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CART 253
Pitch for Final Project

***I reserve the right to change/modify any or possibly every aspect of this pitch.**

I would like to continue working on the idea I had with exercise05 and exercise06. Briefly, what I did was change the Griddies' behaviour so that they do not operate on the grid anymore (and renamed them Cells). The Cells float around like leaves in wind, and the player's mouse cursor acts as a controller of the wind. Also existing are Parasites which drain Cells' energy, and grow bigger when they kill a Cell. Finally, the player may click the screen to let loose a burst of Antibodies, which have the potential to cure injured cells and revive dead ones. The result is a survival game; see how long you can last.

One of my passions is sound/music production, and it has always been a dream of mine to include aspects of generative music into an interactive experience. Now, including generative music is not the goal for *this* particular project, per se, it is merely a foundational idea from which to work out the sonic attributes/identity of the game. Ie. the sound effects will not mask the soundtrack, the music and the sounds will compliment each other, the soundtrack will reflect the feeling I want to convey at particular moments/stages, etc. Generative music is too lofty an idea to fit in *right now*, especially with everything else I want to incorporate gameplay-wise - but I wanted to mention it first as a sort of inspirational starting point, and also for it to exist as a goal far in the distance that I'd like to achieve one day.

Next, I would like to include more of an element of player choice. As it stands, the only real choices a player has to make are where to influences the Cells' movement and where/when to release Antibodies, which is adequate for the current state of the game, but leaves a lot of room for potential. I would like the game to last much longer - perhaps in a Stage-like setup, where once a Stage is completed, the player may restart there as opposed to at the beginning ("checkpoints") - and with the length of the game increased, I will be able to incorporate more aspects of choice, particularly when it comes to the behaviour of the [potentially many types of] Antibodies. Some ideas off the top of my head for new types of Antibodies:

a. Temporarily affecting Parasites
    i. Slowing them down
    ii. Stunning them
    iii. Mitigating their life-drain ability (or even reversing it)

    iv. Decreasing their size
    v. Other random effects
b. Temporarily affecting Cells (as opposed to simply healing them)
    i. Speeding them up
    ii. Giving them a “fear response” to Parasites, influencing their movement away from Parasites automatically
    iii. Increasing their resistance to the Parasites life-drain ability
    iv. Increasing the influence they have on each other
    v. “Upgrading” cells into higher “tiers”, making them much tougher to kill, and changing the effects they have on other Cells and/or Parasites

I have yet to decide how to implement the different kinds of Antibodies, however I feel it would make sense to have two different “strains”, as listed above: those that temporarily affect the Parasites’ behaviour, and those that affect the Cells’ behaviour. The player will have 2 separate energy meters for each strain, and the abilities/their effects will be designed with synergy in mind. The “substrains” of each type of Antibody will be gradually introduced over the course of the game, in accordance with how the Parasites evolve. For example, let’s say the first “special” type of Parasite is introduced in Stage 2 - let’s call it the “Fast Parasite”. It would make sense to introduce the Antibody strains that alter the speed of the objects at the beginning of this stage, allowing the player to get used to quickly switching between using different types of antibodies to survive. The flow of the game will be decided upon during the design process. I am anticipating a large amount of time needed to balance each ability so that they are not only all useful but also fun to use, which I am looking forward to doing.

As mentioned, I would also like to include “special” types of Parasites. I anticipate having to rewrite from scratch the many Parasite classes that will be needed. I would also like to incorporate a way to not only defend yourself from the Parasites, but to attack them (maybe I will reserve this for a special “boss” Parasite later on in the game - I hope my ideas aren’t too lofty, here).

That’s enough about the parasites. Player interaction will largely remain similar to how it already exists in the current state of the game, ie. influencing Cell movement with mouse movement; however, I would like to tune this more and perhaps include more abilities/options to modify the Cells’ behaviour. For example, by “herding” them more (they do this to a degree right now, but it would be cool if the player could control the amount to which the cells huddle together; it would be cooler if this ability were limited, forcing the player to make judgments as to whether/when to herd and whether/when to scatter - fine tuning these aspects will come in the design process, obviously). Antibody

strain selection will be handled with the keyboard (I guess?). I will come up with a way that feels smooth and easy, as the player should remain focused on surviving as opposed to figuring out how to slow down that one parasite about to eat your last dude and dying in the process.

I briefly mentioned the “special” Parasites, which will act as sort of the “gimmick” for each unique Stage (this idea is a little cliche for me, but we’ll see what else I come up with). In addition to this, however, I’d like each stage to carry with it its own environmental gimmick. Perhaps there is the equivalent to “lava” spots that drain the energy of Cells caught in their radius. Perhaps there are spots which slow down or otherwise inhibit Cell movement. Perhaps there will be a stage in the dark, which will necessitate the use of your cell phone’s torch to illuminate the playing field via webcam. Maybe different colours of light will affect Cell/Parasite behaviour differently; maybe some objects are attracted to a certain hue, while others are repelled by it? And then there’s the potential for audio input: maybe some Parasites don’t like loud noises, and maybe even some don’t like specific frequency ranges in the audio spectrum!

Aesthetically, I like the track I am on. I enjoy the minimalist geometry and the primary colours, and will continue designing this way. Perhaps images will make their way in, but we’ll see. Obvious shapes and colours have the highest potential for efficiently conveying aspects of the gameplay, and I don’t want to dilute user experience with distracting or difficult-to-discern visuals (the same thing applies to sound, but I’ll talk about that a little later).

Thematically speaking, I arbitrarily chose the biologically-themed names Cells, Parasites, and Antibodies as behavioural descriptors but I might want to modify the nomenclature depending on what kind of story (if any) I want to tell. Which leads me to inspirations: *Flower* (2009) is a PS3 game developed by Thatgamecompany in which it is the player’s goal to shift the wind to move an ever-growing stream of flower petals through a 3D environment, collecting varieties of flowers along the way, ultimately ending up at a goal. My game and *Flower* are similar in the way that the player controls the wind to affect objects’ movement as opposed to controlling movement of objects directly. *Flower*, however, is not meant to be challenging as a game, which is where it differs from my philosophy. I would like to strain the player, *just a little bit*. I want no downtime. I want to evoke similar feelings to 2D shoot em up/bullet-hell style of games without the same level of technical demand on the player.

Flower uses a very bright, colourful, pastel-like visual aesthetic. Some areas of the game are punctuated by what appears to be dilapidated industrial equipment, which the player must figure out how to get rid off in order to progress. The game is void of

any kind of story or dialogue, and so the narrative aspects, if any, must be interpreted and created by the player. I would like to emphasize a player-driven/exploratory narrative as opposed to an expository one, if I am able to get around to it.

I will need to use everything learned so far and more to incorporate all the ideas I have. I already have classes for the Cells, a single basic-type Parasite, a single healing/reviving-type Antibody, and a rudimentary meter for Antibody uses. I will need additional classes for the different types of Parasites, as well as the different types of Antibodies. I will need another Meter class to differentiate the 2 “strains” of Antibodies. I will potentially need a 3rd meter for the additional movement modifiers I wish to include (such as herding and scattering). I will need to include light tracking for certain stages, and [maybe] colour tracking as well, if I choose to incorporate that (it would definitely be interesting, but I am thinking of how to make it all not *too* unwieldy for players - especially if audio input is incorporated as well).

As mentioned, I have a passion for sound production. I believe sound to be the most criminally underappreciated aspect of games. Good sounds can literally make something funner - it’s really, really not more complicated than that, and most people don’t realize nor think about it that much (at least in comparison to graphics/story/literally everything else). I would like most events in the game to have unique sonic identities. I am not sure I’ll be able to get it up to my own personal standards, however I will still attempt to heavily emphasize the aural aspects of the game during development. As mentioned, if I want audio input to affect the game, I will have to learn how to effectively implement that and balance it in a way that doesn’t seem too gimmicky/unwieldy. All music and sounds will be created from scratch by me and my synthesizers/drum machines.

A final thought/potential inspiration: I have been watching the leaves on the branch of the tree hanging outside my window change colour and be carried by gusts of wind these past few weeks. My game evokes a bit of the same feeling that comes from this. Maybe I will rearrange the colours to follow a sort of Autumn aesthetic. Maybe the [hidden] “goal” of the game is to save a tree a tree from dying. Maybe you learn it’s the last tree on the planet, and no other life exists. But, for now, I will be placing all narrative/thematic considerations as the lowest priority.

That being said, and to conclude, focus of the project’s priorities will be organized as follows, from most important to least:

1. The code: making sure my ideas work, making sure it is smooth, that it does not crash, that it is not too crazy/bulky, making sure it works, making sure it *works*, etc.
2. The gameplay: making sure it is FUN in addition to challenging, making sure it is smooth, easy to learn but hard to beat, making sure it “makes sense” without having to rely on overly interruptive text or bulky UI, making sure it is balanced
3. The sound: making sure too many sounds don’t end up in a swampy mess of noise, making sure they have utility in addition to “sounding nice”, making sure they contribute to the gameplay and support it rather than just simply exist for the sake of being there
4. The visuals: not too worried about this one, I like the track I’m on and have plenty of ideas that will [hopefully] tastefully fit the minimalist aesthetic
5. The narrative: I briefly touched upon some narrative aspects above, but as mentioned, it will be the last of my priorities (if I even get around to it at all).