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Fine Arts

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Short Animation Project Written Report

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Media Authoring 2 – Semester 1: Dr. Brian Keegan

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Date: 06 / 05 / 2005

Brief: Short Animation Project

Understanding of the Project Brief:

Submission of a two page written report about a short Flash animation project.

Deadline

06 / 05 / 2005	Presentation of written assignment

Thematic Coherence

The short animation features the character 'Dave'. It is through the character Dave's short journey that a common thematic thread that runs throughout the project has been achieved. The character is an office worker who lives in uptown Manhattan. The first scene opens after the introductory title with a profile of the character wearing a 'Norm' grey jacket, red trouser pants and grey walking shoes. The character is usually neatly groomed, clean shaven; a sanguine nature is usually evident from the character's fresh-faced ruddy complexion. Being early morning on 86 and Amsterdam the city has yet to awake and so it is that the character's brazen j-Walking goes unnoticed. The lonely background streetscape shows a solitary FedEx meeting the first promised deadline of the day. The tarpaulin-protected motorcycles lining the pavement belong to the not-so-friendly looking bunch of bikers who are members of the local club. The character strides along with confidence written all over, past the trashcan awaiting collection and past the trees. The character is thinking about what happened on Sunday and about what lies ahead in the busy city.


The second scene opens with the character in centre city, just up from downtown, where it's all about to happen. The city streets stick the animation together. The streets spin around the character. The character is about to make the call on a cell phone and knows that this is a turning point in the journey of life. The big yellow taxis roll by slowly, complimenting the grey advert spattered city. The character faces the camera and tells the viewer that it was realised on Sunday night that this would have to happen and that another female character would have to be informed.

Walking Animation

The aim was to make the character walk cycle look as realistic as possible. A profile of the character was created from the outset and was made up of basic shapes using Adobe Illustrator vector based drawing software. The individual shapes were imported into Flash where they were converted to symbols.

In preparing for the animation, the Flash nested hierarchy architecture of symbols was used to make three separate parts for the body; the top, the legs and the back arm. The legs symbol was used to establish guiding points, with the front leg and back leg on separate layers to make the legs look realistic when they moved.
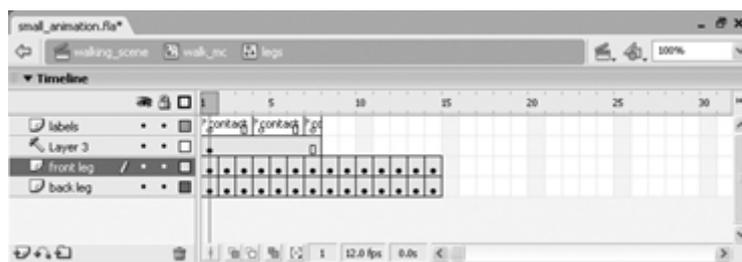
Keyframes were used, which are the main drawings of a movement in animation, to replicate a walk, where the left leg moves from behind to forward while the front leg moves from forward to behind. Whilst travelling on their respective paths, the legs pass each other and for this reason a keyframe was added in the middle of the step. A 'copy and paste'

frames technique combined with the 'move and rotate' tool was used correctly position the leg shapes. A total of fifteen keyframes were added to produce a smoother walk.


This same technique was applied to the top symbol using keyframes to give the arms some rhythm bearing in mind that as the human body walks, the arms move in opposition to the legs. Subtle keyframe movements were added to the top symbol in relation to the legs symbol across the walk cycle to add an element of bounce to the character's walk cycle. The full walk cycle was then converted to a move clip to enable control and to have the clip run on its own timeline in the first scene.

Talking Animation

Lip movements which were in sync to phonetic sounds were used to bring personality to the character. A short spoken sentence (4.4 second '*'.wav (windows audio file)) was imported at the begining into Flash and inserting onto the stage into a separate layer. A head made of separate shapes was created using Adobe Illustrator and these were imported into Flash and converted to symbols. Each symbol was applied to a separate layer to enable full control over the movement of each facial element and to enable the character to appear more lifelike.
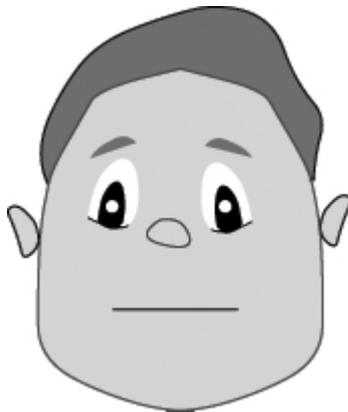
Ten different mouth shapes were created to represent phonetic sounds relating to letters of the alphabet. The technique of 'scrubbing' was used where the playhead was dragged on the timeline to hear which phonetic sound was playing on a particular frame. Each relevant keyframe was labeled with a comment to enable the insertion of the corresponding mouth shape into each frame to match. Keyframes were added to both the eyebrows and eyeballs and shape tweens were applied to add extra emphasis to certain sounds.
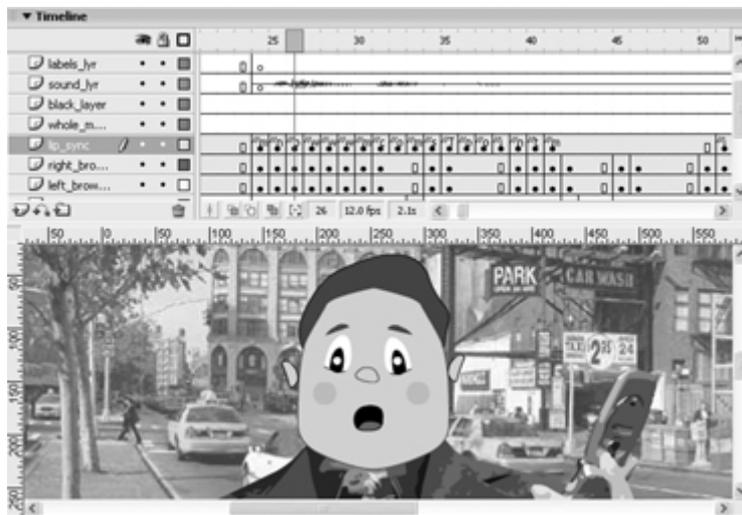
Title / Credits

The graphic elements used in the opening title were created using the type tool in Adobe Illustrator. A bold version of the Antique Olive typeface was used which was converted to outlines and heavy outlines were applied using the stroke option. Bright colours and graphic elements were used to bring an American 'Fifties' feel to the letters. These elements were imported into Flash and converted to graphic symbols and inserted into separate layers.

Keyframes were used to apply motion tweening to stretch the type from a distance and enable the letters to finish up in a neat position on the stage. Motion tweening was also used to rotate the background colour through the RGB spectrum. The final frame of the opening scene was carried through to the walking scene and the alpha option was used to enable a smooth transition between each scene.

The credits used in the closing scene were created using the type tool in Flash which were converted to a graphic symbol. The closing scene was introduced by fading to black in the final talking scene. The credits faded from nothing to white type on a black background and then fade to black over three seconds. This gives a smooth ending to the whole animation.

Conclusion:

The short animation project was a challenging project and provided a greater knowledge of the Flash software. It took quite a lot of work at times to achieve what was wanted in the animation, especially the walk cycle. The project will allow for much more confidence in taking on the next project.