

A Technique for Producing Ideas

James Webb Young (1965)

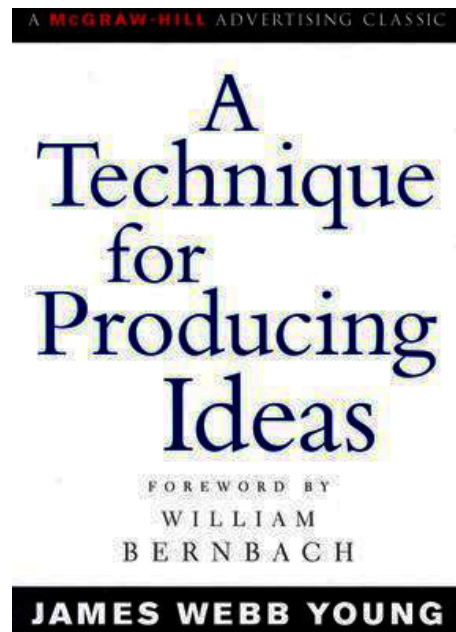
New York, US: McGraw-Hill Professional

64 pp.

As a key stakeholder who is recognised as a designer of high aesthetic building space as well as a leader and coordinator in conventional architectural project developments, an architect has to be well-prepared for such a challenging task. Skills and knowledge, therefore, have to be constantly renewed and created in the fragmented industry structure. One systematic solution can be learned from the highly creative advertising industry where the right idea is crucial for the success of a task.

This little classic book written by the legendary James Webb Young (1886-1973) in 1965 can be a good start to systematically create new ideas. Contents of the book were written from Young's extensive experience in U.S. advertising from the time he started working at J. Walter Thompson advertising agency as a copy writer in 1912 to the top of his career as a vice president in 1928. They were presented to graduate students at the University of Chicago's Business School where he was a professor from 1931 to 1939 and with a number of gatherings with active advertising people to inspire people to conceive.

In order to develop idea creation capacity by energetic persons who can spot opportunities to make things better, two major principles have to be initially recognised. Firstly, ideas have to be perceived as new combinations of old elements. Secondly, people involved have the ability to see relationship to extract a general principle that a new application and a new combination leading to new idea can be created. Once the two principles are accepted, a 5-stage method to successively create new ideas can be introduced.



In the very first stage of this sequential research based method, **Gathering of raw materials**, two sets of them has to be explored. The first is a set of specific materials from both primary and secondary sources. They can be found once *existing problems*, *problematic conditions* or interesting *phenomena* are reviewed. For example, specific materials are, in architectural design context, users' space requirements. Moreover, *theories*, *concepts*, *research findings* also have to be reviewed to find potential solutions for such problems. The crucial second set of general materials in a wide scope of topics and issues including life, culture and events has to be consistently developing in a lifelong process to create one's reservoir of information.

Once all information is ready, it is time to **working over materials in one's mind**. Bits of information can be played inside one's head using

mental digestive process in order to find relationships. At this stage, tentative or partial ideas will pop up along the way. A synthesis where everything will come together in a neat combination of real ideas is expected at the end. However, while playing with materials repeatedly to get into the more profound layer, it seems that tiredness and hopelessness are unavoidable. Therefore, a short break from the thinking process is recommended at the third stage of **incubating in subconscious mind**. Eventually, the anticipated idea seems to suddenly come out of nowhere at the fourth stage: **the actual birth of idea**. However, it does not come by accident since new idea is definitely the fruits of long discipline based on a well stocked mind. At the last stage: **shaping and development of idea to practical usefulness**, new ideas have to be refined to fit the exact conditions or the practical exigencies in reality. At the same time, good ideas can be put to test. They tend to possess self expanding quality when submitted for criticism. Contributions would make the ideas flourish

with new possibilities. As a result, ideas can be used to subsequently identify and propose the *research problems, research objectives* as well as hypothesis.

The clearly identified steps of Young's method make it easier to spot and solve any weaknesses. For example, inconclusive interpretations of specific and general materials by people with experience can be singled out as the major weaknesses that make the creation of new ideas unsuccessful. However, the more experienced users might be able to put their reservoir of information to better use. They might be more successfully coping with stress caused by uncertainties while trying to figure out the relationships among various factors. Nevertheless, anyone who searches for ideas would definitely find Young's systematic method useful.

Archan Boonyanan, Ph.D.

*Faculty of Architecture and Planning,
Thammasat University*