CART 315 – Design Journal – Game Analysis Steve Berthiaume

*Note: Due to constant issues with my Github, it seems at some point the original version of this document was deleted along with dysfunctional repositories that failed to store anything. This version of the document is thus a recreation, lacking much of my original insight or thoughts because those no longer exist.*

A game I’ve been recently playing which has interested me greatly is Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney Trilogy. It consists of the fourth through sixth mainline entries of the Ace Attorney franchise, a series of visual novels known for their court drama and fantastic soundtracks. Part of what makes the mechanics of the series so fascinating to me is the way the series expertly explores lock and key design by making all sorts of logic puzzles for trial sections which require keys found naturally through investigating that you may have forgotten about. The feel of getting to investigate a situation firsthand (or being thrust into something with zero prep or warning) makes the satisfaction of exposing contradictory facts and statements in a trial setting all that much greater. This is helped by the stellar animation and sound design, which take the scene from a tense, desperate situation to one of triumphant turnabout, as the music blasts a victory cry and the opposing characters are left baffled. To break down the mechanics further, investigations involve navigating locations involved in a crime and finding evidence firsthand. This often includes discovering what seems like trivial information, such as newspaper clippings or objects received from a defendant or suspect. Along the way, as the defense attorney you somehow always seem to discover facts unknown to the prosecution or police, needing to reveal it in court at the right time to make your case.

As for the actual trial sections, the game’s puzzles are presented in the form of witness testimony, through which you need to identify a contradictory statement as well as the evidence which conflicts with it yourself. The series has had stumbles in the past in which you may accidentally beat the game to the punch, presenting a solution for a puzzle later down the line and failing the current one. Thankfully, the series has improved on this issue over time. Looking for what I’d like to take away from the series, part of that is of course the ingenuity involved in lock and key puzzle development. Lock and key designs usually suffer from an inflexibility of keys, or from the locks being far too obvious or repetitive. Ace Attorney’s obfuscation of the locks and natural incorporation of an array of keys helps relieve this issue. Additionally, while I’m completely incapable of creating music and not the greatest animator, the idea of providing contrasting animations, music or writing as a reward to a puzzle is something worth carrying forward with my own work as it greatly amplifies the feeling of a reward in a player to see the situation change as a result of their work. As someone whose past work involves many puzzle games, there’s quite a lot I can bring forward in terms of improving lock and key design and reward moments.