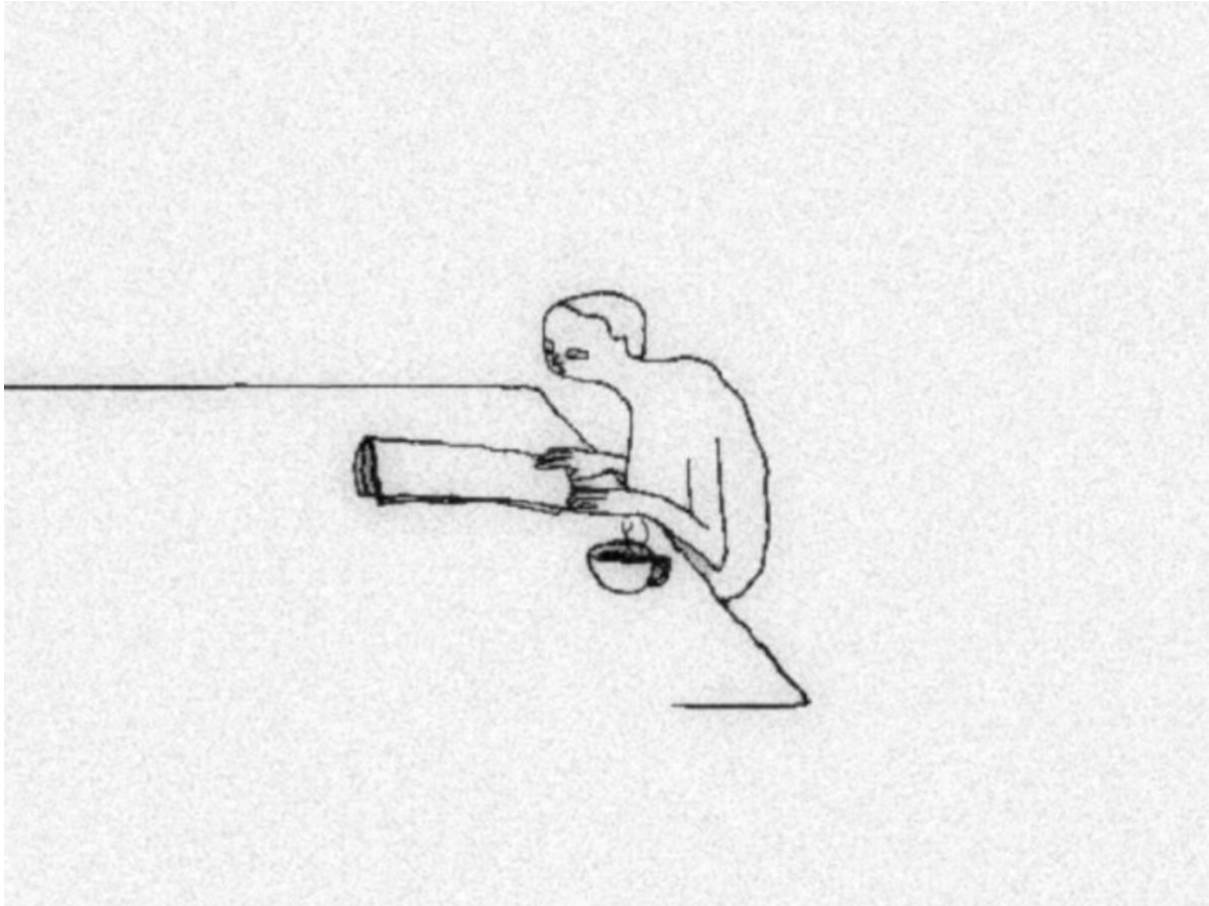


Straight-ahead animation



Video still: the medium is the message, 2004.

Straight-ahead animation is a technique in which the animator creates each frame sequentially, from beginning to end, without first establishing key poses or planning the entire structure in advance (as is done in *pose-to-pose* animation and *inbetweening*). Because of its meandering one step at the time, frame-by-frame nature, straight-ahead animation is inherently open to improvisation, to change and discovery of what each moment holds.

When all you have is the present moment, no defined goal, destination, or preconceived direction, straight-ahead animation can reveal unexpected possibilities embedded in the situation itself. By embracing the open-ended potential of animation as sensorimotor attunement, the animator can uncover "unknown unknowns."

When I was first learning animation, I began with a single drawing: a figure sitting at a table, slouched in an bad posture. That posture likely mirrored my own as I sat hunched over my desk, drawing and animating. The image encapsulated the heaviness I sometimes feel in my own body, particularly in the head, which can, at times, feel too heavy to hold up.

Creating a drawing involves motor output from the sensory system. After, when I look at that drawing, its expression, its lines, it triggers a sensory input. This input evokes a response in my body; I sense, through my whole being, what movement might emerge from that depiction. That movement then leads to the next drawing. Through this frame by frame animation, this ongoing loop of perception and action, a sensorimotor process unfolds, evolving the original image into a one-minute animated narrative.

In the animation, the figure is nervously drinking coffee and reading a newspaper in a public space, perhaps a train station. Environmental sounds repeatedly startle the character, triggering jump scares. I think I was attempting to express a media-critical stance: the character is frightened by the news, by the mediated world. And in the end, it is the newspaper itself that attacks and kills them.

I had probably been reading McLuhan at the time, as I titled the film *The Medium Is the Message*. But now, twenty years later, I see yet another dimension to that message, one embedded not just in the news-medium that the film portrays, but in the medium of straight-ahead animation itself. It is a message about the sensorimotor attunement of a body. Its about how posture and bodily responses becomes understood through the repeated motor action of tracing its posture in a constant dialogue and calibration of the felt inner state. An oscillation between output and input. It's about how heavy a hyperconnected, overstimulated body can feel when exposed to the dense sensory demands of a public space. About how jarring and intrusive external stimuli can be when you have a tendency to drift inward, become absorbed in inner processing and daydreams in order to give grounded response.

As always, artistic action contains so much more knowledge than I could ever consciously account for. But over the time, space, and reflective methodologies that artistic research has given me I have been able to recognize more levels of this experience. It allowed me to situate what emerged from the animation process within wider contexts of learning, teaching and neurodivergence, shedding light on how embodied, sensory experience can inform not just artistic practice but also how to understand and structure knowledge itself.