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CMSC388E

Rachel_Walter_Project2.zip

Overview of the Piece

My piece is a planet and orbiting asteroids to represent my Facebook friend data over time. To translate the concept into code, I created an asteroid class, which one instance represents one person on my friend's list. The asteroids enter my orbit, float in it, and leave it in the same manner that person came into or left my life. It shows both the quantity of my friends over time, as well as the quality of those friendships based on length of time together and closeness (indicated by the ring the asteroid orbits in).

Message/Themes

One message I wanted to convey was the changing landscape of friendships. I wanted to see how accurately my data from modern day social media aligned with psychological theories on relationships. In Robin Dunbar's theory, you have 3-5 close/intimate relationships, 15 people within your close friend group, 50 people who are friends but might not know very well, and finally 150 people who are within our social circles/community that we know. According to my own data categorization, I have 18 close friends (3-5 or 15-person ring), 31 friends (who would help make up the 50-person ring), 26 family members (which would be part of the 15-person ring according to Dunbar's theory), roughly 250 present or former classmates and coworkers (50-person ring), and 799 total "friends" within my whole social circle (150-person ring). Obviously being a social network, a much wider net is cast, but I think that my close friendship levels are accurate to the inner-rings of Dunbar's theory. Using space and planets to represent

myself and my relationships shows how huge modern social networks and connections are compared to the past.

I also used the space imagery to express loneliness. I feel like even though we are all more connected that ever, we are also lonelier than before. I can text someone and hear back in seconds, which makes a few hours wait make it seem like that person didn't care enough about you. People post pictures and posts that make it seem like they live perfect lives even when they might be struggling. It feels more difficult to be genuine and close in this environment. Space is vast and mostly empty. Even the moons in orbit around a planet are thousands of miles away. In the same way, all the people trapped within the orbits of your social circles might not be that close to you. Sometimes it might be best to not worry about the 799 friends orbiting all around you, but the 3-5 that make you feel most loved and valued and not alone.

Explanation of Data

The data came from my personal Facebook data. You can request Facebook's data on you from their "Access Your Information" tool (https://www.facebook.com/your_information/). I used the HTML format because I needed to look through the data myself to add the categorization of closeness to me. I decided to mark people as family, close friends, romantic partners (my inner circle); my other friends; classmates, coworkers; family friends, acquaintances; and people who I dislike but friended out of necessity/to save face. This process also helped anonymize the data (each person is a generic asteroid, not a specific point). My data stretched from April 2011 to March 2019 and I have 799 Facebook friends, so I had a lot to sift through!

After recording the basic new friend data from Facebook, I also went back through and added in important life events. For example, I added relationship beginnings and break ups,

friend falling outs, a grandparent's death, etc. This makes the data more personal to my life and more interesting visually as sometimes asteroids suddenly leave orbit. It also acted as a way for me to reflect on my relationships with others. Do I have more close friends now than in high school? Why do I consider myself closer to one person as opposed to another even if I've known the former longer?

The rings of orbit for my planet represent the level of closeness I feel towards individuals in that category. The color of the asteroid indicates the specific category of relationship. The use of color and space creates a visual divide so the viewer can see roughly the number and grouping of friends. The asteroids enter and leave the orbit based on when they joined my social network and if their relationship to me changed over time. I tried to play with balance some by mixing up structured elements. For example, I used a random asteroid shape for each person and the radius of orbit is allowed a range of plus or minus 15. This gives unity to the asteroids and orbits without being too vanilla. By putting the planet that represents myself at the center, I create framing. This data is my world and all the friends in my network I see in relationship to myself, not to each other.

Critique/Advice

I got a lot of wonderful advice from Astha and Amy about this project! I met with them after class on March 8th. Amy's particle system demo, especially using images with a color tint and how to optimize programs, was super helpful! Astha also suggested using multiple asteroid images to give it a more organic feel. In class right before spring break, Amy suggested I added a time indicator to the project, since the change over time is so important. I added a small text in the upper left corner to help the viewer track the passing of time.

Sources

Tutorials

- Coding Train Solar System Tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8SiJ-RmeHU
- Processing Documentation for loadTable(): https://processing.org/reference/loadTable_.html

Other Sources

- Dunbar's Friendship Circle Sizes: https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-many-friends-do-you-need/
- Images in the project are all from Google Images but I forgot to track their sources ☹