

APPLICATION OF ANTI-SYNTAX AESTHETICS IN CHARACTER'S VISUAL STYLE AT TODAY'S ANIMATED CARTOON FILMS

**Andreas James Darmawan, S.Sn., M.Sn.¹,
Dr. Drs. Anak Agung Gede Rai Remawa, M.Sn.²**

Institut Seni Indonesia Denpasar, Institut Desain dan Bisnis Bali

e-mail: james.dar@gmail.com, james.darmawan@idbbali.ac.id, rairemawa@isi-dps.ac.id

Abstract

Aesthetics is a basic guide in appreciating and assessing the beauty of artwork. In the animation world, the basic aesthetics is commonly used correlation and maintaining syntax in visual style from characters. The purpose of this research is to make a new contribution to aesthetic science, which combines visual styles of mixed characters that are still accepted by audiences. Until now, anti-syntax aesthetics have never been researched in animated cartoon field, for that purpose the authors conducted research based on 3 animated films from different production studios; Toy Story (Pixar), The Amazing World of Gumball (Cartoon Network), and SpongeBob Square Pants (Nickelodeon). This research uses a qualitative method, which will compare three main characters that have an anti-syntax visual style using three aesthetics scientific approaches. Visual style data will be taken from three characters of each of the animated cartoon films, after that we will do a literature study, and analyse each character's visual style with aesthetic science, and finally the results will be based on a morphological matrix. The conclusion of this research will give birth to a new theory in anti-syntax aesthetic science, especially in the visual style of animated cartoon film characters.

Keyword: *Anti-Syntax Aesthetics, Character's Visual Style, Animated Cartoon Films.*

Introduction

Aesthetics cannot be separated from philosophical scholarship. In its development philosophy is the root of aesthetics (Sebani, 2013). In addition, aesthetic science itself is used as the basis for creating and/or enjoying a work. For that, the science of syntax also becomes part of the fruit of aesthetic science. In Philosophy itself, this diversity/ syntax scholarship is embodied in certain segmentations, for example in Plato's philosophy which divides it into two: the upper and lower worlds (ideal and not ideal), and aesthetic science itself is in a non-ideal world; where the beauty of art is a mimetic process (imitation) of the underworld to achieve the perfection of the upper world (Ali, 2011). The authors take a deeper look at one of Plato's divisions, where Plato uses a variety of syntaxes in grouping both ideal and non-ideal.

From this diversity, the authors compare it with the visual communication design approach, in which the main purpose of communication is to convey messages to the target. For this reason, the scalpel in this science is of more semiotics (Harrison, 2013). In Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, a good semiotic is one that considers three things: (1) representamen as a communicator, (2) object as a communicated form, and (3) interpretant as the audience who receives the message (Hoopes, 2014). In its development, semiotics that focus on objects have given birth to a syntax, which became one part of semantics and pragmatics (Wolvengrey, 2011). In the syntax itself, it has the meaning of diversity in a formal presentation. So that what is carried is more of a flexible similarity value. The nuance given to this syntax does give strength to this togetherness. The more diversity of nuances that are built, the more strength of a particular identity will be built.

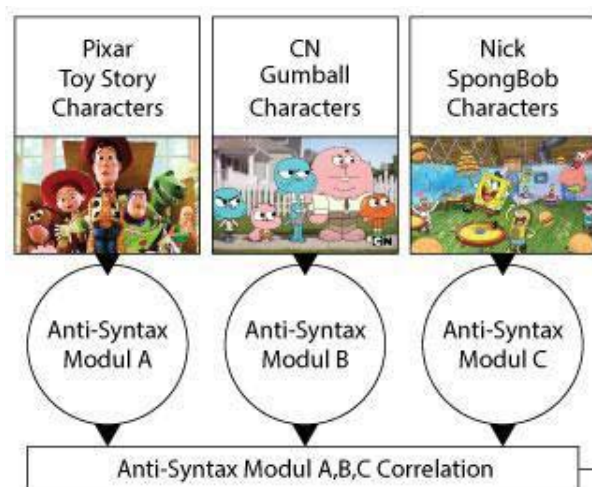
In the world of animation, syntax is usually used as a builder of the overall feel. For example, from certain colour combinations, character shapes, background music used, or the movement of the characters; it will provide a distinctive identity to a certain animation style (Chenney, 2002). In its development, the nuances of this syntax are also the key to the game in an animation. Like the breaking 4th wall story style; where characters can escape from the context of the story and speak to their readers directly, often becomes a special attraction in the comic world (Schlütz, 2010), as well as the audience realises that there are various nuances of syntax that characterise certain animations (Pallant, 2010). Like Disney animation, which has a very smooth character movement, in contrast to the Japanese animation called Anime, which combines still motion (still image) with movement in certain parts of the character; like a still image on the body of a superhero with only the movement of his wings.

However, this development continues, not only across design styles in the nuances of the syntax, even the syntax is also disrupted with the visualisation of character creation (Robert, 2012). This syntax distribution approach is what the authors call an anti-syntax aesthetic.

The scope of the discussion in this study, the authors focuses on the character's visual style used in animated cartoon films. Thus, the authors get a new form of aesthetics, where anti-syntax aesthetics is something cool and an interesting novelty for animated cartoon films.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method, where the authors sorts by conducting research based on 3 animated films from different production studios; Toy Story from Pixar, The Amazing World of Gumball from Cartoon Network, and SpongeBob Square Pants from Nickelodeon. The third author chose these animated cartoon films because of his courage to use anti-syntax aesthetics in mixing character's visual styles in their animated cartoon films. The anti-syntax aesthetic in their character's visual style is also characterised by various approaches, and built a context that carried Epistemology (fact) and Ontology (existence).












Picture 1. Research Method Map

Source: Authors' Works

The authors takes a visual approach to each character from the animated cartoon films of Toy Story from Pixar, The Amazing World of Gumball from Cartoon Network, and SpongeBob Square Pants from Nickelodeon; by sorting out only characters that have different character's visual style, in order to get anti-syntax aesthetic, but the authors also sorts out character selection based on the hierarchy of character priorities in animated cartoon films. After sorting the anti-syntax aesthetics on the character's visual style of these three animated cartoon films, the authors will synthesize the comparison of the results.

Result and Discussion

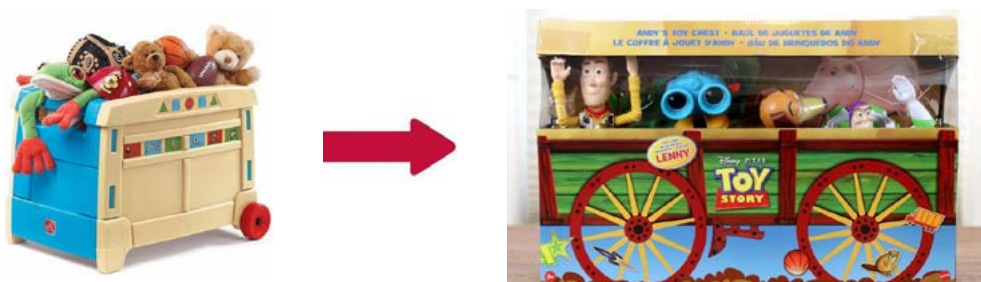
At the beginning of the research, the authors sorts the characters based on the character's visual style by considering the anti-syntax aesthetic; based character selection. For this reason, the authors conduct a literature study based on characterizations of these three animated cartoon films. Towards animated cartoon film Toy Story from Pixar, the authors choose 3 of the character's visual styles; which are: Sheriff Woody, Bo Peep, and Forky. Towards animated cartoon film The Amazing World of Gumball from Cartoon Network, the authors choose 3 of the character's visual styles, which are: Gumball Watterson, Darwin Watterson, and Richard Watterson. And also, towards the animated cartoon film SpongeBob Square Pants from Nickelodeon, authors choose 3 of the character's visual styles, which are SpongeBob Square Pants, Fish Head Reporter, and Patchy the Pirate.

<p>Pixar Toy Story</p>	 <p>Sheriff Woody</p>	 <p>Bo Peep</p>	 <p>Forky</p>
<p>CN Gumball</p>	 <p>Gumball Watterson</p>	 <p>Darwin Watterson</p>	 <p>Richard Watterson</p>
<p>Nick SpongeBob</p>	 <p>SpongeBob Square Pants</p>	 <p>Fish Head Reporter</p>	 <p>Patchy the Pirate</p>

Picture 2. Chosen Characters Based on Character's Visual Style

Source: Authors' Compilation

The authors find several contexts in the selection of characters that are not diverse, by considering this context, the unification of the whole anti-syntax aesthetic can make more sense to be accepted logically. Among them are Pixar Animation Studio, which is based on 3D animation; In terms of character's visual style, Toy Story doesn't really show an anti-syntax aesthetic, this is because all the characterizations in this animated cartoon film are all based on 3 dimensions. However, the selection of anti-syntax aesthetic characters focuses more on the context of the type of toy that will be raised. As an animation studio, Pixar recognizes the existence of anti-syntax in the everyday life of a child. It is impossible for a child to have a toy that is only from 1 visual style or from 1 toy manufacturer; surely in their toy box there are various types of toys from different manufacturers. This is a natural condition in anti-syntax aesthetics in a child's playground environment, and this is well captured by Pixar.



Picture 3. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic Context on Toy Story Pixar
Source: Authors' Compilation

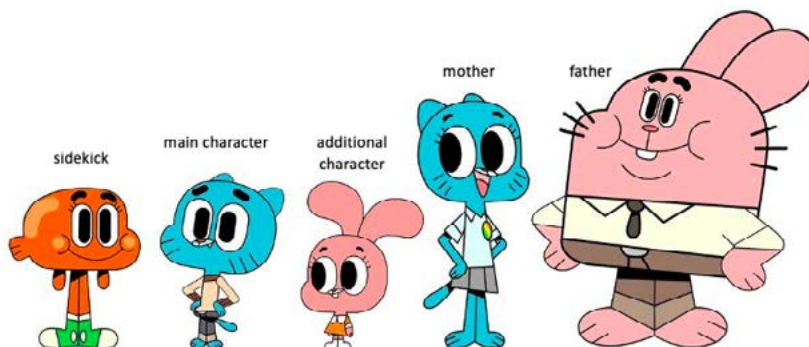
In selecting the character's visual style, the authors get a new context from the basis of anti-syntax aesthetic thinking. Where the main character Sheriff Woody is a type of boy's toy made of cotton filled with cotton and combined with the head and other attributes of rubber plastic, while the character Bo Peep is a type of girl's toy made of porcelain that is prone to breaking and which is more intended as a display. What's interesting is that Forky's character is very different but very loved by their owners, because Forky is a toy made by the owner himself. From this condition, the authors find a new context in the anti-syntax aesthetic offered by the animated cartoon film Toy Story; namely the hierarchical context of ownership that offers the value of empathy as well as emotion that trumps any aesthetic.



Picture 4. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic Characters on Toy Story Pixar

Source: Disney Pixar Documentation

Meanwhile, at Cartoon Networks studio, which is based on 2-dimensional animation with an emphasis on contemporary values; In terms of character visual style, The Amazing World of Gumball is starting to dare to show an anti-syntactic aesthetic, this is because all the characterizations in this animated cartoon are deliberately absurd. In the main family itself, the anti-syntactic aesthetic value is shown genetically; where the characters in it have different species. The main character of this animated cartoon is a kitten; named Gumball Watterson. His education level is elementary school, and he has a father a rabbit, a mother a cat, and a sister a fish. Based on this, the Cartoon Network studio extended an anti-syntax aesthetic to the character's visual style for all the characters in the main character school.



Picture 5. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic Family on The Amazing World of Gumball Cartoon Network

Source: Disney Pixar Documentation

The authors captures a context that unites the character's visual style based on the anti-syntax aesthetic in *The Amazing World of Gumball*, namely the spirit of inner diversity and harmony. In this animated cartoon film, the Watterson family violates the laws of genetics because it focuses more on the nature of the characters created. The father Gumball as a fat rabbit gave the message of being lazy and likes to eat, the mother Gumball as a fierce cat gave a message of being reliable but very firm, and the younger brother as an innocent fish gave a message of a younger brother's trust in his brother's opinions and thoughts. This term will drive children to accept more diversity in their life.

At the Nickelodeon studio, which is also based on 2-dimensional animation with an emphasis on world dualism values (the world in the sea and the world on land); the visual style characters are very dependent on the context of the division in two worlds. Showing an anti-syntactic aesthetic, all the characterizations in the sea world are deliberately different from the characterizations in the land world. SpongeBob Square Pants as the main character himself is an anti-syntax that is more prominent than other underwater world characters, because SpongeBob itself is a sponge box in the sea; where this is different from other characters that are sea animals. Returning to the context of the differences between these two worlds, it was also mentioned that the visual style of SpongeBob's characters also follows the changes in shape if they are in the mainland world. This character becomes realistic, no longer in the form of a 2-dimensional illustration, but the visualisation is made using the doll so that it is more in line with the realistic character in the world above the sea.



Picture 6. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic in SpongeBob Characters Inside and Outside the Sea

Source: Nickelodeon Documentation

This circumstances also explains that the character's visual style on the character is named Patchy the Pirate; which is played by the creator of *SpongeBob* as well as the voice actor,

also visualised by shooting (not animation) because Patchy himself is a pirate man, who is a big fan of SpongeBob from the land world. Until the reality of a character in SpongeBob, until the role of his best friend; namely Potty the Parrot, also visualised with a puppet like SpongeBob's own character when in the same world.



Picture 7. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic in Potty the Parrot and Patchy the Pirate
Source: Nickelodeon Documentation

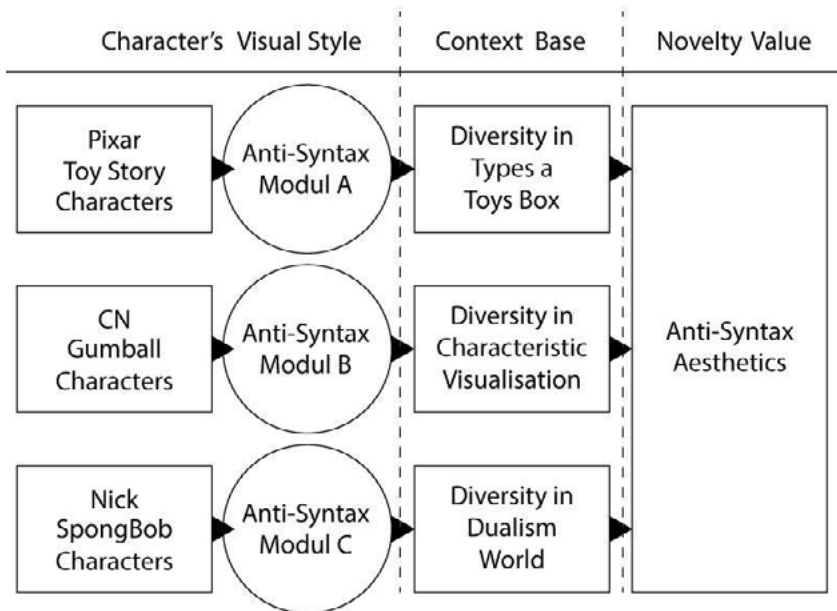
What is unique is SpongeBob's character; Fish Head Reporter violates the context of the two worlds of SpongeBob's visual style. Because this reporter is a creature in the sea world, but still visualized realistically. From the results of the authors' study, it was found that Nickelodeon Animation Studio itself is located in Australia, which has one of the proudest sea and river fishes, that special fish is a tuna fish. From this, the authors conclude, why Fish Head Reporter gets special treatment on the character's visual style. The same thing led to the appearance of the Fish Head Reporter as a whole or a full shot (not only the head) in the opening theme of the animated cartoon films *Sponge Square Pants*, this strengthens the hypothesis that the role of Tuna fish is true. In addition, if the authors look at the characteristics of the tuna itself, this species does live in two worlds, because this type of fish lives under the salty sea, while it will swim to the river and the freshwater fish of the river to lay their eggs.



Picture 8. Fish Head Reporter Appearance
Source: Nickelodeon Documentation

Conclusion

Studying the anti-syntax aesthetic in the three animated cartoon films above, the authors get a new basis in anti-syntax aesthetics, especially in the character's visual style in the three animated cartoon films that were appointed. In this study, the authors find a context that rationalizes the presentation of anti-syntax on the characters of Toy Story, The Amazing World of Gumball, and SpongeBob Square Pants. In terms of creativity, all Pixar, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon studies basically has a value that exceeds the average of other animated cartoon films. This gives an idea that has novelty in the animated series they present.



Picture 9. Anti-Syntax Aesthetic in Novelty Value

Source: Nickelodeon Documentation

The authors learn from this level of creativity, because of the anti-syntax aesthetic presented in their character's visual style, all of them get a positive response from the audience. Toy Story got the best ranking of 31 animated cartoon films, The Amazing World of Gumball got the best ranking of 36 animated cartoon films, and SpongeBob got the best ranking of 29 animated cartoon films; all according to ratings from the Internet Movie DataBase (imdb). From this rating, the authors concludes that anti-syntax aesthetics cannot replace common aesthetics (with syntax); however, the approach to presenting the character's visual style is very promising novelty in the world of animated cartoon films.

References

- Ali, Matus. (2011). *"Estetika: Pengantar Filsafat Seni"* Sanggar Luxor Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. Corpus ID: 238957942.
- Chenney, S., Pingel, M., Iverson, R. and Szymanski, M. (2002). *"Simulating Cartoon Style Animation"*. In Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium on Non-photorealistic Animation and Rendering (pp. 133-138).
- Harrison, C. (2003). *"Visual Social Semiotics: Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning"*. Technical Communication, 50(1), pp.46-60.
- Hoopes, J. ed. (2014). *"Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce"*. UNC Press Books.
- Pallant, C. (2010). *"Disney-Formalism: Rethinking 'Classic Disney'"*. Animation, 5(3), pp.341-352.
- Roberts, S. (2012). *"Character Animation Fundamentals: Developing Skills for 2D and 3D Character Animation"*. Routledge.
- Saebani, B.A. (2013). *"Filsafat Ilmu: Kontemplasi Filosofis Tentang Seluk-Beluk Sumber dan Tujuan Ilmu Pengetahuan."* retrieved from <http://senayan.iain-palangkaraya.ac.id>.
- Schlütz, D.M., Possler, D. and Golombek, L., 2020. *"Is He Talking to Me?": How Breaking the Fourth Wall Influences Enjoyment"*. Projections, 14(2), pp.1-25.
- Wolvengrey, A.E., 2011. *"Semantic and Pragmatic Functions in Plains Cree Syntax"*. Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics.