A CASE STUDY OF EMOTIONAL IMPACT THROUGH EFFECTIVE THREE ACT STRUCTURE: “SPIRITED AWAY”

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Design Technology)
2017
A CASE STUDY OF EMOTIONAL IMPACT THROUGH EFFECTIVE THREE ACT STRUCTURE: “SPIRITED AWAY”

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This project is one of the requirements for Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours (Design Technology)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2017
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Miss Jong Sze Joon for the continuous support of my study and related research. Her guidance helped me in research and writing of this thesis. Besides, my sincere thanks goes to my course-mates who helped me and support me to conduct this research. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. My parents and siblings who support me spiritually throughout writing this thesis and my life in general.
ABSTRACT

Storytelling is one of the important elements in making a successful animation to drive the emotions of the audiences. Thus, this research is aimed to analyse the three act structure storytelling technique based on the animation of *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki. The objective of this research is to observe the story flow and conflicts in the animation of *Spirited Away*. This research was conducted by observing and analysed the data from the conflicts in *Spirited Away*. This research could be used as a reference or useful guideline for future study about storytelling technique.
ABSTRAK

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Study

Three act structure is one of the powerful storytelling technique in the animation industry. The application of three-act structure in a story is to connect the audiences with the story in a more effective way. The importance of three-act structure is also used as a tool to drive the emotions of the audiences. A successful story can deliver the message and impact to the audiences at every turning point of the story.

Three act structure storytelling technique is divided into three parts, namely act one (set up), act two (confrontation) and act three (resolution). Act one is referring to the beginning of the story. At this point, the author will normally introduce the story setting like a place, time and main characters. Act two is referred to the rising action and climax of a story. In the rising action, the main character will normally face to first climax, the hardship or obstacle that have to be overcome. The second climax comes after the midpoint twist and crisis. The falling action is included in act three, the resolution. There is always a resolution after climax too. This part, the main character will normally find a resolution toward the hardship he or she had met and here comes the end of a story.
1.2 Rationale and Motivation

The fundamental rationale for this research is to develop a strong storytelling technique for animation industry, which follows the three act structure. By gathering the useful and related studies help the researcher to find out the different findings of different researchers.

1.3 Problem Statement

Davidon (2006) stated that three act structure storytelling technique is an effective model for transmitting a story to the screen. He elaborated that three-act storytelling technique has provided the basis for many films where a character triumphs over adversity and the good defeat bad.

The western has always rely on the three act structure in storytelling. Nonetheless, but for Asian countries such as Korea, China and Japan are mostly rely on the Kishotenketsu structure which consists of the four acts. The three act structure storytelling technique is not commonly being used in Malaysian animation compared to the western countries. Therefore, a research should be conducted to give a positive impact to the industries by using three act structure storytelling.

1.4 Research Questions

Below are the research questions for this research:

i. How three act structure can influence the emotion of audiences?

ii. How effective is the implication of three act structure in Spirited Away?
1.5 Aim and Objectives

i. To identify the elements of three act structure storytelling.

ii. To analyse the effectiveness of three act structure storytelling technique in *Spirited Away*.

iii. To propose a guideline of three act structure storytelling in animation.

1.6 Importance and Significance of Study

By doing this research, the finding of this research can use as a guideline for animation industry and education of higher learning. The finding of this research can be used as a teaching aid and the source of inspirations for in film or animation story writing. The animation industry needs to be developed in Malaysia in terms of storytelling technique. This research can also increase the interest general public toward animation film making and give a positive impact to the industries in the growth of animation storytelling.

1.7 Scope and Limitation

This research is focused on the use of three act structure storytelling technique in *Spirited Away* through observation and video analyse. Three act structure divided into three parts which the setup, confrontation and resolution. This is to identify the the used of three act structure give emotional impact to the audiences.
1.8 Assumption

The emotional impact of *Spirited Away* has successfully driven the emotions of audiences through the application of three act structure storytelling technique.

1.9 Research Design

This research focuses on examining the story of *Spirited Away* based on three act structure storytelling through observation as shown in Figure 2. This research also focuses on analysing the effectiveness of three-act structure storytelling technique in *Spirited Away* through a set of interview questions.
Figure 2: Research design flowchart.
1.10 Definition of Terms

**Three act structure.** Defined as one of the storytelling technique which consists of three acts in the story flows.

**Act one.** Defined as the beginning or setup of the story in three act structure. The author should introduce the character and the story setting such as place and time in act one.

**Act two.** Defined as the confrontation of the story in three act structure. Complication of the story will happen in this act.

**Act three.** Defined as the resolution of the story in three act structure. The story will be concluded in act three.

**Kishotenketsu.** Defined as one of the storytelling technique which consists of four acts and without conflict.

**Emotion.** Felling of a human or character that will effect the change of facial muscle and facial expression.
1.11 Organisation of Chapters

Chapter One of this research introduces the background study and rationale of this research. Identify the research problem and conducted few research questions. This chapter also includes the objectives for this research and the importance of this study. Scope and limitation had been stated to specify the study field. Assumption and research design used to make sure the researcher follow the right path while doing the research.

Chapter Two is about the literature which related to the research topic. The researcher studies about the history of three act structure and the elements (act one, act two, act three) of it. Besides, the researcher also studies two type of three act structure which are the Syd Field’s Paradigm (1984) and Gabe Moura’s Plot Line (2014) and identify the similarity and differences of this two structures. This chapter also includes the study of current trend of the storytelling technique and the relationship between facial expressions and emotions.

Chapter Three identifies the method used to conduct this result which is the qualitative method (observation). Chapter Four presents the data collection and data analysis from observation of Spirited Away. Chapter Five offers the conclusion and discussion of the study and provides a recommendation for future studies.
1.12 Summary

This chapter introduces the background of the research lead to problem statement of this research, which is to study three act structure storytelling technique in animation. Besides, the researcher identifies the aim objectives of this research to solve the research questions. The scope of this research is also included in the later part of this chapter to narrow down the study field of this research. This research will only analyse the fearful emotion of the character in Spirited Away through the characters’ facial expression. The assumption of this research agrees that the emotional impact of Spirited Away has successfully driven the emotions of audiences through the application of three act structure storytelling technique. This research will be conducted by following the research design flowchart through case study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

According to Davison (2006), three act structure is defined as a powerful tool to tell a story. Three act structure is the fundamental basic in storytelling technique. It brings the character to go on a journey from beginning until the end. It is also a guideline for an author in writing a good story which consists of act one (set up), act two (confrontation) and act three (resolution). According to Aronson (2000), three act structure can successfully connect the emotions of character with the audiences effectively. Besides, the application of three act structure in storytelling also makes believe in the character itself and character development.

2.1 History of Three Act Structure

Abernathy (2014) identifies the most popular screenwriting manual started with Aristotle’s Poetic. Aristotle came from Greek and came out with this Aristotle’s Poetic at 300BC. He stated that the Poetics consist of three parts which are the Protasis, Epitasis, and Catastrophe. The meaning of these three classic Greek words is Beginning, Middle, and End which is similar to the elements in three act structure.

Lanouette (2012) defines a fundamental basis for three act structure is setup (Act One), development (Act Two) and climax and resolution (Act Three). She stated that the effective storytelling technique begins with Aristotle’s Poetics and the tragedy need to consist of beginning, middle and end. Then, Horace who came from Roman in 65-8 B.C invented the five act structure for storytelling in drama. The five act structure then became a powerful storytelling manual in western in the 16th to 18th
centuries. The famous English poet, Shakespeare used Horace’s five act structure to create his plays.

Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) who invented the “well-made play” technique which is close to five act structure. “Well-made plays” had been widely used in the 19th century in story writing and he stated that the word “act” refers to the dramatic action in different scenes. The five act structure leads to a great success for drama writing in the 19th century until a man called Victorien Sardou from French (1831-1908) wrote a story named “Mise En Scene”. The master of “well-made play”, Scribe critique on Sardou’s work which is more to three act structure compare to five act structure. Sardou’s work had only three dramatic actions and this is the first existing of three act structure in drama storytelling.
2.2 Three Act Structure Storytelling

According to Hulk (2013), the best way to describe an act in the structure is where a character makes a decision that can never turn back. A good and effective act with different conflict can make the audiences immerse into the story and have impacted on how one interpreted the story through emotions.

2.2.1 Act One (Setup)

Cannell (1998) stated that act one in three act structure refers to the first meet of the main character with all the characters in the book or screenplay. Besides, he also mentioned that the main problem in the story has to be revealed and keep the story flow interesting. The most interesting part is to start with a conflict and make the audience to feel excited with what happen next. He also stated that act one is the preparation phase for the audience.

Kyrie (2015) mentioned that act one refers to the beginning of the story. According to her research, act one of three act structure should first introduce the main characters and side characters. Besides, the author has to tell the relationship between the characters in this phase. Story setting like place and time need to reveal well in act one too. The mission of the character needs to clearly inform when the author introduces the main character. She also mentioned that the exist of external or internal conflict is interesting to catch the attention of the audiences.

Kyrie (2015) points out that the end of this phase, the author should have introduced the antagonist of the story and build the relationship between side characters. Both of
them, Cannell and Kyrie agree that keeping the story interesting to attract the audiences and the exist of conflict is important in this phase (act one).

2.2.2 Act Two (Confrontation)

Cannell (1998) reported that act two is the most important phase in three act structure which consists of the complication at the beginning of act two. The conflict or hardship in act one will turn into more worst and hard. He stated that the most effective way to attract the audiences is to keep a part of the conflict in act one and reveal the rest in act two. In act two, the main character (protagonist) should try to overcome this hardship or conflict but defeat by the antagonist. The antagonist will not easily defeat by the protagonist in act two. This is to make sure that the protagonist goes through the lowest point and to be broke by the antagonist by physically or emotionally. The protagonist has to seem like he can never defeat the antagonist in act two.

On the other hand, Kyrie (2015) stated that the act two in three act structure refer to confrontation. She mentioned that the protagonist in the story should go through a series of hardship so that the story flow become more interesting. Besides, this is to make sure that the protagonist can never complete the missions or goals. She also mentioned that the conflict should be more difficult in act two so that the strength of the antagonist always ensure the protagonist not to reach his goals easily. The protagonist will then enter the “darkest moment” in the story to boost a more interesting climax. At this point, the protagonist becomes stronger and learn his lessons to solve the conflict.
Both of them Cannell and Kyrie agreed that the complication should be at the beginning of act two to drive the conflict to become worst. Besides, they also mentioned that the protagonist have to go through a series of hardships, lost, defeated by the antagonist and enter the lowest point (darkest moment) in three act structure.

2.2.3 Act Three (Resolution)

Cannell (1998) defines act three as the problem resolved. Act three will conclude the story by good end or bad end. It is not necessary for a story to end in a good way but some stories might end with the protagonist die and defeated by the antagonist. With this kind of ending, Cannell stated that the protagonist should at least learn a lesson before he dies.

Kyrie (2015) identifies act three in three act structure as the resolution which consists of climax and denouement. She mentioned that the protagonist should meet the antagonist in the highest point of the plot which is the climax of the story. After the conflict solved, the situation should have become peace or calm. In act three, the protagonist should able to overcome the hardship and achieve his goals or missions. The story should become calmer after the problem have solved so that the ending of the story can effectively attract the audiences to have the interest to watch the next story.

At this point, both of them, Cannell and Kyrie agree that the act three should lead to a resolution of the problem. The story should end after the problem solved.