Real-time Snake

Synopsis

Our Software

Through a snake game we try to explore the overflow of information on social media sites exemplified in the following quote by Borthwick:

> *"Think about Twitter as a rope of information — at the outset you assume you can hold on to the rope. That you can read all the posts, handle all the replies and use Twitter as a communications tool, similar to IM — then at some point, as the number of people you follow and follow you rises — your hands begin to burn. You realize you cant hold the rope you need to just let go and observe the rope" (Berry, David s. 163)*

In the above quote Borthwick explains how the social media site Twitter has turned into a mass stream of information that flows before the eyes of the user. You might have the right intention to be a meaningful part of twitter, reading what everyone you follow posts, handling all your messages and replying accordingly to what needs to be replied to. But as the people you follow increase, and likewise the people that follow you, the stream of information to handle, reaches a critical point, and it becomes too much for you to give attention to everything. Social media becomes a river of information flowing through your feed, and all you can do is observe this uncontrollable and unfiltered information stream, because meaningfully processing all the information would be impossible. It is this phenomenon, happening on social media sites like twitter or Facebook, we try to explore through a snake game. The snake is the user navigating through a social media site and the food is the constant stream of information, that eventually overflows and overwhelms the snake

How it works

The software starts like the original snake game. The user gets presented with a simple start screen containing the title 'Snake Game', and a simple button that starts the game. The game doesn't include any other form of explanation or instructions on what the user is about to experience, other than the expectations he or she might get from the title. Our software is disguised in a snake game. The snake game utilizes the same basic controls of the original game, where you control the snake around the canvas using the arrow keys, to eat the food. In our version of the game, the snake stops growing after eating four pieces of food, to visualize the limits of the snake. The walls aren't deadly either and can be passed right through. The amount of generated food keeps increasing exponentially, in accordance to when a piece of food has been consumed. At a certain point the canvas will be completely filled with food objects, which just about covers all the spaces on the canvas and the snake. This will be the Game Over point, and the player will be shown the end-screen where we expose the metaphor behind our game.

What is uncontrolled and unfiltered information?

By using the word uncontrolled we refer to the news-stream that is the user's social media feed. The feed is uncontrolled in the sense, that there aren't many constraints in place. The only control the user can wield is by who they decide to follow or unfollow, as well as reporting a post if the user finds it unfit for their feed. However there is only so much you can do when it comes to people you follow. Facebook themselves are contributing to this unfiltered stream in the form of sponsors on the user's feed, in which the user doesn't have much choice in what is shown, since the adds are unblockable.

The real-time streams is an example of how these large streams of information end up containing a mix of both factual information, and people's personal opinions. Since news-sites,

NGOs and government orgs began to operate on social media, the line between subjectivity and objectivity have become increasingly blurred. Personal opinion and facts gets entangled in the social media stream, and are therefore much more difficult for the users to determine whether what you read is objectively true or mere propaganda. A contemporary example of this was the 2016 American presidential election. Since there usually isn't any censoring on social media, it's up to the users to individually be critical about the stream of information and do their own filtering.

The aesthetic of code and the project as a critical work itself

In the chapter "Real-time streams" from the book "The Philosophy of Code", David Berry describes real-time streams; "*as distributed narratives which, although fragmentary, are running across and through multiple media*". Through our work we express the computational culture of streams as the massive amount of data we are presented with, as we are now living in a culture where we are constantly met with data and information.

In our work the food represents the massive stream of data and information, which is exponentially generated on the screen. Each time the snake consumes a piece of food even more food appears. This is to illustrate the constant growing stream of social data and information.
This results in a canvas filled with food in which the snake is eagerly trying to consume it all, but as one piece is consumed even more appear. This is to exemplify the previous quote by Borthwick. It becomes increasingly impossible for us to ever catch up to the constant updates and flow of new information that appears in our real-time streams.
The real-time streams have also impacted the way we understand and form social structures as explained by David Berry in the following quote:

> *"As such, real-time streams presents an excellent opportunity for tracing the impact of computational real-time devices in everyday life and the way in which they capture the informal representations of issues with which contemporary communities are becoming increasingly concerned.*
> *It is possible that Twitter and other real-time streams both decentre social structures and expand the numbers involved". (Berry, David s. 164)*

The computational real-time devices that are used in our everyday life can be used as a way to understand the impact the streams have had on our culture. Social media sites, such as Twitter, have changed our social structures of being together and being involved in different issues. Prior to this communities would share information between its members, thus the information would only reach a limited amount of people. However with sites such as Twitter and other real-time streams, the distribution of information has expanded its reach across different streams and can connect to numerous people. So to understand this decentring of social structure that David Berry points out, it should be thought of as the information having extended its reach across multiple streams, with little to no limit.

This new social culture influenced by real-time streams and computational real time devices, perhaps breeds a principle of people seeking to social media for their information and answers, which leads to a knowing-that culture explained by David Berry:

> *"This points towards an intensity of fast moving technological culture that privileges data streams over meaning, that is, an explosion of knowing-that rather than knowing-how – and here we might note the current political fascination with Twitter and similar social networking sites".* (Berry, David s. 167)

Knowing-that is to be understood as a need for obtaining information and quickly understanding it, rather than prioritizing the meaning of said information. This behaviour is characteristic of the contemporary user's relation to real-time streams. The cause of this behavior could emerge from the fact that the streams are impossible to keep up with, as mentioned in the quote by Borthwick. When the streams are too fast to keep up with, combined with the user's desire to stay updated, the result may very well be this culture that prioritizes "knowing-that" - or in other words; quick results.

The aesthetics of snake

Snake is a familiar game to many. By using this game we can expect the user to know the concept of the game, which is something we can use to our advantage. If we change any of the game mechanics the player will be surprised or puzzled, thus questioning the changes instead of being oblivious to them.
The snake game, which is based on eating food, is a good metaphor for visualizing our thoughts on streams and the user. By utilizing its mechanics to eat social media icons, we can invoke some thoughts in the player that will make them question our intentions.

The snake acts as a user of real-time social media. In the dawn of real-time streams, manoeuvring through the virtual social life was rather simple. You might have started out with a Facebook account and a small social following. Then you add Instagram to your repertoire of social media identities, furthermore Twitter and maybe Tumblr. Now you're trying to juggle four different social networks while maintaining your social identities. The social stream of constant real time updates overwhelms the user, and you end up drowning in the flood of information.

Snake is an old game that originated from late 1970's arcade machines and computers. By using such a nostalgic game as a critique to our contemporary issue of social media streams, we shine a light on a problem that is characteristic for our time. It may as well be seen as the past critiquing the present user who feels the need to stay constantly updated, without filtering the information that is consumed. In comparison to the past, where the user had more opportunity to filter the consumed information. In the present the streams are constantly updated, the user has to accept that not everything can be filtered through, because of the increased amount of information data. The snake game visualizes this unfiltered consumption, as the food aren't actual posts, but an icon that represents the stream of information, and not to be thought of as singular posts.

The work as critique

We have throughout the text at different points mentioned what our game is being critical of in its representation. To go back to the term "knowing-that" in contrast to "knowing-how" used by David Berry, we expressed that these are the characteristic of the contemporary user of streams. The user prioritizes obtaining quick and easily digestible data from the streams, however they aren't critical towards the information they are obtaining. As mentioned early this uncritical approach could be caused by the user's inability and lack of time to discern what information is needed and isn't, thus opting to consume it all. This consumption is also powered by the need to stay connected to the rest of the world. This behaviour leads to the contemporary user to fall under the category of a riparian citizen, caused by the need to stay

connected. In our work the snake represents the riparian citizen, as it is consuming information in an unfiltered manner.

The real-time streams promote this culture seeking a knowing-that, rather than the in depth knowing-how which requires more effort and time. Our work tries to express this stream of information simplified in social media icons. It critiques the contemporary society which seeks the easier and quicker route of gaining information, without filtering it. The game also shows that this cultural behaviour is not optimal should the user want to increase their know-how.
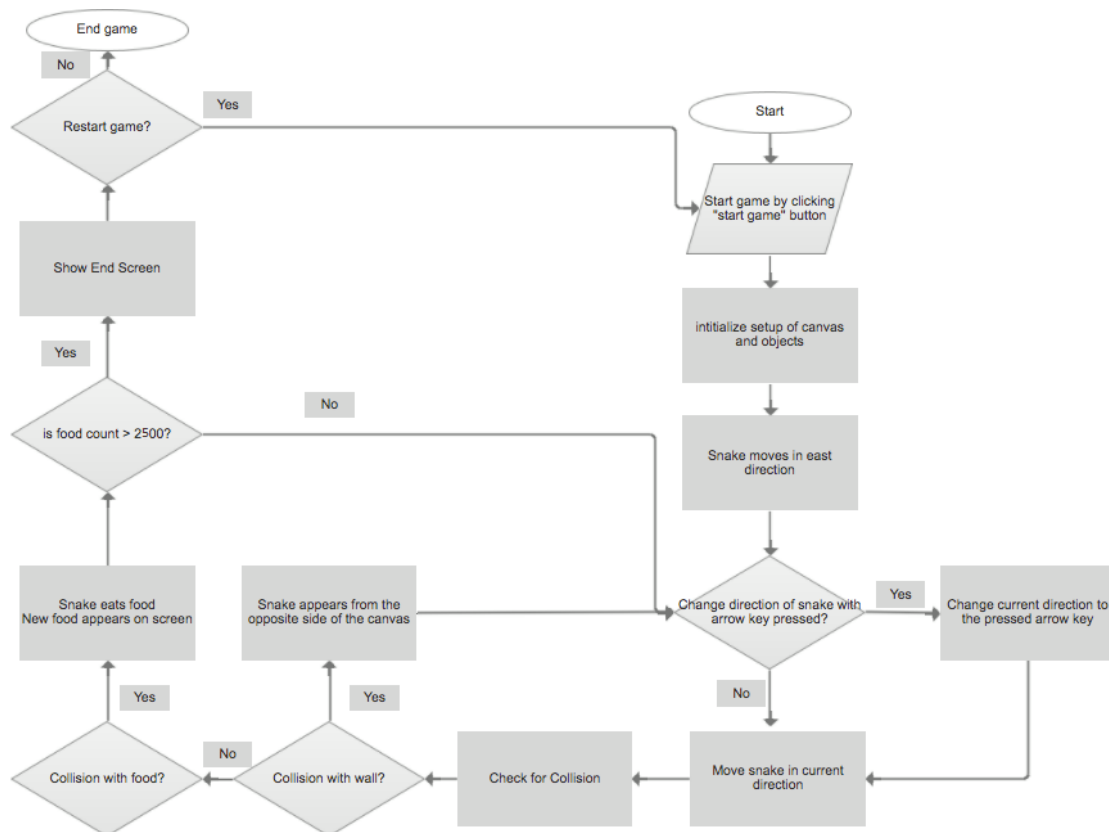
Summary

To summarize, we see our project as a critical stand on the way social media information is consumed in an uncontrollable and uncritical fashion. The snake represents the riparian citizens behaviour in real-time streams, where information and data is consumed in an unfiltered manner, caused by the need to stay connected to the world. By the use of the well known game, Snake, we have simplified and metaphorically visualized this behaviour. We wish to draw attention and critically look upon the increasing usage of real-time streams, and what culture it might promote.

Literature

Berry, David. The Philosophy of Software, Code and Mediation in the Digital Age. Palgrave, Macmillan, 2011.

Flowchart

Screenshot