

# A Feast for the Eyes-A Brief Analysis of the Role of Light in Film and Television Animation

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## Abstract

Film and television animation works convey information to people through audiovisual language, which has a different expression method from words. Light is an important element in audiovisual language. This article mainly analyzes the dramatic and hypothetical effects of light elements based on the characteristics of audiovisual language, to illustrate the importance of the rational use of light in film and television animation works.

## Keywords

Film Television Animation; Light Elements; The Role of Light

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## 1. Introduction

In the audiovisual language of film and animation, the application and handling of key elements such as scenes, lighting, color, and composition offer extensive artistic freedom for recreation and a wealth of artistic expression. As mentioned in the book "Animation Storyboard Design," "animated films share similar external forms due to their artistic language being isomorphic with that of movies. However, their highly hypothetical nature in terms of production techniques and viewing psychology, coupled with the superiority of technological means, adds a new quality to the original audiovisual elements." Film and animation are a collection of visual symbols created by artists, which to a large extent reflect the artist's rich imagination and distinct subjective creative expression.

"Light" is the fundamental medium and primary tool upon which film and television art relies. In film and television animation, it is the presence of lighting effects that endow the camera shots with a three-dimensional concept. Light appears in film and television works as an audiovisual language element, serving as a "vocabulary" to

express the creator's thoughts, feelings, and aesthetic ideals, while also conveying the ideological and artistic conception that actors cannot convey through language. Light is an object that all arts must touch upon, represent, and explore. British photographer Freddie Yang once said, "Lighting is a task that requires a lot of thought, and often involves a lot of improvisation." In film and television animation, light adds spatial dimensions to the film, implies tension and dynamism, and is an indispensable audiovisual element.

## **2. Light can depict the volume, texture, and color of objects in the frame, completing the composition of the camera shot.**

Light rays of different angles and intensities can make objects appear with varying degrees of volume and texture. Lighting reveals the basic external form of an object and its relationship with the surrounding environment, outlining the object's contours and emphasizing its boundaries and detailed volume through the illuminated surface and shadows. Simultaneously, the colors of objects become more vivid in the rich layers of light, subtly creating a scene's atmosphere and depth, softening the two-dimensional effect of the camera shot and making it more three-dimensional, enhancing the third dimension of the image. This completes the composition of the camera shot. Light is a crucial element in the composition of film and animation camera shots. Lighting accentuates the texture of objects, with different textures reflecting and refracting light in varying ways, influencing the audience's perception of people or things in the shot through their perception of different textures.

Film and television animation draws inspiration from traditional plastic arts and represents its development and extension. The same applies to the use of light. The renowned oil painting master Rembrandt is known as the "magician of light and shadow." He placed great emphasis on the expression of spatial depth in his paintings through color usage and lighting arrangement, creating a theatrical lighting effect akin to stage drama. Certain areas of the painting are carefully illuminated, while others are purposefully kept dark and minimally lit, resulting in a strong contrast. At the same time, there is sufficient fill light, rendering the shadows in the painting with a sense of transparency and the flow of air. The composition achieves a balanced contrast between the virtual and the real, the bright and the dark. This lighting approach is also borrowed and developed in film and television animation. It is evident that light plays a crucial role in both film and television art and traditional plastic arts.

### **2.1. Light has a dramatic effect**

By altering the light intensity and hue in the camera shots, viewers can be led to experience different psychological states during the movie, which aids in driving the narrative progression of the film and hints at the upcoming plot developments and the fates of the characters, thereby enhancing the film's atmosphere. Light can

convey the feelings of the characters in the drama to the audience, allowing them to better immerse themselves in the narrative; it reveals the unexpected and unknown fates of the characters, becoming a "significant form" in film and television animation.

The work "Grave of the Fireflies" by Japanese animation master Takahata Isao is a great realistic animation with an anti-war theme. In this film's representation of light and shadow, Takahata Isao departed from his usual dreamy lighting methods and instead adopted a technique that represents natural light, without pursuing overly strong contrast between light and dark, resulting in a delicate and natural appearance of light and shadow changes in the work. All of this demonstrates the animation master's meticulous observation of the objective world and his precise ability to represent light.

## **2.2. Light can emphasize the subject of the camera shot**

Light gives the camera shots a realistic cinematic feel, enhancing visual impact and bolstering the expressiveness and authenticity of the film. It highlights the subject portrayed in the film, drawing the audience's attention. In film and animation works, it is essential to consider not only using the movement of light to convey emotions and ideas but also to vary the treatment of light to effectively showcase the subject, making the film rhythmic and enjoyable to watch. For example, in the animated film "Metropolis" directed by Katsuhiro Otomo in 2002, the lower part of the screen is treated with spotlights. To better highlight the protagonist's image, a stage-like lighting design is adopted, using only contour lighting to outline the main actors, presenting the characters in silhouette, giving a soothing tone and achieving a tragic dramatic effect.

## **3. The lighting in film and television animation is hypothetical**

The film and television aesthete Peng Jixiang once mentioned: "The so-called presupposition generally refers to the non-literal representation of the objective environment through artistic media." "While faithfully reproducing objective reality, it is also necessary to express the creator's subjective consciousness, including the creator's value judgments, moral judgments, and aesthetic judgments of real life." The presupposition of film and television animation is a non-material production method that, through its own appeal, allows the audience to be moved even though they know it is fake. Arnheim emphasized: "Visual images are never a mechanical replication of sensory materials, but a creative grasp of reality. The images they capture are beautiful images that contain rich imagination, creativity, and acuity." Film and television animation embodies the aesthetic ideals and artistic pursuits of artists, and the creation of light in film and television animation is no exception. Light is not constrained by time, space, and perspective, becoming a subjective and even somewhat arbitrary modeling element.

The arbitrary transformation of light in "Prince of Egypt" is highly hypothetical and

subjective, defying everyday logical conventions and serving the narrative of the film, incorporating the creator's aesthetic judgments and artistic pursuits. The hypothetical nature of light can further accentuate the atmosphere in the drama, hinting at the characters' fates and the further development of the plot. The subjective changes in lighting that frequently appear in "Prince of Egypt" carry pioneering aesthetic significance. If this lighting treatment were used in live-action films, it would not only make the audience feel that the transitions between shots are unrealistic, but it would also be difficult to achieve in terms of camera and lighting performance. However, with the technical and highly hypothetical advantages of film and television animation, this kind of lighting not only can be accepted by the audience, but it can also easily achieve artistic effects that photographic equipment cannot reach, possessing technical and visual advantages that film cannot match.

#### 4. Conclusion

Lighting possesses depth, connotation, and quality, serving as a form of "makeup" in film and television art. For animation directors, "lighting arrangement" essentially entails creating freely changing lighting designs in their minds, utilizing imagination and audiovisual language. In film and television animation shots, lighting can be arranged freely, unrestricted by conventional logic, according to the director's imagination and creative intentions.

As creators of film and television animation, one should possess a comprehensive understanding of lighting application, film thinking, and film aesthetics, and integrate these into animation creation to produce excellent film and television animation works, showcasing the unique charm of light in film and television art. In summary, regardless of the artistic means employed, any lighting effect that possesses strong artistic expression can be utilized.

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