Disclaimer

- The base document is Metropolis, a novel by Thea von Harbou in the public domain.

- The organ music was interpreted by Austin Lovelace. It is distributed under the license Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0.

- The violin music was interpreted by Nathan Milstein and conducted by Bruno Walter. It is distributed under the license Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0.

- The special effects where obtained from the Banco de Imágenes y Sonidos del Instituto de Tecnologías Educativas. They are distributed under the license Creative Commons Reconocimiento-NoComercial-CompartirIgual 2.5 España.

- The screenplay, technical script, storyboard and narration were created by Daniel Monedero-Tortola and are distributed under the license Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0.

Introduction

The following variations draw upon Metropolis' (Thea von Harbou, 1925) first chapter as the base document. It is a novel, a standard expository document divided in chapters with headings and a table of content, where the writing follows a expressive, lyrical style with abundant use of descriptive language and rhetorical figures like metaphors and hyperboles.

The variations produced include a screenplay, technical script, storyboard and narration; and, because of its different mode, audience, structure and style, they implied several challenges as we will see.

Illustration 1: Metropolis' poster

Variation 1: Screenplay

Target Audience

Directors usually give this kind of documents to performers so that they can study the play, make annotations and familiarize themselves with the story and their characters. Production crew may also be interested in this kind of documents to acquire a better understanding of the scenes.

Explicit Structure

The document is clearly divided in sections and scenes, which are introduced by a small paragraph that provides context and tone; this division also conveys meaning when it comes to the timing distribution and the development of the story. Bolds or hyphens are used for signaling which character is talking and, in longer, printed screenplays, numbered pages and a table of content provides help locating a specific scene.

Style

The expressive style is derived from the base document with a predominant use of the voice over. In fact, much text comes directly from the original, but a considerable portion of it had to be adapted to our social situation and to fit the format since rich and extensive written descriptions turn long and dull when listened to. Rhetoric forms were only kept when they helped transmitting the underlying message, and in most cases they had to be conformed to fit a less extensive format. Content was also mended to ease the pronunciation of specially long/ complicated paragraphs, and notes were added to emphasize how certain words or sentences should be pronounced and give guidance to the performers.

As a matter of fact, because of its length and richness this kind of base documents provide much more material that one can fit in a mode like audio or video. Thus, much of the work consisted in adapting and selecting, rather than creating new one.

Success

As a format, the success of the screenplay depends on its base document. Having used the base document 'as is' would have resulted in an unpractical document with too long sections that would have been uninteresting both for performers and the general public. However, after adapting the base document and using the screenplay in further variations I can confirm its success.

The current screenplay helps performers focus on the performance and omit the technical details. It eases identifying specific scenes and characters' lines, and provides macro-context (scenes descriptions) and micro-context (emphasizing the pronunciation) guidelines. However, some non-standard expository documents like Quik-Scan could be very helpful in an scenario where performers need to rapidly revise a sub-scene or when actors are only looking for an overview of the scene.

Variation 2: Technical Script

Target Audience

Post-production crew uses this document to process the recordings, editing them, adding music, effects, etc. Production teams could also be interested in it since, together with the screenplay, they provide a global view of the play.

Explicit Structure

Technical scripts are highly structured documents solely containing a table. Since this kind of document aims to provide clear guidance to technicians towards the creation of the final product, the headers of the columns represent technical data like scenes, music, effects, and timing.

This format was adapted to the narration mode dividing scenes in sub-scenes (4.1, 4.2,...). The aforementioned division made sense when thinking about the post-production process and were created according to changes in the background music, effects or prolonged periods of time where only one of the actors speaks.

In a different mode like video, scenes are usually divided into shots where technicians have to reconfigure cameras, lights or set-ups. But in our case it made sense to divide it according to the post-production stage, since most of the effort was going to be made during that phase and only one recording equipment (microphone and sound station) was going to be used.

Also, the format of the columns corresponding to the timing are adjusted depending on the length of the final product (in our case minutes and seconds).

Style

One difference between the screenplay and the technical script is that the last does not offer introductory paragraphs because that context is no longer needed: the audio had already being recorded and it was the performers who where concerned by that information. Notes on emphasizing pronunciation where mostly taken off for the same reason unless I expect to stress that pronunciation through software effects.

However, highly technical terms were used to instruct the technicians regarding the expectations of the director.

On another subject, the scene/ sub-scene division eases the location of a given act while the dialogs supply information regarding who is talking and what is being said. Music and special effects indicate unambiguously how the voice is going to be complemented. And timing is not longer accomplished by side notes but very specific time periods signal the start, end, and length of every sub-scene.

All these columns make every row on the table an independent formula, a modular specification of the final product signaled with a rather direct language that improves its readability because abstract details are made evident.

Success

As a format, the technical script excels on easing the task of the post-production crew. Because it provides a step-by-step description of the task being developed by the technicians. Although it required planning in advance for the tempo and the effects, it certainly saved time during the post-production process because, by then, every aspect of the post-production is crystal clear. Furthermore, a document of this nature supports the final editing not leaving much space for improvisation, which fosters the vision of the director.

Variation 3: Storyboard

Target Audience

The production and post-production crew can use the storyboard in very different manners: On one hand, the production crew uses the storyboard as a guide to create a set-up, set a camera, lights and actors while recording video. On the other hand, the post-production team can also use the storyboard as a way of visualizing what the director is expecting; that is how I used it.

Explicit Structure

Storyboards are also highly structured documents: pages are numbered, titles identified the scenes being depicted and descriptions provide context and technical details about the frames and scenes.
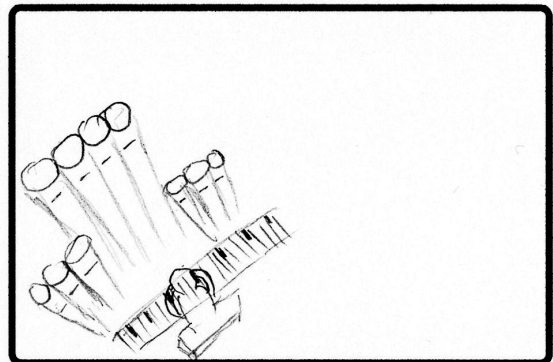
Pages are numbered and, as one advances from frame to frame, time also goes passing by.

Style

The written style is succinct, brief yet clear and some technical terms are used to support camera movements, zoom and focus, which fosters readability for the target audience. No timing measures appear since this document abstracts details not relative to the visual set-up.

However, inside every frames there is a descriptive portrayal that indicates how scenes look and how elements interact. Admittedly, the drawings are usually sketchy and do not include much detail, however, that is the aim of a storyboard: to convey information visually abstract but technically relevant.

Scene 3: Burying his hands in his face.

Illustration 2: Storyboard frame

The aim of storyboards is not to provide realistic images but sketches that can help the rest of the team have a better understanding of the story. Therefore, it does not reflect colors or shapes unless they are crucial for the development of the story.

Success

Thinking about the storyboard, I believe we can only refer to it as having a moderate success. Because of its visual nature, it does not target the narration field, thus, everything that was implemented with images was present already in the screenplay and/ or the technical script. The camera movements presented on the storyboard do not adjust to the audio mode: yet a change in the zoom may relate to a change in the audio gain and fades can be implemented in both modes, other visual effects like travelings or character positions do not affect the audio at all.

However, looking at them now, I realized how they can serve as a reminder of a detail on a given sketch, or how they can be used to lay the discourse about an action. For instance, I just had a look at the first frames of the third scene and it reminded me that I should have included more reverberation during the first scene, when Frederer is inside a tower-like building.

Variation 4: Narration

Target Audience

Universal: anyone able to hear.

Explicit Structure

The most relevant explicit structure depends on the audio player being used, where we usually can see the current time and the length of the audio. Of course, it does not appear to be enough information, but since it is produced to be listened to linearly, most of our needs are fulfilled.

Style

Just like in the base document, the style is expressive with a dominant voice over, but part of the descriptive and rhetoric language has been transformed in a plentiful use of music and effects.

On audio recordings, time is an important factor because it directly affects the perception: two hours of reading can reflect any length of time in a story, but as one listens to audio we perceive time passing by as real. Therefore, pauses and time lapses play an important role defining the tempo.

Furthermore, this is not a multi-mode creation and virtually everything has to be conveyed through audio: time lapses, scene changes, emotions and actions must be conveyed using audio, which requires skills and really prepared performers and technicians.

Additionally, music is essential when it comes to the division in different scenes, while special effects reinforce certain lines or situations, to cause a greater impact on the public and persuade the listener.

Nonetheless, creative freedom comes at a price and, while in other documents like STOP the writer is aware of the needs for the document, there is always some degree of improvisation when narrating.

Success

As a format, a narration success transmitting the story, but only because the base document was adapted. Again, having narrated the base document 'as-is' would have resulted in a long, difficult to follow and challenging to produce document, lacking interest from the listener.

A narration projects the previous text and visual documents, loosing its formality, but gaining all the features associated with oral tradition and culture. Moreover, it can be consumed in different places and, although it requires time, specialized knowledge (audio, pronunciation, etc) and hardware, the lesser structure certainly adds freedom to the process.

Creating audio instead of text or video had the advantage of giving the performer a priceless freedom interpreting the different roles, and transforming different written voices into different factual voices. Nonetheless, having more time and different performers for each voice would had produced a better result.

Variations Reflections

The variations produced are different in its mode, audience, structure and style. But one of the most important things I learned is that every format, every distinctive element was suited to the target audience: technical details do not play an important role for performers, while technicians only concern is their own field.

Another conclusion I can extract from these variations is that structure can be related to linearity: documents that are designed to be consumed linearly, like the narration, do not need as much explicit structure as documents that are going to be accessed randomly.

Axis are important even in written text, for instance, on the technical script, the beginning of the recording is situated at the top, while the end is at the bottom. In contrast, the story may not follow this pattern if it contains flashbacks or other type of non-linear elements.

Another important inference is that the story is, in a way, affected by the genre, which is sensitive to social changes. The aforementioned statement is based on the idea that if Metropolis was to be written today it would be different. While producing the different variations, specially the screenplay, I experienced some of the distinctive traits typical of a society almost one hundred years old with accentuated social differences and fear to the technological advancements. Although our society is subject to other qualities.

Personally, I was not sure about the contribution of the storyboard towards the final narration because of the different mode. But after finishing the projects I realized how much pictures can convey: if they had been present from the beginning, they would have reminded me of certain situations, and would have helped me set the discourse in a more efficient way just like social messes encourage dialog.

Finally, although these are highly specialized formats, after attending class and reading about STOP, IMAP and other non-standard expository documents, I truly believe that there is room for improvement in screenplays and technical script when it comes to cognition, scanning and direct access to portions of the text.