

# เมตาในสตอปโมชัน: กรณีศึกษาของ 'Komaneko's First Step'

Meta in Stop Motion: a case study of 'Komaneko's First Step'

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความเมตาในสตอปโมชันฉบับนี้ มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาเมตา การอ้างอิงตนเอง ในวัฒนธรรมสมัยนิยม เพื่อค้นหารูปแบบของเมตา ที่จะสามารถจำแนกได้ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเมตาแบบบางส่วน หรือเมตาเต็มรูปแบบ บทความนี้จะวิเคราะห์ถึงรูปแบบและเนื้อหาของสตอปโมชัน 'Komaneko's First Step' ซึ่งเผยแพร่บนช่อง YouTube ของสตูดิโอ dwarf ที่เป็นผู้สร้างสรรค์ผลงานชิ้นนี้ โดยเนื้อหาของสตอปโมชันนั้นกล่าวถึงการสร้างสรรค์สตอปโมชัน ซึ่งในขณะเดียวกัน ตัวสื่อเอง ก็เป็นสตอปโมชันเช่นกัน ผู้เขียนจะระบุว่าผลงานสตอปโมชันชิ้นนี้ เข้าข่ายว่าเป็นเมตาที่อ้างอิงถึงตนเอง หรือเป็นเพียงแค่เมตาธรรมดา

**คำสำคัญ:** สตอปโมชัน / เมตา / อ้างอิงตนเอง

## Abstract

Meta in Stop Motion aims to study the self-referential meta in popular culture, determining the possible identifiers in which forms of meta each media can be aligned with, be it a partial one or a complete one. The article analyses the stop motion 'Komaneko's First Step' released in dwarfstudio's YouTube Channel, as it portrays the creation of a stop motion, where the medium itself is also a stop motion, author will try to determine whether it can be classified as a self-referential meta or just another meta piece.

**Keywords:** Stop Motion / Meta / Self-Referential

## Inspiration

Meta, has since become a word on its own, rather than a prefix and it has seeped its way into mainstream pop culture where it has been widely used and understood by most general public. Whether in contemporary literatures, a Hollywood production, short films or the short video clips posted in sites such as, YouTube

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and more, ‘Meta’ has certainly cemented itself into popular culture. The author is taking a look at various forms of contemporary media has begun to ‘refer to itself’. The case study in this article is a certain stop motion short ‘Komaneko’s First Step’, how it has portrayed the metareference in itself, as a form of stop motion, identifying each key factor that makes this stop motion ‘so meta’, as spoken widely in popular culture.

### Objectives

(1) To briefly study the history and notably types of self-referential or meta in popular culture

(2) To identify the ‘meta’ factors found in dwarfstudio’s Komaneko’s First Step (こまねこ はじめのいっぽ Komaneko Hajime no Ippo, 2020 YouTube Release)

### Self-referential Meta

Self-referential in films, televisions and animations has been around in the popular culture since the beginning of cinema itself where sometimes protagonists look at camera acknowledging audience acting as if knowingly the protagonist is realising he or she is in a film, and is a character. Some classical Hollywood films depict the workings of the Hollywood itself, showing the productions behind the scenes or commentaries of Hollywood stars at their fame and their demise a-la Sunset Boulevard (Figure 1), such are representation of a ‘Self-Reflexive’ films (Jane Feuer, 1995).



Figure1: scenes from Sunset Boulevard (1950, Paramount Picture)

Meta as adjective has been added to Merriam-Webster in early 2019 as ‘1. Informal: showing or suggesting an explicit awareness of itself or oneself as a member of its category: cleverly self-referential. 2. Informal: concerning or providing information about members of its own category.’

By the definition stated above by Merriam-Webster and referencing ‘Understanding Media’, the famous work of McLuhan, the author proposes a possible formula of self-referential meta as shown in Figure 2;

Partial meta	Complete meta
<input type="checkbox"/> Ambiguously aware of itself	<input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly showing awareness of itself
<input type="checkbox"/> Refers to other works of its own kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Referencing or referring to itself
<input type="checkbox"/> The medium is not the message	<input type="checkbox"/> The medium is the message

Figure 2: table to determine the form of referential meta proposed by author



Figure 3: Deadpool responds in dialogue and partially nods to audience (2016, Twentieth Century Fox)



Figure 4: a self-referential meta humour scene in Spaceballs (1987, MGM)

The media itself does not have to pertain all the three qualities in order to be placed as a partial meta or a complete meta. An example of a partial self-referencing meta would be from the scene in *Deadpool* (2016) where Deadpool casually stated while he briefly nods to audience that there were no other cast at the Xavier’s Mansion apart from the two who appears in his movie, almost as if ‘the studio couldn’t afford another character’ (Figure 3). In this sense, it is partially referring to the production of the movie itself that is literally low in budget.

An excellent example of a complete self-referential meta, the author has chosen the specific scene from the Mel Brook’s spoof comedy movie ‘*Spaceballs*’ (1987) where the villain plays the VCR of the film itself into the VCR player and starts to fast forward to the current point of the movie and it’s showing a live feed of the villain looking at the VCR of the villain looking at the VCR recursively (Figure 4). Consequently, when the viewers themselves perform the action of placing the VCR of *Spaceballs* into

the VCR player, and subsequently fast forward to this particular scene, the viewer becomes a part of the meta reference as a performer completing the part of ‘the medium is the message’.

### **Komaneko’s First Step (こまねこ はじめのいっぽ Komaneko Hajime no Ippo, 2020 YouTube Release)**

The character of Komaneko first appeared in the 2006 film as the titular character. Later it became a finalist at the Melbourne International Animation Festival, the London International Animation Festival and the 8th Seoul International Cartoon & Animation Festival the London International Animation Festival and the 8th Seoul International Cartoon & Animation Festival (Rebekah Cook, 2016). Directed by Tsuneo Goda, Komaneko’s First Step is the first part of the series of animated shorts in the original Komaneko film, the short is released digitally via the dwarfstudio’s YouTube Channel on 6 April 2020–, which is the version that the author uses as case study. The plot revolves around the titular character Komaneko, who is a creative cat, working on production of a stop motion, to put it bluntly, Komaneko’s First Step is a stop motion about making stop motion. That statement alone has already contributes to identifying Komaneko’s First Step as a self-referential meta work.

The key factors that make Komaneko’s First Step a self-referential meta work are prominently identifiable in the following scenes.

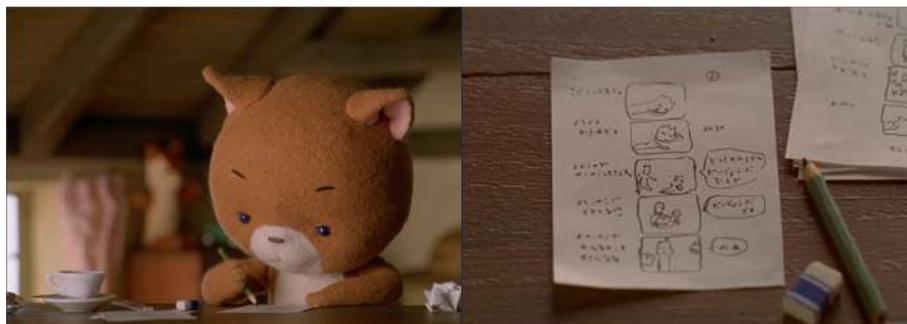


Figure 5: Komaneko working on storyboard of the stop motion (2020, dwarfstudio)



Figure 6: Komaneko crafting the doll and backdrop for the stop motion (2020, dwarfstudio)

- The process of how Komaneko drawing storyboard scenes and construct the backdrops as well as creating the ‘dolls’ characters for the stop motion Komaneko is about to make. (Figure 5 and Figure 6)
- The blundering problems that many stop motion animators, whether beginners or a professional ones, have encountered at some points in their stop motion production. Depicted here as subject does not stay in position, lighting changes creating inconsistencies etc. (Figure 7 and Figure 8)



Figure 7: Komaneko while shooting the stop motion and facing the usual problems (2020, dwarfstudio)

- While Komaneko uses stitch up ‘dolls’ to portray in the stop motion, viewers are led to forget the fact that Komaneko itself is also a ‘doll’ that is being puppeteer to portray the story itself.

- Komaneko depicted in various emotional turmoil throughout the ordeal of making stop motion, yet is shown most satisfaction and pride when the work is finally shown on screen. (Figure 9)



Figure 8: Komaneko shown working meticulously on the shooting (2020, dwarfstudio)



Figure 9: Komaneko sets up the premiere and surprise of the resulting work (2020, dwarfstudio)

- The final result of Komaneko's stop motion is depicted amateurishly with choppy animation frames as well as the inconsistencies of subjects, objects nudged, wires hanging in frame and lighting mismatch when switching frames, these minor continuity errors are akin to any animator who tries stop motion for the first time. (Figure 10)



Figure 10: The resulting stop motion animation that Komaneko has made. (2020, dwarfstudio)

Upon checking through the proposed factors to identify the forms of self-referential meta, the author can state that Komaneko's First Step takes a form of 'Partial meta' in which it is ambiguously aware of itself where it shows in the making of a stop motion as well as showing the result of that effort, hence it has also referencing to other works of its own kind, not referencing or referring to itself. However, from the third identifier, Komaneko itself utilises a stop motion to tell the story of a stop motion production, the medium chosen is now also the message in its conveyance of stop motion (Figure 11).

Partial meta	Complete meta
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ambiguously aware of itself	<input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly showing awareness of itself
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Refers to other works of its own kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Referencing or referring to itself
<input type="checkbox"/> The medium is not the message	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The medium is the message

Figure 11: determining the form of self-referential meta

## Conclusion

Komaneko's First Step is an introduction for beginners and a love letter to all stop motion creators. By itself, it is a brilliant introductory piece that opens up the world of stop motion animation for younger generations and amateur animators alike, through usage of cute characters, smooth animation and simplistic story. Conversely, when viewed through an experienced stop motion animator's eyes, Komaneko's First Step becomes a meta humour that referencing the processes and minor nuisances of making stop motion of its own kind as well as the rewarding satisfaction most animators would certainly relate to when viewing their own creation seemingly comes to life for the first time. With all the factors considered it still is not a complete self-referential meta as it is not a stop motion about making this stop motion of itself.

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