

*Closeness and Alienation : A Case Study of an Exhibiting Animated Film “Inter-Dine”*

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**Abstract**

In modern society with high-end technology nowadays, images and video clips can be accessed by the public easily and fast via various digital devices, including mobile phones, tablets, iCloud, and streaming platforms. In the process of watching videos, the past timeline flows with the present one simultaneously. Additionally, memories and the circle of generations reveal more mobility with time and space. Therefore, we are hoping to connect viewers' emotions with the exhibiting animated short film looping video, “*Inter-Dine*”, the concept of “*Inter-Dine*” presents the creator's feelings in terms of daily life and life circles by dining with family members, the characters in the video setting are attached to complex emotions which in-between closeness and alienation, showing the most common moments in family but yet became precious during the time of coronavirus outbreak.

Keywords: Closeness, Alienation, Inter-Dine, Visual Images, Animated Short Film

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## Introduction

In the presentation of motion graphics, viewers come to the exhibition site, which is constrained in time and space, to experience or interact with the exhibits in person. Such acts of in-person intervention and perception by the viewers further highlight and amplify human connection and sensory perception amid the interpersonal isolation in the pandemic and the era of virtualization and digitization. The motion graphic work “Inter-Dine,” whose homonym in Chinese implies “dining together at the same table,” is a reinterpretation of “contribution” and “participation.” Under the concept, the work tries to discuss whether or not the experience of viewing images can be pulled out of a frame of mind. Through the combination of its mode of creation and method of exhibition, the work brings the experience to viewers in the exhibition site, where it does not simply display animated images but focuses more on bringing in another type of medium. By showing the animated images on the medium, it expands the materiality and sense of time between the animated images and the media to bring out the feelings of viewers, hoping that viewers will think about the meaning and value of “dining together.”

### 1. Animation media categories and forms of expression

Different animation media creation methods produce different screen visual styles. Hand-drawn flat animation, cut-out animation, puppet animation, computerized animation, and experimental animation are often seen in the animation genre. These categories are also described in most references (Yu, 2004). Furthermore, the same type of animation media can also produce completely different visual feelings because of differences in corresponding technical methods or brushwork. In more detailed differentiation, animation technique media can be divided into six categories (Chang, 2015):

1. Line and flat animation
2. Cut-out animation, collage animation, and motion graphics
3. Stop-motion animation: puppet animation, pixilation animation, pinscreen animation, etc.
4. Direct animation: (draw-on-film animation)
5. Color and granule animation: sand animation, paint-on-glass animation
6. 3D computer animation

The aforementioned animated short film creation methods comprise different pre-production and production steps because of the different media used. For hand-drawn line and flat animation, smooth lines in key frames and morphing methods that display hand-drawing characteristics are the major features in line animation. Both the lens transition used by Japanese animation director Kon Satoshi and the hypothetical use of space and deformation transition used by German animation master Raimund Krumme push the expression of animation lines to an exquisite level. For the cut-and-paste animation method, pieces must be prepared and readied in the pre-production stage. Minute motion distribution in key links requires lighting stability in the shooting environment and careful movement of animation frame (cutting and pasting). The new 3D computer animation media that have developed rapidly in the past few decades rely on the detailed pre-production division of labor even more to render each step of the computer animation link. A director-like attention is required to master scene scheduling and scene use for every step, from software modeling, packaging the roles with texture, adding lighting, and the role’s performance and position. Thus, knowing how different media are rendered and their production methods/processes allows us to understand the hard work that many independent creators go through when producing an

animated short film and the difficulties they face at each stage. Consequently, we realize what the mastery animation creators have over media application accumulated through time and experience.

## **2. Implication behind the Animated Work**

The passage of time and the progression and cycle of the life course:

- Home - Bring in the emotionality through the materiality of the dining table
- Family - Incorporate the materiality into the emotionality of generations

In the cycle of changed and unchanged in everyday life, what is the sense of “belonging together” in family bond? Ideally, dining together is an activity through which families or friends share food and communicate feelings. It is the quality time when the dinners interact with one another emotionally and intimately for the sake of companionship. In “Inter-Dine,” the dining table, which is a form of material to foster the family bond and a site of ritual carefully managed, remains fixed and unchanged. This allows viewers to focus their attention on the characters – the elder, the woman, and the child – around the square table. The moment of dining together is supposed to be an intimate time of sharing, but it can sometimes be an embarrassing moment when silence and repression prevail. Through its homonym of “dining together,” “Inter-Dine” displays the four states of the three characters in four scenes. Interestingly, from the title and the content of the work, it is clearly about the relation and interaction of the family at the dining table. Taking a closer look, however, one will notice something strange. The crying of the child, the fact that the woman is busy with household chores, and the confusion on the face of the elder reveal what the work really wants to explore: the gap between the reality of everyday life and the ideal relationship as well as the reconsideration of the meaning of dining together. In the work, due to their respective physiological functions, the elder and the child must have their food shredded or chopped before they are able to eat it. For them, the act of eating is less about the initiative of enjoying food but more about meeting the basic need in a passive way. The mother, who is in the middle-aged generation, cannot fully enjoy food, either, because she has to look after the young child and so has no leeway to care for the elderly mother. What is supposed to be the companionship for the communication of feelings therefore becomes merely an obligation of contribution. The woman will grow old, and the child will grow up and have his own children who may join the endless cycle of embarrassing moments. The growth and life stage transition move forward with time in a prograde direction. Caring, however, is retrograde, and the essence of contribution is a single path in reverse to the next generation. As a result, a repeated spiral structure with a different nature is formed while still following the fixed and unchanged scene for the fear of breaking the harmony that is difficult to maintain.

On the juxtaposed window panes, the images are played in browsing manner to present the atmosphere of boredom, helplessness, and inability of solving the doldrums at the dining table. In contrast, the slowly advancing time that cannot be paused is the only thing that brings some positive elements to the stagnant atmosphere. The work is a simple yet profound depiction of life’s experience and the integral part of the instinct of life’s existence. The subtle and barely noticeable emotions and feelings also express the memories and perspectives at different stages of life by revealing the push and pull between generations and the emotional experience in life, therefore changing viewers’ one-way viewing manner when appreciating animated works.

### **3. Contrast between psychologically perceived time and the time in rational space**

There is a lot of damage in the world that is the result of a lengthy period of social evolution. It is only when food is placed on the dining table, parents are seated by the dining table, children are brought in front of their parents, and a family is fitted in a truly complete home will there be warmth and the possibility of finding human connection in a gentle and rational manner and explaining the cause of various social phenomena. The indifference in the facial expressions of the characters in “Inter-Dine” amplifies an assortment of delicate and sensitive gestures, adding a lot of lasting noises to the saturated colors on the surface while revealing the tangled emotions lying beneath the expression of each family member. The warm colors of the setting and cold colors of the characters expose the hidden secrets that go beyond words. It all points to the fact that no amount of “waiting” will ever fill the family bond, and that the reason for the existence of family connection comes from the dining table. During the waiting, psychological perception alters the true sense of actual time, thereby creating the mental time lag. As a result, a few dozen of seconds feel much longer than they really are as if everything has slowed down. Difference in the perception of family time leads to difference in the perception of actual time. In addition, in the planning of the exhibition space, by putting a sofa in place and projecting the motion graphics onto the window panes, the work has viewers enter the restricted range to see the interactions of the family play out in front of them. This creates a mixed sense that the viewers themselves are both outsiders and a part of the interactions. Being confined to the sofa to observe the interactions of the family, viewers may feel as if they too were in the middle of the exact situation and were not able to get out of that feeling of melancholy despite the passage of time.

### **4. The existence of real space and virtual images**

- Virtual - Projected lines
- Real - sofa and window

Inspired by the experience and observation in everyday life, “Inter-Dine” is a work that projects motion graphics onto the panes of an old-fashioned window, in which the muntins divide the animation into four frames. The motion graphics are displayed in the style of a four-panel comic strip in two adjacent pairs of window panes to depict the family story from the beginning to the end. Such an arrangement bears two layers of meanings. While “pair” has an auspicious meaning in the Chinese culture, “four” implies death in the meantime. Hence, it is an insoluble question to determine whether the beginning or end is good or bad. The only potential answer lies in the cycle of generations.

By projecting animated images onto the window panes, the work turns family members who actually exist into virtual characters that exist only on the window, and turns the window, a tangible object, into something that replaces the warmth of the family bond. It therefore prompts viewers to speculate on the meaning of reality and existence. The projection of images represents the flow and fleetness of life and the passage of emotional relations among people and generations, and yet it is something that circulates across generations. The complete lines and bright colors of the 2D animation and the dull expressions on the faces of the characters to some extent deepen the awkward atmosphere and the discomfort of the viewers that the work intends to reveal. The blue color symbolizes the coldness of the characters, and red color of the dining table and food represents warmth. The choice of colors makes viewers think about whether the sense of belonging is embodied in the existence of

tangible objects or in the memories of time spent with families. This may be a progress of no conclusion.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to seeing animation as a form of image creation, one can rethink how and where animation can be viewed, how animated images are produced, and the physical labor that creator has undergone during the creation of the animation. Informed by the personal experience of the creator, “Inter-Dine” is consistent with the external environment and internal sensibility. The creator encourages viewers to rethink the above-mentioned questions and implicitly and indirectly depicts or narrates what is happening in the story in the explicit form of exhibition and the technique of installation. Just like the ripples caused by throwing a stone into a lake, the rippling waves break the traditional understanding of animation and allow viewers to transition from the state of viewing into the state of focusing and staring or even being stared. Perhaps it is the change in viewers’ state and even their immersion that shifts the line between animation and artwork. It is also precisely the blurring of the line that allows us to realize that we need to go beyond just a piece of narrative or story and go deep into the context to be able to get closer to the creator's inner world. By trying to see the unseen implication, we are able to feel the artist’s inner feelings, be it physical, memorial, or emotional, in a more profound manner.

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