Adapting Practical Aesthetics to the Performance Animation Process

By
Steven Mohr, Chris Carter

Abstract

The relevance of acting theory to character animation was recognised early in the history of animation. In the 1930s, Disney animators studied the performances of actors to improve the quality of their animation and this tradition has continued into contemporary practices. The following paper is derived from a recent practice-led study, which sought to adapt David Mamet and William H. Macy's acting technique, Practical Aesthetics, to 3D computer animation practice. Reflecting upon a series of short character animation studies, this paper shows how the animator can create authentic and therefore more believable character performances via the techniques of Practical Aesthetics.

Keywords

Introduction

The stage performer and character animator share the common goal of presenting an audience with a believable character that is capable of sustaining an empathetic bond with the audience. Theatrical principles and performance theories are therefore significant to both artists despite their difference in medium (Hooks 2005: x). There is little wonder then, that the study of acting theory is a necessary element in the education and training of new animators. Perhaps the most notable source of acting techniques for animators is the work of actor and educator Ed Hooks, whose book, *Acting for Animators* (2011) now in its third edition, contributes insightful acting theories and techniques for novice and professional animators. Hooks work is a valuable resource for animation students, however, it is somewhat disconnected from the practical aspects of the animation process; it stands alone as a separate subject for animators to learn and practice in addition to the technical aspects of animating. Contemporary animation is often a complicated process which can impact negatively upon the animator's focus of character performance in their animation as they try to meet strict production deadlines. Therefore, central to this study was the understanding that animators could benefit from a simplified technique, derived from acting theories, which are immediately applicable to animation practice. David Mamet and William H. Macy's Practical Aesthetics, as described by Bruder in a *Practical Handbook for the Actor* (Bruder et al. 1986), stood out from the available literature as an approach to acting that provided the necessary techniques for creating authentic performances for 3D computer animated characters. As this paper will show, Practical Aesthetics can be easily adapted to 3D character animation practice with positive results.

Animation and Acting

The term, animation, is derived from the Latin term, *animare,* which means, 'to give life to'. It is well suited to character animation, which at its core sits the desire to create the illusion of life in otherwise inanimate objects. Theorist, Paul Wells (1998: 10) describes the animated film as the creation of an illusion of movement through inanimate lines and forms. Animator, Norman McLaren, on the other hand, emphasizes the changing forms when he claims, "what happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame" (Solomon 1987: 11). Both are suitable definitions as neither are fixed on any particular medium of animation. However, in terms of *character* animation, what these definitions fail to describe is the desire to create the illusion of a living, thinking being. While animation mediums may vary greatly, acting and performance are consistent to all forms when the illusion of a believable character is the goal.

Like animation, acting can be difficult to define succinctly, however, its components are easily recognized. The profession of an actor or actress, is a storytelling medium and interpretive drama are all suitable answers to the question - what is acting? In the *Composite Art of Acting*, Jerry Blunt proposes that acting is:

> The process whereby an inner state of being of extraordinary intensity, composed
> of emotions, thoughts, and sensations is revealed in a dramatic manner to others by
> the external expressions of an actor. (Blunt 1966: 188)

Blunt's premise indicates that acting isn't so much 'an act' as it is a release of emotional evocation channeled through a performer. Through the personification of emotion the actor and animator share a trait of giving life to a character, where they differ is the distinct boundary of artist and medium - where an actor's body merges the two, the animator remains detached (Hughes 1993: 40). An animator's objectivity is necessary for characterization; however so too is remaining subjective, after all they are still performing. Herein lies the dilemma of what methodologies and techniques of acting are relevant to the animators practice as these are crucial in developing character before any animation takes place (Wells 1998: 104).

The Actors and Animators Tools of Performance

The tools and techniques of acting aren't so universal as the animators tools, derived from the twelve animation principles. Instead there are several developed methodologies from which actors choose whichever suits their style of performing; Constantin Stanislavski's 'Method Acting' and Sanford Meisner's technique are among the most popular. Stanislavski's technique emphasizes full emersion into a performance from an internal source such as emotional recall by:

> Actually experiencing feelings that are analogous to it, each and every time you
> repeat the process of creating it. (Stanislavski 1989: 14)

In contrast, Meisner promotes external acting through preparation to the point of the lines becoming obsolete and improvisation, whereby the interaction between performers is more important than the internal thoughts associated with the actor's personified character (Meisner 1987). Meisner's focus on 'the reality of doing' is more applicable to the animator's practice than Stanislavski's emotional focus as an understanding of physical movement is key to animating. Method acting is, however, more common as an acting technique among animators as it encourages an understanding of a characters internal processing, which is generally applied in the planning stage of animation. Practical Aesthetics is the amalgamation of these approaches through a simplified toolset, easily adapted to an animator's

practice.

Like an actor, the animator has a series of tools and techniques to use in creating the illusion of movement. *Disney Animation: Illusion of Life*, which was written by two of Disney Studio's early feature film animators, is an acclaimed book that offers twelve fundamental principles of animation (Thomas and Johnston 1982). Constructed through the observation of motion, the principles of animation scrutinize aspects of animated movement that serve the believability of characters; they're a benchmark for understanding and creating good, believable animation (Bishko 2007). The principles of animation have persisted despite rapid changes in the animation medium; however, these principles are mostly concerned with the creation of believable motion with little concern for character performance. While articulating movement is the first step of animation, the next is instigating performance because as Richard Williams states in *The Animators Survival Kit* "acting is intrinsically part of the whole" (2002: 9).

Acting may be intrinsic to character animation but actors and animators are not the same thing. Each has a similar goal, that is, to create a believable character and communicate a story – but the means to that end are completely different. The key difference is that stage actors perform using their own body, in the present moment or real-time (much like a puppeteer), whereas an animator creates the illusion of a present moment frame by frame over weeks and months (Hooks 2005: 10).

Acting for Animators

Acting theory has informed and influenced the animation medium; however, the disparity between the two crafts means acting theory cannot directly be used by an animator. Instead selected stage performance techniques need to be adapted specifically for an animator's workflow.

Ed Hook's acting theory stresses "acting in pursuit of an objective while overcoming an obstacle" as the basis for any performance. To do this an animator "must learn what empathy is and how it works because the magic key to acting is empathy" (Ed Hooks, Email, June 8, 2013). Hooks' concepts are not taken from any one acting technique but instead from 30 years of acting experience and what techniques he understands are applicable to an animator's practice.

Hooks' concepts can be found in other texts pertaining to acting and performance, such as Derek Hayes and Chris Webster's book *Acting and Performance for Animation* (2013). Hayes and Webster emphasize the importance of empathy and motivation, two of Hook's essential acting concepts, in their chapter called 'principles of performance.' Webster briefly goes through some acting concepts in his

own book – *The Mechanics of Motion* (2005) – where again he emphasizes empathy, motivation and objective in his chapter on acting. He argues:

> Animation leads to performance and performance is at the heart of the story; the animator's main aim should be to become invisible, leaving only the character and the performance behind. (Webster 2005: 107)

Hayes and Webster offer an insightful look at this subject, but although very experienced as a director and animator respectively, they lack Hook's experience in stage acting and his perspective which brings real-world acting to the medium of animation.

Action! Acting Lessons for CG Animators is another relevant text, albeit less so than Hook's, which promotes actual participation in acting exercises because the authors, John and Kirstin Kundert-Gibbs, "believe it is virtually impossible to understand and internalize the work and process of an actor without participating in the process" (2009: 14). Unlike Hayes and Hooks, Kundert-Gibbs encourage applying stage acting methodologies, unchanged and unspecified, directly to animation. While they never imply empathy as an acting concept, much of their theory directs the animator to develop observational and sensory skills and to understand their character. Hooks however, remains adamant that "animators do not need ANY sensory training because they are not going to get on stage and act in front of an audience" (Ed Hooks, Email, June 8, 2013). Hooks remains a significant source of animation acting theory, but as stated previously, his texts are an entire subject to master outside of an animator's practical toolset; hence the need for an acting technique readily adapted *into* the animators toolset.

Practical Aesthetics

Practical Aesthetics, a technique developed by the students of playwright David Mamet and actor William H. Macey, goes against the perceptions of an actor raised on the 'traditional' acting tools (Bruder 1986). Mamet bluntly states "the Stanislavsky 'Method' and the techniques derived from it are nonsense" and "the job of the actor is to show up and read the lines" (Mamet 1999: 6; 12). This technique operates under the notions that plays are the writer's world and actors do not need to 'become' the character – "deny nothing, invent nothing, accept everything, and get on with it" (Mamet 1999: 41).

The notion of 'sticking with the script' is completely relevant for an animator because in the production process, character development, story and scene layout are planned in minute detail and decided well before the process of actual animation begins. In addition to the 'tell the truth' concept,

Practical Aesthetics provides a unique tool for breaking down a script and analyzing a scene. This simple three-step process helps the actor to choose the best action for their character actor:

    1. What is the character literally doing?

    2. What is the essential action of what the character is doing in the scene?

    3. What is the action like to me? It's as if...

(Bruder 1986: 19)

This first question is a literal translation of the script into a concise sentence, incorporating every line into a motivated action the performer then executes. This script analysis dissolves any misinterpretation of the character's purpose and keeps their ultimate motivation true (Bruder 1986: 20). The specific gestures and actions the performer executes is the 'essential action', the second question of this analysis. Bruder states that by defining the performers actions, the character's emotional connotations are eliminated in favor of their motivation (1986: 21). Finally the third step, the 'as if', is a mnemonic device where the performer imagines a tangible scenario to invest a personal stake in the situation (Bruder 1986: 28).

Bruder suggests that consistently applying this formula to the analysis of a scene will always lead to an action consistent with the playwright's intentions. This tool is an excellent addition to an animator's movement-based analysis, with constant frame-by-frame reviews of the character's motions to maintain the intentions of the director. Using this scene analysis tool, an animator can gain a clear understanding of a character's internal motives and objectives throughout a scene which are necessary as they determine at any given frame how the animator should pose the character.

An important element of animation is the performance and while there are some acting techniques applicable to animation, there remains no definitive acting theory designed for animators. Ed Hooks remains a primary source for acting techniques, however, Practical Aesthetics has the potential to provide animators (beginners in particular) with simple tools to inform their practice and bring performance into their animations.

Animation Cycles

The following segments examine three of six animation tests conducted as part of a year long Honours research project, led by myself (Steven Mohr) and supervised by Chris Carter. The three character-driven animations, featuring emotions of anger, grief and love respectively, were created using a similar model to the 11 Second Club, an online animation competition with monthly submissions from animators worldwide. Like the competition, each animated piece utilized a clip of

dialogue-driven audio as the starting point for the story and performance to be constructed. With an established story, the animations were constructed with a typical animation workflow consisting of storyboarding, video referencing, 'blocking out' the 3D character's actions to align with the planned storyboards and then 'polishing' those actions to create a smooth, animated performance. The purpose of this study was to explore the application of Practical Aesthetics to the animation production process with the aim of gaining a better understanding of how this acting technique could inform the creative decisions of the animator during the animation process.

To assess the validity of this study, Leslie Bishko (2007) and Gloria Floren (2009) provide clear and valid principles for assessing performance and portrayal of an authentic and therefore believable character. Bishko (2007: 25) states an authentic character animation is encompassed by three criteria; firstly a similarity of the character's design with their expression, this creates a mutually, symbiotic relationship. Secondly, there is a clear link between the character's intent or motivation and the resulting action. Lastly, the animation style and the characterization are in sync, such as a character's implied mood and their animated actions; combined these criteria frame a definitive, authentic and therefore believable, animated performance. Floren (2009) provides an overall assessment for analysing an actor's performance, detailing the scene's components, particularly the characters. The performer's physical characteristics, acting style (dependent on the type of scene eg. romantic/tragic), the function of the character within the scene and the scene itself are the key factors of a complete scene deconstruction. Once Practical Aesthesis has been utilized in each animation's production, the scenes are critiqued employing Floren's framework to assess the scenes and Bishko's criteria to verify an authentic and believable character performance.

Cycle One Animation: Thoughtless

The first animation, called "Thoughtless", uses dialogue from the animated television series *Family Guy*. The primary emotion is anger and shows an interaction between two friends, opening a lemonade stand and having an argument (Figure 3. below). Practical Aesthetics was incorporated into this and subsequent animations through a three-step process. The first step, called "the literal", was used to determine the character's actions within the scene. These actions consist of Bert (left) entering from screen-left, noticing that Ernie (right) has changed the drink's price without Bert's permission, for which Bert scolds him and then walks away. This animation takes a cue from the style in the original footage (Figure 2. below) by using the dialogue in a random context, making fun of the character's over-reaction to a relatively insignificant issue.

Figure 2. Family Guy dialogue footage

Figure 3. Thoughtless screen-shot

The next stage of production involved using the second stage of Practical Aesthetics, which is called the "essential action". This step was about planning the character's specific gestures and movements, which involved video referencing (Figure 4. below) and thumb nailing (Figure 5. below), both common planning tools used by animators. The third and final step of Practical Aesthetics, called "as if", was used in conjunction with the second step. This involved becoming immersed into each character and attempting to truly feel their emotions as if it were a real scenario, this would expose genuine actions for a more believable and authentic performance. In this particular animation, the emotional extremes of fury and embarrassment were used as referential emotions. The video referencing and thumb-nailing combined revealed a multitude of gestures and actions to animate for both characters in several scenarios.

Figure 4. Thoughtless referencing screen-shot

Figure 5. Thoughtless variation 1 thumbnails

Figure 6. Thoughtless variation 2 thumbnails
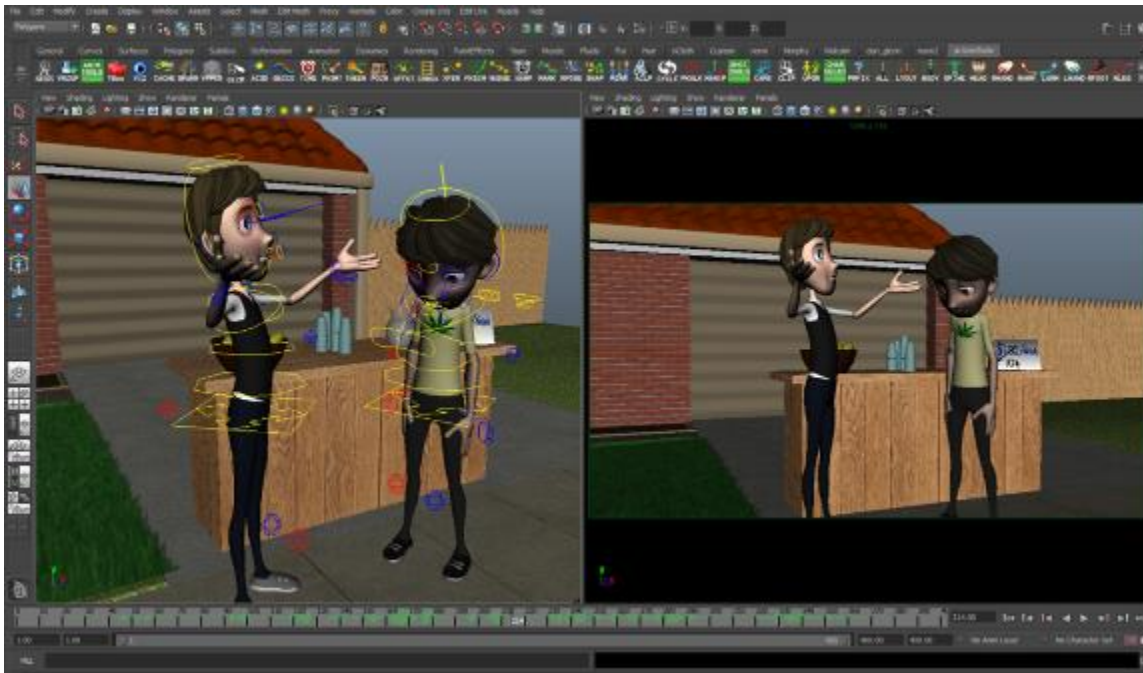

Figure 7. Thoughtless variation 3 thumbnails

Figure 8. Animating Thoughtless screen-shot

Having finished planning several variations of the performance, with the help of Practical Aesthetics, Autodesk's Maya was used to construct 3D scenes and 'block out' each performance for *Thoughtless* (Figure 8. above). The first scene of *Thoughtless* has big swooping actions and contact positions (hand on shoulder) to add double meaning to each character's words. When Bert asks "can I talk to you for a minute"; his hand on Ernie's shoulder says "come with me now". This same action becomes a friendly gesture when Ernie tries to explain by saying "look I just thought..." - telling the audience he's gentler. Blocking out this scene was simple and confirmed my character's action choices in a new medium; it also revealed points where the characters actions weren't suitable for the flow of gestures or timing was off.

For the second variation (Figure 6. above) I kept the beginning and ending the same - Bert walking in, then storming off and Ernie left sad and alone - I did this to 'cap' the dialogue in the scene. This scene plan differed in that Bert 'summons' Ernie over to him after placing the lemons, rather than 'fetching him'. Ernie uses the bench as a prop in this scene, initially leaning on it relaxed but by the end he is slumped over it, depressed. Blocking out an animation often reveals flaws in the planning where the timing of a pose doesn't suit the flow of actions or a stance isn't as strong as it could be. The second variation of this scene incorporated more animation principles such as squash and stretch, which meant expanding on the simple story-telling poses and while this is took longer, it revealed the performance

more clearly.

I ended the final variation of the scene (Figure 7. above) like the previous ones, however in this alternative Bert is much more energetic, pacing back and forth, unable to contain himself as he rants. Ernie is surer of himself in this version; he is not put down so easily until he realizes his 'thinking' hasn't gotten him very far wherein grief finally hits him. By the third variation of blocking I'd begun to explore action differences and how even a slight variation of actions created an altered performance.

The Performance of *Thoughtless*

This production demonstrated that Practical Aesthetics was a benefit in my character's performances; it enhanced my planning stage for understanding my character's intent and how I could apply that to an action. While the variations gave me additional performances, the characters scene progression remained quite similar – especially since I kept the beginning and ending the same for all three. Out of the three performance tests, I chose the second scene variation to extend beyond the blocking animations stage as I felt it best conveyed the intent of the scene where Bert berates an ever-saddening Ernie for what he's done. Both characters were constructed to demonstrate their contrasting personalities: Bert is the dominant, controller - he's clean-cut and wears a business-like outfit while the more laid-back Ernie has a soul-patch and wears a t-shirt promoting weed. Building on the foundation of the blocked version of this scene, facial expressions, hand gestures and body postures were added or adjusted so the timing of gestures and overall pacing of story had well-placed beats (Figure 23. below).

Figure 23. Final Thoughtless screen-shot

In the final animated piece of *Thoughtless* both the characters appearances and actions reflect their personalities and the corresponding interaction between them. Bert remains rigid and firm with his poses, making himself bigger with swooping hand gestures and leaning his body forward. Ernie initially brushes off the questions being yelled at him, attempting to explain himself, but is constantly battered with insults, making him sink lower and lower. The character's intentions show easily with their actions; Bert holds the power, controlling the situation while Ernie shrinks back into 'lackey' status after thinking he could change something about their business. This performance was instantly identified when shown to an audience; they understood the scene, the characters, and their intent and empathized with the weaker character and his situation (Bishko 2007).

Cycle Two Animation: *Judgement Day*

The second animation to utilize Practical Aesthetics, is called "*Judgement Day*". This scene uses a monologue from *The Green Mile*; based on the emotion of grief, it shows a lonely, guilt-ridden man, contemplating how God will judge him after what he's just done (Figure 10. below). Like the previous animation, Practical Aesthetics' first step – the literal – I kept the plan for the characters actions relatively open for a broader range of action variations. The broad strokes consist of a character (Fred) sitting alone, talking to himself about how he'll be judged after having killed a chicken for his dinner. The original footage isn't very animated (Figure 9. below), but still provides an emotional standpoint; like *Thoughtless*, the audio was used completely out of context, limiting influence from the original footage.

Figure 9. Green Mile audio footage   *Figure 10. Judgement Day screen-shot*

The next stage used video referencing (Figure 11. below) and thumb-nailing (Figure 12. below) to plan my characters actions – Practical Aesthetics' *essential action*. Referencing this scene, I acted *as if* it were really happening, feeling so guilt-ridden after doing something terrible. While video referencing is useful, it's quite hard to correlate between audio and action, this is where thumbnail sketches are useful.

Figure 11. Judgement Day referencing screen-shot

Figure 12. Judgement Day variation 1 thumbnails

Figure 13. Judgement Day variation 2 thumbnails

Figure 14. Judgement Day variation 3 thumbnails

As with the previous animation, the planned performances were used to construct a CG scene and block out the character animation (Figure 15. below). For this scene's first variation (Figure 12. above), Fred feels guilty about his actions and speaking with prayerful intent. I based his actions on what he'd be thinking, going beyond his words, such as when he says "why..." he leans back sighing, as if asking himself "why did I do this?" His actions and state of mind throughout this version cycle from guilt > praying > explanation > overwhelmed > amazement and awe > guilt-stricken > consolation.When blocking his actions I used the character's head to help make gestures, emphasizing his words and while a number of the hand gestures are twinning (mirrored movement), these were specifically addressed in the next variation of the scene for a more contrasting performance.

In the second variation (Figure 13. above) I decided to have Fred enter off-screen and sit down as if about to eat; before then being overcome with grief (straight posture turns into exaggerated hunch) and starting his guilt-filled monologue. In this version his grief doesn't truly hit him until he breathes "miracles" (referring to the chicken), shaking his head as if to deny what he's done. The 'essential action' traces Fred's inner thoughts and highlights his personality –religious and self-reflective. In this version I added frames to the scene to allow time for Fred to sit down, as well as the camera being adjusted for a better framing of the scene. While planning is essential, there's no account for in-progress adjustments while blocking out; in this case an eye-wipe gesture was added, brushing away a tear, which looked more genuine than the planned pose of simply resting his head on his hand.

The final variation (Figure 14. above) starts like the first, with Fred already contemplating what he's done; however, unlike the first scene, in this scenario the character has a more serious demeanor. Initially reasoning with himself (jabbing the table) and picturing himself before God; the situation is more like a problem to be solved than a guilt-ridden explanation/monologue. It's only when he puts into words what he really thinks of chicken's – that they're "miracles" – that he's overcome with grief and sinks to the table, depleted. In blocking this scene, his hands often covered his face, to therefore explicate his mood, I pushed the body posing a little more than in previous scenes.

Figure 15. Animating Judgement Day screen-shot

Judgement Day **Performance**

Through the use of Practical Aesthetics, a character's monologue performance was planned and carried through. In changing the characters entire action choices, I changed the flow of emotions and overall tone of the scene's variations. The additional use of camera dynamics with a dolly manoeuvre; kept the purpose behind Fred's actions hidden until the last few seconds, providing a slight build-up. The much slower pacing of this scene gave a large performative contrast from the more energetic *Thoughtless* animation and was an excellent testing agent for applying Practical Aesthetics to animation production. Of the blocked-out variations, the third scenario of *Judgement Day* was chosen to take to the polishing stage as it conveyed a serious demeanor with the character's grief, making for a more convincing performance (Figure 24. below). I used Fred's head to imply more weight on his words, in conjunction

with his eyes and brows to show his distress. His large hands were also a useful asset in demonstrating his mood, such as the start where he has a clenched fist, showing his anger.

Figure 24. Final Judgement Day screen-shot

In terms of performance the scene's characterization and content are all unfailing in a believable animated performance; however, there is an inconsistent blend of voice acting and character design. The character's actions and intent were clear but the voice acting broke the illusion, which brought the viewer out of the scene. Based off Bishko's criteria (2007: 25), there is a strong congruence between Fred's intent (guilt-filled grief and wanting forgiveness) and his resulting actions; he also maintains a series of typically stressed poses – holding his head up, crossing his arms tightly, collapsing on the table – which all indicate his state of mind. In the next animation cycle Practical Aesthetics was utilized in a scene to alter the back-story of the character's with each variation of the animation.

Cycle Three Animation: *Field of Dreams*

The third animation cycle called "*Field of Dreams*" uses audio from *The Pursuit of Happyness* (Figure 16. below); the animated scene is based on the emotion of love and shows an interaction between a father and son inside a baseball field dugout (Figure 17. below). 'The literal' of this animation changes between variations of the scene but generally, it shows a father (Norm) giving his one-armed son (Junior) life advice to never give up on account of discouragement. In the original footage, the actor, Will Smith and his own son have a similar premise, which was used to help develop the story, but the animated actions were all genuine.

Figure 16. Pursuit of Happyness audio footage

Figure 17. Field of Dreams screen-shot

Practical Aesthetics second step – the essential action – is where this animations story line's diverge from the original film. Using thumb-nailing and video referencing, a slightly different backstory was created for each animated variation (Figure 18. below). In each version Norm and Junior both use props of either a helmet, a bat, the dugout fence or themselves (arm-stub). This prop-based referencing gave the characters a different set of actions compared to how they would act if they were empty-handed. Once again Practical Aesthetics third step was employed through referencing by acting 'as if' it were a real interaction, exploiting my own emotions and essentially losing myself in the performance.
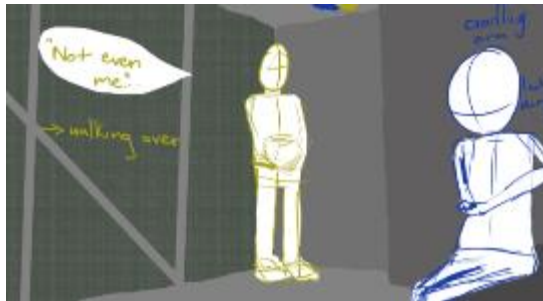

Figure 18. Field of Dreams referencing screen-shot

Figure 19. Field of Dreams variation 1 thumbnails
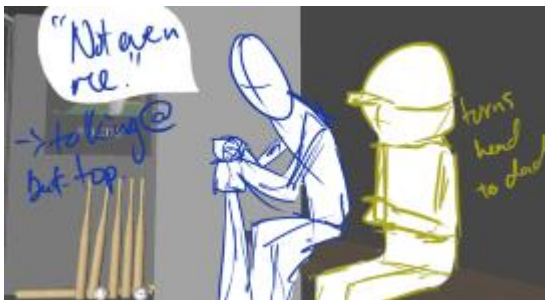

Figure 20. Field of Dreams variation 2 thumbnails

Figure 21. Field of Dreams variation 3 thumbnails

Once again, a CG scene was designed and the characters actions were blocked out using Autodesk's Maya (Figure 22. below). In the first planned variation (Figure 19. above) the scene shows Junior crying alone when Norm walks into the dugout, picks up Junior's dropped helmet, and offers advice to

his son, walking over to him, giving him back his dropped helmet and hugging him. The premise of the scene follows the original audio story, where the father has said something discouraging and wants to take back what he's said. The scene's planning was simple, with the bare minimum of actions and taking a layout approach, this way I could explore the characters actions while blocking out, using the spontaneity of the straight-ahead animation approach (Thomas and Johnston 1982). Norm's posture remains apologetic (head down, drooped shoulders, dragging feet) wanting his son to forgive him while Junior is posed toward the camera, crying alone. This distancing posture is progressively chipped away the closer Norm gets, until they finally reunite with a hug.

The second variation shows a more encouraging Norm, trying to rally Junior to play baseball and to never let anyone tell him he can't (Figure 20. above). This scene's back-story implies Norm's father had told him he couldn't play baseball for some reason and so with his own son, he wanted to be more supportive. Reminiscing about his childhood, he sits down saying "not even me" before offering the bat to his son asking "alright?" Like the previous version, Norm directs the conversation, pulling the story along; however it is Junior who initiates his father's speech, when Norm notices his son looking at and holding his half-arm depressingly. This version was the first to utilize a camera-cut – when Norm walks over from the fence sits beside Junior – this helped to hone in on the actors performances.

The final version of *Field of Dreams* is much like the second, Junior is getting ready to bat and Norm prepares him for what he'll deal with from people when they see his arm stub (Figure 21. above). Using the fence as a prop, Norm hits the fence in anger for other people's indecency before kneeling in front of Junior and looking him straight-on to make sure he understands what he has said. Technically, this scene is simpler than the previous two variations as Norm has no props and Junior holds his 'special bat' the whole scene. This version's much more serious tone is shown from the start with Norm's posture upright as he leans slightly on the dugout fence; this is broken as he kneels in front of Junior, conveying love for his son as he grips him on both shoulders, making him understand what he means.

Figure 22. Animating Field of Dreams screen-shot

Field of Dreams **Performance**

Thoughtless, *Judgement Day* and *Field of Dreams* each attempt a different level of performance; by changing the characters motives, each variation of *Field of Dreams* has an alternative back story and flow of actions. Of the versions, the first scenario where Norm comes to apologise to Junior for something he has said was taken to the polishing animation stage (Figure 25. below) as it had a slightly larger back story, evident from the character's intent and actions. The scene and characters were designed with the baseball theme – Junior wears a little leaguer's baseball outfit while Norm wears a casual weekend outfit. Expanding on the blocked animation, Norm's facial expression remains as saddened as Junior's up until the point where he offers his helmet to him, where he smiles gently, expressing his apology facially. Hand gestures were used to emphasize his apology as he walks forward before kneeling down to Junior's level, essentially giving up any power he has. Junior remains quite stationary (other than the occasional whimper) comforting himself and shunning his father, this was crucial as it kept the focus on Norm's performance.

Figure 25. Final Field of Dreams screen-shot

This animated performance, like *Thoughtless*, succeeds in giving an authentic performance. The characters, their movements and voices all align with the intended content, forming a fluid and meaningful whole (Bishko 2007). Both character's intent are evident from their actions, giving the animation a strong characterization. Junior's inward posture shows his vulnerability while Norm's slow and purposeful actions indicate his submission and regret. Shown to an audience, both characters were understood, the story was clear as well as an indication of some prior incident (Norm having said something disheartening to Junior). The audience immediately empathized with Junior and we are relieved when the pair made up at the end of the scene, demonstrating a strong, believable, authentic performance.

Conclusion

While an understanding of authentic performance and acting theories may be low on an animator's skill set, they're never the less crucial elements in perfecting their craft. Practical Aesthetics, specifically its three step scene analysis tool, has proven itself a simple, yet effective toolset easily adapted into an animator's process. Through a year-long study, these tools were incorporated into six short animated pieces, assessing its viability in generating authentic animated performances.

The stage acting methods derived from Stanislavski and Meisner envelop the majority of acting techniques. Practical Aesthetics, while relatively new, departs from these conventional theories and is well suited for implementing into an animation production. Having established an understanding of

available acting techniques for animators from experts such as Hooks, Webster and Hayes, this technique provides the means for effectively creating performance through applying a scene analysis tool into the pre-production and production stages of an animation.

Integrating Practical Aesthetics helped to establish character, intent, motive and the resulting action. This technique solidified the importance that planning has in creating performance, long before any actual keyframes are set. The planning stage was much more definitive in each animation; an understanding of every facet of a scenario, its characters and how such an interaction would unfold resulted in authentic animated performances, based off of Bishko's authenticity criteria (2007) and Floren's scene analysis framework (2009).

The three animated pieces here (and the three unstated) only demonstrate a very basic application of Practical Aesthetics to create character performances; a more thorough scope would be seen through the same application only on the scale of an animated short or feature film. This would prove consistency of application and character portrayal, through multiple scenes and a variety of character interactions. The small-scale nature of this study; however, was sufficient in proving a successful application of Practical Aesthetics to create character performances.

Practical Aesthetics can easily integrate into the planning stage of any animated production. For student work with or without audio/dialogue, Practical Aesthetics first step – 'the literal' – requires the animator to plan exactly what the scene is and how it develops. Practical Aesthetics second and third steps – the 'essential action' and the 'as if' – help the animator construct the character's motives and intent, stimulating the character's actions for a stronger and clearer performance. In a studio the animator receives a character biography, but re-enforcing this information with a referenced performance (their own or someone else's) adds the nuances of human emotion turned into action, something that can often be missed if simply animating from a script. Having constructed several animations using Practical Aesthetics in the pre-production and production stages to develop character performances, I would encourage this acting technique and indeed further exploration of acting theories to animated productions for all animators.

Bibliography

Bishko, L. 2007. "The Uses and Abuses of Cartoon Style in Animation." *Animation Studies*, 2.

Blunt, J. 1966. *The Composite Art of Acting*. University of Michigan: Macmillan.

Bruder, M. 1986. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. New York: Vintage Books.

Floren, G. 2009. "Tips on analysing acting performance." Accessed June 15, 2013. north.d127.org/teachers/.../Analyzing%20Acting%20Performance.

Hayes, D. and Webster, C. 2013. *Acting and Performance for Animation*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Hooks, E. 2011. *Acting for Animators*. University of Michigan: Heinemann.

Hooks, E. 2005. *Acting in Animation: A Look at 12 Films*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Hughes, R.I.G. 1993. "Tolstoy, Stanislavski and the Art of Acting." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 51:1. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kundert-Gibbs, J. and Kundert-Gibbs, K. 2010. *Action! Acting Lessons for CG Animators*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Mamet, D. 1999. *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*. New York: Vintage Books.

Meisner, S. 1987. *Sanford Meisner on Acting*. New York: Vintage Books.

Solomon, C. 1987. *The Art of the Animated Image: An Anthology*. Los Angeles: American Film Institute.

Stanislavski, C. 1989. *An Actor Prepare*. New York: Routledge.

Thomas, F. and Ollie Johnston. 1982. *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*. University of Michigan: Hyperion

Webster, C. 2005. *Animation: The Mechanics of Motion*. Oxford: Elsevier Focal Press.

Wells, P. 1998. *Understanding Animation*. London and New York: Routledge.