Everything is Under Control

by Brian Tsukerman

For my final project for the semester, which will bridge both this class and Major Studio, I intend to make a 2.5-dimensional puzzle-platforming game entitled “Everything is Under Control”. This project puts the player in the role of a disembodied brain who has been hooked up to a mind-machine interface by a group of varied researchers in order to guide a robot. Presented with a selection of goals from multiple sources, your decision to obey or disobey them will develop the relationships over the course of the game towards a variety of different endings.

For this class, my goal is to develop a tutorial and example level, along with a collection of quality models, which will involve investigating some menu and GUI design methods, along with best practices in dealing with object physics and character animation. Fortunately level design, character control and enemy AI have all been covered, so I am hoping to have enough time towards the end to devote to making higher quality models. Meanwhile, my work for Major Studio will focus more on the games theme and how overall story and character design will accent that theme. Together, they will present a comprehensive foundation for developing the remainder of the game into something releasable, or at least portfolio-worthy.

Regarding class readings, I find that this project ties most closely into the first two readings, which were the Allegory of the Cave by Plato and Coffeehouse Conversations by Douglas Hofstadter. In the case of the Allegory of the Cave, it relates best to the players role as a disembodied brain, particularly in how you are given one explanation of the situation by the experimenters and instructed not to seek further information on it. While the player can choose to accept this explanation and simply finish levels as instructed, they can also choose to ignore this command and seek out terminals which will provide additional story and context. As for Coffeehouse Conversations, its exploration of artificial consciousness connects more with the role of the robot as the players “body.” Using a combination of narrative and scripts, I intend to provide the robot (currently named “Tele,” pronounced much like “melee”) with a naive but earnest personality in the same vein as Claptrap (from the Borderlands series) and WALL-E from the titular film. This should make Tele more personable and relatable, despite being a robot driven primarily by comparatively simple algorithms.

Thus far I have begun modeling the first couple of characters and filling out the tutorial level, as well as scripting the camera to follow the player. My intention is that over the course of the game your brain, the researchers, and the robot will develop a narrative that leads towards several unique conclusions dependent on whose goals you choose to follow or ignore. In this manner, it stresses the shared relationship of control that exists between the player, the developer, and the character respectively. It is a pattern that seems to recur in other situations, such as how an objects interpretation is shared between its user, the context, and the designer, and even in how peoples behavior is based upon their conscious choices, the environment, and their genes.