

**Bachelor Report:
A Study and Practice on the
Attractive Effects of Visuals**

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Date	May 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

I was never the person who was able to keep a consistent style going. Never have I been able to draw a character in the same art style perfectly twice. They say that practice makes perfect but I never had the patience or motivation to practice. I'd rather come up with concepts and stories than to draw them myself, even though I enjoy drawing. Besides, I find beauty in differences. During my early years at LUCA School of Arts I dropped the mentality of needing to have an identity by having my own signature art style. I realised that one must not always need to make an animation that has refined lines, nice colouring and is pleasing to the eye. An animation that is visually ugly or disruptive is sometimes more interesting and intriguing than an animated film where everything is smooth.

I have always held an interest in the differences between moving foreground and the stationary backdrop. Especially in 2D animation. In my first two and a half years as a student working towards a bachelor's degree I always integrated the practice of these differences in my work whenever I could, whilst sometimes making the fore- and background look the exact same just to see the effect it has on the viewer. From that experience I decided to use the former technique in my film.

My film, *Rage Freinage*, tells the story of a biker who has lost his life in a traffic accident but that is not shown until the climax of the film. Throughout the film the biker is walking through his so called "stairway to heaven" and I want to emphasize his angry demeanour by differentiating the character from the heaven-like scenery.

In this report I shall research the effects of these differentiating styles and my process of making them in order to get interesting effects. How do I emphasize the story through these two different techniques? What effects do they give? Do textures have any effect? What about techniques?

Through this report and its research I hope to educate myself more on the field of visuals and their respective effects on the attention of the viewer. Furthermore, I also hope to get a deeper understanding as to achieve a more critical view on the subject rather than just having a fascination. I believe that one must always be critical, not only of their own (finished) work but also of the process and the subject itself as well.

2. A STUDY ON VISUALS: WHY THEY MATTER

“If orthodox animation is characterised by a unity of style, experimental animation often combines and mixes different modes of animation. This operates in two specific ways – first, to facilitate the multiplicity of personal visions an artist may wish to incorporate in a film, and second, to challenge and re-work orthodox codes and conventions and create new effects.”¹

I actually care way less about the story of my film as I worry more so on getting the desired effect of conveying the intended emotions through visuals. I did not realise it at first until I read up on my subject. I’m not putting all my focus on making a traditionally structured animation where layout is usually harmonised with the setting of the story. I am, however, more so fixated on exploring the attention of the viewer and their attraction of what is visible on screen. I believe one could make the simplest of stories interesting by making it visually compelling.

2.1 Same Story, different Face

Disney is a globally famous brand that tends to find its inspiration in fairy tales. The Little Mermaid, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Pinocchio were all famous folklores Disney has adapted into feature films. However, it is also speculated that the studio adapts from other existing films.

Cars (2006)² is an animated film by Disney and Pixar that tells an identical story to that of Warner Bros’ *Doc Hollywood* (1991)³. In both films the protagonist accidentally goes off-road, destroys property and is then punished to work in a town where he learns to connect with the residents. Although both films are more than over a decade old, *Cars* is still a very memorable film and I don’t think that’s predominantly because of its younger age or fancier brand. The difference is that *Cars* is a 3D animated film with the characters being cars and *Doc Hollywood* is a live-action within the setting of a normal, ordinary universe.

Another instance is the similarities of Disney’s *Atlantis: the Lost Empire* (2001)⁴ and Gainax’ anime series *Nadia: the Secret of Blue Water* (1990-1991)⁵. Not only is the story very similar but so are the characters and plot points. Even the male protagonists look almost identical and their personalities are alike.

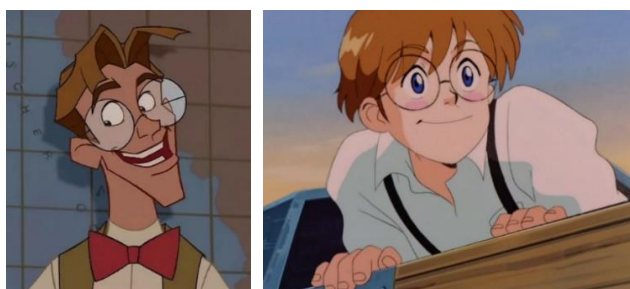


fig. 1 (left): Milo from *Atlantis: the Lost Empire* (Disney, 2001)

fig. 2 (right): Jean from *Nadia: the Secret of Blue Water* (Gainax, 1990-1991)

¹ Wells, P. (1998). *Understanding Animation*. Routledge

² Anderson, D. (Producer), Lasseter, J. & Ranft, J. (Directors). (2006). *Cars* [Film]. Disney & Pixar.

³ Johnson, D., Solt, S. (Producers) & Caton-Jones, M. (Director). (1991). *Doc Hollywood* [Film]. Warner Bros Pictures.

⁴ Hahn, D. (Producer), Trousdale, G. & Wise, K. (Directors). (2001). *Atlantis: the Lost Empire* [Film]. Disney.

⁵ Kubota, H. (Executive Producer). (1990-1991) *Nadia: the Secret of Blue Water* [TV series]. NHK & Sogo Vision.

I find this important because it strengthens my statement from earlier for two reasons. Not only can repeatable stories still be interesting when executed differently but, most important for my study, no matter how simple the story, the visuals will fascinate us. My film essentially tells a simple story too. It is my decision to make the visuals experimental with the goal to make my film more intriguing. Although, I do also admit that I believe that there are many other factors that are at play for the success of these films over their counterparts. My point is that I could have decided on making my film in a more anime-influenced style too but then my film would have probably gotten a different reaction, merely because of the visual style.

2.2 Style Changes Reactions

As time passes, changes take form. This is true for everything. The same can surely be said for animation, whether you look at the entire industry or just a single artist. Refinements take place and the shape of one's signature art style takes on a different form. Thus, with that change, it sparks new feelings in the eye of the beholder.

2.2.1 Evolution of Mascot Design: Mickey Mouse

Mickey Mouse, the mascot of Disney, has gone through these changes as well. The Walt Disney Family Museum blog tells us how Mickey's design has changed throughout time. The blogpost starts by explaining how the character's outfit has changed. Mickey started off with gloveless hands and no shoes (with an inconsistent amount of fingers) but eventually has been given shoes and gloves to differentiate his body parts. However, Mickey's facial features have had the most and biggest changes, the blogpost states.

"In *Plane Crazy* (1928), where his eyes occupy almost his entire face, in *Steamboat Willie* his eyes were redesigned as small, black ovals giving Mickey a greater range of facial expression."⁶

The blogpost then continues stating that, over time, Mickey's facial features and his personality became intertwined and inseparable as the character matured. Freddie Moore then came up with a new design in Disney's *Fantasia* (1940)⁷ where Mickey had smaller eyes and pupils. Mickey also has been given more colour due to technical evolution. This new design had changed the mouse's style and made it a beloved classic, causing the following designs of the mascot to stem from this version. That is until Disney announced the new animated Mickey Mouse series of 2017.

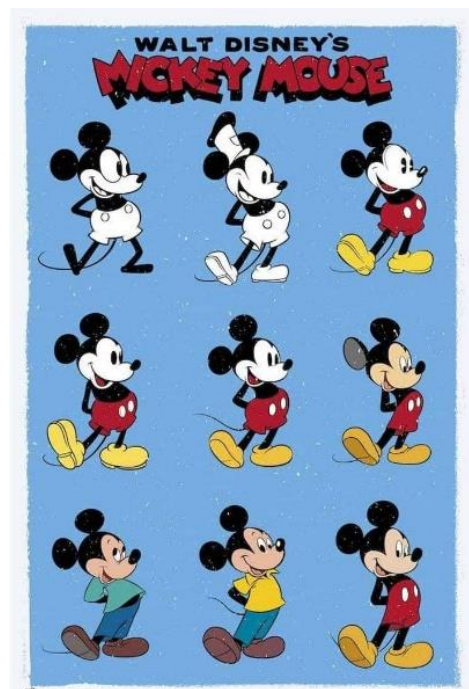


fig. 3: Evolution of Mickey Mouse (Erik, 2017)

⁶ Hellman, N. (2020, Feb 3). The Evolution of Mickey Mouse. *Walt Disney Family Museum*. <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/evolution-mickey-mouse>

⁷ Algar, J. & Armstrong, S. (Directors). (1940). *Fantasia* [Film]. Disney.

Mickey’s new design took the internet by storm. Fans were not happy with the new design, myself included. An article by Medium (2017)⁸ defends this design by stating that fans are only hesitant because of passion and nostalgia to which I have to agree. The controversy around this drastic design change, rooted out of what a person is used to, shows all too well how style and design can have a huge impact on the emotions of any person.

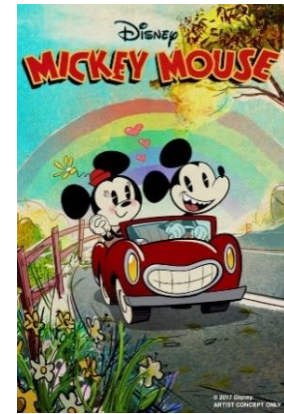


fig. 4: Poster of new Mickey Mouse series with Mickey’s new art style (Disney, 2017)

2.2.2 Evolution of an Industry: Anime

In anime I find similar results. Love it or hate it, anime is undeniably a successful industry with its own distinct style that also has evolved over decades. Along with those changes came new feelings. I want to go over some changes and explain the effects they had on their audiences.



Osamu Tezuka’s *Astroboy* (1963)⁹ and every other anime from that time were mainly catered towards children with its simple and charming style. It wasn’t until the 70s anime started to cater to an older audience. *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (1978)¹⁰ and *Ashita No Joe* (1970)¹¹ have more body proportions and details compared to anime from the 60s. Designs started to look more mature as the stories of anime matured with them. This also tells me how visuals and story influences one another. Although the style is iconic, anime from this time is often mocked.

The 80s and 90s brought us anime such as *Akira* (1988)¹² and *Cowboy Bebop* (1998)¹³ and with it came an evolution of more technicalities and anatomy. Shading is experimented with, hair and clothing get more detail and there is this new, big consideration of the human (especially female) anatomy. The style from this time was so beloved, it is frequently referred to as “The Golden Age of Anime”.

Around the 2000s anime took a step back from the more “realistic” anatomy in order to make character movements easier to animate. Then came Kyoto Animation which brought in the characterisation of big eyes. Many weren’t a fan of this style at first. Anime shifted both in style and story. Fans had mixed feelings about this drastic change. Nevertheless, it did set up an evolution: the Moë style (meaning “attraction”).

Fig. 5: Evolution of Anime (Anime Art Museum, 2013-2019)

⁸ Eng, L. (2017, Aug 31). In Defense of Mickey Mouse’s New Look. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/disneywtf/in-defense-of-mickey-mouses-new-look-4e1d7168e7a>

⁹ Masaki, M. & Bessho, K. (Executive Producers). (1963-1976). *Astro Boy* [TV series]. Mushi Production.

¹⁰ Rintaro (Director). (1978-1979). *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* [TV series]. Studio Nue.

¹¹ Dezaki, O. (Director). (1970-1971). *Ashita no Joe* [TV series]. Fuji TV.

¹² Otomo, K. (Director). (1988). *Akira* [Film]. Toho, Kodansha & Mainichi.

¹³ Watanabe, S. (Director). (1998-1999). *Cowboy Bebop* [TV series]. Bandai Visual.

Ever since, anime has adapted their style which still has influence to this day. Both *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (2006)¹⁴ and *The Disappearance of Nagato Yuki-chan* (2015)¹⁵ are two different anime set in the same universe with the same characters. They look completely different yet still recognisable. Despite production value changes, it is obvious that the Kyoto Animation's style still holds strong today. Especially in the unrealistic eyes, strange reflections in hair and use of colour.



fig. 6 (left): Nagato from *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (Kyoto Animation, 2006)
 fig. 7 (right): Nagato from *The Disappearance of Nagato Yuki-chan* (Satelight, 2015)

This drastic shift, that eventually formed the current standard for anime, motivated some illustrators to do something similar as I am doing now with my film. Taking the conventions and throwing it away. Fan-Artist Evelyn Gonzales reiterated the 2016 anime *My Hero Academia*¹⁶ by giving it an old-school aesthetic. These recreations have sparked a remarkable response as it perfectly captured that old anime feel, as stated by an article from Comicbook (2019). “*My Hero Academia* has become a staple of online fandom communities, and there's something about its expressive, fantastical character designs that just beg to be drawn. Fan art of all styles, mediums and skill levels has taken over social media, and it shows no signs of stopping yet.”¹⁷



fig. 8 (left): frame from *My Hero Academia* 3rd season episode 8 (Bones, 2018)
 fig. 9 (right): fan art of *My Hero Academia* in an old-school style (Evelyn Gonzales, 2018)

This actively demonstrates that people are intrigued by that which is different from what one is used to. The reason why the artist community on social media is so important and popular is because fan-art dissects what we know from the original (and the standard) and reconstructs it into a different style, even if that style is “strange” or “out-dated”, conveying different reactions. It is exactly because of that why I find it so interesting to make a film where the visuals are nothing like the standards today.

¹⁴ Hatta, Y. (Executive Producer). (2006). *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* [TV series]. Klockworx, Kodakawa & Lantis.

¹⁵ Sabat, C. (Executive Producer). (2015). *The disappearance of Nagato Yuuki-chan* [TV series]. Klockworx, Kodakawa & Lantis.

¹⁶ Nagasaki, K. (Director). (2016-ongoing). *My Hero Academia* [TV series]. Dentsu, Mainichi, Movic, TOHO & Shueisha.

¹⁷ Hein, M. (2018, July 25). *My Hero Academia Gets A Perfect 90s Anime Makeover*. Comicbook. <https://comicbook.com/anime/news/my-hero-academia-90s-anime-makeover-twitter-fan-art/>

3. CREATIVE PRACTICE: THE PROCESS OF MAKING MY FILM

Through literature research I learned that simple stories can be interesting via execution. Whether a story about the lost city of Atlantis will be interesting is partially the result of visuals as it influences the story. Even if that story has been told before, if it looks different and distinct the film could still be fascinating. When we see something unusual or unfamiliar our attention gets hooked. Especially when we are attentively watching a film. If style changes (even if abruptly), our cognitive awareness peaks. By experimenting with sudden style-changes, I must be able to reconstruct conventions and make something different from a simple story.

3.1 Working in Reverse

It is sometimes better to work your way backwards. That's what one of my teachers says from time to time and I took that advice to heart. *Rage Freinage* tells the story of a biker who has died and finds his own body. To separate his soul from his body I decided on making the climax partially live-action. It would give a sudden, deceiving effect as it would throw off the viewer. When something comes unexpectedly, the brain wants to understand what is going on and therefore becomes more attentive, even if for a brief moment. But why did I decide on live-action then instead of just another form of animation?

The standard of film (disregarding SFX) is that live-action and animation are often separated as two different forms of art. However, there have been many films in the past that have brought the two forms together. *Mary Poppins* (1964)¹⁸, *Enchanted* (2007)¹⁹ and *The Lego Movie* (2014)²⁰ are films that blended live-action and animation. Real life actors dance and sing together with animals on the same screen in *Mary Poppins*. *Enchanted* tells the story with a universe where there exists both a fairy tale-like animated world and the real world filmed in New York City. *The Lego Movie* is a film where the animated Lego-characters are unaware that they are being controlled by real, live-action people. I enjoy these films not only because they played with my attention but also because those are such rare events. Hence, making me recall them. They're not the standard. They don't harmonise hand-in-hand but contradict and play off of one another.



fig. 10 (left): *Mary Poppins* singing and dancing with animated figures (Disney, 1964)

fig. 11 (middle): Prince Edward in both animated and live-action version (Disney, 2007)

fig. 12 (right): immobilised Emmet after witnessing the "real" world (Warner Bros., 2014)

¹⁸ Stevenson, R. (Director). (1964). *Mary Poppins* [Film]. Disney.

¹⁹ Lima, K. (Director). (2007). *Enchanted* [Film]. Disney.

²⁰ Lord, P. & Miller, C. (2014). *The Lego Movie* [Film]. Warner Bros.

Stormy Studio wrote about the differences of these two forms. Where animation excels in conveying abstract or complicated ideas, it also has the potential to feel impersonal to certain audiences. Live-action, however, has that sense of authenticity of actual human experience.²¹ So which is better to convey a story? That, I think, needs some nuance because it depends on who you ask and the story that's being told. But my film isn't as much about the what or who, more so about the how and why. Therefore I wanted to end my animated film with an unexpected live-action scene; to humanise the story and to scrutinize the awareness of the audience in order to make them think about my film.

3.2 Establishing Style

One of the most recognised parts of film is how characters are represented throughout the film. My characters have to look identical to their live-action counterparts in order to retain the humanising effect. Therefore, the style has to be somewhat realistic. I could have decided on a hyper-realistic style too but I'm not comfortable with the style nor will it align with my idea to form distinct and peculiar visuals. An anime or cartoon-esque style could also have done the trick but then I fear it would lose the humanising aspects of the story. However, just as Evelyn Gonzales recreated an anime into a different style, maybe I could refurbish realism by changing and leaving out details as long as body proportions are still realistic.

Subsequently came technique and materials. I stuck with techniques I already knew, which was 2D animation. For materials however, I went the unfamiliar route. Thinking back on how even something ugly can have more effect than things that are neat, I opted for oil pastels. This is a technique I'm not very acquainted with (and therefore might come out rather ugly) and it would also be a nice contrast to what I decided for the scenery (see chapter 3.3 *Separation through Textures*).

During the making of key-frames, troubles arose. Some movements were too hard. I could not get certain character-actions to flow smoothly or look natural. Thus, I made use of an old method: Rotoscoping²². Whilst filming myself I came to the idea of playing with motion. Depending on technique, film has a set amount of frames per second which is typically twenty-four. Stop-motion, however, uses twelve frames per second which in turn makes movement more attractive. If I were to do the same for only the animated, moving characters, I believe it might contribute to the idea of breaking up conventions. As twelve is half of twenty-four, skipping every other frame might work.

I made some test animations: some in twelve FPS (frames per second) and some in twenty-four. When I imported the animated Adobe After Effects files into Premiere Pro, I noticed an unforeseen occurrence. The animations that were twelve FPS were converted to twenty-four FPS. The gaps in between keyframes automatically filled in. However, that was not an issue. The flow of the movements of the animations that were originally twenty-four FPS felt forced and too polished whilst those in twelve FPS had a grainier and rougher effect, suitable for the textures of oil pastels.

²¹ *Live action vs Animation: A Comparison*. (n/a). Stormy Studio. <https://stormystudio.com/live-action-vs-animation-a-comparison/>

²² Rotoscoping. (2021, Apr 6). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotoscoping>

3.3 Separation through Textures

When selecting materials, I had to think about separation as well as the setting of the story: an angry biker in a train station to heaven. I decided that something texturally crude and something visually serene and calming would work. I decided on grainy oil pastels with a backdrop of cloud-like watercolour.

These were not the first materials in mind but they did have the best effect. When layering the characters on top of the backdrop, the contradiction between the two separates the character from the scenery and enforces the story. It also retains the feelings that textures can provide connection to the object.



fig. 13: Oil pastel character on watercolour backdrop

Although I was not versed in oil pastels, I have tried my hands on watercolour in the past. Admittedly my skill in watercolour isn't the best but the lesson of "ugly can be interesting" made the process more fruitful. For some parts I resorted to water-soluble coloured pencils which eventually came to be the better decision. Lines of the pencils were still visible which gave an extra layer of texture ideal for metallic and wooden objects.

4. CONCLUSION

Dissecting and re-evaluating protocol was an interesting task, it taught me more than what I had originally thought I would learn from this study. Studying conventions and making films with the application of these conventions are logical and sensible. On the contrary, completely dismembering them was like baking bread with no recipe. It makes no sense at first. After all, why would you bake without a recipe? However, that didn't mean it wasn't interesting and experiential.

I found that by de-harmonising structure and separating layers and visuals the film became a film that could be viewed in multiple aspects. Either focused on story that got influenced by style or style that got influenced by story. One could also watch the film as a study itself which to me was not only what it became to be but also something that feels more personal.

After my studies I want to work at a studio or maybe become a freelancer and make my own films. Nonetheless, this report has taught me to be observing and more critical of the conventional technicalities of animation, its limits and boundaries. It taught me to always strive for more knowledge and experience, captivating me to experiment and maybe detecting alternative, potential options.

In terms of how the future of *Rage Freinage* will be, I hope that it does not become a film for its story. I hope it becomes a conversation piece about its technicalities. For someone to come up to me and ask not “Why?” but to come discuss with me about experimenting with storytelling and visual attraction. In turn, it would make me ask myself not “How can I make it better?” but rather “How can I make it different?” As occurrences that are different from what we are used have the potential to attract our attention and memories. As everything has been done before, not enough has been done differently.

Source List

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