Tetris essay

Reflections on the effects of this change on the game structure and the game experience

A good exercise for designers is playing games and think about how different modifications would make them better or worse. This way, we get aware of different aspects involved in the game and the effects they can have.

Another good way to get started in game design is looking for pleasurable experiences in unusual places of daily life, like trying to cross the road without stepping on any stripe, or trying to wake up before the alarm rings. It is a way to begin thinking about rules.

In this prototype, we used a combination of both methods to add a new vector to our game. Instead of giving the intended use to the peripherals of a computer, that are supposed to help us to organize and help us to progress in our tasks, we created a social activity by splitting up the tasks of the user in two: one person would be able to see the screen while the ability to react to what is going on relies on other person, that controls the input with the keyboard.

The same way this idea is an exciting change for some person that just want to use its computer, we considered it would drastically change the player experience in a single player game, and it would be particularly interesting in a game that requires concentration and fast reaction.

Keeping this in mind, we came up with a co-op tetris, were the order that typifies this game becomes a hectic social play, with room for improvisation and negotiation. We considered the idea of organizing tournaments with this approach, but through playtesting we identify it more interesting as an ice-breaking or party game. The game would still work if players develop a great communication system as a team and for sure beating others teams or the high score might be rewarding, but a main part of the amusement resides on the way players get to create this system while experiencing the game's pressure. The player is not able to imagine the challenges that can emerge on this situation until they experience it. One of the most common ones we could observe was the inconsistency on getting to an agreement to make clear what moving the piece to the right or left meant. This was caused because the players are positioned one in front of the other, so what is physically the space at the right for one, is the left for the other one. The classic tetris game was a great choice in this case because while the game is slow in the beginning, players start negotiating this kind of issues and experiment a learning curve through the practice of their method, but soon the game starts to speed up and the tension make it difficult to the player to control the way they act. Use of the real "left" and "right" concepts emerge, instead of those agreed upon, and the body

language starts gaining control over the situation, not often leading to succeed in the game. When the screen is full of figures placed in a chaotic way and there is no way to improve the situation, players would just laugh and enjoy sharing that moment, when they got to know more about the other player and about themselves.

Following Huizinga, who argued for play as an elemental form of interaction and a contributor to culture, we encourage everyone to experiment and socialize through playing.

This physical modification also gets Tetris closer to non-digital games, in the sense that usually players doesn't try to play the game in a different way that the one proposed by the system. Playing our modified version, instead, inspires alternative forms of playing and "house rules", more common in board games or playgrounds. The meta-game gains importance and the challenge of experimenting and trying to master new ways of play can be more pleasurable than the game itself. This is also the reason why we are just using an online version of tetris instead of implementing a specific one to be played cooperatively, even though we agree that it would be interesting providing more sound feedback in order to let the player that cannot see the screen experiment victory the same way the other player does when seeing that a piece fits perfectly or some completed rows disappear. But the classic game's feedback is still enough to keep the "blind" player engaged.

With this design, we contribute on the increasing community of indie developers interested in the social element that surrounds videogames, where the creators of *B.U.T.T.O.N.* place themselves.