Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

week two, lecture two
Today

• A study announcement
• Innovation: the example of platformers
• Game concepts, playcentric design, and innovation
• A playtesting announcement
Virtual World Study Participant

• About
  – Participate in a study aimed at pushing forward the realism of NPCs! This study involves playing a character in a 3D virtual world with the goal of informing and testing the latest systems of supporting character behavior. Specifically, your movement, behavior, and interaction data in the virtual world will be used to help design AI-controlled characters.

• Participant Requirements
  – 18 years of age or older, not pregnant
  – English fluency

• Time Commitment
  – Be available for a time slot at least two of the following blocks:
    • Sunday, April 17th, 12pm-5pm
    • Saturday, April 23rd, 12pm-5pm
    • Sunday, April 24th, 12pm-5pm
  – Once assigned to a time in one of the above time blocks, you will spend 45 minutes participating in the study (introduction to testing environment, study, and questionnaires)

• Contact
  – Email this address and list two or more blocks of time (of the three listed above) that you will be available: holodeck.project+study@gmail.com
Participation is worth one point of extra credit

There will be a number of opportunities during the quarter for extra credit doing things that deepen your experience with and understanding of games.
But first...
Quiz #1

10 minutes, use both sides of paper as needed, closed book, no notes, no collaboration, etc.

If you are a DRC student and have not come to my office hours — make note on your quiz, come ASAP.
How can the platformer still be interesting?

Haven’t we been jumping on things for more than three decades?
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

• 2003 entry into long-running *Prince of Persia* series, first designed by Jordan Mechner since original (1989)

• The ability to rewind time (and slow, etc) is added to 3D platforming/combat mechanics

• Time manipulation is a resource to be collected, saved, and spent
Braid
Braid

• Engages the long history of 2D platformers (Mario, original PoP, etc) but is a 2008 game largely created by Jonathan Blow

• Strong sales had a big impact on indie scene

• The ability to rewind time is added to platforming mechanics

• The ability to rewind is infinite — but some elements are “out of time” (creating time-oriented platforming puzzles)
PoP:SoT and Braid

• A connection between the mechanics and the fiction

• In PoP, the same events explain the new mechanics and provide the story momentum (and reason to kill NPCs)

• In Braid the mechanics are thematically related to world’s backstory and motives (as made clear in level-entry texts)
But time isn’t just for platformers
Achron: Time travel RTS

not a platformer — and now in beta
http://www.achrongame.com
Other platformer innovations
Portal

Which we’ll return to later...
Closure

http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/480006
Let’s play!
Spelunky

Rouge-style generation, destructable terrain, made in Game Maker, source available!
Lost in Shadow

Platforming on shadows as a shadow — with a helper
Super Meat Boy

Side platforming — and difficulty from Santa Cruz!
Bit.Trip Runner

Rhythm-based platforming — also from Santa Cruz!
Capture objects/creatures with snapshots reposition to move, solve puzzles, etc
Changing the platform space

- Changing space’s connections (*Portal*)
- Changing space’s presence (*Closure*)
- Changing space’s objects (*Spelunky*)
- Moving objects non-traditionally (*Snapshot*)
- Moving player character non-traditionally (*Super Meat Boy*, *Bit.Trip Runner*)
- If you’re thinking of making a platformer, *places* to start brainstorming...
What’s needed to design something innovative?
Player centric design

- You are creating an aesthetic experience for the player – all design considerations must flow from the questions:
  - What does the player do? (mechanics)
  - What experience (dynamics) does this create for the player (why do they do it)?
- You are not your own typical player
- The player is not your opponent
Iterative design

- Rapid iteration, with something working all along the way, is a widespread design idea.
- Fullerton calls the designer “an advocate for the player” — but it’s easy to lose sight of new player’s perspective.
- Her approach: rapid iteration, with input from playtesters at every possible step.
Playcentric design

• Start with player experience goals — aesthetics — e.g., need to trust and distrust other players (strategic), always almost out of control movement (feel), etc

• Generate ideas, formalize ideas, test ideas, evaluate results

• Eject, repeat cycle, or accept current ideas

• Brainstorming, prototyping, design, production, testing
Your game projects
Your goal

• A game of the sort that does well at festivals, conferences, contests...
• A game you can explain in 30 seconds
• A game you can demo in 3 minutes and play in under 30 minutes

Experimental Gameplay Workshop
Game innovation

• Familiar mechanics in a new situation. *American McGee's Alice* uses standard action mechanics in dark Wonderland

• New mechanic(s) supported by new element. Achron’s time manipulation as RTS resource
Game innovation

• A new mechanic for something familiar (wheel navigation of *Mass Effect* dialogue)

• A new mechanic for the unfamiliar (*Portal*’s portals are a new gameplay element, even if already in engines)
Game ideas

- Gameplay: a puzzle game, a party game, a game like *The Sims*, a game like *Super Mario*
- Technology: a particle effect game, an asynchronous multiplayer game, a specific tool trick
- World, theme, story: HP Lovecraft, environmental education, espionage
Game ideas

• Brainstorm multiple ideas connected to your strengths/interests

• “A 2D Sims-style game set in an HP Lovecraft world”

• “A mosaic-assembling puzzle game with mechanics inspired by art history”

• “A Diplomacy-style game of conflict and allegiance set in a suburban mall”
But where to start?
Fullerton on brainstorming

- Get together to brainstorm!
- Have a challenge for the session
- No criticism
- Vary the method

- Playful environment
- Put it on the wall
- Go for lots of ideas
- Don’t go too long
Example: Flanagan’s Grow a Game
Alternate methods

- List creation
- Idea cards
- Mind map
- Stream of consciousness
- Shout it out
- Cut it up
- Surrealist games
- Research
Edit and refine

- Will Noah and the TAs think it is innovative?
- Do we have the skills needed?
- Do we have the time needed?
- Will we be happy to have made it?
- Do we know how to start prototyping a playable, formal system?
- Would it be compelling to play?
Learning objectives for next week

- Physical prototyping and storyboarding (section, text, and lecture)
- Types of play (including Huizinga’s) and types of fun (including Koster’s) (lecture)
- What is a game? (lecture)
- How games present worlds — real and fictional (text & lecture)
- More on game genres and game history if time permits (lecture)
- Hopefully Game Maker platformers and hidden object games (section)
Playtesting

- One of the important things you’ll be doing week 9 is playtesting
- The Game Design Studio (172) students are playtesting now — good way to learn
- You can also get a point of extra credit for participating, per game, up to three
- To sign up: http://bit.ly/g0oDms