Metaphorical storytelling
An ironic Experimental 3D animation

ABSTRACT

The project will be a 3D animation that tells a story about COVID through anthropomorphic means. This project studies what factors determine how closely a role is linked to the symbolistic target. Through different expressions, the audience can understand the author's intention. There will not be any information related to COVID in the whole animation, and the study explores the impact on the audience's understanding through various factors such as camera framing, colors, and story design etc.

This is a nearly 3-minutes 3d animated short film, made through Maya. The biggest challenge is to grasp the animation rhythm and camera movement. The simple and clear storytelling allows the audience to quickly enter the characters and understand the hidden irony.

KEYWORDS

Metaphor, COVID, Ironic, Camera framing, movement, 3D animation

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INTRODUCTION

This will be an anthropomorphic animation about COVID-19. By metaphor people to fish, and through the isolation of fish in small fish tanks, more people can see the current situation of the quarantine policy of COVID in China.

The amount of work in the early stage will be relatively large, but I will try to make the animation of the non-main character part as simple/loop as possible to reduce the movement of too many objects on the animation at the same time, which is also a way to reduce the workload of me and the computer.

This animation hopes to resonate and ponder people, can you accept such a fate when the country's policy is not to protect people's fences but to strangle the ropes. Besides, I will explore How to use camera framing to express metaphorical character relationships or deep content meaning through this work. I think this can lead me to better narratives in future creations.

I've been focusing on the connection between the author and the audience, and for a long time I like to make abstract animations because I want to hide the emotions in my work by making the audience wonder or test the audience so as to pass their guesses reflect on the expression of my work. But I realized that most viewers misunderstood my intentions, and they wanted to confirm what I was trying to convey. So this time, I want to be explicit about what I want to tell the audience. Through a variety of expressions, narrative, camera language, sound effects, and so on.

Using IOL's courses helped me to create more possibilities in studio3's works, test them out, and finally achieve the best results within the possible range.

Here' s some goals I wish to do research on and achieve in IOL:

- Represent the water (Make the audience visually believe that the fish are swimming in the water)

- The sense of flow when a fish swims

- Camera framing and animation

RELATED WORKS – Content and Expression

Happiness by Steve Cutts

In the animation, the mice trying to catch its happiness by going to work, shopping, rushing to purchase on the Black Friday, drink, and so on; but at the same time, it has to take the corresponding damage from what it has done.

The animation anthropomorphizes mice while maintaining their biological characteristics. For example: when fighting, they will use their teeth and claws to attack. Their appearance and expressions can also be seen to be based on the original appearance of the mice, there is not too much exaggeration. This is what I want to learn from.

The author guarantees the animation style while giving the mouse the appearance, behavior and mind of a human. My work will express in the same way.

Through anthropomorphism, the author endows mice with the pursuit of life and exposes the desires in people's lives. My work is also the same logic, the whole work will express the meaning of irony through the behavior of the fish in the small jar. And also will have one main fish as the protagonist. The story will move the audience's emotions with him as a perspective. Another part will smooth the content of the story from the third person perspective.

What do I get for snapping up on Black Friday? It seems happy to buy a cheap TV, but it is an unpleasant day in the crowd. Buying a sports car and driving on the street is awesome, but getting a ticket and getting stuck in traffic is unhappy. It feels good to be drunk, but then the discomfort of the body needs to be repaired by spending money on medicine. Is this series of "seeming happiness" in daily the real happiness we are looking for in this life. The answer is obvious. The author must have experienced it and figured it out to make such a "perception"-like work. I hope that my audience can also have various reflections on the COVID quarantine policy after watching my animation works.

RELATED WORKS - Content and Mood Transition (Facial Expression)

What amazes me is the portrayal of the main character, No. 585. His emotions changed from doubt-uneasy-fear-fear-overwhelmed-surprised-anger-revenge, this series of changes, was very well expressed on his face. It is also this series of changes that achieves the people and things in the reality that it metaphors.

"POUR 585" by Patrick Smith

This is a 2d animation. The direction of the metaphor can be varied, and each audience may have a different guessing. For me, the metaphor is “The right in the society”.

People are curious and fearful when they don't get the right, just like the main character 585. He is afraid of getting bigger, and the metaphor at this time may be the fear of changes in life. But when he got poured, he did turn big at first. At this time, the ridicule of people around him, just like when people who had the ability in life, but there no way to play well, will be ridiculed by the people around them, and sometimes even bullied. And in the end, when he grows bigger than expected, the change in the attitude of the people around him and 585 himself is very ironic. He's become what he once feared and hated, but he's done the same thing as them.

RELATED WORKS - Direct Simile (Visual Appearance)

HYBRIDS By Florian Brauch - Matthieu Pujol - Kim Tailhades - Yohan Thireau - Romain Thirion

This is another metaphorical animation through direct visual expression. Marine life has become a cobbled together creature from human trash. This makes people think deeply about the social problem of environmental pollution. The transition of the camera perspective introduces the animals we are familiar with, while paying attention to how the marine debris is pieced together, we also think about how they live nowadays.

During the first half of the semester, I always wanted to make my project into this real-style 3D animation. When I first watched this work, I didn't distinguish whether it was animation or a real shot film. This work retains almost all the physical characteristics of marine animals, allowing the audience to easily distinguish each marine creature. But at the same time, the authors remodeled their bodies with "garbage". Although the marine ecology is still balanced in this work, it maintains the ecological fundamentals of the strong feeding the weak. But seeing the rubbish features on their bodies made me think again and again about the impact of human pollution on marine life.

I appreciate the style very much, and I hope that I can also make such a real-style animation in this work and even future works. But at the same time, this style is completely different from the traditional 3d cartoonish animation style, which makes me very confused about whether I need to give the fish expressions. After testing the expressions, I still think that the visual effect is better than the story, and the story can be made up through sound effects, camera angles, and character actions, so I decided to continue to use the real style.

Iteration – Models and Eyes

I wasn't satisfied with the three old versions of the fish, so I remodel a fish after midterm. And I decided to give the fish eyes, although there will be no expression animation, but the fish with eyes will make the viewer feel believable.

I ‘ve been making changes to the UVs in the beginning, I thought it was just a map for the eyes. But I don’ t like any of them (on the right), it makes my fish look like a fool, and I like the transparent texture of the fish, which allows the fish's eyes to see through the body to the other side. Just when I didn't know what to do, I accidentally created a cube, which inspired me to use a cylinder to make the eyes for him.

Iteration – Water Look and Waving

Before this project, when I wanted to make relatively realistic water, I only knew the option of simulated water. The water rendered with Arnold is very realistic, it flows by itself, I can set what objects it interacts with, set the type of water, etc. is a very powerful function. My idea was very simple. I think as long as I set the water in the big fish tank, the swimming process of the fish can let the water interact with the fish, and the water surface will have the appearance of realistic water waves. In addition, I can set the mechanical grab to interact with the water, and the feeling of splashing when the fish is caught must be very real. But really after I started making it, I found that, let alone the interaction between water and fish, I couldn't even animate the most basic fish in the software. My computer configuration is a big problem, and the simulation of water itself is not suitable for large-scale production. My final shot is with 100 jars, I'm I going to use the simulation water for all of them? I can't even make the water in a tank… This has my iteration of water.

Then after watching tutorials, I found that there are several different ways to make water. I tested them separately, and finally decided to use blender shape.

Test 1: https://youtu.be/9aDYjEnBDLA

I tried making just the water plane, but there are two problems with this.

The first is that the smoother the fluctuations, the more faces are required. This can make the software freeze.

The second problem is that when the fish passes through the water, there is a problem of they can't interacted. This is not easy to solve.

Test 2: https://youtu.be/T1BNxBIka-0

So I listened to Yee's opinion and used the blend shape, which not only does not affect the animation production but also quickly creates a wave loop on the surface of the water. In addition, it is consistent with the style of fish, both are low poly.

The only thing that needs to pay attention to in this method is to take into account all the shapes that water will transform into.

I forgot the shot of the fish falling into the water at the beginning of the production, which resulted in re-creating the water in the jar halfway through the animation production.

Iteration – Fish Swimming

Test 1: https://youtu.be/TwOY4ifISnA

Test 2.1: https://youtu.be/pUehk0uJQIo

Test 2.2: https://youtu.be/02GeG9XFVVQ

When the fish swims, they are very soft and smooth, and each joint has a sequence. After observing and doing research, we can know that their movements will be dominated by the head, and the body will follow, just like a snake. But there will also be differences in the types of fish, resulting in different swimming postures. So, I did tests of the animation based on observing the types of fish that were similar to the design of my fish.

Test 1 is when every joint is flexed to the same arc and the fish looks stiff.

Test 2 is where I stagger the keyframes for each joint. Then added the mouth and fin movements.

Test 3 was adding head turning, but it didn't work well, the fish looked bulky.

Test 3: https://youtu.be/PC0b74_7jJ4

Iteration – School of Fish

I made a school of fish in Maya using Mash and then drew curves to make them move on the path. One of my shots is when the protagonist fish coughs, and the other fish face him. I encountered technical difficulties during production, and it has not been solved until now. There is no way for Mash to stop the objects following the path in the correct way, nor to change their facing direction after. So I can only connect different files through the conversion of the camera angles. I have two files, the first one is all the fish swimming on the curve. The second is that the fish swim with a different paths, but all face the protagonist fish.

To be honest, I encountered a lot of technical problems when making the school of fish with Mash. I tested a lot, but because I didn't document the file and kept fixing the places I was not satisfied with, here I can only show two final versions of the fish.

Technical problem: https://youtu.be/hTo-HMhKtX4

Very beginning Test: https://youtu.be/eClfjVq6e7c

Fish swim through the curves: https://youtu.be/WdcuNlxjcxQ

Fish swim facing the main one: https://youtu.be/LbezUh-Jfiw

Iteration – Camera Framing & Camera Animation

My entire animation has a total of 6 files, and each file has the problem of not being able to connect with the previous file. These problems need to be hidden by switching the camera angle. Under the premise of fitting the storyboard, these camera perspectives also need to be combined to think about how to position the camera can have better storytelling.

Playback 1: https://youtu.be/Cu2NnTGsYi4

Playback 2: https://youtu.be/mt-CSAwrCs0

My biggest problem with the camera framing is at the scene of the fish coughing, because I can't connect the school of fish, so I tried a lot of ways to connect the reaction of the other fish before and after the fish coughed.

The most modified in each version is the scene of the fish coughing...

Playback 3: https://youtu.be/AMoo60PWLdg

Playback 4: https://youtu.be/0eaaq6_hml4

Iteration – UV & Color

I didn't set out to differentiate sick fish from healthy fish by coloring the fish at the beginning of the project, but getting working, I realized that I needed more features to tell the audience what my character was symbolizing. So I think of making the fish go from green to red when it got sick. In China, everyone would have a QR code in their phone, and every time people need to scan it in the public, to shows if this person is safe to get into the place. The code tells others if the place you've been recently is COVID safe, green means safe, yellow means not very safe, and Red represents danger. So I changed the color of the fish to tell the audience whether they were sick or not. Coughing fish turns red after coughing. The remaining fish in the tank are green. In addition, all the fish in quarantine are red, which means they are sick too.

In addition, the water in the fish tank will change color according to how long each fish is in it. The water for the fish that just entered the tank will be clear, then slowly turn pale yellow, and finally darken.

Iteration – Render Tests

On render settings, I test a lot of versions. These two versions are the best results for the budget I can accept after discussing with the render farm. Different camera perspectives, although with the same lights and materials, can cause big differences in rendering settings. The two figures below are the render settings correspond to the rendering on the right.

The higher the number of render settings, the less noise. But due to lack of funds, this is the highest quality I can render. 12 camera shots, I tested the initial frame, intermediate frame and final frame of each camera, because the change of camera may cause the effect of some scenes to be different than expected.

More images (render testes):
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18Ca9sb5FAykkuXcDm7XMMINqHHdwOWTD?usp=sharing

CONCLUSION

Through my research on this project, I concluded that the following factors determine how closely a character is connected to a symbolic target in metaphor storytelling.

Clear metaphorical targets and characteristics the character needs. Whether the character needs to resonate with the audience, expressed through expressions/behaviors/languages or some specific characteristics.

Camera framing and camera animation allow the audience to clearly understand the author's intention and understand the content of the picture.

Suitable tempo allows the audience to receive matching content at the right time, better bring in the character or have a better understanding of the metaphor target.

The use of color and sound effects can make the audience quickly understand the author's intention and help the author express their more directly.

Of course, there are still many factors that determine good narrative storytelling. This project only covers a few sides. I will continue exploring in my future work and study.

Final Work (Unfinished audio): https://youtu.be/OpqPEJVgdto

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