Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

VISUAL EFFECTS AS A PART OF EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING

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Bachelors of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)
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This project is one of the needs for
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(Cinematography)

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2016

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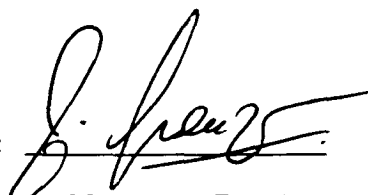_____
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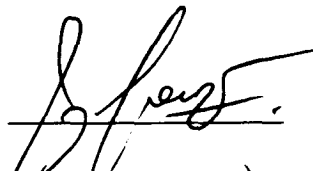
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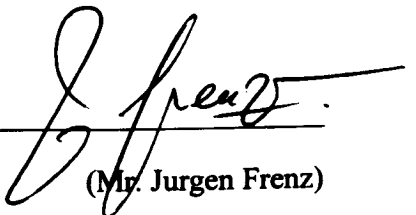
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24-6-2016

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ABSTRACT

The advancement in technology enables a much more powerful computer which results in widespread uses of visual effects. Nowadays, we can see many filmmakers are using visual effects as a part of their film. The use of visual effects had been a common practice nowadays and much more advance if we compare from decades ago. These comes a problem when visual effects are everywhere but the narrative of the films becomes forgetful. The audience are amaze by its visual appeal but will forget the film in just a few weeks. The researcher questions if there is a way where the filmmakers can implements visual effects in their films without eroding the narrative of the film.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The researcher had researched about the visual effects as a part of effective storytelling. Visual effects plays an important role in today's filmmaking but also the researcher questions whether visual effects alone is really compulsory.

"Visual effects is the term used to describe any imagery created, altered, or enhanced for a film or other moving media that cannot be accomplished during live-action shooting. In other words, much of the art of visual effects takes place in post-production, after primary image capture is complete" (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

According to the above statement, visual effects is basically done in the post-production phase. The researcher believed that editing is essential in making a polish film but visual effects may result in desirable or undesirable effect.

"Some of the earliest films, including Georges Melies's A Trip to the Moon ("Le voyage dans la lune" ;1902) and Edwin Porter's The Great Train Robbery (1903) and Dream of a Rarebit Fiend (1 906 ; see fig. 8 . 3) , took advantage of the available technologies of multiple exposures, time-lapse

photography, and hand painting to make moon-dwelling

creatures appear and disappear or to enhance the impact of

a safe full of cash that explodes during a train robbery."

(Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis, 2008)

It is visible that visual effects had always been experimented by filmmakers since the early days. It makes the seemingly impossible, possible. But with the advancement of technology, more visual effects are being applied to films nowadays which may or may not help in improving the film's narrative.

"In a famous essay in 1949, Andre Bazin characterized the

advance of film technology as an inevitable and graceful

progression towards greater screen realism. In doing so,

however, he ignored the socio-economic context in which

each development was grounded. Up to that point, the prime

impetus behind each major technological innovation had

been commercial rather than aesthetic, as enterprising studio

heads recognized new technology as a means to maximize

profits while simultaneously distinguishing their product

from the competition."

It is debatable whether visual effects does really help in aiding the narrative of a film or reduce the value of the film's narrative. The current state of many filmmaker focuses visual effects more than the film's narrative.

1.2 Problem Statement

Visual effects has certainly been extensively use since computer have been significantly technologically advance. Since then, filmmakers uses visual effects to enhance their film visually. But the question remains, does this really help in terms of its narrative.

"Has an emphasis on special visual effects in Titanic, the Matrix trilogy, Sin City, V for Vendetta, and the X-men films undercut the importance of character or theme? Is the industry using special effects to compete with sophisticated home viewing technologies(broadband cable, high-speed computer connections, and home theatre systems) at the expense of thoughtful narratives?" (Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis, 2008)

According to the above statement, the researcher understands that there is a rising question about whether or not visual effects ruins the overall narrative of a film. The experience of watching a film that is enhanced with visual effects may or may not be ruined. Therefore, the researcher looks upon the consideration needed when implementing visual effects to ensure narrative of the film is not sacrificed.

1.3 Research Objectives

i. To analyze the motivation of visual effects in film.

ii. To analyze the factors in making realistic and believable visual effects.

iii. To analyze the misuse of visual effects in film that affects the narrative of the film.

1.4 Research Questions

i. What is the motivation of visual effects in film?

ii. Why does visual effects looks fake even though it looks great?

iii. Why does visual effects being misused in film?

1.5 Limitations

The researcher puts limitation on the research into visual effects in films and not special effects. Not to be confuse with special effects, special effects or practical effects are done in the production phase while visual effects are done in the post-production phase.

1.6 Audience

The audience for this research is the researcher's supervisor and also for filmmakers who are interested in visual effects.

1.7 Conclusion

For this research, the researcher will look into the factors that leads to the importance of visual effects in aiding the narrative of film. It is visible that even from the early days of filmmaking, filmmakers creatively find their ways in manipulating the moving images as a way of storytelling but since advancement of technology is inevitable, more sophisticated manipulation is possible in producing the unimaginable. Because of this, the researcher questions weather advancement in visual effects in films can really aid the narrative of a film without sacrificing the narrative of the film.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Visual Effects as a Part of Effective Storytelling

Advancement in technology is inevitable thus a lot of innovation goes along when the art of filmmaking is growing. The uses of visual effects in film is one of them and it aids a lot in filmmaking.

> *"Secondly, every shot must tell a story. That is to say, objects or characters within the frame must move; they must act in furtherance of the story"*(Charles Finance and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

According to the above statement, it is important for each object inside the frame must have a function to forward the story.

> *"Think of it this way: In visual effects, we create objects, characters, environments, and sometimes entire scenes in the computer (what we call all-CG). But these digital effects serve to support a story that is basically told in live action and usually — though not always — are intended to look photorealistic, even when they depict fictitious situations."*
> (Charles Finance and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

The statement above states that digital effects must be significance towards the storytelling of the film. This statement can be related to the previous statement where every object inside the frame must have its purpose.

"Understanding the story point of the shot is perhaps the most important consideration. Why is the shot in the film? How will it advance the narrative? Where should the viewer look while the shot is on the screen? These questions severely complicate the process. Only by creative collaboration with the filmmakers and by hard work can matte shots become a welcome addition to a film." (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

From the statement above, it is important for the visual effects needed to be use wisely so that it can help advance the narrative of film.

"To analyze and interpret individual films, viewers must consider what digital technologies contribute to the overall system of meaning. Shock, surprise, and delight at optical and digital tricks can make watching films fun. But to unearth a greater underlying significance, those effects must be read in relation to story, character, theme, tone, and style" (Maria Pragmaggiore and Tom Wallis, 2008)

According to the above statement, the visual effects needs to be really significant to the overall narrative of the film.

2.2 Motivation of Visual Effects

Visual effects are a common thing not just for film but also for a commercial these days. There is are a lot of motivation of using visual effects in films.

"That is the short description of what visual effects are all about adding elements to a picture that are not there, or removing something that you don't want to be there." (Steve Wright, 2008)

From the above statement, visual effects are used either to add or removing objects from the scene.

"If you wanted your actors to be seen standing in front of the Imperial Palace on the planet Mungo, you may not want to spend the money to build the exterior of the entire Imperial Palace. Better to build a small piece of it on a movie set, place the talent in it, then extend the set later using CGI when you need a wide shot" (Steve Wright, 2008)

According to the above statement, visual effects are used to place the talents at a specific place and at the same time it can reduce the budget of the film.

"The second reason to use visual effects comes to for when you could do the scene practically, but doing so might place

someone's life at risk." (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

From the statement above, it is seen that visual effects are used when it is dangerous to do the scene during the production phase.

2.3 Realistic and Believable Visual Effects

Films with heavy visual effects looks great but the audience can see that it's fake even though it looks great. There are certain factors that makes the visual effects noticeably fake in films.

"Truly great visual effects serve story and character- and in doing so are, by their very definition, invisible." (Freddie Wong, 2015)

According to the above statement, a great visual effects is the one that the audience would not be able to tell that it was digitally added to the shot.

"Computer graphics, while being infinitely flexible, always suffers from the challenge of being compared to the real thing under a microscope." (Mark Sawicki, 2007)

From the above statement, it is inevitable that visual effects will always be compared with the real thing that camera captures.

"Focusing on the visual effect and trying hard to prove it's real has the unfortunate consequence of causing the audience to look at the shot as a visual effects shot and not an emotional shot helping to tell the story." (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

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It is important for the filmmakers to deliver the visual effects real but it is importantly for the filmmakers not to focus it as a visual effects shot, but also serve a function to the story itself.

2.4 The Misused of Visual Effects in Film

"Perhaps the most profound change regarding visual effects is the 'miracle' of digital. Unfortunately, this miracle and the accompanying ability to manipulate and fine-tune just about everything have resulted in furious production schedules and frantic, free and- easy shooting with a 'damn the torpedoes' attitude" (Mark Sawicki, 2007)

According to Mark Sawicki, it is evident that visual effects can result in dependency in fixing everything in post-production. This can result in filmmakers not to be very detail or aware of problems when shooting their films.

"Visual effects are used more and more as a catchall to cover problems on the set that could have been avoided." (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

According to the above statement, it is visible that filmmakers sees visual effects more as a tool to fix everything in post-production which can be easily avoided during the shooting phase.

"In many cases there is a desire to increase the number of extras, space and ships, creatures, etc., within a scene or to keep layering element after element in an attempt to "amp up" the action." (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

According to the above statement, filmmakers tries to make the scene more impressive by including various visual effects.

"Spending a lot of time and money on a shot that becomes a 2-second quick cut or is so full of things that the audience has no idea what they are looking at is a waste" (Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman, 2010)

From the above statement, it can be seen that its only a waste to invest into visual effects if the audience don't know what they are watching.

2.5 Conclusion

The researcher sees that visual effects can serve as a tool for filmmakers to enhance their visual and at the same time serve as a device to aid their narrative as well. Other than that, visual effects can also be overwhelming at times if it's not used usefully.

Chapter 3 : Research Design

3.1 Research Methodology

The researcher is using two methodologies for this research to answer the research questions in chapter 1. These methodologies will help the researcher in achieving the objectives of the research.

3.2 Content Analysis

"Content analysis maybe briefly defined as the systematic,

objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristic."

(Neuendorf, 2002)

The researcher uses content analysis as a methodology for answering the research question. The researcher collects the data from books, archives and online articles to find a pattern and interpret the meaning of the pattern.
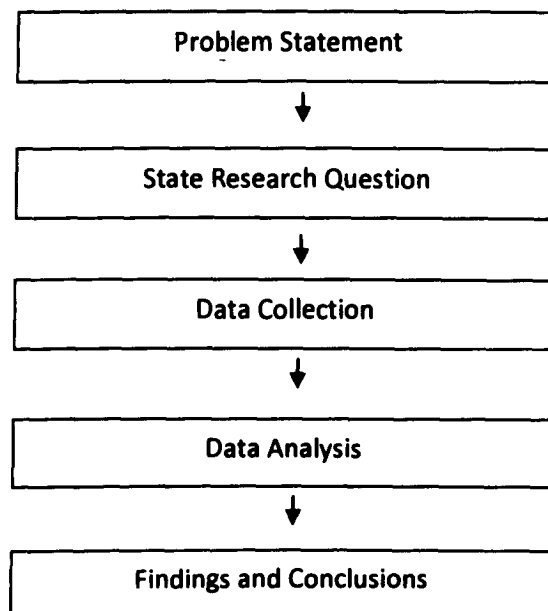
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Figure 1.0

3.3 Case Study

"The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result." (Schramm, 1971)

The researcher uses case study as a methodology to find answers for question research in chapter 1. The researcher will study behind the scene of films that uses visual effects that is important to the narrative of the film. The films is "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button". The reason that the researcher chooses this film is because this film includes visual effects that is mostly invisible to the audience but at the same time serve as a function to move the story forward. The researcher would look into why the visual effects artist did the visual effects and how they blend the visual effects seamlessly with the footage.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher uses two methodologies which is content analysis and case study. The researcher hopes that with these methodologies, the researcher can answer all the research questions in chapter 1. For the next chapter, the researcher will discuss on the findings from these methodologies.

Chapter 4 : Analysis/ Discussion / Reflection

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss about the findings from the chosen methodology. The chosen methodology that the researcher chose is content analysis and case study. The researcher had gather data from books, archives and online articles to find the answer for the research questions. With this, the researcher gain insight on how to implement visual effects in films without sacrificing the narrative of the film.

4.2 Challenges in Visual Effects

One of the biggest challenge in visual effects in making it realistic and at the same time believable to the audience. A slight defect or anomaly on the visual effects can alert the audience that it is all digitally made from a computer which can make them distracted from the story itself. Because of this, the main purpose or motivation of visual effects which is to sell the visual effects cannot be achieve.

"Sometimes a secondary purpose of a shot is to sell the audience on its reality. Care has to be taken that this is subtle. For example, in Forrest Gump (1994), one of the characters has lost his legs. This is treated in a realistic