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Assignment 2: Communication Design micro-project reflection.

This assignment aimed to expand upon or build a new prototype that had enhanced data representation in the form of a better structured UI, effects and small changes that allows the user to better understand and interact with the system.

Communication design does not only encompass the UI and what is primarily visible to the player, small things such as a slightly brighter light placed strategically to tell the player where to go without forcefully guiding them. It also informs the player of the state of their avatar and environment. A game that effectively communicates data through design is Escape from Tarkov (2017), while an immensely complex system in comparison to the project being discussed it uses small pop-ups and icons that are not always on screen to tell you what is wrong with your player. If your avatar's left arm is "blacked" meaning that it has no more HP left, the player will have a hard time aiming and the gun will be much less stable. Without telling your player, "your arm is broken" they have communicated through visual and mechanical cues that there is something wrong. This is a small example of how communicating data is not only about displaying numbers, while Tarkov does have health bars and a ton of values for many statuses and items they are not shoved into your face. A player who has some experience can tell what is wrong through visual and audio cues.

For the current iteration of this project no audio was used, this is due mostly to lack of knowledge of the audio systems in Unity and the simplistic nature of the game. The game communicates player input through the UI, numbers, and small visual effects such as: particle systems that show when the player has healed or when a character is stunned as well as a character shakes when they are damaged. Traditionally screen shake is used to infer damage or size but with a system such as the one used in the prototype, an effect like camera shake looks unprofessional, over the top and does not communicate that the avatar has been damaged as well as the avatar shaking does.

Camera shake is best used to communicate, as mentioned, size or impact; an explosion close to the player or a boss that is three times larger than the player. Camera shake is also best used when the player has more control over the player's movement, the player can currently only choose four options by clicking those corresponding buttons. If the game were in the first or traditional third person then having screen shake would be more applicable.

The second set of communicative effects are particle systems, these show the player that they have healed and that either they or their enemy has been stunned. The healing effect is a small burst of cross-shaped particles with a light, as the burst happens the health bar increases, and a small message tells them that they have healed. The number of available healing items decreases this is shown on the healing option button.

The stun effect is to show the player the effect of their current skill, a stunning ability that has the chance to stun the enemy, fail or stun the player. If a character is stunned a small orbiting particle system will spawn on them and remain there until it is their turn. Originally the dialogue box informs the player if the skill worked or not and if it was a success they

immediately went again, this meant that the player may be able to gather that the enemy has been stunned but if nothing happens or they are stunned they will either need to read the dialogue text and if they miss that then they will think that the game is bugged.

In conclusion simple changes were made to allow for the system and player to better interact with each other, in some cases there is now too much information resulting in some being redundant, but it still communicates the necessary information.

References

Escape from Tarkov (2017). PC/Mac [Game]. Battlestate Games: St. Petersburg