

Post Production

MU60008E

Level 6

'Elephants Dream'

Assignment 2: Project

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Project Aims

After reading the MSG and from past experience the author decided to collaborate with Darren Jennings; another TVU student. It was known from previous experience that we share similar working methods, can collaborate together and have the same ambitions; as such this assignment was seen to be a good project to corroborate on.

We decided to find an animation that would look good on our portfolios as well as fit the brief; for this reason Elephants Dream (ED) an open source movie from Blender Studios was chosen. This clip was in keeping with the project guidelines, provided us with very well animated footage and was also unknown enough to look professional within our respective portfolios.

Although well animated the original sound track was not of the highest standard or aesthetic; our goal was to recreate these sounds to a more refined degree than initially presented with. We decided from watching the animation that it lacked life and felt this was due to a lack of attention to human elements like clothing noise/breaths and an overuse of synthesis in a 'steam punk' world for its sound design. For this reason the project was undertaken with the intention of using recorded sound where possible, rather than synthesis, in an attempt to bring this needed realism to the clip [Beauchamp 2005 p67].

Dialogue

Although voices are typically recorded first and then animated to; it seemed that this was not the case in ED [Beauchamp 2005 p37]. The dialogue was often out of sync with the visuals and although the character Proog was acted to a passable standard, we felt that Emo was needlessly annoying.

Due to these flaws in the original soundtrack a lot of time was spent on dialogue replacement and re-characterisation; many lines were modified in an attempt to create a better sync while a significant amount of time was also spent on re-acting the lines appropriately. The dialogue took several days over which the scenes were completed and as recommended by Beauchamp [2005 p34] materials related to a particular scene were recorded on the same day.

With many changing environments throughout the clip it was decided best to capture the vocals without spatial reflections and add the room ambience later as mentioned by Wyatt [Amyes & Wyatt 2005 p85]. This was achieved by building a recording hut that was dead enough to achieve this, please see production diary for further details.

Breaths

The original soundtrack was missing breaths (and overly compensated for with reverb) leaving the characters very detached from the picture and breaking the audiovisual contract. [Filmsound.org 2010]. These breaths were recorded in the same hut and timed to the characters which really helped the characters to seem realistic [Beauchamp 2005 p39].

Foley & Sound FX

All clothing, most footsteps and many SFX samples were again recorded in the reflection free hut, with extra SFX and some footsteps recorded on location.

Clothing

The varying nature of ED required many surfaces and textures for the footsteps, the timing of which also had to be very accurate. Most of these were performed in time with the clip though some harder scenes were edited into time from approximate takes.

Footsteps

Again close attention was paid to the timing of clothing noise and appropriate materials were chosen for each character. Although in some scenes the music may be too loud to accurately hear the timing of clothing noise it was felt that subconsciously it could only strengthen the audiovisual contract. Noise removal was utilised to eliminate any excess pre amp noise found on these recordings [Filmsound.org 2007].

Sound Effects

This clip required very heavy sound design throughout and provided quite a task in managing all the samples. After reaching the maximum voice count in Pro Tools the project was split over several sessions with a master 'bounce session' for importing completed sound effects from the various editing sessions.

In order to build appropriate sound effects the videos overall theme of an old-living-machine world was adopted; in keeping with this we decided to create the sound-effects from organic sounds over synthesis. [Whittington 2007 p101]

Many sound effects were recorded in the isolation hut and with many different objects; these were mostly diegetic sounds that needed to be synced with the video. Most of these sounds were layered quite heavily with various possible samples and later edited together in order to build the on screen objects.

Any non diegetic sounds or sources that could not be recorded in the hut were recorded on location with a portable recorder. In particular there were several midnight visits to some near by skips and the local park in order to gather samples in quiet surroundings. These were brought back, imported into an editing session, layered, processed and bounced for import into the master session.

To give many of the various objects a sense of depth they were recorded with a stereo pair and panned through their position in relationship to the microphone. Further depth was achieved by processing the samples with eq then timing and automating certain aspects of each to the on screen objects [Rose 2009, p90]

Mix

As most dialogue was recorded in sync with the picture and without an in time guide track, little dialogue editing was necessary. When recording this dialogue we were careful to time our lines as accurately as possible, checking with half speed playback so that only the phase relationship between the various microphones needed fixing. Elastic audio was used at a bare minimum, re-recording where possible until the line was correct.

Dialogue was processed with eq, reverb and automation between the two microphone positions was used to create depth and realism; distant shots had the far stereo pair mixed louder while close shots had the mono 414 up. Recording this way allowed a choice between close/direct sound and a stereo ambience/indirect sound in mix down and proved very flexible. The recorded breaths had their own tracks so that they could be easily automated to the desired volume.

Clothing noise and footsteps were recorded to the individual scenes and automated throughout the project. Most of the sound effects were already mixed and bounced so level balancing between them and sometimes spatial positioning was all that was needed.

Conclusion

This project would not of been completed without effective team work. Working with Darren proved an easy experience in terms of co-ordination; we would generally split up the sound design and frequently organise our effects into a master session. This working process of using a bounce session helped organise and speed up the mix process while keeping confusion to a minimum as result.

The method of recording dialogue and the space used proved quite successful offering few reflections while still sounding live. The hut that was built initially came from ideas used in the first project with refinements to the structure to allow standing room and use of a stereo array rather than a mono set-up for ambience microphones added to the dialogues realism.

Our approach to recording extra breaths and clothing noise allowed significant flexibility during mix stage but more importantly provided the characters with a sense of life not present in the original clip.

The stance of trying to use 'organic' samples rather than synthesis worked surprisingly well and in the authors opinion proved more realistic than the original clip. In actuality no synthesis was used; although not avoided it proved unnecessary and simply less realistic than using processed samples. Starting with approximate waveforms also provided a much quicker way of creating the necessary effects than building them from scratch; also proving to be a much more enjoyable experience as a result.

From undertaking this project its clear to the author how important sound is in particular for animation; with the on screen environments never existing, building realistic effects and paying attention to detail is of the up most importance if the animation is to enthrall the viewer as a believable environment can not be created solely in the picture.

A personal aim for this project was to create a professional piece of work to be used as part of a portfolio. This project although not perfect shows a degree of professionalism and will be happily exhibited in this way. While watching a making of the soundtrack video the original designer Jan Morgenstern states it took him seven months to create his work; while in our case the work was completed in two months to a more refined degree.

With the project containing over the minimum 15 lines of dialogue and being extremely heavy on sound design its the authors opinion that the work went further than what was required in the brief to also meet personal goals.

References

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Pictures



