

# Understanding the Design Space for Animated Narratives Applied to Illustrations

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## INTRODUCTION

Illustrations, as a genre of graphic design, use a visual language to communicate a specific contextualized message. They have been widely designed for integration in digital media such as websites, mobile applications, games, and interactive storytelling in recent years. While creating illustrations, designers have increasingly used to explain an idea, bring stories to life, or convey an emotion.

As an emerging medium, animated illustrations usually present short stories using dynamic visuals, typically lasting less than 15 seconds. Such illustrations can facilitate comprehension and augment engagement, making them appealing to a broader audience. Thus, our work explores the design space for animated narratives applied to illustrations via three complementary methods. We constructed a design space that systematically describes these design patterns, which is informed by coding the object types of the identified animation techniques, combined with the narrative intents served by these animation techniques.

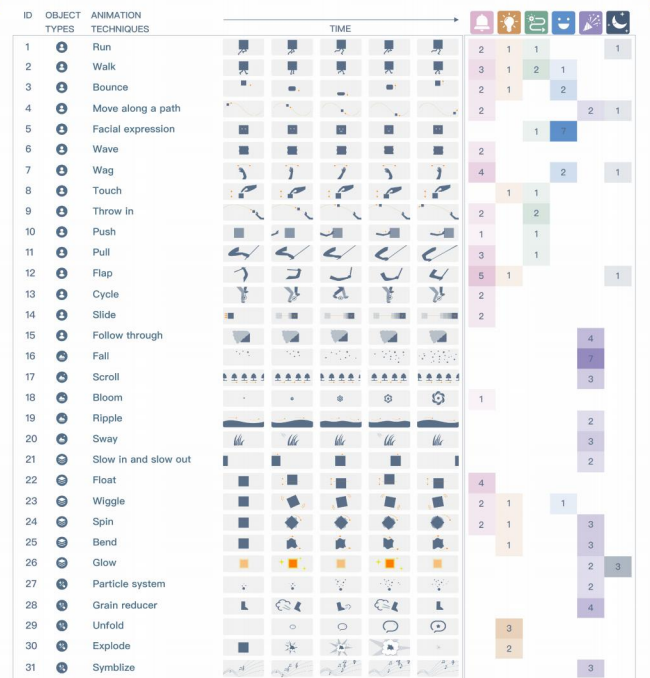
## Design Space: Dimension I - Object Types

- Character**  
The character of an illustration can be a person, creature, animal, plant, or item that performs the actions and speaks dialogue, moving a narrative along its plot.
- Environment**  
Regarding this object type, the environment of an illustration consists of the physical location, weather, or social surroundings of a narrative.
- Embellishments**  
Animation techniques applied to another object type manipulate the embellishments added to a character or the environment, such as props and items, which help build a narrative's mood, plot, and character development.
- Special Effects**  
Last, the special effects of an illustration refer to illusions or visual tricks that simulate the imagined events in a narrative.

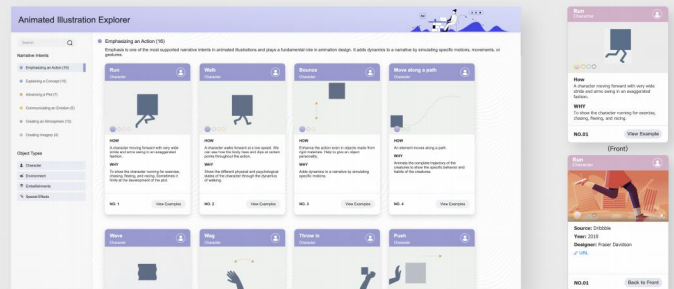
## Design Space: Dimension II - Narrative Intents

- Emphasizing an Action**  
Emphasis is one of the most supported narrative intents in animated illustrations and plays a fundamental role in animation design. It adds dynamics to a narrative by simulating specific motions, movements, or gestures.
- Explaining a Concept**  
Another class in narrative intents is explanation, which pertains to a sequence of actions that used to introduce abstract concepts or complex processes. Such intent is often used for an educational purpose by making abstract concepts emerged from a narrative directly observable.
- Advancing a Plot**  
Advancing a plot is a narrative intent that used to depict the ongoing event and thus trigger the anticipation of consequent events. It is achieved by addressing the relationship between different elements of a narrative and is extensively used in animation design for visual discourse.
- Communicating an Emotion**  
Communicating an emotion constitutes another common narrative intent served by animation techniques applied to illustrations. It is frequently presented through facial expressions, allowing the audience to develop empathy with the character of a narrative.
- Creating an Atmosphere**  
Atmosphere refers to the aura of mood that surrounds a narrative. It is often established through the environment to evoke emotional responses from the audience.
- Creating Imagery**  
Visual imagery uses a metaphorical and symbolic language to formulate or modify attention and perception. Creating animated imagery in illustrations can introduce a novel perspective for the audience to read an illustration and thus improves its memorability.

## DESIGN SPACE



## Animated Illustration Explorer & Method Cards



<https://illustrationexplorer.idvxlabs.com/>

## CONCLUSION

In this work, we proposed a design space for animated narratives applied to illustrations. All of the 121 animated illustrations in our corpus can be described along the two dimensions of our design space: object types and narrative intents. The results of our workshop showed that the design space can be used as a design tool that supports ideation for creating expressive animated illustrations. Also, we considered that our design space can lower the barrier to designing animated illustrations and encourage designers to explore novel ways to communicate visual messages. Future work can include expanding our design space to involve additional dimensions and design patterns, and deploying the proposed design space in long-term animated illustration-making work.

