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Rapid Idea Prototyping

Midterm Project Reflection

10/17/14

Why did I make the design choices I made?

Of the games we had to choose from for inspiration, the Marriage was the most interesting to me. I liked that it was open-ended and experimental, and I was impressed by how effectively the designer used the game mechanics as his expressive medium. It also helped that the Marriage was the most accessible game, and could be played through in about ten minutes, which let me get started on the creation process sooner.

Once I had settled on my inspiration, I needed to pick a medium. What materials would I use? I had already created a multitude of card and board games, even a few pen-and-paper or verbal games. I knew I wanted to challenge myself with something new, so I decided that I would translate the Marriage to an on-your-feet, active game-- what my friend calls a “playground” game-- where players must move their bodies in order to play.

From there, I was reminded of a playground game that I play with my close friends where you push against each other’s hands to try to make the other person move their feet or lose their balance. I figured that would be a good starting point for my translation, since the biggest theme I saw in the Marriage was balance. In the video game, you have to balance resources and needs between the blue square and the pink square- often the two squares have conflicting needs. In my translation, players must push against or move their hands away from the other player’s hands, according to opposing instructions. Sometimes conflicting goals in my game can cause a player to lose their footing or to fail their current goal. This dynamic reflects the balance between the two squares in the original game.

After I had settled on the main concept, I moved onto translating more specific aspects of the Marriage into my game. For example, the Marriage comes with no instructions or tutorial. If you look under help, it will simply tell you that your primary control is to mouse over different game entities. I thought it would be an interesting challenge to emulate no instructions in an analog game. The best translation I could think of for this, in a game with no assets beyond the two players, was to still instruct both players on the basic rules of the game (or else I would have no deliverable), but, as a rule, the players cannot talk during the game. So, they may have separate goals, but they have to figure out how to communicate, to instruct the other player on what they both need to do to accomplish that goal.

With that, I arrived at my first iteration of the game, where I used cards and keywords to give the players their different goals. Cards would read something like, “Extend Left Fast Release”, meaning you would have to extend your left arm as fast as you could while not touching the other player’s hand. I split the goals cards evenly between the two players and then laid them out on tables behind the other player so that only the one player could read them. I did not like the way that this worked because the game would end very quickly and there wasn’t a clear order or any constraints in which players were supposed to accomplish their goals.

So, for my second iteration, I used computer-generated goals that would dynamically change during gameplay. This helped me get closer to the randomness and other things beyond the player’s control featured in the Marriage. I also took advantage of the computers to generate sound and visuals to create an atmosphere for people playing the game. I wanted them to feel more immersed in the experience, to feel less awkward about touching each other’s hands. Although sound and visuals are something the Marriage purposefully underrepresented, I believe that they can be a powerful medium that works in tandem with the game mechanics to create a more complete interactive experience. So, this is one area where I specifically strayed from the theme of the original game.

I liked where I ended up for my second iteration. So, for my third iteration, I refined the constants from the second iteration- like how long a player has to accomplish a goal- to give this version more polish than the last. That way, I could see if there were any problems that stood out after a closer inspection this time around.

Overall, I’m proud of myself for taking on such a challenging design. Working from a very abstract game, in a medium had never designed for before, I learned a lot. That’s the biggest strength of my game: its value as a learning experience from a design perspective. I think the weakness of my game is whether or not it actually conveys the idea I was trying to get across. How well does my game represent a relationship the way the Marriage does? I don’t really know. I would need to spend more time with it to find out. Looks like I’ll have to keep iterating then!