

Innovations Report

Paul Routledge e9554660

BACVA 3

2008

Cupid

2D Animation with David Laurence



Contents

Abstract.....	p3
Introduction.....	p3
Aims.....	p4
Aim 1:	
The Idea.....	p5
Audience.....	p6
The Script.....	p6
Character Deisgn.....	p6
Planning.....	p6
Aim 2:	
Postal Service.....	p7
Individual Jobs.....	p8
Aim 3:	
My Animation Style.....	p9
Meeting Of Styles.....	p11
Aim 4:	
Time Frame.....	p13
Critical Analysis	p14
Bibliography.....	p18
Appendix.....	p20

Abstract

The overall goal of this project is to create an interesting and funny animation we will produce in a 'Postal Service' Style, which means assigning individual parts of the animation process between the two of us, but not be in contact with each other during this process, and only gain contact at the end where we will exchange work and edit the outcome. This will lead into an interesting mix of styles and will be all done one week.

Introduction

A while ago I came up with an idea for an animation about a cupid character whilst on the London underground. I wrote the idea down in a notepad I carry. I didn't think much about the idea for a while until I was listening to a band called Postal Service. They are different to most other bands in that the band members record their different parts separately. I felt that this was a very fresh and interesting idea. I then tried to think of a way that this could be recreated through different media. As I have been working with David on our major project together I knew that we worked well together and could make a very interesting piece using this "Postal Service" format.

As we were both interested in producing a film using this technique, having, we needed a story line. I suggested the idea that I had had previously about the cupid character and Dave was very interested in making it happen. I knew him to be a talented individual who could add something to what I wanted to produce. I was also aware that Dave and I shared the same sense of humour while realising that we are very different in our styles of drawing and animating. This juxtaposition would be important in creating an interesting end product.

As our major project was executed in a series of short films, released as weekly podcasts, we both understood the need to work to very strict deadlines. We therefore decided to complete the project within a week.

My aim in this project has been to create something innovative that has not been achieved before.

Aims

We decided on four aims for the project –

Aim 1: To make a funny and interesting 2D animation.

Aim 2: To create an animation which will be divided into separate parts, which we each will be assigned, and to complete these parts to form an interesting animation. We will have no contact during the animation apart from when passing our individual parts to each other. This will be influenced by the way the band The Postal Service produce their music.

Aim 3: To create an animation with an interesting mix of different styles which will not be affected by each other.

Aim 4: To create the animation in one week, with a deadline, so that it can be released as a podcast.

The combination of all of these aims will hopefully achieve an innovative animation.

Aim 1: The Idea

The original concept for the animation is simple. I spotted an advertisement for a matchmaking website called match.com. The advertisement featured an overweight cupid with a man, probably in his twenties. See Fig 1.



Fig.1 Match.com Advertisement

In the advert (above), cupid does not have the usual attractive image but instead is slightly overweight and not particularly efficient at his job. The idea of a very different image for cupid intrigued me. However, as a stand-alone premise, this wasn't enough to hold my attention beyond that brief glimpse of a new comic character.

I wondered whether the character could be developed by using the idea that, while believing that his arrows, when striking his victims, allowed them to fall in love, they simply died as a result of the arrow.

This simple idea then had to be developed into a story which could then be developed into 2D animation that would hold an audience's interest.

I developed a script in which cupid skips along up in the clouds, shooting people with his bow and arrow, with no idea of the pain and suffering he is causing. The job of telling him about the killing would fall to Santa Claus.

The reason for choosing Santa Clause was that, while he is a character that is instantly recognisable by any audience, he is so far removed from the image of cupid that the audience would be instantly intrigued by his appearance. My aim was to create Santa Claus as a very dry character, creating a humorous relationship between himself and cupid as he tries to explain the reality of the situation to cupid.

Audience

I think the animation would be targeted at a older audience. The comedy swings from visual humour to a dry conversational humour. It will not be every bodies taste but I think would be appreciated even if not. I didn't intend it for a specific audience, just to the style of humour and visuals that I like.

The Script

My intention for the script was two achieve a dry humorous outcome to this strange scenario. I did not set the script in concrete as I do not like doing this for small comedy sketches. I subscribe to the Larry David school of comedy scripting. In his comedy show 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' it is "shot without a script. The cast is given scene outlines and often improvise lines as they go." ³This keeps the narrative "fresh and spontaneous" ³. This is exactly how I wanted our script to be. I told David the basic outline of the script, telling him certain lines that I wanted to be in the script. I think it worked well and the script has a certain slow dry wit, with nice comedic pauses. For dialog see appendix.

Character Design

My character design was very much a free hand drawing, I decided that I wanted my cupid to be as far away to the generic looking cupid as I could get because I wanted the animation to be edgy and untidy. It was the same with the other characters, I did not have time to do a serious character study on each of them so I made them very simple, easy to animate and quirky.

Planning

I planned everything that I could in advance, apart from starting the actual process of animation. I took reference footage a day before starting the animation we recorded the sound a day before. Planning was obviously limited because of the time scale and the fact that we could not discuss each others parts.

Aim 2: The Postal Service

The Postal Service is a band I have known for a while now and their music I am a big fan of. There is something about their music which is very different to the genres of music that the individual members are usually associated with. The band The Postal Service was created by two musicians, Ben Gibbard (also in the band Death Cab For Cutie) and Jimmy Tamborello (also in the band Dntel). They coined the name The Postal Service due to the way they produced their songs. They would individually record their separate parts and send them on a CDR via 'The Post Service' in the USA. Jimmy Tamborello would write and perform the instrumental parts of the songs and Ben Gibbard would lay down the lyrics on top. I think that this is such an interesting way of producing songs and is so innovative in the field of music. They would have no communication with each other about their separate parts of the tracks and just see what the outcome would be.

"The good thing about working with [producer/musician] Jimmy [Tamborello] is it takes him sending me something for me to write lyrics for it. It's not like I'm sitting around going, 'Oh, that would be good for a Postal Service song.' " (Gibbard.2006)

I like the way that Ben Gibbard is being kind of forced to use this music he has been given and put his own lyrics to it rather than working closely and producing something completely different. I would describe Ben Gibbard's band 'Death Cab For Cutie' as an indie pop rock band and Jimmy Tamborello's band 'Dntel' as electronic, which for me is an exciting mix already, but the way they go about it is so very unique and innovative

I wondered if this would work in some sort of short film and after realising I could make it work I started to think about how. I told David about the idea and he was excited about it.

"Time wasn't an issue at all for this project," he said. "Jimmy just sent me stuff in the mail as he put it together" (Gibbard 2003).

We decided to use emails to send our files as it is much faster and working to a deadline of a week away we needed the instant access to the data to complete the animation. If we hadn't set our self the deadline we would have tried sending CDRs through the post. Sending the files via email wouldn't affect the way we wanted to create the piece it just meant we wouldn't totally follow The Postal Service ideology to exact detail.

Individual Jobs

Selecting what each of us would do in the animation was a fairly straight forward task as I had things that I wanted to explore and look into, as did David.

As I thought of the idea I knew that I wanted to direct, script and animate it. I had to complete all of the animation in under a week so that we could composite the two separate entities together and David could colour the animation.

While I was responsible for the animation and editing the sound, Dave was the background artist, creating backgrounds in his individual visual style which I would not see or know anything about. After animating, I would hand over all of my animation and Dave would use his same animation style to ink in the characters. He would then pass back to me the finished background and inked characters so that we had a series of images that I could edit. I would then go about editing all of the images together and also add sound effects to the images.

I will use, for my animation, adobe photoshop and adobe premiere. I have had experience in animating in 2D before and find these the most usable and helpful programs when doing so. As they are sister programs, adobe premiere is very compatible with photoshop's PSD format and you can use the layers created in photoshop as frames in the different tracks in premiere.

I am very interested in the role that an editor plays in alleviating high height of the comedy which is given to them. This in animation can be achieved in two different areas. It is important to think about the edit before you start animating as it is such a long process. The timing of the animation and the timing of the cuts very much entwine both roles. I always slightly over animate so that I can have that extra second or two to create the perfect cut. A perfect cut can make or break a comedy situation. Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar describe, in 'The Technique of Film Editing', a comedy editing as "Not necessary to convince the spectator of anything, just to make them laugh" and that "the funniest films are often those in which the editor has been absolutely ruthless in his disregard for reality and solely on extracting the maximum amount of humour out of the situation." (Reisz, Millar, 1986) When I read this I knew it was something I could take under account when editing and animating. I perceived it in terms of how long you can prolong a cut to create the most laughs, or even how quickly you can cut to create the same. They describe this as a harsh cuts or "Faulty piece of continuity"(Reisz, Millar, 1986).

However they later goes on to say that "on balance it is better to loose a few laughs by having them follow each other too fast than to miscalculate and to leave the gaps too long."(Reisz, Millar, 1986).

I have to partly disagree with this statement, I think that this is not looking at comedy editing as a whole, but only thinking about fast passed comedy. When you think about a comedy like 'The Office' it is not gag based, or fast passed. It uses slow dragged out conversations to create this dry English comedy which is so entertaining.

Aim 3:
My Animation Style

My style of 2D animation is scratchy hand drawn simple animation. I think that if you have something you want to say or show through a certain type of media and you do not want it to look like a masterpiece then you concentrate on how to do it as quickly and effectively as you can within the time period you have set yourself. I admire the work of David Shrigley. See Fig 2



Fig 2. David Shrigley – Excerpt from Who I Am And What I Want

Shrigley's approach is minimalist. He tells a story in the simplest way possible.. Here, in an excerpt from 'Who I Am And What I Want', he relates a story to the viewer in just two images and two lines of writing. His animations are the same. The simple hand-drawn, childlike nature of the cartoons tell a story so simply without over-animating or over-exaggerating things that do not need to be over-exaggerated. His uncomfortable humour is very interesting

too. He does not shy away from the obscene, but uses it to create this edgy intelligent humour.

I also looked at how to create simple lip-syncing which would be fast but effective. I looked at Shrigley's simple lip-syncing technique. They show speech and emotion in its simplest form but really work in the context of the media.

I took reference footage for the animation, as I believe that, if you want to create a realistic animated performance by a human character, you need to reference the movements. This was especially a factor for me because of the short time period I had to animate. Some of the best animators in the world have been influenced by the Muybridge Books by Eadweard Muybridge, written in 1887 which give a break down of many different movements. Williams(2001) describes it as a "Treasure trove of action information", and says that "Milt (Kahl) swore by The Muybirdge Books".

I think this shows that even the greatest animators in the world are influenced by reference material. Fig. 3 demonstrates how I was able to use reference footage to my advantage for inbetweening of the Cupid character.



Fig 3 Cupid inbetweening

When creating a basic animated piece, created in order to communicate a simple message to the user, I like to use simple camera angles and use the

animation and visuals to portray the different moods. This is why I tend to use simple side-on shots. In this way, the viewer does not get disorientated by multiple shot changes.

I try to create reactions from the viewer by the timing and different touches to my animating. I like the idea that you can make someone laugh by drawing one extra line into a frame.

My animation and drawing style is intentionally sketchy and a little child like. This is just a look that I like. I like things to look jerky and not totally smooth, this style can be as relevant as the smoothest, most flowing animation in my eyes. I take time to make the animation look a certain way, which I am developing into my own personal style.

A Meeting Of Styles

The real test will be when my style and David's styles meet at the end of the project. In terms of the mixing styles, a lot of post-production houses transfer their work between houses through drives which can sometimes lead to different styles of shot being mixed together. If there is not enough communication between entities when producing work, the style and look of the outcome can be incompatible.

In the film 'Waking Life' written and directed by Richard Linklater, an animated film where the artists painted over live action to create a painterly effect for the picture. The different animators were given their own characters in a scene to paint over. Intentional or not this would create a different style between scenes. Foxsearchlight.com explains that "It was simultaneously artistic – because each artist creatively interpreted the scene in his or her own style." This bares resemblance to what we are trying to create. Not in the way of differing animation styles but in differing styles of drawing and visuals.



Fig. 4 Screen Shot From 'Waking Life' (1)



Fig. 5 Screen Shot From 'Waking Life' (2)

These two screenshots from 'Waking Life' show how interesting the variation in styles between the different scenes as the animators were given parts to animate.

A natural, untouched, unpolished collaboration of two different styles is a very interesting idea which could work for our animation.

Aim 4: Time Frame

David and I have, over the last 2 months, been used to working to a weekly schedule. We have worked through the night countless times and have a good understanding of what it would be like to produce a short film in just a week. Before starting the animation we will have produced six 1 to 3 minute short films every week. This experience I thought would be key to us completing the project on time. In our major project we have been releasing podcasts every Friday for an internet audience which we take great pleasure from hearing the feedback. We plan to release the cupid animation as a podcasts as well to see what the feedback will be, although we will release it on the day of the deadline.

They set up will be the same as we have been used to in the last 6 weeks. We will shoot the reference footage a day before I start animating. I will animate for 2 or three days then pass on my work to David. After he has finished he will pass it back for me to complete it. The difference is, we will not be in contact with each other about the animation. In our major project we spend most days together discussing the look and overall outcome of the film. In the cupid animation we will not do this at all.

When looking into how we would achieve this weekly deadline we researched in depth the TV program South Park. The program works on a weekly schedule where they have a Wednesday deadline, which is when they have to air their show in national television. We thought there were parallels between what we were trying to accomplish and what they already have accomplished, however, obviously not on the same scale. They will storyboard, record and animate a complete episode in one week, which is so impressive given the length and quality of the episodes.

One of the main reasons they need to do it on a weekly basis is because they like to parody recent events. They “need the ability to spoof yesterday’s presidential news conference or parody Britney Spears’ latest hairdo.” (Driver, 2007) There was not a need for us to do this, however I liked the idea that you can produce something to be proud of and call your own in just one week of your life.

We took a lot of ideas from how the South Park team speeded up the process. “We have a 10-year library of props and backgrounds and characters that we recycle and reuse,” (Stogh, 2007) which was very helpful when releasing our six podcasts. I will also be able to reuse animation for the cupid piece and Dave will be able to reuse backgrounds and background objects.

Critical Analysis

No matter how much me and David talk about how we are trying to achieve all of our aims and keep to our 'Postal Service' ideology for the project, the most important thing to me and what was always in the back of my mind was wanting to create a funny and interesting animation.

We took a week from start to finish, from Thursday to Thursday to complete. I had three days to animate the shots up until the dialogue. David was doing the backgrounds as I was doing this. When I finished these shots, I sent Dave all of the individual frames of my animation for him to ink in. Then I started lip-syncing and finished the final shot. This shot was static so I had sent it to Dave with the first finished shots. This worked out very well as I finished on Wednesday night and Dave gave me the final frames to edit, and, once I completed that I gave it back to Dave to edit the sound. Fig. 6 shows a shot breakdown of how we went about compiling a scene.

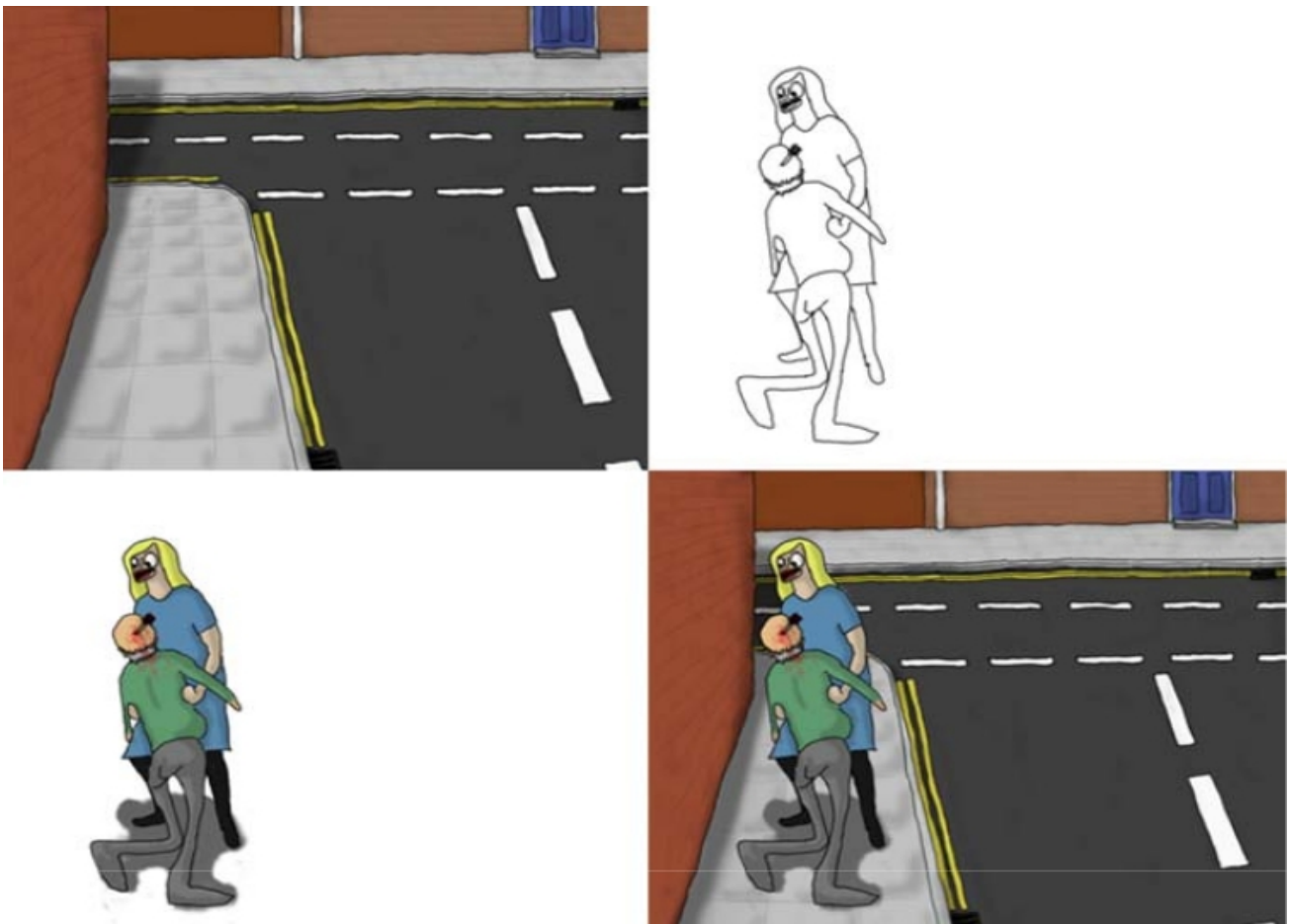


Fig. 6 Shot Breakdown.

I am very happy with the outcome. When I received the files from David to edit I was very surprised with how well our two styles blend together. When we first discussed using the 'Postal Service' idea as a base ideology of our project, I was nervous about whether both of our styles would work together. I didn't really know what to expect. I knew he liked visuals that were clean and used bold colours and I didn't think that it would look right with my scratchy style of drawing and animating. I did however have full faith in him and was comfortable handing over my animation and my idea, as I knew if we were going to produce it with the ideology that we wanted, I needed to have this blind faith.

After a final meeting with our tutor Paula, showing our final animation, she raised a lot of interesting points about it. The lack of total facial animation is a hindrance to the product, as the viewer is drawn just towards the lip-synch of the character. If I were to do it again, and if we gave ourselves more time I would have worked much more on the eye emotion of both characters and maybe concentrated on that even more than the lip-synch. I think however in the time frame that we gave ourselves I only had one day to do the entire end shot and kept the whole facial animation to a minimum.

I also think that some of the sound effects could have been better. When the two couples are talking the sound effect isn't clear enough and there needs to be more sounds around them in those scenes. There could maybe be other people reacting to it in the background.

I do however like the over all sound of the animation. From start to end I wanted to keep the sound minimalistic and not include too many sound effects or any kind of music. The idea of a quiet animation where the viewer has to listen intently to it is appealing as it is not throwing sounds at you, which is often confusing and over bearing.

The way the end scene seems to carry on longer than you expect is what I wanted the viewer to think. I wanted this dragged out conversation to be never-ending, where it just tails off with both characters standing there in a awkward silence. This dialogue and the ad-libbed nature of it were key in the last scene.

I think David did a very good job with background and the inking in of the characters. The backgrounds were simplistic and used bold colours and basic ideas, but this worked well as my characters were also simplistic.

I thought my characters were successful apart from the Santa character. The other characters were all very unique and quirky, but looking at the final piece Santa was slightly more generic. If I had had more time I would have produced a character study on Santa and looked into trying to make him less like a conventional Santa.

Fig. 7 shows all of the characters together and you can clearly see there is a difference in the way that Santa looked compared to the rest of the characters. This is one of my main regrets about the animation.

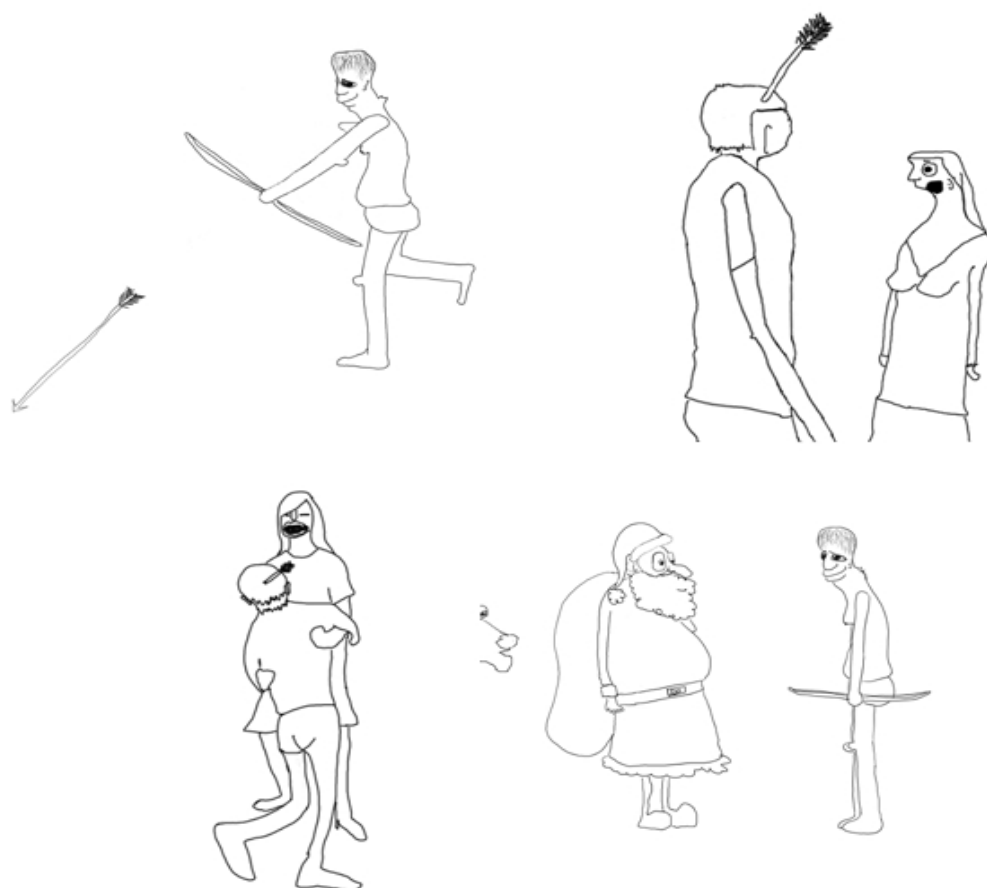


Fig. 7 Different Line Drawing of all the characters

I carried through the way I like editing comedy animations. I like to use cuts that are not obvious. For example the time I left until the arrow hit the first male that got killed was longer than the second. I wanted the viewer to think that it was going to be a normal cupid scenario where the arrow would make them fall in love. Leaving this pause, I think, made the viewer think this but then the arrow coming in later than expected added to the comedy.

I think if we were to try a project like this again, there would be many things which we could do differently. I think the main issue was the time

constraint. We successfully finished the animation however if we had more time I could have made more detailed animations and Dave could have done the same with the background. We would have been able to do more with the sound such as better editing and more background noise during the scene when cupid kills the males. We would have had more trouble achieving it if we hadn't had six weeks experience of working on a weekly basis, producing short films.

Another possibility would be to reverse the roles. With David animating and I would create the backgrounds and ink in the characters. If this was to happen we might need more time as David hasn't animated in 2D before and I haven't done the research on inking in that David has. This would however create a huge difference in the outcome of the animation as my style is very unclean and edgy, whereas as you can see by the visuals that David has created, his animation would be smoother and more akin to what 'The Simpsons' or 'Family Guy' looks like. However if I were to create the visuals I would use much more scratchy colouring and shading with less bright colours. Working with this reversal of roles would definitely be a future ambition.

If we gave ourselves more than a week to produce the animation, we would have done many more things. I would have liked to see how the audio worked if we had done it separately. I think that there would not have been as much of a flow to the audio and the ad-libbing that we achieved would be lost. The audio would be edited, which may have created more humour, however may have lost the authenticity of a real conversation.

I think I have made progress in my animation, I am gradually creating my own individual style which people will recognise as my work. I think this is important, but I'm still confident that if I wanted to create a different look to any of my future animations I could do this.

It has helped me in my confidence as an animator as well, I know I can produce fast and effective animation.

I definitely intend to create more 2D animations in the future, preferably in short time periods. This is because I have lots of ideas and I like to show people them as quickly as I can. I enjoy people's reactions to ideas that I have and like making short quirky animations.

In the future I would like to try and transfer my style to a 3D animation. I haven't had the chance to so this yet and would like to spend time on producing a small 2 minute story in 3D in this kind of

Bibliography

Literature:

Williams, R, 2001. UK: Faber and Faber Limited.

Reisz, K, Millar, G, 1986, The Technique Of Film Editing - Second Edition. USA: Focal Press.

Websites:

2001. Fox Office Waking Life Website [online]. Available from:
<http://www.foxsearchlight.com/wakinglife/>

2006. Ben Gibbard Interviewed by James Montgomery [online]. Available from:
http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1534893/20060622/postal_service.jhtml

2003. Ben Gibbard Interviewed by Tim McMahon [online]. Available from:
<http://www.timmcmahan.com/postal.htm>

2007. Erik Stough Interviewed by Dustin Driver
<http://www.apple.com/pro/profiles/southpark/index.html>

Images:

Fig. 1: Image [online] Match.com advertisement [2007]. Available from:
http://images.match.com/match/fig/registration/ukRegPage_pic.jpg

Fig. 2: Image [online] Excerpt from WHO I AM AND WHAT I WANT [2006]
David Shrigley and Chris Shepherd: Slinky Pictures: Available from:
Davidshrigley.com

Fig. 4: Image [online] Waking Life Screen Shot (1) [2001]. Available from:
http://mindpetals.com/wp-content/images/waking_life_ant.gif

Fig. 5: Image [online] Waking Life Screen Shot (2) [2001]. Available from:
www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1153436,00.html

Films:

Waking Life, 2001, Film, Directed by Richard Linklater. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Who I Am And What I Want, 2006, Film, Directed by David Shrigley and Chris Shepherd. Slinky Pictures.

Appendix

Dialogue For Final Scene

Santa

Alright cupid.

Cupid

Alright Brian.

Santa

Brian? I'm Santa Clause.

Cupid

Oh....I...It's just you look like my...like my mate Brian.

Santa

Right...ok....erm, I've been meaning to have a little chat with you, for a while now.....you know the whole arrow shooting, falling in love business you've got going on?

Cupid

My..the..my job yeah.

Santa

Yeah, you are aware that you're actually killing people?

Cupid

What?

Santa

Have a..Have a look.

Cupid

Ohhh...Ohhhh

Santa

Yeah, you should probably stay away from the whole bow arrow thing, I mean it is a deadly weapon, isn't it?

Cupid

Yeah.

Santa

Maybe try something a bit nicer, just give them flowers.

Cupid

(mumbles)

Santa

Choclates.....ok?.....good luck with that.

Cupid

Ok..bye.