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CART 351
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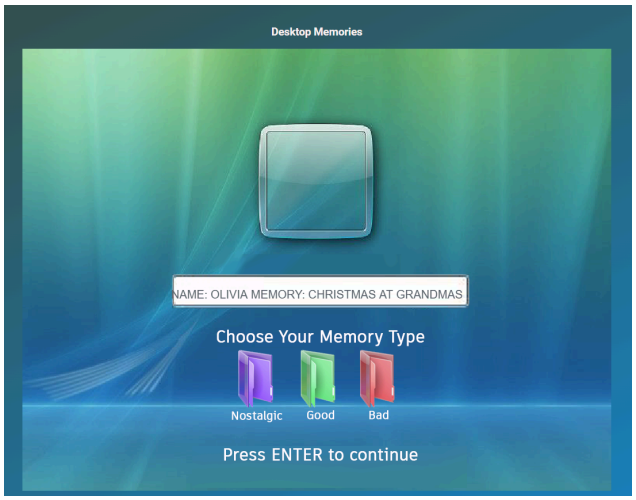
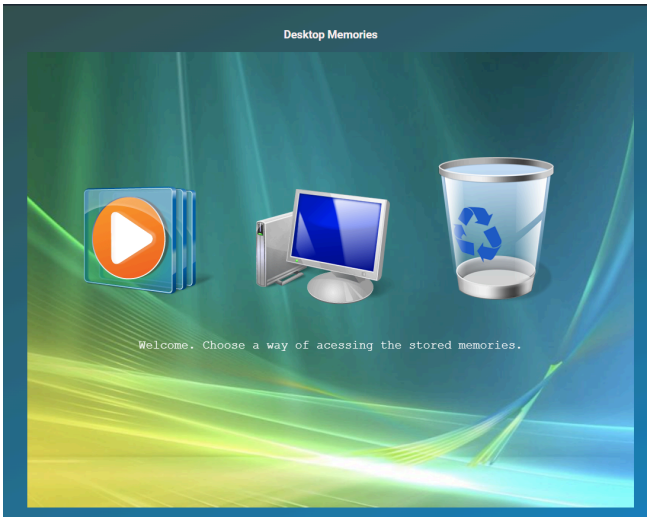
Project 03 Reflection: Desktop Memories

For project 03, the goal was to develop off of what we learned doing project02 “Fortune Rookie” in order to expand it into a more cohesive experience. While we liked the idea of a networked space powered by p5, we wanted project03 to represent the inputted data in more dynamic, unexpected ways. Instead of assigning data to the user, as was seen in project 02, we decided that project03 “Desktop Memories" would instead encourage the users to input short descriptions of memories they have, before selecting a category it falls into. This way, the final visualizations would feel more meaningful, and all client input stored in the MongoDB database would end up representing a more personal aspect of each user.

At its core, “Desktop Memories” is a series of data visualizations. However, as mentioned before, the data being visualized is based on memories, creating a more intimate link between past and present users. Centering heavily around imagery pertaining to past Windows versions and older technology, the application’s aesthetics lean into what is nostalgic to us (the creators) personally, but also express a digital/ technological era pre social media. One could say it is a different type of network.

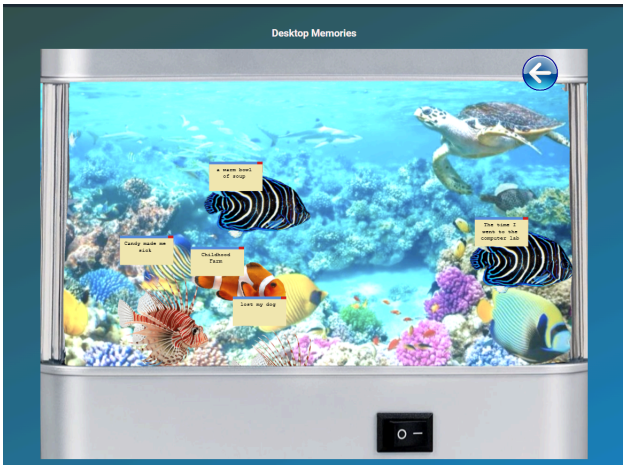


The application opens with a prompt that encourages a new user to input their name, a short memory and to choose from a nostalgic, good or bad memory. After these have been inputted, the program proceeds to the Desktop state where the user will have the choice of choosing from three different icons: a media player, a computer and a recycling bin, each of these leading to a different visualization. Once in, all the visualization states are navigable seamlessly through the back arrow button, which will lead back to the desktop.

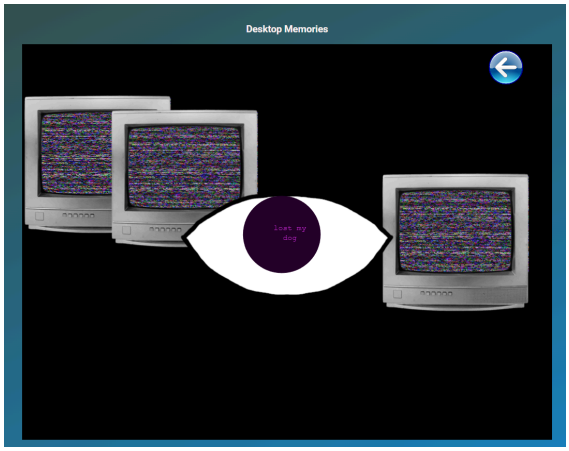


The first visualization takes the form of a media player, and displays every memory stored in the Mongo database as a default ‘avatar’ sprite as they glide along a blue path. While they are all identical visually, each avatar shows the name of the user associated with the entry it represents. This feature becomes more meaningful once one tries to interact with the moving sprites. Clicking on one of the green avatars will actually reveal the type of memory stored in its respective entry, with a blue flower plush representing nostalgic memories, a red error button representing bad memories and a yellow version of the green sprite representing positive memories. While an initial glance at the sprites presents them to all seem the same, a small bit of exploration reveals complexities and similarities between individuals, setting the theme for the Media Player visualisation.

Back to the homescreen, the second visualization following the media player is the My Computer icon. Clicking on this icon will activate its respective state and visualisation. Interestingly, this one was actually the first that we worked on and was the first idea for a visualisation as well. While it strays away from the old Windows theme, it emphasizes the nostalgic aspect of the application's experience by representing the memories as fish in an early 2000s style aquarium nightlight. Although not interactive, each fish represents a different type of memory, much like the sprites in the media player visualisation. The clownfish represent "nostalgic" memories, the blue fish "good" memories and the lionfish "bad" memories. However, this is the only visualization where the content of the memories themselves is visible, with each fish dragging with it a windows style popup which displays the memory text. All of the memories swim peacefully together within their shared world of the lamp.



Finally, the last visualisation can be accessed through the recycle bin icon. This one strays farthest from the fresh, comfortable imagery of the rest of the application. For this state, only the negative memories from the Mongo JSON data are being pushed to the TVs array, which is then used to draw each negative entry as a CRT TV. Displaying only static, their screens are interactive. When a user clicks on them, their respective memory text will appear within the iris of the eye which watches the user's mouse as they explore the space. This visualisation aims to create a more uncanny atmosphere, representing the side of nostalgia often ignored. While it is fine to look back fondly at the past, even at the negative memories, the eye in the trashbin watches as if to make sure each less pleasant memory is still acknowledged.



After viewing all three, it is clear that each of the visualisations represent only a part of the information initially given. While viewing the three in sequence eventually displays all the information at one point, it is impossible to match exactly which memory belongs to who. This creates a certain anonymity in itself (although it is not required to submit your full name), while connecting the present user to the past entries through memories alone, and not through the association of the memory to an individual.

In terms of successes and points to improve on, we both agree that the visual aspect of the application was successful and lends to the themes represented. We are also quite glad that the time was found to also add sound, use custom sprite images and, most importantly, implement interactivity further than the initial sending of the data through mongo. A lot of this was thanks to the use of p5, which we are familiar with, in order to fully realize the application and create an exciting version of data visualisations. Interestingly, while we were originally intimidated by using the Mongo database, it proved to not cause many issues past the initial setup and worked largely like a regular JSON file.

If we were to improve on the application, the main points would be largely to expand on what is already there and to make "Desktop Memories" feel more like an expansive, interactive world. While the interactive elements add a certain amount of depth to each visual state, we would've liked to have pushed each one further and introduced more 'game-like' elements which would further comment on and push the thematic elements of the application.