

Workshop: Digital Character Making

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose an effective technique for Character making. Character making is the construction of details to create the appearance and impression of a character and is the most important component of video content production. Character making deals with the creation, selection, design, exploitation and management of characters. In this paper, we show a series of digital character making techniques that can be used and supervised throughout the production process: story, setting, plot and episode development; character and content design, production and distribution; and finally even exploitation of the licensing, marketing, and distribution of auxiliary merchandise.

1 Visual Content Production Industry Structure

We outline the scheme of the visual production and visual content industry (Fig. 1). Creators produce video content based on an assortment of knowledge, technology and experience. The main components of the visual content are the script (scenario) and the characters. The script describes how to create the content in scenes and shots while characters describe the content through action and dialog. The director creates the content based on these two elements. The core of the director's job is directing the "mise en scène," which consists of arranging props and characters into scenes based on his or her interpretation of the script. However, the director's responsibility also includes general supervision of the entire storytelling process including crew and cast selection and guidance, scheduling and budgeting, editing and mixing, and finally fine-tuning the finished materials. These jobs are collectively called "direction."

The finished visual content is presented to the distribution industry and then packaged and delivered to various viewers and customers by means of exhibition, broadcasting, transmission and sales. In exchange, the viewers pay money to the distribution industry and a portion of that money is then shared with the visual production producers.

2 Character Making & Industry Relationship

Fig. 2 shows the relationship between Character Making and the content industry/society.

- (a) Character Generation Stage: (designer, director, producer, etc.)
In this stage a director creates a character's impression based on literal and visual information.

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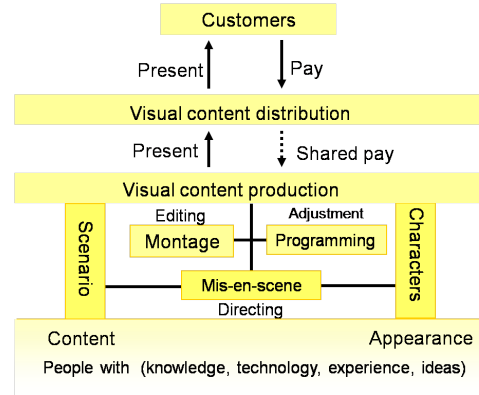


Figure 1: Scheme of Visual Production Industry

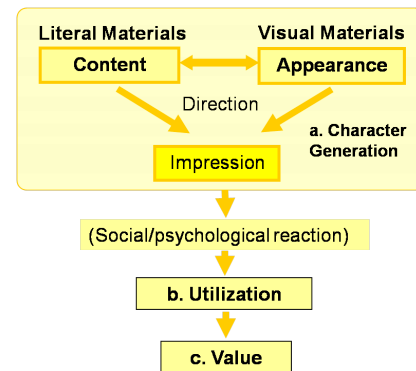


Figure 2: Relationship Between Character Making & Industry

- (b) Utilization Stage (publisher, distributor, licensor, etc.) It is here that content is licensed, distributed, and re-purposed.
- (c) Value stage (Consumer, end user, etc.) Here societal, psychological, and cultural morés combine in complex ways to attribute value to the character.

3 Character Making Templates

In this section, we explain the use of both literal and visual templates in preparation for the Character making process.

3.1 Literal Information

Character making requires aggregation of literal information related to the character (Fig. 4). Most often found in the script ("Content" in Fig. 2), this information may be details found within the description of episodes, physical structures, costumes, abilities, props, behavior and other characteristic information in alliance with story setting, genre, and other factors.

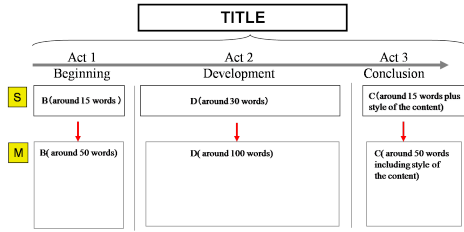


Figure 3: Literal Information Template

Figure 4: Literal Information Template

3.2 Visual Information

Next we gather visual information by collecting visual samples of pre-existing characters using a system we created called the Digital Scrapbook (DSB). The DSB is a personal digital database that helps directors pin down the appearance or looks of a desired character. DSB works with 2D and 3D graphic software to allow the user to merge and mix lines, colors, and images to create new characters. Our DSB system provides creators who are unable to communicate through drawing or sketches with another way to convey their desired images to staff and crew. It takes literal information from scripts and other written materials and combines it with design samples of pre-existing characters in order to generate visual references for new characters.

4 The Character Making Process

4.1 Character Making Process Exercise

Our Character making process can be divided into three major steps:

1. Development of literal information material by writing small and medium sized script outlines called “S-plots” and “M-plots,” respectively that we then store in templates (Fig. 4). These outlines describe character and setting information including various characteristics of each (Fig. 5).
2. Development of visual information material by classifying the desired character image on a Character Impression Scale (CIS) and collecting design samples into a collage. These samples are kept in a Digital Scrapbook (DSB) database.
3. Production of 2D or 3D versions of the desired character image based on the design samples in the DSB.

4.2 Character Making Process Classroom Results

During the Literal Information stage of the Character making process, students decided the settings of their desired character’s society, life-style, abilities, appearance, and personal relationships. Students then collected images of pre-existing characters with similar settings into a DSB and placed them on a CIS based on the students’ impressions of the character. Fig. 6 shows an example of characters placed on a CIS, and Fig. 7 shows an example of a character design sample generated by a student after selecting parts from characters in their DSB and then combining those parts to form a new character.

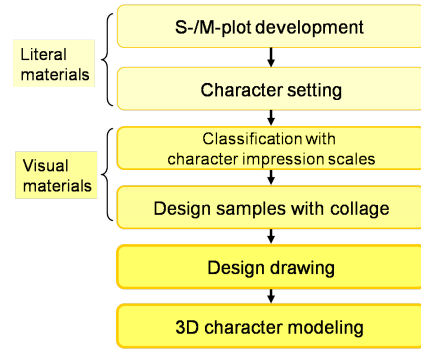


Figure 5: Character Development Process

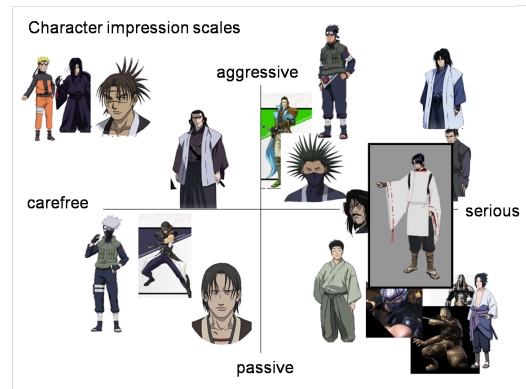


Figure 6: Example of Characters Placed on a CIS



Figure 7: Example of a Character Design Sample