Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

week six, lecture two
Today

- TBA readings still... & more papers @ front
- Multi-game analysis essay
- More games and fiction — recapping prior lecture and adding more
- Can games and fiction work together?
- How do games and fiction work together?
- How could games and fiction work together?
- Presentations of *Mass Effect* and *Heavy Rain*
Multi-game analysis

• Your next major assignment, due in two weeks in section

• Pick three games to compare, focusing on some aspect of their design, and connect this to their mechanics

• One of these games must come from the S&E Library’s game collection (see syllabus page on the multi-game analysis for links)
Comparing games

• Choose something about the game design to compare

• You might look at changes in fiction (e.g., different stories/mechanics), procedural rhetoric (e.g., simulated pollution), basic mechanics (e.g., jumping mechanics and challenges), etc

• Explicitly state your views on the differences and support with specifics!
Comparing games

- The most common type of comparison is in the same genre and/or series (it’s easier to compare jumping across platformers)
- Choosing three games from different eras is encouraged (e.g., the original *Prince of Persia*, *PoP: Sands of Time*, and the recent *Forgotten Sands*)
- With permission of your TA, you can choose a different dimension and grouping
Creative groupings

- Some Bogost essays are multi-game analysis examples...
- “Games Phone Home” analyzes playing weakness in 3 games
- “Turning the Tables on In-Game Ad Design” looks at unlicensed branding in 3 games
Questions?
Games and fiction
Games are complex systems. Play creates many emergent possibilities.
Stories are linear arrangements.

One arrangement is carefully selected.
Stories are inherently linear.... Indeed, this is a strength; the author chose precisely those characters, those events, those decisions, and that outcome, because it made for the strongest story....

Games are inherently non-linear. They depend on decision making.... To the degree that you make a game more like a story — more linear, fewer real options — you make it less like a game.

— Greg Costikian, 2000
There is some evidence for this
Great-looking graphics: aka movies

Not enough movies for dynamic gameplay or story
We have better cinematic models
Tells an “action movie” story

With gameplay challenges:
running, jumping, climbing, shooting, using cover
Games can do
what movies can do
Setting up character tensions
Making tensions clearer
Setting some tensions aside
Games can do what movies can’t do
Can’t run, jump, or climb; only pistol
Hard-won victory made meaningless
Does bad things in a separate world

Does bad things in a world impelled by my gameplay
But traditionally cinematic games are just one approach.
We can connect gameplay and fiction more deeply
... and a deeper connection between game and fiction doesn’t require a huge team.
Odd, how the light just makes your apartment gloomier. Pre-dawn darkness pools in the corners and around the tops of walls. Your desk lamp glares yellow, but the shadows only draw your eyes and deepen.

Not much of an apartment, no. One desk, paper-piled, with a dusty computer shoved to the side. Your futon. Second-hand stereo sitting on a cardboard crate. A kitchen nook one way and a bathroom nook the other, with a closet to the side. A broad mirror tries to make the place seem twice its size; it halfway works. One window, whose shade is down, and the front door firmly shut.
>look in mirror
The far side of the mirror is just as shadowy as this one. It's probably meant as commentary; not more space, just more of the same.

Come to think of it, as with a hangover, dehydration is probably the problem. Your mouth is dry wool.

>turn on kitchen sink
You step into the kitchen nook.

Nothing comes from the tap but an eerie distant howling. The kitchen sink hasn't worked since you moved in.
>read list
The task list for your impending journey is a mess of crossed-out items and scribbled corrections. Huh. "Vacuum" is checked; you remember doing it. But look at this floor.

>get vacuum
Taken. (Awkwardly.)

The sound of a helicopter comes faintly through the closed window.

>vacuum
You squeeze the handle, and the vacuum cleaner begins humming industriously. You run it back and forth on the floor. But it only seems to spread the sand around. In fact, it looks like there's more sand than before you started.
You're definitely getting hungry.

"And that's, um... far out. Back to the groove, folks," and a Filipo-Shaker lullaby begins.

>open cupboard
You stand up, and step into the kitchen nook.

You open the cupboard, revealing a box of crackers.

>get crackers
Taken.

>eat crackers
You pull on the box top. It's stuck, somehow. You yank --

The top tears away, and white sand sprays out of the box.
Shade

• The game system provides a space, objects, and a mystery

• The player and the character both explore the space, use the objects, and uncover the mystery

• Unlike a traditional fiction, the audience not only experiences intellectual curiosity about the fictional world, but must experiment with the world actively — curiosity in action

• The player understands the world at the same time the character’s fiction climaxes
Or you could control the world at a different level
Storytelling with *The Sims*
Alice and Kev
Alice and Kev

• A story about poverty,
• with the choices of the player implicating the audience in a way *The Bicycle Thief* couldn’t,
• told through a simulation game.
• It works because both game and story are about resources.
• *The Sims* is an amazing — if somewhat abstract — metastory.
Or a simulated world might not be a goal
• A collaboration with Josh Carroll, Robert Coover, Shawn Greenlee, Andrew McClain, and Ben “Sascha” Shine

• Played in the Cave at Brown University

• Texts of memory as a virtual experience

• The language of memory as game material, in relation to the body, made almost tangible

• Words peel loose, hit back with the hand...
Or the boundary between worlds could be questioned
“The Beast”

Circles: “Evan Chan was murdered”
Squares: “Jeanine was the key”
I was born in Shanghai in 2066. Both of my parents were professors at the University of Shanghai. My father was an astrophysicist, and my mother a professor of quantum mechanics. After my father’s death in a plane crash, my mother accepted a position at Harvard.

At first I hated Cambridge. I did the lonely, moody adolescent bit and took to writing poetry and acting sulien. Then one day, friends of my Mom took us sailing off of Marblehead. I fell in love that day. I then had two passions: sailing and haiku.
“The Beast”

This is not a game
“The Beast”

- Elan Lee (puzzles), Sean Stewart (writing), and Jordan Weisman (concept)
- First ARG; denied its own existence; spread through internet text, movies (and phone, fax, USPS, bathroom walls, live events)
- Required massive player collaboration (Cloudmakers had 7,500 members)

Nearly 150 characters, nearly 4,000 documents, four languages, nightmare database, Enigma code, etc.
“The Beast”

- Launched the “alternate reality game” genre
- Fictions uncovered/performed as a group
- Taking roles in fictions that blur boundaries
- Game system provides a framework and goal for social interaction in fictional/real world
- Pushing back on plans of game/story authors (even if not visible to players)
Or you could make choices for characters that branch the plot.
Role-Playing Games (RPGs)

Maybe this is starting to sound familiar?

Quest structures enable choice — states and possible future states

Dialogue trees enable choice — options of what to say, followed by NPC responses, choices are gameplay decisions
Role-Playing Games (RPGs)
Role-Playing Games (RPGs)
Mass Effect

Presentation by
Alexander Schneider
Or you could inhabit multiple characters
Heavy Rain
Heavy Rain

Presentation by
Alexander McCaleb
Heavy Rain & Fiction in Games

Presented by:
Alexander McCaleb
amcccaleb@slugmail.ucsc.edu
Some History

• Heavy Rain was produced by Quantic Dream & released February 23, 2010 in the states
• Director David Cage previously did music for video games during the 90’s
• He then endeavored in designing with the founding of Quantic Dream in 1997
• 2 years later, Quantic Dream’s first title was released: *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*
Omikron: The Nomad Soul

• Without giving away too much of the story, you play as Kay’l 669, an Omikronian police officer investigating a spree of serial killings
• The further into Kay’l 669’s investigation, things slowly turn towards the unexpected & surreal
• How does Kay’l 669 go through his investigation (i.e. progress through the story)? By collecting clues, talking with other characters, shooting bad guys & fighting them as well
• Logically, this makes the game an adventure/FPS/fighting game with some puzzle elements incorporated into the level design
Omikron: The Nomad Soul

• Opening:

• [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HDHJoaeEC-I&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HDHJoaeEC-I&feature=related) 2:22
Omikron: The Nomad Soul

• So what has Kay’l 669 told us here?
• Basically that we must give him our soul in order to play the game right?
• But, doesn’t fiction do more than this?
Fahrenheit (Indigo Prophecy)

- Quantic Dream’s sophomore effort released in 2005
- This time around, Quantic Dream has attempted to define their own gameplay mechanics in order to unify story & gameplay much better
- But how can we achieve this unison?
- We saw in lecture before that games can tell stories in ways that movies cannot with *Uncharted 2*
- So then is it possible for gameplay mechanics to evolve to portray what movies excel at?
Fahrenheit (Indigo Prophecy)

• Opening:

• [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaNMC8pqtqk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaNMC8pqtqk) 0:12
Fahrenheit (Indigo Prophecy)

- What do we notice here? How do players interact with the game system?
Fahrenheit (Indigo Prophecy)

• What do we notice here? How do players interact with the game system?
• We can walk around freely
• Close windows
• Cover up blood on the bed sheets
• Pretty much interact with everything in our apartment no?
• Our interactions then cause microscenes to trigger
Microscenes

• What are microscenes?
• In my opinion microscenes can be quantified as in-game actions conveyed in a fashion more like a movie than a game.
• We are able to interact with anything in the environment, but only as much as it applies to the overarching story of the game
• Sure this contributes to the unity of gameplay & story, but we need something else
Heavy Rain: Intro

- After another 5 years, Quantic Dream was finally able to accomplish a near-perfect union of gameplay & story where all interactions caused some impact on the story.
- Because of this, fictional elements of Heavy Rain became more dynamic as it was easily possible to play through the entire game & barely skim the surface of story possibilities.
- This gives the player much more control over what experience they want from the game, varying the possibility space of player satisfaction as well.
Heavy Rain: Demo

• Demo: Sleazy Place
• Things to look out for as I play:
• How is it that the game is forcing me to give my soul to it as I play?
• What story pieces can you derive from this brief segment of gameplay? Do these seem familiar in any way?
• How does this form of gameplay unify gameplay & fiction into a singular entity?
• Where does the use of microscenes help in story-telling?
• Exercise 4.8: How does the plot unfold based on my gameplay choices?
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• So let’s address these questions... aggressively
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• How is it that the game is forcing me to give my soul to it as I play?
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• How is it that the game is forcing me to give my soul to it as I play?

• We could say that we are giving our souls to the game as we’ve abandon our role as the player of a game & become the protagonist Scott Shelby. The sense of immersion brought about from this game is much more prevalent throughout the remainder of the story.

• The first time I played through the game, I completed it from beginning to end (including DLC) in one 15 hour sitting. Why? That’s how immersed into the game I was.
**Heavy Rain: Analysis**

- What story pieces can you derive from this brief segment of gameplay? Do these seem familiar in any way?
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• What story pieces can you derive from this brief segment of gameplay? Do these seem familiar in any way?

• We are Scott Shelby, a private detective investigating the case of the Origami Killer. Lauren Winter is a prostitute who’s son Johnny was a victim of the Origami Killer. Currently, Lauren Winter lives in a sleazy apartment complex & is well-known amongst that community. This could possibly be the end result of her dead son. Troy is an ex-client of Lauren’s who has violent urges & thinks he owns Lauren.

• This premise seems familiar to that of Omikron except we’re a private detective in the near future versus a futuristic cop.
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• How does this form of gameplay unify gameplay & fiction into a singular entity?
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• How does this form of gameplay unify gameplay & fiction into a singular entity?

• Gameplay & fiction merge here as every aspect of the gameplay available to me was driven by previous choices I made in the story. In particular, every time that Troy was able to hit me, I’ll sustain those injuries throughout the game. Likewise, with any RPG, the ways that I’ve been talking with Lauren affect her relationship with me, which drives her reactions later in the level.
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• How does this form of gameplay unify gameplay & fiction into a singular entity?

• Analyzing this from an outside perspective, during our quick time sequences, the story would often imply that I would be able to strike Troy in some particular manner with button presses or joystick movements that came intuitively with what was occurring on screen. This may be a nitty-gritty detail, but still applicable to our discussion
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• Where does the use of microscenes help in story-telling?
**Heavy Rain: Analysis**

- Where does the use of microscenes help in story-telling?
  - Microscenes are used to show discussion between characters as well as small acts that characters are doing. For example, when Scott needed his inhaler, a microscene was shown where he pulls the inhaler from his pocket & leans up against the wall to use it. This particular usage aids story-telling as it tells the player through their interactions & watching that Scott has breathing problems. In addition to this, microscenes are also utilized during Scott & Lauren’s conversation to give emphasis onto what exactly is being said. Without microscenes in this context, directly telling the story would be a much more difficult task.
Heavy Rain: Analysis

• Exercise 4.8: How does the plot unfold based on my gameplay choices?
In the context of Heavy Rain, the plot will unfold differently after almost every playthrough. So in this case, its too dependent on how I played the game to have a singular answer.

Exercise 4.8: How does the plot unfold based on my gameplay choices?
Recap

• **Omikron: The Nomad Soul:**
  – Attempted to push the limits of games & story-telling by a combinational overhaul of genres to depict applicable events in the story

• **Fahrenheit (Indigo Prophecy):**
  – A much later attempt of what *Omikron* initially set out to accomplish
  – Approached the issue by defining new modes of gameplay with a more cinematic focus via microscenes

• **Heavy Rain:**
  – Gameplay & story are essentially one entity as the gameplay is creating the story from a vast possibility space.
  – Likewise, the story is constantly dependent upon the gameplay, making them behave as one
Other Games to Consult

- *Façade* by Andrew Stern & Michael Mateas
- *Mass Effect* (series) & any BioWare RPG
- *Shadow of the Colossus* by Team Ico
- *Adventure* on the Atari 2600
- *Uncharted* (series)
- *The Legend of Zelda* (series)
- Any others with significant fictional aspects
Questions?
Recommended Exercises

- Exercise 4.9-4.11 (will need dramatic arc for some)
- Analyze your current project for fiction elements & ask yourself how the story & gameplay are merged as one?
- Better yet, how can story & gameplay in your games be adjusted so that they can coexist better?
- Play a segment of your favorite game & answer the questions I’ve asked about *Heavy Rain* in regards to your game
- Reflect upon any questions asked today
Or you could gesturally perform the characters
Motion controls
Gestures control everyday actions
• Enacting fictional roles, taking multiple POVs
• Motion control for fiction — high-level puppeteering, rather than full-body enacting
• Raises question of the alternative — taking emotionally powerful stances, making emotionally laden movements
We can do exciting things with games and fiction
Doing things with game fictions

- Accomplishment, emotional interpellation
- Unraveling mysteries with active engagement
- Interrogating our responsibilities
- Making play material of fiction’s language
- Play enacting fictional themes metaphorically
- Creating new social connections via fictions
- Physically enacting fictional roles
- Experiencing choice in a possibility landscape
It’s a great time to be working on games and fictions