Analysis of Visual Language for Clay Animations

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the visual languages for claymation from the perspective of artistic expression and different processes of claymation production. In terms of the application of role performance, modeling effect and true feelings brought by materials, the paper analyzes the language rules and relations among these three aspects and shows the laws by combining some artistic theories and animation techniques.

KEYWORDS

Clay; Stop Motion Animation; Visual Language; Role Performance; Modeling Effect

INTRODUCTION

The visual language is a medium to express various geographical cultures and convey emotions. For a long time, animators and relevant practitioners have been discussing, demonstrating and practicing how to make the visual language for the animations explicit, precise, vivid and various.

An important feature of visual language is to display the visual culture by static and dynamic images, enabling people in different groups and regions to accept and
understand role’s behavior, action and background in the image-building and even the events and plots of story.

Given the special production and filmmaking of claymation, the feature mentioned above is quite complicated and changeful. According to the process of clay animation, the visual language can be generally decomposed as two aspects: technique and shot language, which mainly consists of languages in body emotions and shot.

The analysis of claymation should start from the role performance. This paper is aimed at studying how claymation modeling develops in different stages and exploring how roles affect the visual language in the formation of shape.

In the production and shooting of claymation, the paper analyzes the relations and differences among stop-motion animation, two-dimensional (2D) animation and three-dimensional (3D) animation, then decomposes the process of claymation to dissect the particularity of performances, modeling and photography of all stages in the clay animation. The paper concludes a visual language system that meets demands of animations by combining factors such as body languages, behavior languages, the application of realistic material and beauty of artistic modeling. Then the system is applied into teaching and practice, in a hope to improve students’ analysis of shot language and inductive ability as well as cultivate their ability of innovative thinking.

APPLICATION OF ROLE PERFORMANCE

The visual language of clay animation is to shape roles made of plasticine clay by a series of complicated technological processes. The frame-by-frame shooting style makes roles vivid. Thus, the grasp of animation modeling and law of motion is the key to reflecting the visual language in the films.

In line with the scenario and character setting, features of character modeling should conform to the performing requirements of roles in stop motion animation because the shot language is first expressed by the character performance. Due to the physical clay models, there is always a contradiction in the filming about what animators want to express and what cannot be achieved by technology. A great number of practices demonstrate that the character performance is, to varying degrees, reflected and applied in all stages of claymation creation. For example, when creating characters, designers are based on the different shooting functions of claymation, and then combine assembling method and casting process, effectively reducing the difficulty in filming caused by continuity. In general, the various visual languages shown in the application of character performance are just a feature of artistic languages.
EFFECTS OF CHARACTER MODELING

The process of character modeling exists in cel animation, computer animation and any stop motion animation, which also affects how the whole animation is finally presented.

Character model that clay animation requires has distinctive differences from that of 2D and 3D animations. First, the physical model is applied into the character image according to the prototype. Second, the puppet performance is used to create a shooting atmosphere, producing artistic forms of both static and dynamic modeling. Third, Montage sequences and techniques are utilized in 2D images to realize the visual effect of animated storytelling.

The contents and reflection of effects are mainly shown in the three aspects as follows.

Static Modeling

The effect of static modeling requires that first, the created role must unify the accuracy and abstraction. Second, a character’s personality based on prototype should not be limited to its external form and can be accepted in any culture. Third, the material should comply with the requirements of shooting, with armature, polymer rubber and clay undamaged and under formed when bearing the repeated buckling in the staged photography. Fourth, facial expressions of characters in performances should be considered in producing the head armature of puppet because it is convenient for filmmaking.

Dynamic Modeling

The effect of dynamic modeling requires that, first, the body structure of puppet satisfies the features and laws of motion. Second, the role must possess enough performing ability. Third, designers and animators should have the enough ability to control the puppet’s performance and are artistically accomplished.

Photography

Photography is to freeze-frame the role shape and performance effect in an all-dimensional way. The effect of photography requires that first, the selection of shot types should reflect the relations among role, set and story. Second, lighting that meets the demands of appearance and connotations of the character should create a setting that the role performance needs. Third, by following the changes of story, character performance should bring different atmospheres and emotions based on various sights and mental feelings that directors convey to audiences. Fourth, the application of Montage, such as intersection, parallel, comparison, symbolization and reproduction should accord with people’s way of thinking, such as association
and memorization. Through the techniques such as recall, expectation, interposition, imagination and flashback, the visual images of animations are delicately shaped.

REAL FEELINGS BROUGHT BY MATERIALS

In both roles and set props, the selected materials will generate the extraordinary effects to the clay animation as those materials stem from the realistic materials and beauty of molding.

First, the realistic materials’ textures peculiar to stop-motion animations are incomparable to those in 2D and 3D animations. In art, such realistic sense of beauty comes from the application of materials in the stop-motion animations.

Second, the sense of beauty in application of materials, namely, the material selected in the character design, can bring people the aesthetic intention visually. The visual perception of material is reflected in the texture of character itself and embodiment of character, endowing roles with feelings, thinking, emotions, will and behaviors. Take animator Christopher Kezelos’ film for an example. It takes two years for him to finish Zero, a 12’32 stop motion animation from conception to filmmaking. Zero is not only one of works wining the “Best Short Animation” in the 83rd Academy Award, but also receives more than ten awards in over 40 tour exhibitions. In the film, the protagonist’s body is wrapped with yarn. Such bold character shape and delicate texture of material are the visual highlights of the film.

Third, the sense of beauty in artistic shape has a unique and irreplaceable charm that makes clay animation different from freehand sketching and computer animation. Sometimes, the selected materials generate a plain and vivid sense of beauty with the features of materials, such as fine skeleton, clay more malleable than argil and skins made from silica gel. Based on the new techniques, the material modeling is applied in order to bring a brand-new Gothic feeling and impact. This irresistible attractive power has surpassed the charm of body language, emotion language, behavior language and shot language, thus becoming a key of the enduring artistic style of clay animation and one of features of its artist languages. What is more, clay animators’ thoughts are also reflected there.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, with the diversified development of media, the visual language of clay animation is combined with digital technology and becomes more vivid and various. According to different functions of claymation, designers should find out the accurate breakthrough point in ideological and artistic works, striving to make roles more lifelike. Meanwhile, the key to innovating the visual languages also lies in the innovation of culture and industry systems, taking market innovation as breakthrough and leveraging the technological innovation. In all, only by integrating
new technology and methods and keeping innovation can we enrich the visual effects of clay animation.

REFERENCES