Reflection Blog post

Reflection: write a blog post reflecting on your work so far. This should summarize what you have made, what you have learned, what has worked and what hasn't. Include pictures and details from in-class feedback sessions as well as any out-of-class interactions you have had. Style can be informal. 500 words min. Post the link here.

So far, I have managed to consolidate a theoretical framework within which to situate my project. Doing research on expressive games, walking simulators and hyperliterature has helped me determine the direction of my project as an experience with no goals or win-state save for enjoying oneself, discovering the environment and (possibly, if I can make it happen) *be* part of the environment and play through the perspective of something in it. I found written works by Jesper Juul, a ludologist, which provided the primary conceptual knowledge for my project and helped me better understand my own work— to say nothing of the fact that simply knowing that an analytical structure exists for non-traditional video games exists gave me the reassurance and confidence to pursue my own ideas.

My blog posts so far have mainly been idea dumps belying my haphazard initial approach to ideating and creating my project. What I didn’t write about all that much in the posts themselves was the research I was doing- reading Jesper Juul for example, and looking for other games and art for inspiration. Since there was not much tangible progress for the first few weeks, I felt somewhat disoriented and perhaps guilty for not having much in the way of deliverables. However, by the time the midterm paper rolled around, I realised I had a solid theoretical foundation to analyse my artistic influences with. Professor Heather’s artist recommendations were incredibly useful, of course, and I wrote about some of them in the midterm paper.

My research helped me figure out what gameplay would look like, with interactions in the VR experience and what a game with no win-state allows its players to do, or affect the environment it is set in. I learned about different types of decisions made by players in games, and how generally they are meaningful in that they make progress towards a win state.

My weekly meetings with Professor Farrow and after-class chats with Professor Heather have been invaluable in not only giving me direction and resources to look at, but also making me feel a little less like a tortured artist who finds it difficult to express ideas. Professor Farrow gave me several resources to help me with research, such as works by Jesper Juul and other literary sources as well as artists whose work might relate to mine. He encouraged me to start collecting these sources of information and inspiration which I’m now glad I can fall back on as I plan my project out. Our conversations have helped me gain some much-needed direction as well as clarity about what I want to do for my Capstone. They also provided me with an outside perspective which made me more aware of how my work might be experienced by its viewers/players- sort of like a theoretical play test.

I’ve been doing some ‘informal’ research as well, by listening to podcasts of people talking about games, gameplay, specific features of some games that make them unique and how some of these features are achieved. It’s sort of been like a cross between research and looking for inspiration. Seeing as I’ve never done a project on this scale or even something so entirely my own, I’ve been feeling lost and overwhelmed (as if it wasn’t clear enough already) that I’ve been scrambling to look for any guidance and information I can find. I also got into video games relatively recently so I’m still learning a lot. Professor Farrow also helped me realise that research does not have to be ‘academic’ in the strictest sense. Playing games counts as research if I’m learning something, as does watching gameplay and game review videos.

In terms of the Capstone seminar class, it was nice to have to write blogs to hold myself accountable for my progress, but I feel as though I have not been living up to the idea of the prototype, though I know it’s a loose term. I am finding it hard to track my progress since I don’t have many tangible deliverables, so I’m not even sure how to answer the “*what has worked and what hasn't*” part of the prompt. Or the “*what you have made*” part either, for that matter. I have several disparate ideas for elements I would like to have so it’s difficult for me to show a clear narrative (which to be fair is partly the point of this VR experience anyway so there’s that). Hopefully some of my accompanying sketches will help.

I also changed the aesthetic direction of my project a bit which I think was a good decision, and a result of my seemingly disparate attempts to look for inspiration which I realise now is paying off and hopefully will continue to do so. I also think that now I’ve gotten a lot of my ambitious (and in some cases, outlandish) ideas down on paper (or blogs), I can get down to actually creating what I’ve only thought or written about so far. I am using online tutorials, and my class lectures from this and previous semesters to create elements in my project and by the time I have my extended critique I should definitely have something to show.

My concerns: as I’ve said before, this is daunting. I’m doing absolutely everything; rigging, modelling, designing the environment, lighting, code, sound, and anything else that comes up. I am specifically apprehensive about the soundtrack. I think we discussed this in class a bit already; I am considering asking a friend to help a little with composing the soundtrack but I don’t know to what extent someone can help with this, and how collaborative this process needs to be.

Summary/explanation of my Capstone:

* A VR experience in which players/users can explore, interact or just look at their environment.
* The environment itself is a combination of a regular man-made room/gallery/exhibition space with fantasy elements in every area.
* Super super rough description- imagine a gallery space with something different in every exhibition space, which you might look at or interact with, and it’s different every time you experience it. Sort of like this video- (ziye liu- which I’ve referenced before)
* This combination will allow me to focus on the details of the elements I add to the environment.
* Also, I wanted to have a certain amount of randomness, however, I don’t think a procedural terrain will work since randomly generated elements in an environment may or may not seem coherent with each other.
* For the extended critique I plan to create a very (very) rough draft of the environment, possibly with placeholder assets and at least one of my own- to give an idea of what the project will look like.

In short, I don’t know what I’m doing, but I think I’m getting there. Probably.