Embracing Technology

Critical Seminar Fall 2013
MFA Illustration Practice
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"Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'."

-Bob Dylan

Throughout history advances in technology rapidly and drastically changed our ways of living. New jobs were created, but in the same breadth many jobs became obsolete and faded away. Those who adapted were successful, while those who held fast in their old ways were often left behind. This same notion holds true today with rapid innovation on the internet, social media, computers and mobile devices. Technology is changing on a month to month and sometimes a day to day basis, so it can be difficult for businesses and sole proprietors to stay current in their methods and connect with their core audience. Many illustrators are facing this challenge and many are learning to find where they fit in within this technological puzzle.

In 1962 J.C.R. Licklider of MIT created a series of memos called the "Galactic Network", the first known concept of the internet. This in turn influenced the creation of ARPANET, the first computer network created by Lawrence G. Roberts. The scientific success of ARPANET eventually turned into the Internet, a collaboration of a series of independent network of computers that could communicate with each other in a series of different ways. These ideas grew throughout the 1970s in departments of various engineering universities. In the 1980s rapid development of the personals computers (PCs) made the internet a more desired concept for

computer engineers. This internet was still closed off from the public. So throughout the mid to late 1980s government agencies, scholars, and engineers worked to develop policies that would shape the creation of the internet we now know today. In 1995 the word Internet was officially defined and led to the creation of the World Wide Web. Commercial entities realized the power in it, new businesses developed, and there was a new technological boom associated with it. [1] At first the internet and the speed with which things were done on the internet were incredibly slow - limiting the uses to mainly text based information. But each year since the Internet's inception average usage speeds have dramatically increased. Since 1993 small studies have shown each year the average speed of the internet available has nearly doubled each time [2]. Not surprisingly the amount of internet users over that time has skyrocketed as well (Pew Internet). But what do these technological feats and advancements have to do with the business of illustration. Simply put: Illustrators create images. Hiigh quality images in digital form are large files. Large files require faster internet speeds to be usable in a mass market. The internet originally was not suitable for complicated imagery. It took a decade or so for images to make their impact there, and even then most imagery had to be small in size for the majority of the public to view them. Now with technological advances giving users up to GBs per second internet download times, larger images, videos, and other multimedia forms can easily be accessible by the majority of the public. Looking at the studies of increase in traffic and speed, it is easy to assume that the speeds will only increase and the abilities in what the internet can offer creatives will only grow. [3]

The internet is only on part of the canvas - computers, phones, tablets, and ereaders are all devices that have either drastically improved or been created in the last decade. They way people use these devices has changed the way the world works. To the illustrators benefit almost all of these advancements involve the implementation of higher screen resolutions and

[1] Leiner, Barry, Vinton Cerf, David Clark, Robert Kahn, Leonard Kleinrock, David Lynch, Jon Postel, and Lawrence Roberts. "Internet Society." *Brief History of the Internet*. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Dec. 2013. <http://www.internetsociety.org/internet/what-internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet>.

[2] "Internet Speed History." *Cedarville University*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://www.cedarville.edu/Offices/Information-Technology/Internet-Speed-History.aspx>.

[3] Zickuhr, Kathryn, and Aaron Smith. "Digital differences." *Internet adoption over time*. N.p., 13 Apr. 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Digital-differences/Main-Report/Internet-adoption-over-time.aspx>.

more eye catching visuals. More and more businesses have launched and been defined by the Internet that dictate how the modern world works - Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Flickr, etc. Unfortunately with the rise of one thing, usually that means the demise of something else. From 2005-2009 advertising revenues of print newspapers and print magazines declined by a whopping 44% [4]. Not shockingly over the last decade many traditional newspapers and magazines have gone out of business or drastically scaled back the size of their content in print form. While the book industry has not been affected at the same rate, there is still a fall in numbers every year. Since 2009 the rate in print book sales has declined roughly 9% each year.[5] While the percentage has not grown each year, it is still going down. This seems to coincide with the increase of new technology like the IPhone and IPad. Since 2007 there has been a new IPhone developed every year, essentially flooding the market with internet ready, visual communicating devices.[6] In that same span of time a new form of eReader has been developed every year as well. In 2007 Amazon debuted the Kindle, a black and white ereader that simulated the look and feel of printed text and could store thousands of full novels on the device. Since then the IPad, Google Nexus, and Kindle Fire were developed offering tablets that could provide unique touchscreen interfaces that had the power of traditional computers, but the portability of a small book.[7] The possibilities are endless on these devices. So an illustrator has to take into account where their image will be successful. The internet and computer/mobile devices are grabbing the attention of previous print media users more and more every day. What can an illustrator do to stay relevant on these modern modes of technology.

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[4] Heim, Anna. "The decline of traditional media [Infographic]." *TNW Network All Stories RSS*. N.p., 5 Mar. 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://thenextweb.com/media/2012/03/05/the-decline-of-traditional-media-infographic>.

[5] Milliot, Jim. "Rate of Print Decline Flattened in 2012." *PublishersWeekly.com*. N.p., 4 Jan. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/55382-rate-of-print-decline-flattened-in-2012.html>.

[6] Molidor, Brian. "#Infographic: The evolution of the iPhone." *Techi Fresh Daily Technology News*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://www.techi.com/2013/11/infographic-the-evolution-of-the-iphone/>.

[7] "From tablet to tablet â€" a short history of reading (infographic)." *Ebook Friendly*. N.p., 1 Sept. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://ebookfriendly.com/history-of-reading-infographic/>.

With this new slate of possibilities for illustration, animation or motion graphics are the forms of visual communication that many online publications are seeking. Some see this as a passing fad, but some see it as the beginning of the future. Whatever the case may be, illustrators need to take note of these new ways of working and consider them as possible avenues into a new industry.

In 2010 at the ICON 6 Conference in Pasedena the keynote speech brought the topic of animation to the large crowd of illustrators. Entitled "The Future of Publishing: The Great Transformation," *Wired* design director Wyatt Mitchell, Adobe's senior experience design manager Jeremy Clark, New York Times art director Kelly Doe, and Taschen America's executive editor Jim Heimann all spoke about the development of web-based tablets as the leading future of publication and how illustration combined with animation was an important new form of communication for them. The audience generally reacted with apprehension. Many were fearful of learning a new method, not being compensated for extra work, or not being able to adapt to these new changes. After much debate and discussion many did come to the conclusion that these new changes were nothing to fear, but, on the contrary, inspiring to them. Illustrator Cliff Cramp provided concise and poignant reflections on that keynote:

The key word for me that night was "possibilities." New technologies provide varied possibilities for the delivery of our content. The fax machine allowed illustrators to fax comps to a client rather than drive them over. Product Illustrators produced line art of merchandise for wholesale companies so that catalogs could be faxed to retailers. The Internet has allowed the illustrator to have a global audience, shrinking their world while broadening their possibilities. Email and social media have allowed the illustrator to have more opportunities to connect with their peers. For some, new technologies will mean new ways to produce art. For others, new technologies will mean new uses for their art.

Transportation has changed over the years. I have multiple options. I can get in my car and drive to my neighbor next door to get my kids, or I can just walk over there. One option is a better solution than the other.

Modes of communication have changed also. Again, I have lots of options. I can curl up on my child's bed at night and read one of the many picture books that I purchased at

ICON or I can stay downstairs and open iChat and read it to them that way. Once again, one option is a better solution than the other.

The first ICON was held in 1998. At the time, there was slower Internet, no iPhone, no Facebook, no Twitter, and no iPad. Yet all of those technologies were used in force at ICON. Things change. The future of publishing will change as technology changes. Ultimately, art directors will decide what problems need to be solved with which technology. They will also contact the artist that is the best fit to solve that visual problem.

So the illustration industry will still exist as it always has, but the participants need to be students of these new modes of communication, pushing the boundaries of them, but also being cognizant of the correct compensation for their work in them. For those hesitant on the change, Heimann's answer perhaps said it best:

The question then is, "Why would you want to negate a revenue-generating opportunity when clearly, adding this element to your career is a move forward, and follows what is inevitable? And yes, perhaps this is not a path you want to follow, for whatever reason. That's your choice. And you can always hire someone to do the motion work; just know enough to be able to guide them through the process.

One way or the other, the writing is on the wall. I see this as an exciting creative opportunity. One only has to imagine an iPad version of The New Yorker and watching the cover move. Kelly Doe of the New York Times demonstrated this in her presentation.

Should you be paid more for having to provide for this animated feature? You better believe it. But that has yet to be determined. Will subscribers pay more for this? Pricing is a whole other can of worms that needs to be addressed in a separate conversation, but does need addressing.[8]

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[8] Dooley, Michael. "ICON Reax, Part 1: Is Animation the Future of Illustration?." *Print Magazine*. N.p., 21 June 2010. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.printmag.com/interviews/icon-reax-is-animation-the-future-of-illustration/>.

This new technology and new opportunity truly has brought a new sense of optimism to illustrators. Illustrator Chris Ridell writes of a fantastically illustrated book, Samuel Pepys' diaries, a 1947 edition featuring illustrations by the famed illustrator EH Shepard. Shepard is known for his work on the Winnie The Pooh and Frog and Toad series, but Ridell describes Shepard as a master illustrator whose work "doesn't respect boundaries. While remaining consistent in style, Shepard's skill at drawing allowed him to illustrate non-fiction, poetry, satire and autobiography with equal authority." He goes on to explain that the book publishing world has changed since then and one rarely sees illustrations intermingled with the text of a novel or book. If they do appear they rarely emulate the power and boldness that the illustrations of Shepard often do. Usually they are small and insignificant compared to the text. Illustration nowadays in book publishing is meant for the cover and that's about it. It is Ridell's opinion that modern technology could pave the way for a renaissance of illustrative books:

> At the same time graphic novels, computer games and CGI animation are blurring the old distinctions and categories in publishing. In the digital future, texts will be annotated visually, animated and illustrated like never before. The austere 'prayer book' paper that permitted the space for Shepard's illustrations to Pepys' diaries is now being recreated in the digital era. It is a space waiting to be filled by today's illustrators. [9]

The formats that an illustrator can create for these new forms of tech is can be versatile, but each has its own limitations. The easiest to create is the GIF (graphics interchange format), an animated graphic file that can be produced with many common software programs, but most notable Adobe Photoshop. The file format was first brought to the internet by Steve Wilhite of Compuserve in June 1987, but later found popularity in the mid-1990s for display small garish animations like candles flickering and text spinning on some of the first designed web-pages. Because of the general ugliness of these images, GIFS were almost avoided completely in more modern web designs through the early to mid 2000s. The GIF resumed popularity in the last few years, mainly portraying short humorous animations posted on Tumblr blogs and social media

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[9] Riddell, Chris. "Chris Riddell: What I'm thinking about ... a new era for illustration." *theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 12 Aug. 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2012/aug/12/chris-riddell-new-era-illustration>.

sites.[10]   But in very recent times illustrators and publications have begun to see the advantages of the GIF and how it can be used in web publications. The New York Times has used a variety of subtle animated GIFs for their web-entity. Some notables included the lonely and empty illustration of Main Street by Rebecca Mock. Mock has caught many people's attention with her subtle, detailed, and exquisitely rendered animated GIFs. In addition to her New York Times work, she has produced a series of personal works - Nothing To Do In This Heat, The Party - that feature similar quiet moments in life, heightened by smartly placed animations. The idea of atmosphere seems to be the driving force behind a lot of the animated GIF illustrations featured in editorial work. Oliver Munday's illustration for the New York Times' "The Full Israeli Experience" column features a graphic image of a mobile with the star of David surrounded by the Islamic crescent star and moon. The animation is the slight wind blowing these "ornaments" on the mobile. This technique is not overly gaudy in execution, and provides a keen amount of attention on a page filled with a great amount of text. Another quality of animation being used is a the passage of time. In Brian Stauffer's animated GIF illustration for the New York Times letters column "Life Sentences for Low-Level Crimes" he uses the passing shadow of window light in a loop to portray an endless amount of time behind bars. Another illustrator really at the forefront of animation combined with illustration primarily in the GIF form is the English illustrator Robin Davey. Davey has done a series of animated illustrations for Wired Italia that are energetic, bright, and captivating. These present themselves much differently than the illustrations featured in the New York Times. Davey's works are less of the subtle complementary animated illustrations and more of the eye-catching statement variety. These fit the aesthetic of the Wired Italia style of sleek, modern, bright, and cutting edge. Continuing in the realm eye-candy Stephen Vuillemin creates brightly colored animated GIF illustrations that have simple to very complex animations rolled into them.   In his piece for the New York Times Opinion article "No Country for Slow Broadband" he uses the looping animation to heighten the extensive length of time the tiresome superhero is hovering there holding the laptop for the aged and lazy man on the couch. Truly a humorous depiction, but done with skill and finesse. Vuillemin has also taken the animated GIF format into the world of graphic novels with his *Schoolgirls.* Liz Stinson of Wired Magazine online wrote a feature article in September 2013 highlighting this piece that Vuillemin

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[10] Buck, Stefanie. "Mashable." *Mashable*. N.p., 19 Oct. 2012. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://mashable.com/2012/10/19/animated-gif-history/>.

has been working on since 2011.[11] While the animation doesn't take the story to another level entirely, it's interesting to see the style working in a graphic novel form.

Like previously mentioned by Chris Ridell earlier, the advancement of technology seemingly should truly lend itself to a new connections between visuals and the written text. E-readers and tablets have come a long way in the last few years. That being so, things have not quite been fully realized as to what the public would seem to enjoy in an e-book in terms of visuals or no visuals. In February's Digital Book World online article they featured a video with Karen Lotz, Publisher of Candlewick and Managing Director of Candlewick's parent company, Walker Books. In it she explained the slow transition into the digital world especially for children's books. Because of the many forms of e-readers and tablets, it's hard to get a consistent look for a designed and illustrated book across various devices. This has made the porting of children's books tremendously difficult in the past. That being said, Lotz goes on to say:

> *"Even our business that is in the middle grade reader area, a lot it's very illustrated, and early e-readers didn't really accommodate illustration particularly well when the illustration is there as a way of understanding the words, when you have to have the flow exactly right between text and picture, text and picture. So as devices have improved and expanded their capabilities, we've been able to enter the market more and more."* [12]

Where some publishers are starting to see the advantages of advanced tablets is where they give the end user multiple ways to enjoy the book. For example Illustrator Shaun Pendergast worked on a wonderful interactive book app for The Wonderful Wizard of Oz published by Random House. This app allowed the user to have the story narrated, have the ability to read just the full text, or view the book as a series of interactive picture pages. The wonder of this type of book is that it can change and adapt to the age range of the person using it.

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[11] Stinson, Liz. "A Sweet Comic Book Made Entirely From GIFs." *Wired.com*. Conde Nast Digital, 13 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.wired.com/design/2013/09/a-clever-comic-book-made-entirely-from-gifs/>.

[12] Fahle, Rich. "Candlewick's Karen Lotz on the Future of Illustrated Books in a Digital Era (Video)." *Digital Book World*. N.p., 18 Feb. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2013/candlewicks-karen-lotz-on-the-future-of-illustrated-books-in-a-digital-era-video/>.

Another successful transition from print to digital is the puzzle themed book. Roxie Monroe has illustrated more than 30 children's books, but has recently switched over to developing interactive puzzle book apps such as "Roxie's a-MAZE-ing Vacation Adventure", a non-fiction puzzle game for young children. In an interview with Digital Book World he states:

I do mainly nonfiction and concept children's picture books. They are considered interactive, and include guessing games, mazes, search-and-find, counting games, lift-the-flap paper engineering, hidden objects, and so forth. The books already use a form of "gamification" to engage children in reading, using the books, and learning. So evolving into making interactive apps felt very natural, and like the next step.

Some books, however wonderful they may be as a print book, do not translate well into apps. Studies have shown that adding all the bells and whistles, unless really relevant to the idea, sometimes distracts from learning and comprehension, so you do have to be careful about what properties to make into apps.[13]

In fact in a study done by The Joan Ganz Cooney Center they recorded a significant deficiency in reading comprehension and learning through interactive ebooks than through traditional printed books. A lot of this they attributed to the interactive elements in many e-books enhancing things that did not relate to the main subject or story matter of the book. This can be expected seeing how this is a relatively new medium, and designers, writers, and illustrators are still learning themselves what works best with them. So the tendency initially, like when websites were first being designed, is to go a bit over the top visually. This can be seen in apps like The Pedlar Lady of Cushing Cross by Moving Tales. While the visuals are quite dramatic and beautiful, the animations do seem to distract and entertain rather than inform and tell a story.

One successful app/book is the non-fiction The Magic of Reality by Richard Dawkins and

[13] Bacon, Beth. "Creating Interactive Digital Children's Books With Author/Illustrator Roxie Munro." *Digital Book World*. N.p., 23 July 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2013/creating-interactive-digital-childrens-books-with-authorillustrator-roxie-munro/>.

illustrated by Dave McKean. This interactive publication for the Ipad explores the scientific studies of how life began. It not only has written information paired with the moving illustrations of McKean, but it also features multi-sensory puzzles and learning games to help teach the user about the subject. This could be done with print media as well, but it would not be nearly as immediate and accommodating.

Another form of technology opening up a place for the use of more illustration in modern times is Web Design. While illustration has often been used in web design, faster internet speeds and new scripting languages have made the use of illustration more engaging and exciting. On technique is called parallax scrolling, a javascript code used in web design that sets off a series of actions and animations when the user scrolls down a website. An exceptional example of this is the website created by Nice & Serious for the company Waterwise entitled Every Last Drop. This website is essentially an animated/illustrated infographic that changes the scene as the user scrolls. This seems to be a common use for this type of design. Another example being the scrolling presentation website developed for Express Solicitors by Stickyeyes. In this infographic website a nurse wheels a gurney down a long corridor as the user scrolls. Information and time passes to tell the story of how much money has been lost in this particular healthcare firms history.

Infographics aside, this scrolling design technique can also be used to produce extraordinarily engaging websites such as the website created for Musician Laura Marling and her album The Beast. As the user scrolls through the site and listens to the music they are treated to the animated illustrations of Shynola paired with her lyrics. It's a simple movement, at the same time very engaging.

So the times are a changing...constantly. This new technology brings about large open doors for illustrators and creatives. Many have begun exploring the modes of animation and collaboration in web and mobile technologies that are very successful, but it also doesn't feel quite complete or resolved in many other instances. Illustrator Aileen Holmes perhaps says it best:

> *Technology offers exciting opportunity and new ways to offer illustration to the world. Movement is one possible avenue for innovation of the millions not even conceived yet.*

Still, the public craves raw visual images created by the human hand. Art transcends time and will always be desired.[14]

Illustration by Eileen Holmes

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[14] Dooley, Michael. "ICON Reax, Part 1: Is Animation the Future of Illustration?." *Print Magazine*.

Brian Stauffer Illustration for NYTimes

Jim Heimann Illustrations

Rebecca Mock - "A Party" Illustration

Rebecca Mock - "Nothing To Do In This Heat" Illustration

Rebecca Mock Illustration for the New York Times "Main Street's Landlord"
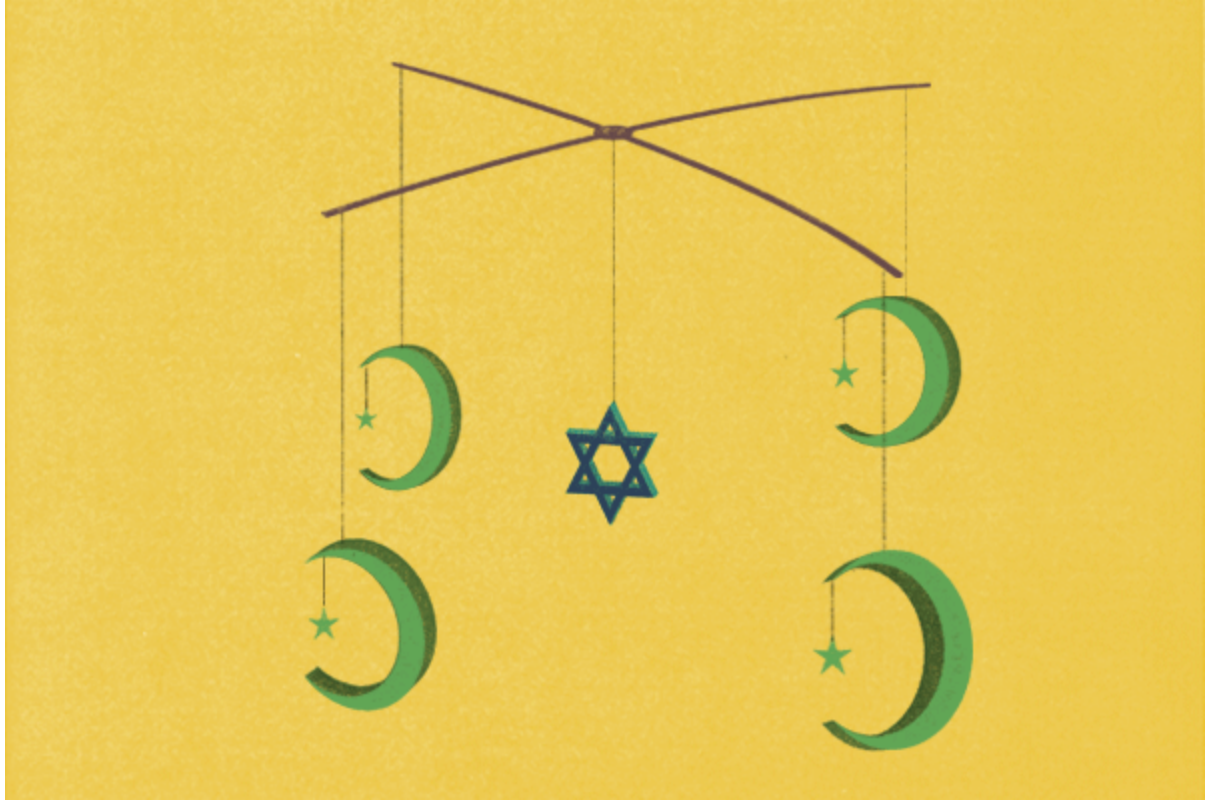
**Oliver Munday - "The Israeli Experience" Illustration for NYTimes**

Shaun Pendergast - The Wonderful Wizard of Oz Interactive Book for Random House

The Emerald City was soon left far behind. As they advanced the ground became rougher and hillier, for there were no farms nor houses in this country of the West, and the ground was untilled.

In the afternoon the sun shone hot in their faces, for there were no trees to offer them shade; so that before night Dorothy and Toto and the Lion were tired, and lay down upon the grass and fell asleep, with the Woodman and the Scarecrow keeping watch.

Now the Wicked Witch of the West had but one eye, yet that was as powerful as a telescope, and could see everywhere. So, as she sat in the door of her castle, she happened to look around and saw Dorothy lying asleep, with her friends all about her. They were a long distance off, but the Wicked Witch was angry to find them in her country; so she blew upon a silver whistle that hung around her neck.

Shaun Pendergast - The Wonderful Wizard of Oz Interactive Book for Random House
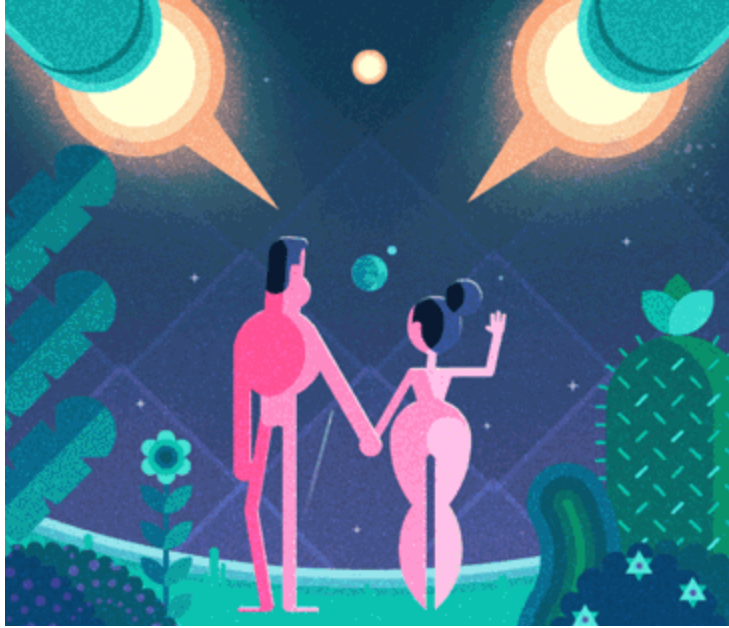
Robin Davey for Wired Italia
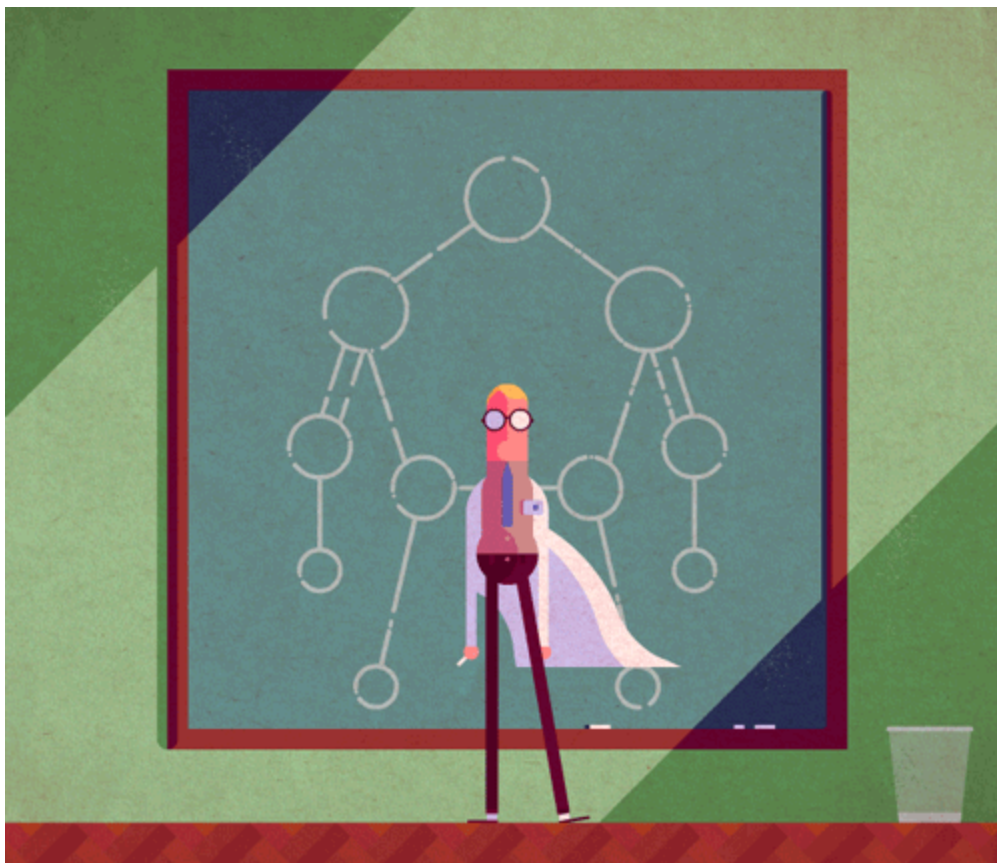
Robin Davey for Wired Italia

Roxie's Amazing Adventure App by Roxie Monroe

Roxie's Amazing Adventure App by Roxie Monroe

Stephen Vuillemin for the New York Times

Stephen Vuillemin Animated GIF Graphic Novel

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