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Media Lab

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<div align="center">WIP - CTRL</div>

Project Recap:

While using a Neural Highway Browser to enter his own conscious, Otto sees an impostor trying to take control of his mind. Otto escapes his conscious and wipes the last hour of it, effectively getting rid of the doppelganger. After waking up safe and refreshed, he comes across Brain Bastion: an antivirus software for NHBs. Skeptic of the AIs offered by the program, he downloads a blank AI onto which he can upload his own conscious and create a loyal clone to defend him. However, things go awry when the clone believes it is the real Otto and escapes aboard the NHB, trapping the previous Otto inside what used to be his own conscious.

Work done so far:

A Youtube link has been provided in the blog post of this WIP.

Work to do: Brain Bastion idea (2D digital animation), Consciousness trips (2D digital animation), audio editing and finalizing video editing.

Challenges and happy discoveries:

Start big, then cut, cut, cut: due to time and resource constraints, I had to cut a few details in the story: The white cable and the dial that Otto uses to download the blank AI; I had to simplify the movements inside the conscious (they could have been slower and more stretched out to create the "swimming in jello" effect).

Keeping consistent lighting & colors is hard: there are a few lighting and colour inconsistencies within the consciousness sequences in the animation. At times, colours seem warmer than they should be. I think this was caused because I kept changing the position of the two lamps I used to light my set. I have and will continue using Sony Movie Studio to quickly color correct & balance the sequences that stick out most from the rest of the animation.

How to make the decoy idea clear: the idea Otto has to use a decoy used to be represented by him simply looking at a poster saying: "If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself". I considered changing this poster to another advertisement or message he would see on the Internet. However, to make the idea foolproof (and to make it a bit more fun to animate), I have added a sequence with a thought bubble that clearly shows Otto copying himself into a blank AI and ordering that AI to protect him. This makes Otto's intentions crystal clear and presents them in a more dynamic fashion than a simple wall of text.

Questions and feedback:
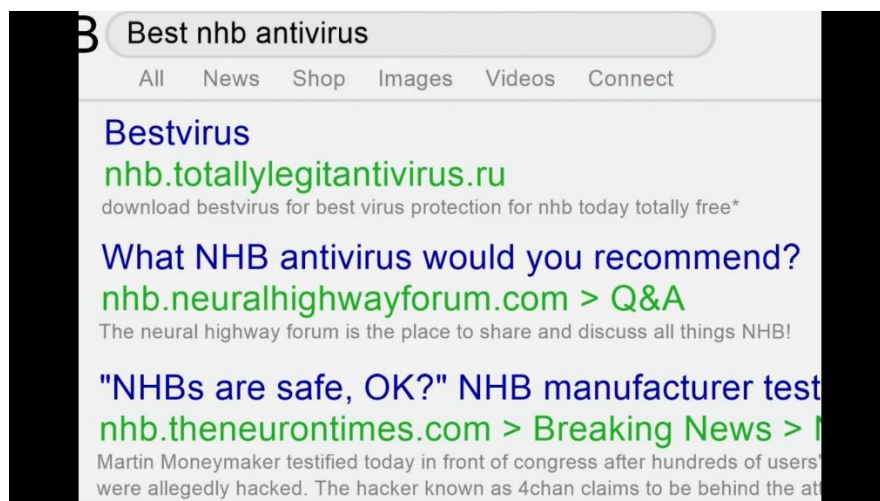
Four-minute limit: where to cut?

I would be able to cut the beginning sequence of the animation (where Otto is in his own conscious, sees the previous Otto and ejects), especially since it has a slower pace than the rest of the story. I can also begin the story at another point to get rid of the bookends, which is essentially a repetition of content. However, I believe that shortening the video would make the pace even faster than it already is. I purposefully dragged out the beginning of the video to create the "gelatinous" effect of Otto's conscious, where movements are slower as if the character was in Limbo or in a dream.

Is the decoy idea clear?

Students understood the idea of Otto copying his own conscious into a machine to defend himself. However, there was some confusion as to why a cartoony robber would show up to attack Otto. This should be clarified in the Brain Bastion ad, when the narrator talks about "hackers, thieves and impostors" trying to enter people's minds. The advertisement uses very cartoony and crude imagery as a way of fear mongering. A thief is also an easy way of representing a hacker, instead of another character sitting at a computer.

Pacing: too fast?

There were some students that believed that the pacing was fine, while others thought that the cuts were a bit jarring and that the video jumped too quickly and too often from one scene to the next. I agree with the concerns about the quick pace of the video, which is also why people recommended to polish and smoothen the transitions between scenes. I will see about using transitions to make the jump from Otto's consciousness to Otto's room and vice versa smoother. I will also look into adding a filter to the shots of the NHB's screen, since it feels like the audience is jumping from a close-up of Otto's face to literally being inside the screen. Adding a filter or a computer screen border to the shots where the NHB's screen occupies the whole shot would make it clearer that these shots are Otto's POV.

Comments on the animation itself:

Very good on the most part, but some movements are a bit jerky. This can be solved in future projects by taking extra care when manipulating puppets and perhaps adding a rig to hold them in place. Anchoring elements that must not move (such as the NHB) would have eliminated the shaky movement of these props in some shots.

Software used:

I am using Sony Movie Studio to compile all the photos I took and the drawings I made with Autodesk Sketchbook. Movie Studio is not exactly an animation program, but it helps shorten and lengthen sequences of frames. It is also a helpful program when layering PNG files (from Sketchbook) and creating 2D animation. This is also the first time I am using a green screen and Chroma key, which I think I did pretty well at for a first attempt. There are some frames where there is "noise" from the green screen, but I cannot get rid of these green pixels without the chroma key making other pixels within the puppets transparent. For next projects, I will look at more chroma key tutorials and at better software. I also need to find an alternative to the IKEA lamps I am using to light my set, since the light reflecting off the green screen and onto the puppets makes it difficult to properly regulate what must and what must not be transparent in each frame.