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CHARACTER CONCEPT DESIGN 101

Nowadays media characters surround us everywhere in digital space and not only in there: you can see them in commercial, video-games, movies, cartoons, and even music videos. According to the researches of social marketing, you can say that the consumer prefers product that has a face - a mascot. What's the meaning of "mascot"? Mascots - is a person, animal, or object that is believed to bring good luck, or one that represents an organization [1]. But is this the only reason why artists create memorable and individualistic characters? Not necessarily, but usually artists put much more attention to fictional media characters, because they serve as tools to provide emotions, tensions and other feelings to viewer. But design of those characters also might be tricky, and according to the plot, character that looks dangerous might have a really nice and naive personality, and on the contrary, small childish characters could appear as a mysterious, sinister creature.

Many of these types of media are more or less familiar to the consumer, therefore I would like to talk more about the youngest of them.

The video-game industry began to develop and also was created in a traditional concept in early 60th of the last century. In just over forty years, people in the game industry have achieved such a beautiful manner of expressing thoughts and ideas, telling a story to the player, most of them that are not available to some modern movies. One of the first steps was adding motion capture technology. 1994 was the year when first game with motion capture was released [2]. It was "Rise of the robots", and even though game wasn't too successful, it still was just a beginning to develop such a perspective technology. Initially, the main task of video games was simply killing time for young

people, when the main role was the gameplay. But now everything has changed, and the game creators need to attract the players not only by fascinating process of passing multiple levels, but also by deep history and decent level of interest in events that happen in those games. One of the main tools of getting player involved into the story and makes him feel empathy is characters.

Keeping up with characters from the lyrical genres of art, video-game character must have a real living personality. It should be interesting and memorable. Previously, designers didn't think so much about the role that the human brain plays when actual user sees a picture. They created "flat" and awkward characters. But now, when the competition in the market of video games is so massive, designers finally began to think about the perception of an image.

The first thing that our brain perceives is the silhouette. It's not just a black spot; this blob might tell to our brain a lot more than our eyes. Perception of form is primarily connected with the associative array of a person. If we see a massive silhouette, then this tells us that this character is strong and full of courage. If silhouette is elongated and lean – then the character is probably crafty and fast, if the same character is also stoop – it immediately gives us a clue that he is weak or old or maybe just unconfident.

The key element in the creation of the character is its characteristic feature. I want to show you some canon examples of simple but time proved designs.

Evil characters represent negative aspects of human (and not only human) personality: greed, wrath, aggression, vulgarity. Usually modern villains and evil characters are anthropomorphic, because when our brain sees something that looks similar to human, but it's still has something different, that human's body usually doesn't have, it creates a dissonance in our brain. Artists, robotics and movie creators call this "uncanny valley" [3]. Design also might have a lot of similarities with infernal motives. Evil characters usually embody any kind of destruction, dangerous natural phenomena, they usually just heavily armed and create feelings of danger.

Protagonists and positive characters, on the contrary, usually look neutral or friendly. They mostly look either like an attractive person, comedian character, or having a side-support role, which means that they should build a deep trusting relationship [4].

One of all those artistic tools is using a color palette. Sometimes people creating character using the method of “zone of interest”. This is a ratio of two colors, one of which is usually located parallel to the other according to the “Ittan’s color circle”. The proportion of one color to another is a maximum of 30% to 70%. Those 30% are an actual zone of interest. Most often they look more contrast and brighter than anything else. Artists also use complimentary colors. Concept of complimentary colors is pretty simple – looking at “ittan’s color circle” you need to choose two or three colors that are placed near each other.

If we put together all the initial stages of the work, spend some time developing the appearance of the character, then we can conclude that the character’s design is not only an artistic work, but also an integral process of thinking, though in most cases an intuitive one, as a result of which we can see a special and independent character.

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