

After Effects: Chroma Key and Scaling

Putting yourself in a layered PhotoShop image

Overview

This is where the magic starts! Special Effects is about coordinating and moving layers of video to interact with each other to create an illusion of something that you cannot otherwise film. In the 1933 version of King Kong, a stop animation King Kong was combined with filmed actors. In the 2005 version, King Kong was modelled and animated in a 3D animation program; and combined with actors filmed in front of a green screen. It is the layering of video that creates the illusion of King Kong grabbing the heroine, Ann Darrow.

You will be learning how to use the chroma key effect in After Effects. Actors act in front of a blue or green screen; and the colour is removed, leaving just the actor and a transparent background, known as an alpha channel, which can be layered over top of another layer of video. Why do they use blue or green as the colour of choice to remove a background? It is the furthest colour in colour spectrum from your skin tone; and you don't want to put a whole in your actor's face. The only limitation of using the chroma key special effect is your imagination!

In this assignment you will put yourself in a scene. You will be given the Adobe PhotoShop source files to work with. All the layers have been separated for you, so you will see a series of foreground, midground and background images. In the final product you will either be scaled down to size and walking amongst something small like sewing thimbles; or you will be scaled up in size and you will be walking around something big like the Taj Mahal, appearing as a giant. (Although you can easily create the layered PhotoShop image yourself, time does not permit such an exercise.)

Procedure

- Using the source files provided by the teacher practice keying out the green background. Practice on medium length shots as well as full length shots, which are more of a challenge as the background is less evenly lit.
- Bring the layered Photoshop image into After Effects; examine all the layers; and think of how you can integrate yourself into that image.
- Film footage of yourself in front of the green screen. Pay attention to the "blocking" of the shots, where you will move so it looks like you are actually in the scene.
- Combine chroma key footage of yourself with the layered PhotoShop image