Narrative in Games

Foundations of Interactive Game Design
Professor Jim Whitehead
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UC SANTA CRUZ

Assignments

- Due today
  - Multi-game analysis essay
  - May submit any time within next 24 hours without penalty

- Final game project
  - **Due next week on Wednesday**
    - Talk with your partner about how you will complete the project
  - Turn in working game on CDROM or USB drive
    - **Game Maker:** game source files (.GM6) and executable (.EXE), if possible
    - **RPG Maker:** game source files, executable is required
    - **Other platforms:** include source files, and executable
      - Make sure the CDROM/USB Drive indicates which computer type (PC/Mac) this is for
    - Include the minimum amount of files needed for your game
      - No random, extraneous files, previous versions, etc.

Game Maker/RPG Maker Help Sessions

- Many help sessions this week
- **Tuesday: Game Maker**
  - 12-1:10pm, Earth & Marine Sciences (E&MS) B214
  - Jacob Telleen, Jeff Brizzolara
- **Wednesday: RPG Maker**
  - 5:30-9pm, E2 280
  - Nate Emond, Nic Kent
- **Thursday: Game Maker**
  - 4-5:10pm, E&MS B214
  - David Olsen, Tim Davis

Computer Game Design Degree

- UC Santa Cruz has a four year degree program on computer game design
  - Bachelor of Science in Computer Science: Computer Game Design
  - A technically focused degree
  - Year-long game design project in senior year
- Informational session this Friday
  - Learn about the content of the degree
  - We are actively seeking students for this major
  - Job opportunities in the field
  - How to sign up
  - Friday, March 2, 2-4pm
    - Location: “Simularium”, Engineering 2, room 180

Game Design Seminar: SQ 07

- Next quarter I will be running a group independent study on game design
  - Open only to students who have completed this class
- Goal is to improve your proficiency to create computer games
  - Create three games, one every two weeks
    - Each game must meet a theme topic
    - Demonstrate games in class, receive critical feedback from me and other students
  - Take one of the three games, and polish gameplay and design for the final project.
  - May take for 2 or 5 credits (2 vs 3 games)
  - Will meet once a week, TBD
- Indicate interest on signup sheet after class

Exam #2

- The second midterm exam is this Wednesday
  - Will primarily cover material between first and second exam
  - May draw upon concepts and material from the entire class
  - No Game Maker or history of computer games
- Will give list of potential questions on following slides
- Exam #2 will be similar in difficulty and format to the first exam
  - Mostly short answer questions

Potential Exam Topics

- As Univ. of California students, you are expected to be able to assess complex material and make judgments concerning its relative importance.
- That said, it can be helpful to have some input from the Professor to help focus studying activity.
- The following are questions/material that are likely, but not guaranteed to appear on the exam.
- Anything covered in class or in the assigned readings since the last exam may appear, even if not explicitly mentioned today.

Exam #2 Potential Exam Questions and Topics

- What is a Shmup?
- Give at least three thematic elements of Shmups
  - Be able to describe how a given Shmup (either one of your choice, or one shown in class) exemplifies these thematic elements
- Be able to give one advantage and one disadvantage of fixed (top-down, single-screen) Shmups
- What is a landscape narrative?
  - Be able to give an example of this
- What are the advantages of being able to perform level design for a Shmup?
  - As compared to the disadvantages of a fixed (top-down, single-screen) Shmup?
- What is a manic (bullet-hell) shooter?
- What is a “cute-em-up”?

Potential Exam #2 Topics and Questions (2)

- What is a core game mechanic?
  - Be able to define, and identify in a game of choice, or demonstrated in class
- What is the core mechanic of a platformer?
- What are the advantages of level design for platformers?
  - As compared to prior games like Pac-Mac, Berzerk, etc. that had limited or no level design.
- What benefit does scrolling provide for game design
  - In Shmups, Platformers, RPGs?
- What were some of the design challenges of moving platformers from 2D to 3D?

Potential Exam #2 Topics and Questions (3)

- Describe the advantages/disadvantages of Shmups, Platformers, RPGs for storytelling
  - Consider issues such as characters, potential for dialog, breadth of story supported by genre
- For Shmups, Platformers, RPGs, be able to describe two distinctive qualities of the genre
  - Or, given two genres, be able to compare/contrast by listing distinctive aspects, and how they differ
- What is collision detection?
- What is the difference between scrolling in Shmups and Platform games?
  - Shmups are always pushing you forward, platformers typically give more freedom of movement

Potential Exam #2 Topics and Questions (4)

- What is the difference between challenge and conflict?
- Know Crawford's dimensions of challenge
  - Cerebellar, Sensorimotor, Spatial Reasoning, Pattern Recognition, Sequential Reasoning, Numerical Reasoning, Resource Management, Social Reasoning
  - Be able to give an example of each.
  - Given a game, be able to identify the kinds of challenge it provides.
- Be able to identify several forms of conflict
  - Given a game, be able to identify the types on conflict the game supports
- What is Crawford's definition of interactivity?
  - What are the four important elements of his definition?
- Given a game example, be able to describe whether it exhibits high or low interactivity (according to Crawford)

Potential Exam #2 Topics and Questions

- What two seductions must a designer accomplish in creating their game?
- How does to the act of submitting to game rules lead to player pleasure?
- What is the lusory attitude?
- What is autotelic play?
  - What are some of the implications of games being mostly autotelic?
- What are the elements of a game's reward structure?
  - Types and frequency of rewards
  - Types and frequency of punishments
- Be able to give examples of types of rewards in a game
  - Given a game, be able to identify the kinds of rewards and punishments it provides.
- Be able to give examples of short and long term goals.

Workshop Highlights

- Attended Microsoft sponsored workshop last week
  - Academic Days on Game Development in Computer Science Education
  - Focus in on use of games to enhance computer science courses
  - Also, use of computer games for education across broad range of courses
- Some highlights
  - Colleen McCreary, Electronic Arts
    - EA hires about 250 people each year fresh out of college
    - About 70-80% are software engineers
    - Rest are artists, except for 1% game designers
    - Very rare to get a game design job straight out of college
    - But, relatively easier to get a game development job

Workshop Highlights (2)

- XNA Game Studio Express
  - A complete development environment for creating 2D and 3D games
    - Free tool (Windows only, of course)
  - Simplifies use of Microsoft's XNA technology stack
  - Can create games that run on Windows PC or XBox 360
    - Your game, running on your (or a friend's) XBox 360
      - This requires "Creator's Club" subscription ($100/year)
  - Write games in C# language (easier than C++ to use)
    - Saw several very speedy demos (car racing game, flying airplane over procedural landscape)
    - Many libraries
    - Large use community
  - Comes with many demo games
  - Easy pathway to XBox Live Arcade if you wish
  - http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/directx/aa937795.aspx

Narrative

- Games tell stories
- A game's **narrative** is the aspects of a game that contributes to it telling a story
  - Questions concerning whether games are narratives, or whether narrative provides just one way to look at games are still actively debated.
- **Narrative** is also used to describe the story itself
- Computer games stretch the notion of narrative
  - The interactivity of computer games, like the interactivity of hypertext, pushes hard against existing theories of linear narrative
  - No longer just one privileged story being told; many possible ways to experience a non-linear narrative (computer game, hypertext fiction)

Structures for Game Narrative

- **Embedded narrative**
  - Pre-generated narrative content that exists prior to a player's interaction with the game
  - Cut scenes, back story
  - Are often used to provide the fictional background for the game, motivation for actions in the game, and development of story arc
- **Emergent narrative**
  - Arises from the player's interaction with the gameworld, designed levels, rule structure
  - Moment-by-moment play in the game creates this emergent narrative
  - Varies from play session to play session, depending on user's actions
- Game design involves employing and balancing the use of these two elements

Narrative Descriptor

- A **narrative descriptor** is an element of a game that communicates aspects of its story to the player
  - Broad concept, which encompasses most visual elements of a game and its surrounding context
    - Instructional text
    - Cut scenes
    - Interface elements (joystick, buttons, controller, and how they're used)
    - Visual elements comprising the field of view of the player

- Example: Asteroids
  - Instructional text places you in space
  - So do the visual elements of the game
  - Wrap-around space also contributes to this feeling
  - UFO ties into cultural understandings

Narrative Descriptors in Games

- **Fictive worlds**
  - The narrative of the game world
  - Creates coherent narrative spaces in which story events take place and take on meaning
  - Fictional world creates affordances and limitations for what is possible in the world
    - Super Mario Bros.:
      - Cartoon world makes things like goombas and mushrooms consistent with the world
      - But, photo-realistic dog would be out of place, since it's not consistent with the world
- **Story elements**
  - Individual moments of narrative play as the game progresses
  - Individual actions of players and enemies also need to be consistent with, and support overall narrative goals
    - Pac-Mac: chewing animation of Pac-Man supports fictional world of eating dots
      - Pac-Man uses chewing mechanic to eat ghosts when they are vulnerable, instead of, say, shooting at them (which would be inconsistent with the world)

Narrative Based Design Issues

- What story are you trying to tell?
- Internally consistent fictional world?
  - Does your gameworld allow you to easily determine what does or does not belong in the world?
  - Do the graphic elements clearly communicate expectations about the gameworld to players?
- Characters
  - How do game characters (player avatar, non-player characters) contribute to the narrative
  - Are they consistent with gameworld?
- Core game mechanic
  - Do the core actions of the player contribute to the narrative?
  - Is the core game mechanic consistent with narrative goals, and consistent with game world?

Interactive Drama

- First conceived of by Brenda Laurel in her PhD dissertation (1986)
  - Idea is to use drama as the guiding metaphor (narrative conception) for game design
    - Focuses attention on intensity, enactment, and unity
  - Player interaction deeply shapes the path and outcome of the story
    - But, while maintaining authorial control over the story structure. Not a loosey-goosey world.
- Wants the player to be immersed in the game world as a character in the story.

Tension Between Embedded and Emergent Narrative

- Games provide rule-driven worlds
  - Provides support for emergent styles of narrative
    - What the player does comprises the story
- Narrative involves telling a story
  - If the designers wants to maintain broad control over the story, involves predestination, or at least guiding towards one of a set of destinations

"Where gameplay is all about interactivity, narrative is about predestination. There is a pervasive feeling in the game design community that narrative and interactivity are antithetical."

Mateas and Stern, "Interaction and Narrative"

Demonstration of Facade