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Human Computer Interaction within Industry Tools

Bsc. Computer Games Programming

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**Abstract**

This paper follows the development of a 3D computer games tool powered by a human computer interaction based device, the Microsoft Kinect.

Research was based around three fundamental areas required for the project. Human computer interaction (HCI), Image (more specifically the hand) recognition in real-time and finally terrain deformation within 3D graphics.

Using previously gained industry knowledge and details gained from my areas of research, an initial design prototype was created, followed by a small amount of user testing. Testing for ease of use, productivity and comparing against gestures natural within the real world.

**Acknowledgements**

Neil Holmes, Tom Gaulton, Terry Greer, Test Subjects.

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**Introduction**

**Research Question**

In the modern day games studio, artists and designers are often found using keyboard and mouse input to create scenes, art assets and such; for games. However, creative people have a tendency to work better with their hands. The keyboard and mouse input may limit their ability to do this. Posing the question, is current computer hardware limiting usability with its non-natural interface?

I aim to create a simple tool (in the form of a terrain editing system), where the input is based upon the user within their 3D environment (via the use of the Microsoft Kinect device) as well as using other inputs such as the users’ voice. This creates an interface more in tune with its users’ tendencies resulting in the exploration of the users’ potential productivity gain and a potential higher quality of work. Where by the main complication in implementation will be finger tracking and hand gesture recognition, due to variations in hand size and shape of different users as well as different mentalities of how they believe the gestures should work.

**Rationale for Project Choice**

I have had a life-long passion for tools within computer games, trying to make interfaces and systems as simple as possible for the user to interact with. My inspiration for this project was found whilst on work placement at ‘Blitz Games Studios’. Whilst there I spent time working on their tool system (‘Blitz Tech’) as well as working closely with game teams and at points the Microsoft Kinect. Whilst working I noticed how the artists, designers and animators used real-life models and scenarios to compare with their plans or creations. Using pen and paper as well as other input devices such as tablets to draft work before creating the asset within a 2D or 3D graphics computer tool.

With this, I have first-hand experience of how an artist works and how a programmer creates software. However the two do not necessarily correlate due to the differences in rational between artists and programmers. To expand on this, I have experience with user interfaces, tools graphics/rendering and the Microsoft Kinect.

**The Current State of Human Computer Interaction**

Human computer interaction (HCI) is an astronomical field of ongoing research. However the majority of such research is specific towards the general user and or non-computer user, attempting to allow non-technical people to interact with computer hardware. The problem lies in extracting data from the user in a manor most natural to them and evaluating the data for use with a device, as doing such is hard to generalize. Resulting in software that feels natural to some and not to others.

This problem is reduced when looking into to HCI within the games industry, as we can make the assumption that the user is somewhat technically minded. Already the user should have an understanding of current HCI making use of both the standard keyboard and mouse, as well as other artist specific input devices.

**System Requirements**

Given the problem of non-natural HCI interfaces for creative peoples, specifications for a natural HCI interface can be formed.

An artist should be able to move a gizmo (a replacement for the mouse cursor in three dimensional space) about the terrain environment using nothing but there hand. Once positioned to the users requirements, the user need only use their other hand to apply the selected brush to the terrain in an area about the gizmo.

The user should be able to change the selected brush via a graphical user interface (GUI) based menu system, via the use of voice commands and hand gestures. The GUI menu system should also allow access to other mandatory tasks associated with a terrain based tool system. This includes creating a new default terrain, opening existing terrains and saving the currently active terrain. Along with this editing settings about the size and strength of the currently active brush should be performed via voice and gesture based commands however this does not require the user to traverse a menu system and instead should be performed at any point during runtime.

To achieve the above outcomes the following steps need to be fulfilled.

* Implement a simple C++ terrain rendering system using Microsofts Direct3D 11.
* Allow the terrain system to be deformed via the use of the traditional keyboard and mouse.
* Consult potential users on gestures for different operations.
* Implement the first draft of gesture based commands.
* Test first implementation with potential users.
* Improve first draft based on feedback from initial testing
* Consult potential users on voice commands for performing different operations within the system.
* Implement first draft of voice based commands
* Test improved gesture commands and draft voice commands with potential users.
* Finalize gestures and voice commands based upon user feedback collected during testing.

Overall, the goals for the project are as follows.

* Create a simple terrain editing system powered by a natural human based input device.
* Attempting to prove that both productivity and quality can be improved by reducing the barrier that exists between creative people and the tools extant within industry.

**Methodology**

**Design Methodology**

Given that hardware tessellation is implemented within the Direct3D 11 SDK I have chosen this to be the graphical API I will use, as tessellation could be used to smooth the terrain with little overhead. Due to this I will also be implementing the program using the C++ programming language. Not only for the easier implementation of hardware tessellation but also for the speed and performance gain that present with the programming language. The Kinect SDK also has a C++ implementation which again has performance gains over other language implementations. The speed benefits from using a low level language such as C++ allows for fast processing of the vast amounts of data that will be gathered by the Kinect camera and microphones.

The project was initially drafted via the use of unified modelling language (UML) diagrams. The object-orientated behavior of the C++ programming language allows UML to easily layout and design classes and interfaces required for the project.

**The Methodology behind the Implementation**