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CART 451 2232-AA

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CART 451 FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

TENTATIVE TITLE: ENJOY THE MOMENT

Overview

What is your theme/topic/goal/issue to be tackled - why is it important to you?

Enjoy the Moment's main theme is about identity, specifically about the dilemma of personal satisfaction. The work is a text adventure where the player, a nondescript peasant living near a tower, decides to leave behind their poor but peaceful life in the countryside in order to ascend the dangerous spire in the hope of living a possibly new and better life.

One of the reasons why I chose this theme was due to my personal dilemmas of living a working-class life: should I stay peaceful and complacent with my meager living, or should I overwork myself to rise above my current status and strive for more? Will reaching my goals truly make me happy? What will I strive for after that? I want to channel these feelings of existentialism into this work.

Another reason for choosing this theme was that I want to depict a form of elevation in relation to life. People are not born equal in terms of their social status; some folks end up with better living conditions than others. The act of climbing the tower in the game symbolizes a person of a "low" social class improving their way of life through struggle and perseverance. Of course, the peaceful path is also perfectly acceptable; players who don't choose to scale the tower will be able to interact with NPCs and live out their days without any conflict.

What form will your project evolve into - who is your audience?

The project will evolve into an interactive text adventure game where the player will have to explore a tower and collect items in order to defeat enemies. Alternatively, should the player decide to stay in their village, they can start an *ELIZA*-esque system where they endlessly talk to NPCs about mundane

affairs. The tower will consist of three floors, each containing a monster that has to be defeated with a specific item. Once the user reaches the top, an ending will play where the player avatar reaches a city inhabited by people that look similar to each other.

My target audience are those who feel a little aimless in life or are uncertain about the future. I want to allow players to experience a vertical journey where they have a set goal (reaching the top of the tower) and a horizontal journey of living day-to-day (hanging out in the village, chatting with the NPCs). For the vertical journey, I want aimless users to realize that it's alright to struggle when trying to reach an objective and that overtime, your efforts will bear fruit. The horizontal journey meanwhile, tries to tell uncertain players to relax and go about doing things one day at a time; your goals won't be reached today or tomorrow, but they will happen eventually if you take the first step forward on a new journey.

Discuss how each of the two readings listed above have inspired/motivated your current choices with regards to the project.

Mimi Onuoha's article inspired the game world of this work. The article mentions that when it comes to big data sets, the ones behind those sets have a tendency to marginalize people into different groups for the sake of convenience or political motivations. Onuoha succinctly summarizes this way of thinking with the passage "As we abstract the world, we prioritize abstractions of the world". *The Point of Collection* ended up shaping the game world: there is a peasant village (inhabited by "poor" people) located at the bottom of a cliff and a bustling city at the top; the only thing separating the two is a giant tower symbolizing "moving up in the corporate world". The world of *Enjoy the Moment* is a simplified look into class division.

Hito Steyerl's article mentions the concept of "dirty data": information of individuals seen as worthless to those with higher power. Essentially, "dirty data" is an "undesirable statistic". The "dirty data" in the context of the game world are the peasants: people living in poverty outside of society's comfort through no fault of their own. Inceptionism is the act of machines creating images based off of a massive database of user-generated data. These mechanical creations and creators are described as chimera-like beings sometimes possessing innumerable eyes due to the way they absorb information by way of constantly observing commodities, humans and animals. My work incorporates this idea in the form of the enemies the player faces in the tower: amalgamations of various creatures possessing numerous eyes, each observing the player and the environment. This design philosophy reflects the scrutiny and pressure one might feel while trying to change their life for the better.

What medium(s) do you intend to use and why?

I plan to build my game with the engine *Twine*, due to it usually being recommended for text adventures. *Twine* apparently also incorporates both HTML and CSS, so using it can be a good opportunity to practice those two coding languages. I don't know much about *Twine* at the moment, but with some practice I should be able to get comfortable with it!

HTML and CSS will mostly be used for UI. The overall [presentation will resemble retro adventure games seen on the NES or Famicom](#). The retro aesthetics are chosen due to my familiarity with creating pixel art. Furthermore, pixel art is relatively easy to make due to its minimalistic nature. Javascript will be used to incorporate the *ELIZA* chatbot; the bot will have its own dedicated HTML page and the user can return to the main game at any time with the press of a button located at the bottom of the webpage.

Photoshop and Piskel will be used for pixel art, as they are my-go-to software for that kind of artstyle. Another software I plan to use for pixel art is Pixel Studio; an Android app that allows me to create images and gifs while commuting (it's a great time-saver). The game's backgrounds will also be made with Photoshop: I plan to use photos from my personal collection and change their color palettes in order to accentuate the atmosphere. After the change in color, I will use dithering in order to give the images an archaic, computer-processed vibe.

What is your data: where will you get it, will it be collected - how and why?

I plan to use a Google Survey in order to get a better idea of what kind of story I want to tell. While I have an idea of the overall skeleton of the project, having additional feedback from others will solidify my workflow moving forward. In addition, the survey will give me a better understanding of how to tackle the themes and issues I present in the work; I might change its overall structure entirely: it might just be a story about the player solving the problems of the villagers, for example.

I plan to send the survey to the class Discord and reflect on the thoughts of my peers. The reason I chose my class is because everyone is on the same page when it comes to knowledge about the required readings of the final project. As such, asking questions about dirty data or marginalized groups should yield interesting answers. However, I should also consider extending the survey to any other CART 451 class, just to have a broader range of opinions. Of course, because this is a busy time of the semester, the questions should only demand quick answers consisting of a few words, so as to not take up too much of the others' time.

The collected data will be used to better structure the story into one that better relates to the target audience, by way of having believable issues related to how people's data is being used and treated by those in power and society at large.

The survey is planned be held from October 6th to October 13th.

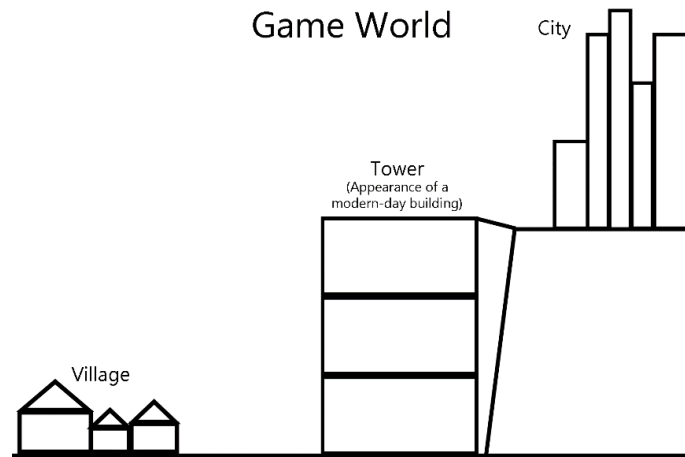
At a very high level : what are the algorithm(s) that will be used and implemented to achieve your intentions?

A Google Survey will be used to determine certain aspects of the story. The questions are as follows:

- What kinds of individuals would you feel are deemed as "dirty data" by powerful organizations and the like?
- If you were in a situation where you are living with a minimum wage, blue-collar job, but are able to live comfortably with said job; would you live that way for the majority of your life?
- What is your idea of freedom? Is having too much freedom a scary thing?
- When reaching one of your life's goals, do you feel a sense of emptiness?
- Do you feel empty when you are given a lot of free time?
- Do you believe that struggling is necessary for success? Would you be willing to sacrifice your well-being if it brought you closer to your goal?
- Do you believe that marginalization is a necessity to keep the population in an organized manner?
- Would you accept daily messages of encouragement even with the knowledge that it came from a bot?
- Do you find change in others scary? For example, if your friend got a new, well-paid job and their attitude changed entirely, would that make you feel anxious?
- Do you believe that marginalized groups that have to fend for themselves have a stronger sense of community?
- What gives you the motivation to reach your goals? Are there people you fight for/supporting you?

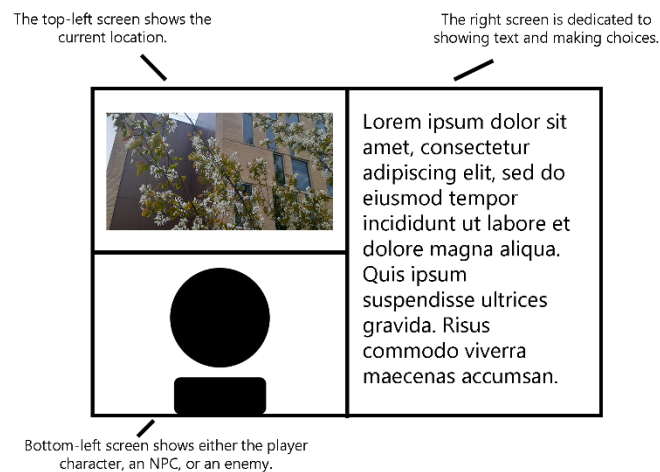
Storyboards

[\(For a better view of the images, click here\)](#)



A very simplified look of the world, showcasing the various elements of the story. Because the player will only see backgrounds, this image's purpose is to inform the creator of the general placements of said backgrounds.

UI Draft



[The UI is based on retro adventure games](#) and is meant to categorize elements in a simple way.

Village Locations



Central Fountain
(Hub area where all
the other locations
can be accessed)



Tavern



Church



Settlement



Outskirts



Forest leading to
the tower

Depending on how the story changes after running the survey, nearly none or all of these backgrounds will be used.

Tower Locations

Entrance



Level 1



Hub

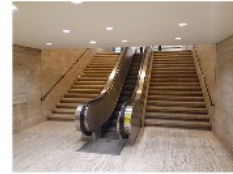


Tower Locations

Level 2



Hub



Level 3



Hub



Tower Locations

Rooftop (Ending Sequence)

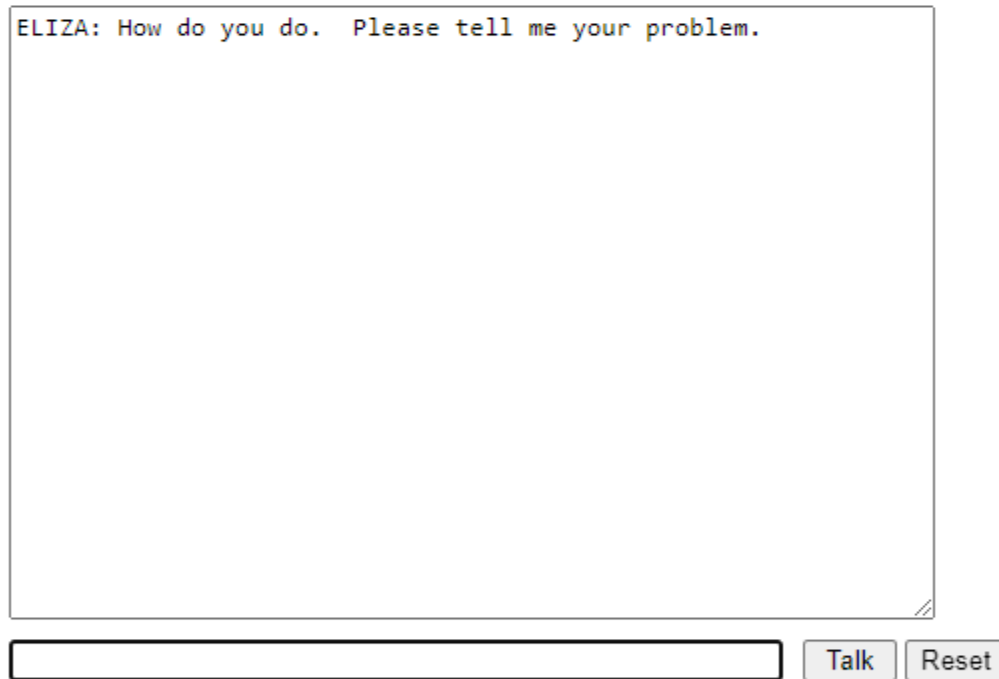


The pictures for the tower were chosen with the sense of “elevation” in mind; as the player climbs the establishment, the locations get more extravagant, until the user given an outside look of the landscape.

Inspirations

ELIZA

Eliza

A screenshot of the ELIZA chatbot interface. It features a large rectangular text area with a thin black border. Inside the text area, the text "ELIZA: How do you do. Please tell me your problem." is displayed in a monospaced font. Below the text area is a horizontal input field, also with a thin black border. To the right of the input field are two buttons: "Talk" and "Reset", both with a light gray background and a thin black border. The "Talk" button is slightly larger than the "Reset" button.

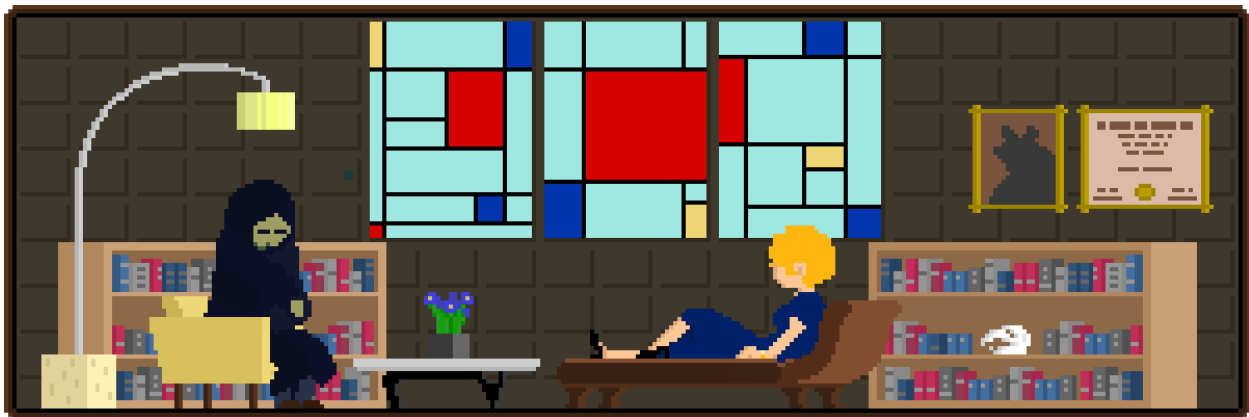
[Source 1](#)

[Source 2](#)

Created by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966, *ELIZA* is a “virtual therapist” chatbot capable of having simple conversations with a user. The way this works is that ELIZA asks a question to the user, the latter answers it and then the chatbot asks to elaborate on the answer; this cycle of questions and reflection goes on until the viewer is satisfied. Upon its release, users were enamoured by the program and became attached to it. One of the reasons for this phenomenon was due to ELIZA’s capacity to allow users to talk about their issues at length; it was a great vessel to vent their frustrations, despite the simplicity of the program.

My work incorporates the ELIZA program should player refuse to scale the tower or give up during exploration. Its use is to give the player a sense of ease and allow them to talk about their issues with a townspeople; the conversation ultimately turning into an infinite loop of the user's self-reflection. While this conversation might be a good diversion, it also distracts the player from completing the goal of the game. In a way, the ELIZA section is an alternative ending of sorts: the player spends the rest of their days chatting with the townsfolk, living peacefully (albeit somewhat unsatisfied).

PCKWCK



[Source 1](#)

[Source 2](#)

PCKWCK was a 2015 writing experiment where writer Joshua Cohen would spend the early afternoon writing an improvised story while streaming it to an audience of anonymous users. The concept of the project was based on Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*, a story about the adventures of a group of Englishmen; the stories would be made up as the writer went along, giving the series a very frantic pacing. At the end of every day, Cohen would look at the comments that were made during the stream and incorporate the users' ideas into his own story; some of the comments he received were even used word-for-word during a torture scene.

The Google Survey I plan to launch after this proposal will give numerous questions to the audience relating to marginalized groups in society and personal satisfaction. Once the survey ends, I will collect the answers and incorporate them into my story. The feedback might drastically change the setting of the project and might even change the goal of reaching the top of the tower; maybe it could be settling

down with someone in the village, or destroying the tower from within. The feedback will hopefully improve the story by making the way the issues are tackled and discussed more authentic.

Shadowgate



[Source 1](#)

[Source 2](#)

Shadowgate is a first-person adventure game that puts you into the shoes of a nameless hero who must brave a tower full of traps and monsters in order to defeat an evil warlock and prevent the revival of an ancient being known as the Behemoth. The game has a trial-and-error format where the player enters a room (or a set of rooms) and has to solve a puzzle or defeat an enemy with the use of items that they collected during the journey. Failure to solve a puzzle usually results in death and the player will be transported to the room prior to where they died. Furthermore, there are several rooms throughout the game whose purpose is to simply be a trap for the unassuming player and are unnecessary for completing the game.

My game's tower takes heavy inspiration from castle Shadowgate. The bosses guarding the next floor of the tower require an item found on the level they are currently on. However, each floor has several rooms and some of those rooms are either empty or have a death trap waiting for the player. This trial-and-error structure was chosen in order to give the tower a sense of danger: you never feel safe, as any

action you take can lead to your doom. Furthermore, this feeling of dread might cause the player to retreat back to the village, in order for them to have a sense of safety.