Isabel Salinas-Arreola

Art of the Game Final Reflection

Throughout this semester, Art of the Game has forced me to reevaluate how I look at art and what it means to tell a story. The class has far surpassed my expectations in some regard while also falling short in others. At the beginning of the semester, I wasn't sure what to expect coming into this class except that I wanted to make a video game. I was a short girl with tall dreams of a game with the scope on par with Super Mario Brothers or Pokémon. Granted, I'm still short but this class was honestly a bit of a slap to the face (in the best way possible) and an eye opener to how games are really made and the process behind it.

The beginning of the semester was probably my favorite. In part because I had a lot more time to dedicate to the projects and also because I was only in the early stages of birthing an idea so everything I came up with I loved and wanted to do. The author page was a fantastic way to start because it started to push me in a more creative direction by emphasizing the importance of voice and intention. Learning HTML was surprisingly not as bad as I thought it would be and made the whole coding part of the class much more approachable. The character development on the other hand, phase was amazingly easy but also amazingly difficult. Talking to Federico and having him grill me not only on who my character was but also what kind of setting I wanted to present, made me realize that my idea was an idea, but it had so much more to do before I could even being fathoming creating a game. I learned that setting itself, is a character, a lesson I wish I would've brought into my final project more. It was difficult to try and create what I saw as an entire person. I didn't know Jake's intentions or thoughts, I didn't know where Jake lived, what he wanted to accomplish. The SIMS presentation with JoAnna Lio Amos drastically helped with my character development. I realized that a game maker can start off with a certain intention but

that people will essentially play as they want to. The SIMS world had so many different kinds of players with different priorities and different ideas of what it meant to play the SIMS the "right way" but it was all grounded in the same game. It was the "freedom" that Huizinga mentioned when he talked about the play "marking itself off from the course of the natural process" (13). People play because they enjoy playing. It brought together the idea that I was creating a game that I would enjoy playing, but that other people would enjoy playing too. It helped me when I was developing my Twine story map and attempting to give the player more freedom in his actions while also having the actions impact the overall story line.

The audio walk was an interesting experience. After the presentaiton with Andrew Schartmaan over music in video games, having the audio walk experience was a great tool for learning how to manipulate sound and its importance. Audio walks are an amazing art form that I hadn't yet discovered and the audio walk forced me to develop a sense of place and purpose. Although I don't think that the audio walk helped develop my final product or helped me develop a story line, the experience with working in AdobeAudition and manipulating sound sparked my interest. I love listening to soundtracks for both movies and video games but I had never realized how strongly they can affect *how* a player plays, like with the Super Mario Bros. soundtrack and how it affects a player's jumping pattern.

Twine was honestly rough. I think it was the hardest of the modules because it took everything I had put off and forced it into a single space. Essentially, I came into the class with programming as my main focus. I wanted to integrate my creativity and ideas into programming but I didn't expect the focus of the class to be on developing the story and helping the story by having technology as the platform through which we shared it. I completely rewrote my Twine map 3 different times and went back a countless amount to tweak details. The thing about

making a game, is that you don't realize how many nooks and crannies a narrative has until you have to create one. I will admit that one of the pitfalls of this class for me was that I didn't quite get to make the game that I wanted. I wanted to create a game whose mechanics and gameplay were supported by a narrative, but pretty much ended up creating an entirely narrative based game. My problem with this was that I didn't get to use as much programming as I thought I would get to and which in my opinion, is a perfectly valid aspect of the art of video game making. I understand why the class doesn't focus on it because it is not a class focused on programming but rather on story-telling, but it was a little bit of a let-down to be put on a certain path that I couldn't really diverge from.

On the other hand, I am supremely glad that the class forced me into that direction. I am not a story-teller. I am very bad at forming thoughts than continue for more than 2 or 3 steps and I am a fickly human. Having this idea and having to continuously go back to it (thanks, Twine) forced me to reevaluate a lot of which at the beginning of the process, I thought would be relevant or a good idea to include. Scope was a huge issue for me. I think that I didn't really understand the problem of scope until our last meeting when I still had dreams of 8 levels of wandering through a town for my game and Professor Bertozzi just went "nope." This class really forces you to focus on specifics in a way no other class really does because ART007 makes you deal with the matter of size. Big dreams aren't possible when you have a week to code something and Twine especially, forces you to consider every decision and whether it really matters because it really is a pain in the butt to go through it and make all these passages that lead to nowhere.

Throughout the semester, I honestly felt intimidated by the genius in our class. Every student had so much creativity and knew how to tell a good story. Julia's artwork spoke volumes in itself and Matan's humor made Arc-Light quirky and unexpectedly delightful and Branson's game was

deliciously exquisite in the intricacies of his choices. Kevin's puzzles were insanely creative but they still supported his narrative and Carlos's scientist was spunky and like Elia, had a (tragic) backstory that changed the entire game and made it more powerful. Knowing that this is what some of the people in the class want to do and having people who are very performance driven (i.e. theatre kids), was intimidating because I just didn't know how to create a story.

Honestly, my final product made me deal with that. Play is supposed to be outside the "reasonableness of practical life" (1). It was interesting to capitalize on how a game is played to create something that for me, signifies a problem with this idea of an "interlude in our daily lives" Huizinga talks about (15). I didn't realize that how one plays a game is just as important as its content and with the structure of Twine, tried to make people feel like wandering, brainless zombies as they clicked through my game. I now pay much more attention to how a game engages me and how the mechanics of a game either add or detract to it.

The biggest takeaway from this class I will say is that you get out of it as much as you put in. You can put in 3 hours or spend 30 and you will learn as much as you want to. It is very hands off in a way that forces you to be realistic but also allowed you to dream big. My one suggestion really would be to connect the units more. It was much easier and I think ultimately better for the development of my project when we had overlapping deadlines. The author bio and the character sheet became a lot more intertwined when we had to work on both. Likewise, having the twine map module interspersed with the animatic forced me to think about which images represented the most important points of the twine map and then present those. Overall, this class has given me a new way to think and made me realize that I need to have a lot more respect for people who create video games because the work and intricacies that come from it are incredible. I didn't take the direction I thought I would and this class pushed me so far out of my

comfort zone that I had to think of new ways to think and approach my ideas. Professors

Stevens-Morling, Bertozzi, and Federico, taking this class with the three of you was an honor

and a privilege. This class offered an unbidden view into the industry and into the art of

storytelling itself. Thank you for the life lessons learned and the experiences gained

Reference List

Huizinga, J. (1955). Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture. Boston, MA:

Beacon Press.