

Film and animation storyboard camera language exploration

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the study of the charm of camera language in film and animation, guiding the reader to feel the expression of camera language consciously in the future, and to concretize the abstract feeling of watching a film. A good film and television work, each of its images should have meaning, that is, the lens language. It is often ignored by the audience, but it does exist. In this paper, the author will analyze some clips from Akira Kurosawa's film *Seven Samurai* and a Chinese XIANXIA animation film, *A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality*, and analyze the camera language hidden under the visual images through the layout of the images, the movement of the camera and the performance of the characters. In *Seven Samurai*, the author mainly analyze the general scenes, while in *A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality*, the author will focus on the fight scenes.

1. Introduction

Storyboarding refers to a variety of video media such as movies, animation, TV series, commercials, music videos, etc. Before the actual shooting or drawing, the composition of the image is illustrated in the form of a diagram, which breaks down the continuous picture in one run and labels the running style, duration, dialogues, special effects, etc.

Storyboards are divided into different directions depending on the media. The common ones are film storyboards and comic storyboards. In filmmaking, a storyboard is basically a large cartoon of a film or part of a film created in advance to help the director, cinematographer or TV commercial client imagine scenes and spot potential problems in advance. Storyboards usually include arrows and directions for movement. In film productions that adhere to a certain degree to the script, storyboards provide a visual layout of the events viewed through the camera lens. In the case of interactive media, it also determines the layout and order in which users and viewers see content and information. The storyboarding process can effectively illustrate most of the technical details involved in a film or interactive media project, with images or additional text.

My report focuses on the use of storyboarding in film and animation as a way of expressing camera language. I will analyze some clips from Akira Kurosawa's film *Seven Samurai* and a Chinese XIANXIA animation film, *A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality*, and analyze the camera language hidden under the visual images through the layout of the images, the movement of the camera and the performance of the characters. In *Seven Samurai*, the author will mainly analyze the general scenes, while in *A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality*, the author will focus on

the fight scenes.

2. Literature Review

Storyboard is a plan and blueprint for a film. It is a series of sketches or lists that the director prepares for filming, showing the basic elements of the future scenes and camera arrangements, and recording the director's visual vision before the film is formed. By storyboarding, you force yourself to imagine every shot of the future film. This is how your script evolves from a vague concept to a rich and concrete one, and the combination of shots can be seen as a combination of storyboards.

Storyboarding in the form widely known today was developed at the Walt Disney studio during the early 1930s. Disney credited animator Webb Smith with creating the idea of drawing scenes on separate sheets of paper and pinning them up on a bulletin board to tell a story in sequence, thus creating the first storyboard [1](Christopher Finch, 1975). The first complete storyboards were created for the 1933 Disney short *Three Little Pigs* [2](Diane Disney Miller, Pete Martin, 1957). According to John Canemaker, in *Paper Dreams: The Art and Artists of Disney Storyboards*, the first storyboards at Disney evolved from comic-book like "story sketches" created in the 1920s to illustrate concepts for animated cartoon short subjects such as *Plane Crazy* and *Steamboat Willie* [3](John Canemaker, 1957).

The language of shots in storyboards had in fact been studied and understood long ago in the past. For example, Daniel Arijon's *Grammar of the Film Language* lists the basic rules of camera performance for essentially all possibilities in film [4](Daniel Arijon, 1991). In *Framed Ink: Drawing and Composition by Visual Storytellers* by Marcos Mateu-Mestre and Jeffrey Katzenberg, the language of shots in storyboards is presented [5](Marcos Mateu-Mestre, Jeffrey Katzenberg, 2010).

There are many books on the grammar of the film shot, but it is difficult to get a real sense of storyboarding when it is only in books. In life, audiences watch films that are already finished, and the camera language expressed in the composition, camera movement, and character positioning is already integrated with the film itself, so people rarely realize that this is actually the camera language expressed in storyboarding when watching the film. So in the next chapters, I will do my best to explain the charm of camera language by actually analyzing the footage of the film, explaining the meaning of camera shot type, frame layout and character position, etc.

3. Discussion and Analysis of the Film and Animation

3.1 Analyzing Fragments from Akira Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai": A Journey into 16th Century Japan.

In this chapter, the author will first analyze some fragments from Akira Kurosawa's [6] *Seven Samurai*. It is a 1954 Japanese epic samurai drama film co-written, edited, and directed by Akira Kurosawa. The story takes place in 1586 during the Sengoku period of Japanese history. It follows the story of a village of desperate farmers who seek to hire rōnin (masterless samurai) to combat bandits who will return after the harvest to steal their crops.

3.1.1 Specific analyses of clips from Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* Part I.

Since the film clip between 01:05:03~01:09:35, the screenshots are shown in Fig 1. In this clip, full shot, mid shot, and medium close up appear on the shot type. The six samurai go to the village led by the villagers, followed by Kikuchiyo along the way, always keeping a distance between them, forming a pair of many characters from the screen. This distance maintained foreshadows the

separation between Kikuchiyo and them cannot be removed.

Outdoor scenes, the characters are moving forward, more follow-up shots, scene changes are also larger, shot type are basically switching between midshot and full shot, while having the hand-held following shot viewing experience. Kikuchiyo can always find a way to attract the attention of others, such as he touched the fish with his bare hands, or undress. And not far from the rocks, the six samurai tower over the scene, but appear very small in the frame, while Kikuchiyo is nearly naked at the forefront of the camera, creating a sense of defiance. Approaching the village Kikuchiyo's separation from the six samurai diminishes, and he, who likes to steal the show, stands in front of the other samurai on the hillside.



Figure 1: Samurai's village entry scene and villagers' meeting depicted in the picture.

3.1.2 Specific analyses of clips from Akira Kurosawa's Seven Samurai Part II.



Figure 2: Samurai's discussion of countermeasures with the village head inside the house portrayed in the picture.

Since the film clip between 01:09:51~01:11:41, the screenshots are shown in Fig 2. The shot type in this clip is mainly medium shot and close up. In Fig 2, the indoor scenes form an image of a group of heroes. From the almost close-ups shown in the close up scene you can see the old man like a statue, always a symbol of wisdom. The villagers' fear of the samurai at this point makes the samurai very awkward as well, and this awkwardness makes the atmosphere strange.

The silence is broken by a knocking sound outside that startles the village headman and the two villagers in the house like they have lost their souls. The close-up shots of the faces of the village chief and the villagers tell the audience that something is wrong, while the samurai do not know what is going on. The triangular composition of two foreground and background characters has a different atmosphere. The first foreground of the village head and Kambei, followed by two villagers who invite the samurai, has the awkwardness of the foreground and the trepidation of the background characters. The second is Kambei in the foreground and Shichiroji (the left) and Heihachi Hayashi (the right) in the background, with the awkwardness of the foreground and the disdain of the background, followed by a close up shot of the village headman with a helpless face.

3.1.3 Specific analyses of clips from Akira Kurosawa's Seven Samurai Part III.

Since the film clip between 01:43:03~01:46:25, the screenshots are shown in Fig 3. The types of shots that appear in this clip are mainly panoramic, medium, medium close-up, and close-up. In this clip, the feelings expressed in the camera language change a lot in terms of mood shifts, from serious to lively. Some people want to betray before the war, as the leader of the Kanbei's decisive power is excellent, at this time shake the army will certainly suffer defeat, he must maintain the morale of the team, which is an experienced leader must have the quality. At the pep rally, Kikuchiyo once again showed his hilarious skills just right, allowing the nervous peasants to relax again at once. Not only the men, but also the old ladies who had lost their teeth were laughing their heads off.



Figure 3: Kikuchiyo's lively intervention during the samurai's gathering of the villagers depicted in the picture.

There are three follow-up shots in this scene, which are actually motion follow-up shots of the same camera, such as camera 1 in Fig 4, where the camera track moves one back and forth to deliver the whole event in a crisp and clear manner.

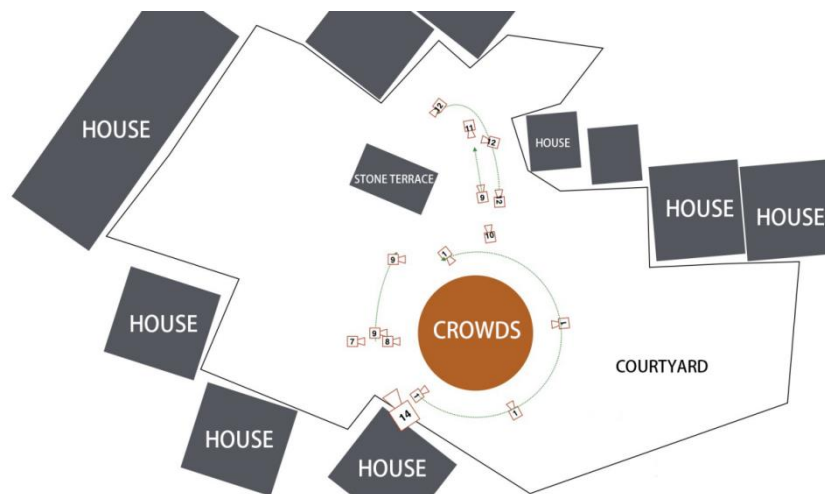


Figure 4: Figure 3 scene plan drawing illustrated in the figure.

3.1.4 Specific analyses of clips from Akira Kurosawa's Seven Samurai Part IV.

The film was produced in 1954. Japan was a defeated country in World War II, and as a nation that respected Bushido, the whole nation was looking for a way to exist after the defeat, and the spirit of Bushido was at the edge of society. They could not pursue the ultimate goal of "dying well" as they did before. Director Akira Kurosawa's use of the camera language to express the realistic dilemma of the "Bushido" spirit reached a peak.

After all, film is an art that needs to be shown by the camera image, and it is on top of the image that the director's artistic conception is added to give it a deep emotional meaning. Akira Kurosawa has a high level of artistic skills in painting, so he made a very precise conception of camera angles, scenes, and movement directions in his split-screen sketchbook before shooting. Therefore, it can be said that every shot and even every frame in Seven Samurai is directly full of the director's artistic creation emotion.

3.2 Unveiling Camera Language: Analysing Fight Scenes in "A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality".

3.2.1 Basic introduction before analysing.

In this section we will analyze two fight scenes in A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality to concretize the camera language hidden behind the shots that give us a good viewing experience.

A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality is mainly about a poor and ordinary boy from a village joins a minor sect in Jiang Hu and becomes an Unofficial Disciple by chance. How will Han Li, a commoner by birth, establish a foothold for himself in his sect? With his mediocre aptitude, how will he successfully traverse the path of cultivation and become an immortal? This is a story of an ordinary mortal who, against all odds, clashes with devilish demons and the ancient celestials in order to find his own path to immortality [7] (A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality Wiki, 2023). In this world, the levels from low to high are Meditation Phase, Foundation Phase, Virtuoso Phase, Immortality Phase, Incarnation Phase, etc.

3.2.2 The following analysis is partly from episode 35 of the cartoon, 08:27~11:56.

As in Fig 5, after the main character Han Li meets the enemies, the enemies set up a red energy shield to trap Han Li and his friends inside. In this segment, the creator first used a few small

characters have no way to resist to show the power of the energy shield, several levels are still in the Meditation Phase of the powerless to fight back.



Figure 5: Additional details can be found in the text description.



Figure 6: Additional details can be found in the text description.

Han Li needs to get to the weakest point of the energy above to break the energy shield. So we can see an open terrain in the screen, in a translucent hood has a tornado, forming a special space, then the battle logic is very clear: Han Li in the energy hood to dodge attacks, from the energy hood above to fly outside the formation to solve the outside of the small villain led to Tie Luo block, Han Li use the characteristics of the tornado to dodge, unexpectedly sneak attack from behind, two moves end the battle, the energy shield was resolved. Han Li in the first move with a small knife (in Fig 6), the second move with a giant sword, in the pace of the fight also has a progressive relationship. Finally the battle ended, the screen appeared subtitles, Han Li's level is Foundation Phase. This screen treatment is a little more dramatic than telling the audience Han Li's level at the beginning.

3.2.3 The following analysis is partly from episode 36 of the cartoon, 01:35~03:19.

As in Fig 7, Han Li begins a chase war and aerial battle with the villainous Butler Wang. Butler Wang turned to escape and lowered his flight altitude in the air, trying to use the woods to block Han Li's view. The camera also changes rhythm and begins to rotate 360 degrees in motion, giving the viewer a sense of movement. Han Li chased after him and used the terrain (circled in the lower

right corner of Figure 7) to attack Butler Wang remotely, blowing up rocks to block Wang's route.



Figure 7: Additional details can be found in the text description.



Figure 8: Additional details can be found in the text description.

As in Fig 8, Butler Wang dodged Han Li's attack, and dodged the falling rocks, the terrain became narrower and narrower, from narrow to wide again, is the director's use of camera language to deceive the audience visual time.



Figure 9: Additional details can be found in the text description.

As in Figure 9, as the terrain gradually becomes wider, it is Han Li's fatal attack that is ushered in. Reviewing the footage just now, Han Li is actually chasing around the road, and the previous attack is also forcing Butler Wang into the narrow path to slow him down. And from the beginning of the shot just now, the director only let Wang Butler appear in the picture, Han Li's figure did not appear in the picture, even in the back with a close-up of Butler Wang's side to block the picture deep in Han Li, until the final mystery is revealed, a large close-up of Wang Butler's face, immediately opposite Han Li lens flung over a fireball. Flames also from the direction of the plane of the camera turned to the depths, picking up the counter-strike in Butler Wang, followed by a quick shot of the broken stone, reflecting the sense of power hit, so the big picture has been decided, the end of the chase.

This part is both a chase and an air battle, both ordinary human probability of not reaching the sense of movement and speed, but also the use of space and terrain to show the human tactics. Plot twists and turns, and from the beginning to the end did not say a word, only with the camera language to tell the plot clearly.

3.2.3 The language of the camera hidden behind the screen.

Through the above, you can see that each shot has its meaning when the director shoots the fight scene. Through the camera to induce the viewer's eyes, the message is hidden in the language of the camera. Such detail-rich shots can withstand repeated viewings by the audience and enhance the fineness of the work.

4. Conclusion

Carroll has pointed out that the expression of film cannot be compared with language. Because any adult does not need any training to read the expressions in the film [8] (Carroll, 1985). Through the previous analysis of the clips of Seven Samurai and A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality, we can find that the language of the camera is indeed hidden in the picture, but she is different from the language we usually use for communication, which induces the audience's feelings through the form of the picture.

Throughout the history of cinema and research, cinema has changed from "author-centered" to "audience-centered". The birth of the storyboard allows for a richer expression of the language of the camera, and the need to express the language of the camera deepens the need for the storyboard, both for the sake of achieving a good viewing effect, and the effect is for the audience. Film creation and appreciation is a wonderful psychological phenomenon, which is both a reaction of the creator and the audience to the objective world, and an active subjective reflection. This subjective dynamism is reflected in the processing and cohesion of cognition, emotion, perception, etc. of the real world. It can be said that storyboarding and camera language both aim to reveal the psychological laws of film-related artistic aesthetic activities (creation and appreciation) and explore the universal principles of human perception of audiovisual language.

In addition, although the laws of the camera have been studied and used thoroughly by previous generations, this does not mean that creation is limited. The desire for expression and imagination of human beings predestine the language of the camera to change in many ways.

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