Olivia Axiuk

CART 253

Professor Pippin Barr

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Pre-Reflection

Although I have little programming experience, I am well aware of the creative potential that digital mediums can bring to a project. With my knowledge in 3D filmmaking, I've been exposed to many digital and interactive mediums, particularly games, which fed into my overall interest in using these programs as means for creativity. However, the potential for creating interactiveness is somewhat limited in the digital world without the skills to be able to code for specific artistic needs. Knowing that game creation can be a difficult endeavor, I decided to learn the beginnings of coding using Gamemaker, which has its own language but nonetheless introduced me to certain basic concepts in programming. I believe that interactivity can become an essential form of creative expression, which can involve the person experiencing the artistic piece in a way that other mediums cannot.

Perhaps it goes without saying that Toby Fox's *Undertale* is one game which has undoubtedly inspired many aspiring indie creators themselves to take on their own endeavors. For me, it is not the sole inspiration for game creation, but it stands as an excellent example of how storytelling can be made more powerful through interactivity. The game relies heavily on the player's decisions throughout the game, which all lead to different endings, in order to convey its themes. The way that the player decides to befriend, kill or help different characters

directly reflects on their own decisions and consciousness, therefore making the sadness or happiness of the characters a direct result of the player's own morals.

The game design therefore allows for an experience that is introspective, making themes dealing with love, grief and friendship have a personal impact on the player through the interactivity programmed into the story. Unlike a more passive form of media, like if the same story was told in the form of a movie or series, interactive forms of media immerse the player and turn the character self into the actual self.

More recent to my discovery are Joshua Ellingson's physical displays (found at ellingson.tv on Instagram) which blend physical and digital programming together. The pieces, which are usually a blend of videos displayed on a series of old TVs and creative 'pepper's ghost' effects, brings the interactivity of programming to art displays. The pepper's ghost holograms are controlled by a series of physical cranks, while the videos on the screens (including the the screen which displays the hologram) are controlled digitally by a program which distorts the images based either on music or physical manipulation. I find it fascinating how Ellingson blends the digital with the physical through programming, creating displays which feel both nostalgic and futuristic and perhaps existential. The concept is very appealing to me, inspiring me to want to try to use programming in non-traditional ways. For example, could something similar to Ellingson's displays be used as a means to play a game?

One game which perhaps challenges the idea of self to its limit is *The Stanley Parable* by developer Galactic Cafe. Set in a seemingly never-ending office building, a player is guided by a narrator which they can choose to defy or obey. The player is left with more questions than answers, wondering who Stanley is, as they seem to have replaced him in his own body, and what role the narrator truly has in the story as he audibly becomes extremely upset and exhausted

with the player if they ignore his storyline. The game seeks to break the preconceived ideas we have of the role of the storyteller and of the player in its creative breaking of the fourth wall. Programmed within the game is the inherent understanding by the creators of their players, trusting in them that because of their previous knowledge in gameplay they will purposefully try to defy the narrator and explore the game's many paths in order to take away the most from its themes.

I think that it does not come as much of a surprise that one of the aspects of programming that I am most interested in is its ability to create pieces that break the fourth wall between creator and player. The type which has the ability to form personal, psychological connections within the experiencer. Perhaps one dream project of mine would then aim to tell a story through gameplay, visually appealing and entertaining, but which explores themes about mental health and the roles of nostalgia and creativity. Despite my experience in 3D animation, I imagine I would opt for a 2D pixel art style, perhaps with 3D elements, in order to bring about this nostalgic, classic feel. Unfortunately, I do not at this moment have a clear story for such a projet, although I have been thinking of the visual style and overall mood.

However, also in the vein of nostalgia and pixel art, I also plan on co-creating a semi-surrealist RPG with my sister which has been in its design stages for a long time. The project with visuals inspired by the 80's in which the story is also set, plays with all the aforementioned elements which interest me, but has a larger scope gameplay wise as we plan on working together. It is exciting to think that only our lack of knowledge of coding is holding back the project, and it may be able to move forward in production by the end of this year.