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Film 485

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**AI-Generated Storyboard Self Reflection**

The inspiration for my project is rooted in capabilities of AI in the realm of filmmaking, specifically rendering storyboards for low-budget filmmakers who do not possess the skills, like me. As I imagined before starting this project, AI can offer a cost-effective solution for quickly visualizing scenes from text-based scripts.

There are a lot of similar business for AI-generated storyboards online, so it is obvious that people have been using AI to create storyboards for a while. I chose a software called “Boords” and paid thirty dollars for it. What attracted me was its function “AI Character Guidelines” - “Now, you can generate storyboards with consistent, recognizable characters from frame to frame.” Users are supposed to type prompts to customize a character and use this character consistently in the following pictures. There is also a function called “Seed”, which is supposed to be used to create a similar version of an existing image by adjusting text prompts. I thought that these tools might solve problems I ran into in my midterm project. So, I picked very short scenes from scripts I wrote before and tried to create a series of storyboards out of them.

Within ten minutes, it became evident that the same difficulties I encountered during midterm project reoccurred here. The primary constraint was the prohibition of gore and violence. In one scene, I needed a shot of a fox with a dead rabbit in its mouth but was unable to generate it. This eliminates any possibility for genres like horror, thriller, or even crime. Given the fact that contemporary cinematic narratives almost always engage with violent/sensitive content, this severely limits the usefulness of this AI tool because artists’ creative process is constantly interfered with. Secondly, pictures generated from the “Seed” image still have obvious deviation from the original one. It is barely possible to keep the background of the set consistent. As a result, there is no way anyone can use this software to generate storyboards (exactly as how they want it to be) for a feature length film. In fact, even completing a short scene is incredibly difficult. Lastly, AI still makes tons of mistake even though the prompt is very clear. I wrote annotations under pictures with problems in my blog post.

Despite aforementioned limitations, it is still important to acknowledge potentials of this technology. For instance, stylistic options are offered - marker, ink wash, sketch, and even photographic or anime. What’s more, the best function of this software is probably “negative prompt”, which asks you to type in what you want to avoid while creating pictures. With more advanced AI tool, users can also create a series of short moving images, which is helpful especially when the film involves CGI or animation.

Regardless of the advantages, this function of AI is accompanied by artistic concerns and practical difficulties. In a New York Times article that discusses teaching AI in school and embracing AI technology in art, Jane South, the fine arts chair of Pratt Institute says, “The artist today is expected to produce meaning, not just images.” She also goes on to say, “And technologies can help develop new meaning about contemporary life.” I consider these two sentences already contradicting themselves. Yes, meaning is the essence, but meaning comes from personal visions linked to personal (human) experiences. AI merely imitates, which means the art it creates has no meaning, because AI art is the result of algorithm calculation.

Furthermore, as we all know, the styles of AI-generated images are similar. It is possible that a homogenization of visual story telling will emerge when new filmmakers start to use AI for storyboards frequently. Strategically speaking, when we imagine a picture in our heads, our imagination expands in various dimensions. However, when we just type in a simple, or even sophisticated, prompt and get a fixed picture out of it, our imagination stops there, because it is difficult to visualize something else when you are already looking at a certain image in front of you. In addition, with the already existing bias in AI technology, bigger problems will emerge, like the lack of representations in films, followed by reduced diversity and cultural identity. Those are existing problems in real world, and current AI technology only reinforces that. Culture, gender, and race are important topics that get reflected more and more in recent films. Although sometimes it is the credit of politically correctness, I still consider diversity and accurate representations as a breakthrough in modern film industry. AI, as far as I am concerned, will stagnates this process, or even make it go backwards.

These days, those who use AI to generate storyboards might be either curious to see its potential, or simply cannot afford a professional. In the latter scenario, people need to take legal challenges into consideration. It is reported that, “The New York Times sued OpenAI and Microsoft for copyright infringement… opening a new front in the increasingly intense legal battle over the unauthorized use of published work to train artificial intelligence technologies.” The Times is also the first major media company that turned into action. If they win, AI market will face turbulence, because AI companies will need to pay database source where their AI models learns from. This is such an important case because it gets people to think about ownership and authorship to artwork. If an artist creates a film with an AI software and generates profit, will the AI companies try to get a cut? Who possesses the final rights to the artworks? The same concerns apply to a successful AI-generated storyboards, if unfortunately, there ever will be some.

There are too many uncertainties, but I want to state my position firmly: I have and will always believe that AI should serve as a tool in the realm of artistic creation, enhancing rather than replacing human creativity. I mean, if we narrow this problem down and just look at my final project … why use this tool when a human gets the job done faster and better?

**References**

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