John O'Sullivan
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Professor Fox Harrell
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Exploring Memory

The focus of this assignment was to use still images as a constraint in the blending of non-digital and digital media. My group and I decided to achieve this by remediating a story into a video game, specifically using photos as the unifying element. Our project describes a prototypical grandfather's experiences in World War II with photographs, and then remediates these photographs into a virtual world to allow you to peruse them and consume the story at will.

Our remediation chains multiple concepts to create a final whole, first beginning with the concept of a memory. A memory is unquantifiable and cannot be shared, except in the form of a story – at best, somebody can recount their experiences to you as they, often imperfectly, recall them. This makes photography an incredibly helpful tool for sharing memories – as long as the image is preserved, there remains an unchanging view of a place as it appeared at that moment. Baudrillard says an object photographed is protected from aesthetic transfiguration, such as the transfiguration made by a grandfather struggling to describe a hazy memory. A photo is a snapshot clearer than nearly any memory, calling to mind Sontag as he said, "To collect photos is to collect the world."

While one photograph may bring back memories, juxtaposing multiple photos can allow you to tell a story through a series of captured moments. Popularized in the 20th century, collage rearranges images and sometimes text to create an effect greater than any of the individual images alone. This juxtaposition is an example of hypermediacy, asking the viewer to see all the images as part of a continuous whole – as opposed to a series of windows into memory, as one might view individual photographs through the lens of immediacy. In our project, we created a virtual collage that allowed us to tell a story that would have spanned multiple years in the grandfather's life. Using this virtual world freed us to easily create a three dimensional space for the photos, lending greater choice in narrative. As Bolter and Grusin might explain, the immersive reality created by a computer game tries to inspire a feeling of presence where you cease to mentally separate yourself from the viewed reality. However, this is only achieved by heavily relying upon conventions created by film and television like the first-person camera, forcing us to contend with hypermediacy as the means to create a sense of immediacy. By remediating our collage into a game, we create a sense of

presence in the grandfather's mind that would be missing if the photos were just viewed in a scrapbook or webpage. This unifies the central conceit of our project, which is that of a grandfather inviting you to explore his memories of the war rather than him explain them to you.

The implementation of this project consisted of four separate parts: writing the grandfather's story, gathering the representative photos, and implementing the active website. We decided to focus the grandfather's story on his time in World War II as we knew it would provide a large number of old and emotionally charged photographs. We tried to gather photos that represented a "life before the war" including, family, friends, and a love interest to lend a sense of perspective, and then take the user through training, departure to Europe, combat, and the return to home. With a large bank of photos, we organized them into a made-up chronology to support our story and set about creating the model in Google SketchUp. To maximize the player's choice in how they viewed grandpa's story, we opted for a five-spoke design where the player begins in the center and each off-shoot contains one part of the story. This allowed for groups of related photos to complement each other and tell a coherent story segment, while giving the player multiple paths on which parts of the story they want to view first. Lastly, with the model made we set about creating the story front-end and interactive functionality. The front-page which sets up the story was made with simple HTML/CSS and acts to frame the player's perception of the game before they see it. To implement the interactive world, we imported the .fbx model into Unity3D, added the key elements, and exported into the Unity Web Player.

Were we to continue developing the project, there are many potential avenues to explore. While the player is able to navigate the world and view the images, incorporating hand-written notes near the photos would allow for another dimension of narrative depth. Additionally, we could find a primary source in the form of a veteran or their descendant who has a large number of photos from the time. This would let us tell a truly continuous story, as opposed to cobbling one together from Google Images. We also didn't incorporate any sound into the game, limiting the sense of presence in the world. Had there been footsteps, or perhaps a radio in each corridor playing a different song, the space could have felt much more real. Lastly, we could have explored more lay-outs for the gallery including multi-leveled structures, intersecting corridors, and teleporters that could act as "hyperlinks" around the gallery. There are many affordances created by a virtual space that a normal gallery could never have, and it would be very exciting to explore them.