Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

week six, lecture one
Today

- Demos of *September 12th, Darfur is Dying, and Disaffected!*
- Procedural rhetoric
- Assigning multi-game analysis
What do games mean?
How do games mean?
What does this mean?

*September 12th, newsgaming.com, 2003*
What do you notice?
September 12th

Not an animation, but an interaction...
September 12th

- Fictional world: Village of civilians and terrorists, bomb targeting

- Rules: People move continually, bombs take time to fall, dead civilians inspire mourning, mourning inspires terrorism
September 12th

- **Gameplay:**
  - Targetted bombing hits civilians, sprouts as many new terrorists as it kills
  - Indiscriminate bombing creates a wasteland w/ more terrorists than others
  - Procedural rhetoric: Bombing is a poor tool for addressing terrorism
Other Sept 11th games

• **New York Defender**: Is arcade-style play an argument?

• **9/11 Survivor**: Rhetoric of randomness or disturbingly affectless?
Procedural rhetoric
What does this mean?

- *NRA Gun Club*, Crave Entertainment, 2006
- Realistic operation — discharge to reload
Procedural Rhetoric

• “Procedurality refers to a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes.”

• “Rhetoric refers to effective and persuasive expression.”

• “Procedural rhetoric, then, is a practice of using processes persuasively.... persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular.”
Interpreting rhetoric

• “Just as verbal rhetoric is useful for both the orator and the audience, and just as written rhetoric is useful for both the writer and the reader, so procedural rhetoric is useful for both the programmer and the user, the game designer and the player.”

• We may find procedural rhetoric at work in a game beyond that consciously intended
Procedural

• “To write procedurally, one authors code that enforces rules
• to generate some kind of representation,
• rather than authoring the representation itself.”
Procedural

• For Bogost “procedural expression must entail symbol manipulation, the construction and interpretation of a symbolic system that governs human thought or action.”

• Computers “are particularly adept at representing real or imagined systems that themselves function in some particular way ... The computer magnifies the ability to create representations of processes.”
Procedural

• We live in a world of systems, of procedures, only some encoded in software

• A fundamental question: *How does this work?*

• “Procedural representation explains processes *with other processes.*”

• Requires a procedural medium
Procedural figures, forms, and genres

- Operational logics (e.g., collision detection) are small and used in many ways

- Procedural forms (e.g., game engines) are larger and determine more about use

- Procedural genres (e.g., platformer) “similarities between the constitutive procedural representations that produce the on-screen effects and controllable dynamics we experience as players.”
On the other hand

- Bogost argues “procedures found the logics that structure behavior in *all* cases”
- Is this an unproven thesis (about cognition, culture, etc., as computational procedures)?
- Or is it a gesture to how broadly Bogost thinks we need to think of procedures?
- Should we differentiate the un/specifiable?
What does this mean?

Darfur is Dying, darfurisdying.com, 2006
What do you notice?
Darfur is Dying

Political awareness, and empathy, not policy
Darfur is Dying

- Fictional worlds: Water foraging & village, individuals (not “lives”)
- Water rules: Can run & hide, confrontation is death
- Water gameplay: Being slow, fearful works
- Water rhetoric: Just basic living harrowing
Rhetoric

- A derogatory term, a means of persuasion, or a means of seeking “correct judgement”
- Both macro- and micro-structures for speech and reasoning
- Now broadly considered beyond speech
Rhetoric

- Now encompasses writing, speech, art, etc
- Effective expression, employing techniques
- In emerging field of digital rhetoric, thus far, more focus on computer networking than procedurality
Rhetorical vividness

Most Vivid
- actual experience
- *procedural rhetoric*?
- moving images with sound
- static photograph
- realistic painting
- line drawing
- narrative, descriptive account
- descriptive account
- abstract, impersonal analysis

Least Vivid
- statistics
Rhetorical coercion?

• In procedural rhetoric, the world operates according to certain rules
• Even if we disagree with this model of the world, we must go along to progress
• Impossible to respond in situ, change rules
• Is this more coercive than what is required to follow a complex argument in a book?
• *September 12th* is a political game, making a policy argument

• What about other kinds of persuasion?
Serious games

• Political games
• Advertising and promotion games
• Education and training games
• Even job interview games
• All, of course, can be viewed politically (military investment in promo and education games, and latter as former)
What does this mean?

Disaffected!, persuasivegames.com, 2006
What do you notice?
In one view, an “anti-advergame” — using brand power toward social comment, also...
Service Games

• From *Diner Dash* to *Disaffected!*

• Coworkers move things randomly, customers come in already exasperated, etc

• Bogost: “the player is stripped of the power to service customers successfully.... Instead, he is forced to perform under the powerlessness of alienated labor.”
Many games are ambiguous — interpreting rhetoric requires an argument.
Arguments are also important to: multi-game analysis
Multi-game analysis

• Your next major assignment, due in two weeks

• Pick three games to compare *along some dimension*

• 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., quest structure), 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 new *PoP*)

• 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
This week
This week

• Prototypes due in sections — don’t forget to test you have turned them in correctly

• Start working on your multi-game analysis, check with your TA on special groupings

• Don’t forget a quiz could happen any time