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CART 211 - Proposal for the Final Website

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Introduction

This website joins the discourse on the subject of the potential of social networks and human behaviours related to the making of relationships in online video game communities. We discuss the idea that relationships formed in massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGS) transcend the specific context of the game, and is able to engage the player on other levels outside the medium. This means that the website and the Internet that hosts the game can become a gate for designing experiences that are meta-reflective in nature.

Self-presentation and the Internet

We begin this exposition of online social networks and human socialization processes by arguing that players seek a rewarding, affective experience that differs qualitatively on the Internet. If we assume that there is a specific human motivation for playing video games that only run on the Internet, such as MMORPGS, versus choosing to play a single-player game, then that specific motivation can tell us about the nature or potential of the medium itself, which is both the online video game, and the Internet that hosts it. This is to say that we may understand the monk by his innards. If the Internet is the meditative monk, and the specific human motivation to play a video game online is the innards, then we may use the innards itself as a royal road to understand the Internet. Park and Chung found that interactivity in the spaces of MMORPGS had the biggest impacts on self-presentation desire (2377). By this reasoning, it is not folly to say that the Internet is an intrinsically interactive place, given how it impacts self-presentation desires[1].

Social Network Theory and the Internet

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[1] See self-presentation theory for more details.

Secondly, we argue that online video games can tell us much about the social nature of the Internet, and how this analogous relationship directly maps onto human social laws. For example, we can assume that most people in an online video game do not know each other very well, with the exception of those in closely-knit communities, a.k.a guilds. The strength of the relationship "tie" between individuals between different guilds (even more so if they are enemy guilds) can be regarded as "weak", while those ties between individuals of the same guilds can be regarded as more likely to be "strong" (operationally, this means if they are people who share an affective bond of intimacy and interact also outside the usual channels, over a long period of time). Following that logic, if the weak ties' hypothesis of Granovetter (that states that it is weak ties and not strong ties that allow the most novel information to circulate) is correct, then weak ties represented on the Internet analogous to those in online video games actually suffice to distribute novel information about group dynamics, or even career mobility (both rewarding "gains") that can benefit individuals and their respective communities (Szell et al. 328). For example, we can see that jumping from a reddit thread to the other makes the person more knowledgeable about a new community's perspective, and vice-versa. Similarly, being in a professional LinkedIn group by knowing only one acquaintance in that group (a weak tie) can plausibly lead to a career opportunity.

Therefore, we can respond to the mainstream idea that Internet relationships are less important than real life, or more "superficial", with the finding that they are actually very similar in certain areas such as how information-carrying connections work out naturally in terms of density of information.

Web Application Proposal

Keeping these ideas in mind, we want to emphasize the two main selling points: the power of interactivity in the spaces of MMORPGS and its impact on self-presentation desire as understood in self-presentation theory, and the information richness of weak ties in social ties theory. Both of these elements can be played with and designed in such a way as to fit in an overall web application

according to what is called Affective Computing in computer science. The main goal is to allow computing to simulate human emotional expressions—in computation arts terms, it would mean to use the website to convey human emotions in such a way as to be similar to real life emotions, that the contents of the website should facilitate the communication in the affective context (Argasiński and Węgrzyn 529).

Conclusion

The proposal for the final website is to use the full medium of both browser, website and video game together to create an interactive story game which will be about the dramatic events surrounding a MMORPG's guild leader private life, and the player's decision to betray or help his friends in-game and out-game. The climax is the player's frustration to control the outcome of the story and the browser's (and the website) refusal to cooperate in the midst of ultimate crisis. This will be highlighted by extending the boundaries of the game to outside the p5.js canvas (the guild friends list lays outside the canvas) and showing how in-game and out-game can interact and play with our emotions. It is a choose your own adventure RPG (with some strategy guild management mechanics) mixed with p5.js sketches. We will use meta-reflection and distance engagement processes (breaking the fourth wall, for example, such as in Atlus' Catherine).

References

Argasiński, Jan K., and Paweł Węgrzyn. "Affective Patterns in Serious Games." *Future Generation Computer Systems*, vol. 92, 2019, pp. 526–538., doi:10.1016/j.future.2018.06.013.

Miller, Carolyn Handler. *Digital Storytelling: A Creators Guide to Interactive Entertainment*. CRC Press, 2019.

Park, Seung-Bae, and Namho Chung. "Mediating Roles of Self-Presentation Desire in Online Game Community Commitment and Trust Behavior of Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2011, pp. 2372–2379., doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.07.016.

Szell, Michael, and Stefan Thurner. "Measuring Social Dynamics in a Massive Multiplayer Online Game." *Social Networks*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2010, pp. 313–329., doi:10.1016/j.socnet.2010.06.001.

Similar Projects

Most Twine Games: https://johnayliff.itch.io/seedship

The Stanley Parable

Kingdom of Loathing

Yume Nikki

Device 6

Gone Home

*Oxenfree*

Her Story

What Remains of Edith Finch

Appendix A - Technical Details

The specifics of the basic website are that it is a static, single page. Some of the pages in the website are actually the display of the playable character's inventory and choices journal. The features of the website are: flex-boxed elements, CSS components, JavaScript and Node.js server-side for handling animations, forms, local storage, Twine, and a P5.js canvas.

It is not sure at this point how much of it will be text or a combination of simple pixel art/2D graphics. The website displays either a Twine object or a rendered p5 canvas, or both (sketch integration in Twine passages is possible) which is setup in the centre of the website. The goal is to use both JavaScript for client-side interactivity with the game, and server-side functions to do something original on the background in other pages of the website (e.g., with local storage, to keep track of what the user has done in the story for example). This dual interactivity will influence the story of the game in a canvas in the middle of the website. I will attempt to use the website's pages to tell the experimental narrative. For example, some pages could act as folder tabs visually and reveal some information about the state of the story and what is to come next. Another tab can act as the game map. The website's theme will be situated in the context of postmodernist video games; it is experimental and it uses meta-thinking (breaking the fourth wall) to push its agenda (e.g., Atlus' Catherine).

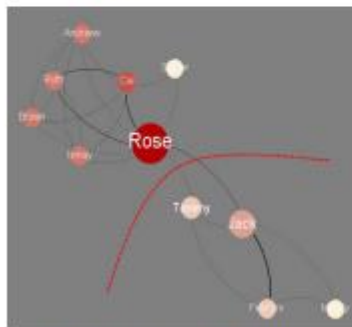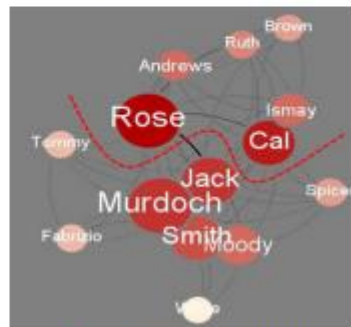# Appendix B – Affective Nodes in Story Characters
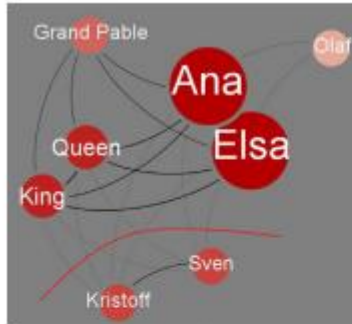
(a) On an early phase of 'Frozen (2014)'.
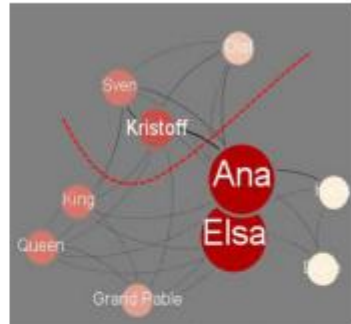
(b) After a climax of 'Frozen (2014)'.

(c) On an early phase of 'Titanic (1997)'.

(d) After a climax of 'Titanic (1997)'.

Appendix C – Narrative Examples

In-game

- You see Adventus, the guild master of Heroic Rabbits approaching your guild house with a murderous intent in his eyes. He carries with him a great sword imbued + 15, the red glow of which intimidates a newbie in your guild into escaping shamelessly. Adventus sends you a duel request, and you prepare your macros as…

   (Suddenly, your browser throws you an alert message (this really happens). Your mom is calling… You forgot to bring your lunch to school!)

- The guild raid is nearing its end, but you see no signs of your main healer, Nancy43.

   (Nancy43 is texting you in your friend chat log: "Oops, I forgot to finish a paper for tomorrow! Good luck for the raid lol, but like we had no chance anyway :/).

   You decide to…

   A) Expel her from the guild.

   B) Send a message of peace and forgive her.

   C) Tell her she's a *****.

Out-game

   The grey clouds around your apartment forecast an ominously dark day. You put on a hoodie and venture outside. The text browser that you use to review your guild storage's resources is still open in one of the sixteen tabs on your iPhone's Firefox browser. One of the guildies, Jenna Clayton, just sent you a text message that she heard one of her friends from another guild say that their guild master mentioned your name. Something about "knowing where he lives in real life".

   A) Respond that she shouldn't take rumors seriously.

   B) Say that you're actually worried about this, because lately you've felt observed…

C) Close the browser and come back later. (This closes the browser for real)