Game Design Practicum (CMPS 179)
Critiquing Games, Good Kinect Gameplay Videos
Upcoming Events

- Daniel Benmergui
  - Wednesday, April 18, 2012, E2 180, 11am
  - Created *Storyteller*, the winner of the 2012 Independent Game Festival Nuovo Award for innovation.

- Zynga Campus Visit and Tech Talk
  - Wednesday, April 18
  - 5pm – 7pm, Career Center Library (3rd floor bookstore building)
  - Food served, RSVP to robin@soe.ucsc.edu

- Spring Job and Internship Fair
  - Tuesday, April 24, 11am-3pm
  - College 9/10 Multipurpose Room

- Stone Librande
  - Creative Director/Game Designer, EA/Maxis
  - Wednesday, April 25, 2012
  - E2 180, 11am
Upcoming deadlines

- Monday (April 23)
  - Week II prototype due for Phase I game
  - Demonstrate this in lab
Games: Critiques vs Reviews vs Criticism

- Game reviews, game critiques, and game criticism are often viewed as the same thing
- However, they have different goals
- Game review
  - Help the buyer decide whether to purchase a given game
- Game critique
  - Criticism is an informed discussion, by an intelligent and knowledgeable observer of a medium, of the merits and importance (or lack thereof) of a particular work.
- Game criticism
  - Feedback on a game to its designer with a goal of improving the overall gameplay experience
  - We’re focusing on this in CS 179
General Principles

- The subject of criticism is the **game**, not the game designer.
  - Yes: “The game suffers from lag in controls.”
  - No: “Your controls are laggy.”
  - Even good designers sometimes make bad games.

- Focus on **issues**, not solutions
  - Let the designer determine how best to fix issues
  - Yes: I’m confused in this section, I don’t know what to do.
  - No: This is confusing; you need a tutorial.

- Corollary: you’re the critic, not the designer
  - You do your job, they’ll do theirs
Qualities of good game criticism

- Some rules of thumb for good game criticism

- Focus: pick a small number of lenses and focus criticism there. Don’t be all over the map with observations.

- Short and sweet: don’t overwhelm, instead, have short, punchy observations.

- Breadth: have observations be spread across several issues, not just different facets of the same issue.
In-person delivery

- Try the “shit sandwich”
  - A method of making an unpleasant thing more palatable by surrounding it with more pleasant things.

- Say something positive about the game (bread)
  - The designer immediately thinks you’re brilliant, since you have seen through to the inner awesomeness of the game. They are much more receptive to what you say.

- Give a critique of some element of the game (shit)
  - Since the designer knows you clearly have refined taste, they are willing to acknowledge that their game does have a few minor flaws.

- Say something else nice about the game (bread)
  - End on a high note. Lets designer know you don’t have it in for them, and really, you are a nice guy.

- Try it. It works.
Specific issues for Kinect games

For game criticism in class, there are several Kinect-specific issues to focus on:

Does movement fit the game?
- Is the player’s movements consistent with the game and its world?
- Good: player is a frog and jumps to move
- Bad: player is a snake, but jumps to avoid obstacles and runs to move

Does game recognize movement/gestures?
- Does the game effectively recognize the player’s movement and gestures?
More Kinect issues

- Does the game communicate when player is too far/too close/off-screen to sensor?

- Does the game communicate what movements or gestures to use?

- Does the game have an effective mechanism for traversing menus and making selections? (e.g., proper use of swipe, button selection, etc.)

- Does game world provide sufficient feedback so players can judge relative positions of items in game world?
  - Examples: shadows on walls, placement of items in front/behind player avatar, etc.
Other Kinect issues

- What other Kinect-specific issues do you think are important to consider when evaluating a Kinect game?
  - Sensitivity of controls
    - Too high/low can make a game frustrating
  - Safety instructions
    - Karate game: check surroundings
  - How well does game handle different sizes and abilities of players
    - Kids vs younger adults vs older adults, etc.
  - How robust gameplay is in different environments
Kinect Gameplay Videos

- An important aspect of this class is creating video documentation of games you create
  - For your portfolio
  - To demonstrate to people on the Internet

- There are a lot of bad Kinect gameplay videos online

- Not too surprising, since it is complicated to create a good gameplay video
Creating good Kinect gameplay videos

- Some rules of thumb for creating good Kinect gameplay videos
  - Show faces, not backs
    - True for most photographic situations. Humans like to see the faces of other humans.
    - Corollary: no “over the shoulder” views of players and screens
  - Have faces properly lit
    - Good lighting is worth its weight in gold, and is worth every effort to achieve it
  - Capture two video feeds
    - Independently capture the game’s video and audio, and the player video and audio. Then, combine to form final video.
    - Many bad videos try to make due with one. Results are bad.
  - Avoid background clutter
    - Distracts from movements of the players
Bad Kinect Videos

- A two-player Pong
  - With a soccer ball and Flintstones soundtrack. The author subjected his kids to the game.
  - Don't: pan back and forth between the screen and the players. Instead, collect *two* video streams, and then do some editing.
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6Ljwp5slOg

- One-player Pong
  - Strange outline of player in the background.
  - It distracts visually, and you don't get to see the player's facial expressions.
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsAX-XxEnWo
Bad Kinect Videos

- **Two player Pong**
  - At the start of the video, the light coming in from the background window causes the camera to close its aperture and not collect enough light from the player's faces, so they appear too dark.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YCTO6_LOH4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YCTO6_LOH4)

- **3D Pong**
  - The gameplay should take up most of the area of the screen you're looking at – in this video, it's only about 1/4 of the available screen real estate during video playback, and as a result, it's hard to tell what's going on. But, at least we do see the front of the player.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRakz_Xi1ZE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRakz_Xi1ZE)
Bad Kinect Videos

- **2D Pong**
  - Don't: film the player only from the back, because that is boring. We like to see people's faces. This player had lots of great reactions while playing the game. We could hear them, but not see them.
  - Don't: have the lighting so dark that you can't see the player.
  - Don't: have really bad microphones so the audio sounds muffled.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bl2JMGhGNjEM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bl2JMGhGNjEM)

- **2D Pong**
  - Camera keeps panning from small laptop screen to two players just moving their hands up and down.
  - Setting is a corridor someplace. Yuck.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qOjdyfxQDo&feature=fvst](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qOjdyfxQDo&feature=fvst)
Good Kinect Video

- Pixar Rush Part 2 (The Incredibles), by Judgement Awaits
  - Good: Picture in picture, can see person and game play
  - Good: Person’s movements and gameplay synchronized
  - Bad: Lighting on person is too dark, light from windows in background too bright.
  - Bad: background of room is too cluttered.

- Any of the Kinect Effect videos
  - They sometimes use the over-the-shoulder shot effectively. This is really difficult to do well, since you have to match lighting of the person and the screen. Proceed with caution in your own videos.