A STUDY ON THE IMAGE NARRATIVE ISSUES IN ANIMATION NARRATIVE OF NOVICE ANIMATORS' ANIMATION - A CASE STUDY OF THE SHORTLISTED SHORT FILMS IN THE 2019 TAINAN ANIMATION AGE FESTIVAL

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Abstract

The best animation depends on the image narrative and the use of the lens. In order to connect between the animation and the audience, both skills are significant and professional. General animation narrative requires that the story content be complete, have a beginning and an end, and pay attention to cause and effect. Through the structure of the beginning and development, the story can be advanced step by step. However, it's important and challenging for novice animators to both deliver scientific knowledge and storytelling in a short. Whether it is the timing of the shot,

the misplacement of the character's position, unclear vocabulary, unclear movements, or expressions, etc., many factors may cause the audience to not understand.

Therefore, given this situation, this study collected 6 animations which were made by students from the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival and then found out the common problems with novice animators by conducting participant observation and case study research. The result demonstrates the more common problem for novice animators is the animated image narrative, such as insufficient frames, unclear expression of character movements and expressions, unclear use of lenses, etc. This result can be a reference for novice animators or beginners.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Motivations

In life, what kind of elements are used to create animations that resonate with the audience? What kind of materials are used to create animated scenes full of vitality? What is the narrative essence of the story? What is the use of lenses in animation? In the field of animation creation, whether they are novice animators or industry experts, all animators rely on their hands to create animation works full of dreams. However, novice animators or beginners who are new to animation production can create an animation that the audience can understand and resonate with. Therefore, it's a very important and challenging issue for novice animators or beginners that animation works often convey the content of the story through image narration and the use of lenses. Given this situation, this study focuses on how to enable novice animators to successfully master the process of animation image narration and the design of the lens used to allow a dialogue between the work and the audience and allow the audience to have a feeling of being close to the animation.

1.2. Research Purposes

Animation is defined as moved paintings and convey the story to the audience through the lens; a simple dialogue requires relative camera positions to interpret; a simple idea requires sufficient explanation to be conveyed well (Shih-Kai Chun g, Yu-Ching Chang, 2009). In an animation, image narrative and lens use both play critical roles. However, many novice animators

often make the audience difficult to understand because of their image narration and lens use, such as the control of the camera, the control of time, the arrangement of the character's position, the expression of the character's expression, or the performance of the character's movements, etc. Therefore, this study will focus on image narrative and lens use, and collect 6 shortlisted animations made by students from the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival so as to figure out the reasons why novice animators make animations difficult for audiences to understand.

1.3. Research Questions

Animation generally means the use of static images to produce the illusion of movement by playing them frame by frame and using the principle of persistence of vision to form dynamic images and record them (Men-Ling Li, 2008). Story narrative has a certain dominant position in the creation of animation. With the narrative of the central theme, the creator can express the most important creative concept of the work. While making animation, the expression of the work through story narrative can make the audience understandable, which is a very important issue for the creator.

Thus, this study will analyze the reasons why the audience cannot understand the animation made by beginners by analyzing the 6 shortlisted animations made by students from the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival. Finally, this study will summarize and sort out the relationship between short animations produced by novice animators and why the audience cannot understand them.

- This study will use literature research to analyze the correlation between story narrative and the audience's understanding.
- Analyze the animation produced by novice animators.
- Summarize the narrative issues, lens usage, etc.
- Understand why and what factors influence why audiences don't understand.
- Finally, the key techniques for novice animators to create animations will be summarized.

2. Literature Review

This section focuses on the essence of the story - animation narrative principles, basic rules of animation, and the relationship between animation composition and shots because analyzing the performance of novice animators in animation narrative includes story arrangement, facial expressions, staging, lens design, etc.

2.1. **The Essence of Story-Animation Narrative Principles**

According to Film Art: An Introduction, narrative can be regarded as a series of events that occur at a certain time, at a certain place, and have a causal relationship. It's often what we call a "story". Usually, a narrative begins with a situation, and then causes a series of changes according to the pattern of causality; finally, a new situation is generated, giving the narrative an ending.

When watching animations, the audience can actively receive information, recall the plots in the film, predict upcoming plots, and be fully immersed in the plot creation of the animation. The book "Film Art: An Introduction" mentions that movies use techniques such as curiosity, suspension, and surprise to induce psychological reactions in the audience. The same is true for animation, and the audience has therefore developed expectations for the direction of the plot, which controls our expectations for animation. Therefore, the ending has a satisfying or unexpected plot result for the audience and may cause them to recall from a new perspective.

2.2. **The Basic Animation Principles**

The article "Animation Notes from Ollie Johnston" mentioned that in the animation bible-"Illusion of Life" written by Frank Thomas and Frank Thomas, the veterans of Disney, The Twelve Basic Principles of Animation is regarded as a classic of animation, mainly it tells how the character's movements are "performed" and makes the performance more lifelike by strengthening the physical effects of the movements (such as compression and extension, exaggeration, preparation and buffering... etc.). If the movements or expressions aren't accurate, the message to be conveyed is likely to be incomprehensible to the audience. Hence, this situation is included in the study as the inspection standard for this research case. The Twelve Basic Principles are briefly summarized as follows:

- Squash and stretch
- Anticipation
- Staging
- Straight-ahead action and pose to pose
- Follow through and overlapping action
- Slow in and slow out

- Arcs

- Secondary action

- Timing

- Exaggeration

- Solid drawing

- Appeal

2.3. The relationship between layout and lens

Layout is the art of composing a picture. How to arrange the scenery and characters within the frame to create a vivid and emotional picture requires meaningful techniques to convey the content. Layout isn't just about putting things into the frame, but an image constructed through thinking and cleverly arranging elements such as design position, size, contrast, angle, etc. This is what novice animators should consider while designing scenes. It takes more practice. The main functions of composition are as follows, to confirm the space of the performance and to create style and atmosphere (Wan-Jhih Hsieh, 2015, pp. 17).

The position of the camera will affect the "shot angle" of the shot and the shot angle is never randomly determined (Li Liu, 1990). It always depends on the shape of the scene, the lighting, and the certain aspect of the subject that needs to be highlighted. On one side, with the previous scenes and with the next scenes. This is also the lens language often used by directors to achieve an important basic form of various narratives and expressions. (Shih-Kai Chung, Yu-Ching Chang, 2009) The lens language is briefly summarized as follows:

- Photography angles are roughly divided into elevation lens/low-angel shot, low-angle lens/high-angel shot, birds-eye view, and tilted shot/canted shot.

- The visual psychology of photographing the position of a character is divided into the full front which means facing the camera and participating closely; quarter turn; profile, where the character looks to the right or left square, more distant; the three-quarter side, more distant; back to camera, rejection, or unconsciousness.

- The visual psychology of distance is divided into intimate distance - Detail Shot, Close-Up; personal distance - Medium Close-Up; social distance - Medium Shot, long shot; public distance Shot, Extra Long Shot.

The visual psychology of space, the drama of the space: the 180° line (The 180° System), also known as the "180 imaginary line principle" or the "action axis". It's generally

formed by the line of sight between the two characters in the scene. Once this line is determined, the 180-degree working area camera will never cross this line to maintain a consistent screen direction and space. The 180° line makes a clear plan for the space, allowing the audience to know more clearly where the characters are standing and the relationship between the scenes, so that the space of a scene can be presented without contradicting each other or confusing the audience.

3. Methodology

This study adopted case study research to record the research content because the researcher was an event assistant at this festival, therefore, it was easier to observe the content and collect the information. Moreover, through the animation and first-hand information of the festival as research data and further analysis, from the analysis results, the reasons and influencing factors why novice animators were unable to be understood by the audience in the story narrative. Finally, this research summarized the key points while making animation for novice animators.

3.1. Research Method

Case study research was conducted to mainly explore the issue of animation image narrative from the works of novice animators and understand the differences in animation production of each team from the actual participation process of researchers. In addition, through "participant observation", researchers and the observed groups established a multi-faceted and long-term relationship. Observing the actual participants in the process of animation production also allowed the researcher to conduct discussions under the condition that "First impressions are most lasting." Moreover, by participant observation, researchers had a clear understanding of the current time, behavior, and situation, and had an in-depth understanding of thematic animation production learning as an extremely complex process. Therefore, in order to actually understand the perspective of novice animators on animation production and obtain first-hand information in real-time, "case study research" was used.

3.2. Research Subjects

Six shortlisted short animations were collected from the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival: "Send a Heart", "Memories Box", "The encounter story", "Transient", "South", and "Hometown". The relevant information is in Table 1, including the year of creation, title, and length of work.

Table 1: *The Analysis of The Animation Case*

The year of creation	Title	Length of animation (minute: seconds)
2019	Send a Heart	05:40
2019	Memories Box	04:12
2019	The Encounter Story	05:25
2019	Transient	02:37
2019	South	04:00
2019	Hometown	03:01

3.3. Research Steps

First, literature research was used to analyze the correlation between the story narrative and the audience's understanding. Second, six animations produced by novice animators were analyzed and discussed. Third, the narrative problems of novice animators in animation stories were summarized, whether it was the control of shot timing, misplacement of character positions, unclear vocabulary in the picture, unclear actions, or expressions, etc. Finally, this study figured out the reasons and solutions why the audience cannot understand and sorted out the key points for novice animators to produce animations.

4. Findings

The research subjects are 6 shortlisted short animations from the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival. This study analyzed them to determine what factors resulted in the audience not understanding this animation.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the shortlisted animation "Send a Heart" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The postman in the animation uses the expression of movements to convey the action of reaching out to pick up the little boy who fell into the water, however, there is a feeling of pause in the expression of the action of reaching out and pulling up. Therefore, in this animation, due to the insufficient frames, the action scenes feel slightly paused, which makes the viewer feel that the communication of the actions is a bit strange.
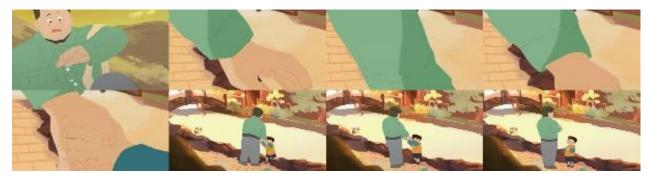
Figure 1: *The Animation of Send a Heart*

Table 2: *Problem Sorting Table of Send a Hear*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
Send a Heart	Insufficient frames	At 02:42

As shown in Figure 2 below, the shortlisted animation " Memories Box " in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The male protagonist in the animation moves from right to left, and his path forms the axis of action, which is the 180° line. In the first half of shot 1, the hero's action direction is from right to left, but in the second half of shot 2 (shot from the other side of the line), the action direction is from left to right. In this animation, owing to the changes in the movement of the screen, the problem of spatial continuity arises. Therefore, since the space of a scene is constructed around the action axis (180° line), the 180° line provides a clear plan for the space and ensures a consistent screen direction, allowing the audience to know more clearly where the characters are standing. and the relative position between scenes, so that the space of a scene can be clearly presented, so as not to contradict each other or confuse the audience.
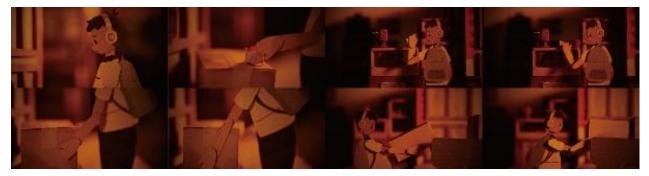

Figure 2: *The Animation of Memories Box*

Table 3: *Problem Sorting Table of Memories Box*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
Memories Box	Spatial continuity	At 03:01

As shown in Figure 3 below, the shortlisted animation " The Encounter Story" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The little girl in the animation communicates through movements. The first half is to express the action of jumping grids, and the second half is to express the process of jumping and turning.In this animation, the detailed movements and expressions aren't enough, which may cause the audience to not understand the meaning of the animation. For example: the expressions and movements when jumping the grid are not exaggerated enough; the jumping and turning movements in the second half are not compressed and stretched. As a result, the strength is not enough, and the movement of jumping and turning is a bit like floating in the air.Therefore, it's significant for the position of the limbs to be correct for the target object. When many novice animators are doing animation, they are actually just doing "moving images". Thus, when designing the key animation, the principle of "a small change affects everything" is important, which can lead to the failure of movements or expressions.

Figure 3: *The Animation of The Encounter Story*

As shown in Figure 4 below, the shortlisted animation "The Encounter Story" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The little girl in the animation wants to convey the action of escaping danger through the expression of facial expressions, emotions, and postures. However, the facial expression doesn't change much and is too rigid and consistent, resulting in no thrilling feeling in the expression of the picture, which easily leads to the audience's confusion. or confused. Hence, in animation, inaccurate movements can make people unable to understand the message conveyed by the animation.

Figure 4: *The Animation of The Encounter Story*

Table 4: *Problem Sorting Table of The Encounter Story*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
The encounter story	The heroine's jumping and turning movements are weak	At 02:05
	The heroine's expression is too stiff	At 04:08

As shown in Figure 5 below, the shortlisted animation "Transient" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The protagonist in the animation was originally intended to appear to be flying quickly through the expression of his movements, conveying an exaggerated speed effect. However, due to the insufficient frames, the action stopped for a while and then quickly disappeared, making it difficult to understand the character. The story screen jumps too fast to fully understand the actions and performances of all the characters, making it difficult for the audience to understand. Thus, in animation, controlling the movement time of objects is the soul of animation and the key to expressing the rhythm of animation, so that the audience will not be confused.

Figure 5: *The Animation of Transient*

As shown in Figure 6 below, the shortlisted animation "Transient" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. During the performance of the characters in the animation, there is no clear explanation, and the screen is constantly switched, causing the audience to be unable to understand the content to be expressed. In animation, it's necessary to add explanations of important shots so that people can more clearly understand the message the character wants to convey.

Figure 6: *The Animation of Transient*

Table 5: *Problem Sorting Table of Transient*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
Transient	Insufficient frames	At 00:05
	Screen description was incomplete	At 00:57
	Lens usage unclear	At 01:39

As shown in Figure 7 below, the shortlisted animation "South" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The protagonist's body in the animation is constantly changing. The role isn't the same shape, it's suddenly fat and thin, and his body hasn't been properly processed, which makes it easy for the audience to confuse whether they are the same character. Therefore, in animation, with proficient hand-drawing skills, the presentation of animation will be more refined and perfect.

Figure 7: *The Animation of South*

Table 6: *Problem Sorting Table of South*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
South	There is no consistency in the look of the characters	At 03:20

As shown in Figure 8 below, the shortlisted animation "Hometown" in the 2019 Tainan Animation Age Festival is an example. The mother in the animation expresses the movements of origami through the images. However, in the image, only the hands of the mother are moving when folding paper, and the other movements of the hair and body aren't followed. Because the following movements aren't smooth enough and the performance of the movements isn't smooth enough, resulting in a lack of authenticity in the performance. In animation, auxiliary actions (following actions) mean that when the subject is moving, if there are other additional accessories on the body, it can also move naturally. Therefore, if the auxiliary actions aren't smooth enough, it can also affect the authenticity of the performance and lack of authenticity. It can make people unable to understand the feeling that the character is trying to express.

Figure 8: *The Animation of Hometown*

Table 7: *Problem Sorting Table of Hometown*

Animation Title	Main Problem Description	Key frame
Hometown	The following movement is not smooth enough	At 01:12
	The performance lacks authenticity	At 01:16

5. Discussion And Conclusions

This study sorted out common issues for novice animators based on the analysis above and divided them into four categories: performance, lens, story, and insufficient frames, which are common issues for novice animators shown in Table 08 below.

Table 8: *The List of Common Issues For Novice Animators*

Problem Description		Explanation	Animation Title
Performance	The action and expressions don't do well	The heroine's jumping and turning movements are weak.	The encounter story
	Unnatural emotions and postures	The heroine's expression is too stiff.	The encounter story
	The character's body keeps changing	There is no consistency in the look of the characters.	South
	The following movement isn't smooth enough	Character origami movement is not smooth.	Hometown
Lens	Spatial continuity	The hero's movement direction is from right to left; however, the second half of the shot is shot from the other side of the line	Memories Box
Story	Screen description was incomplete	Keep switching screens	Transient
	Lens usage unclear	Not clearly conveying what the protagonist is going to do	Transient
Number of shots	Insufficient frames	Mr. Postman's movement of reaching out to pick up the	Send a heart

		little boy who fell into the water stopped for a moment.	
	Insufficient frames	The main character's rapid flight is a bit stop-motion.	Transient

This study found out the factors and differences by analyzing the factors that the audience cannot understand through the literature review, and then comparing and verifying them with the animation works shortlisted by students. Moreover, during this festival, this study observed and analyzed lots of animations so as to sort out the advantages and the shortcomings.

- By exploring and solving the problems of animated image narrative in the works of novice animators, this study can enable novice animators to produce animations more efficiently. In addition, based on the case study research, many common problems faced by novice animators were discovered, such as frames, lack of authenticity in performance methods, lack of movement expressions, spatial continuity issues and influencing factors, etc. This study also understood why most audiences can be incomprehensible reasons.

- By exploring the issue of animated image narrative in the works of novice animators, this study gains another level of harvest. In order to achieve good animation communication effects, in addition to paying attention to the story structure, the performance of character actions is also a factor that cannot be ignored in animation design.

- For novice animators, honing a personal style in the field of animation requires constant trial and error. Learning animation requires continuous learning of new skills and absorption of new knowledge. Animation is a kind of performance, and performance is an art. How to present own art is a key point.

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