N.E.O - Drive

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Introduction

The game we worked on for this semester was a game we called Neo Drive. It is a racing/hover game in which the player has to be one of the first racers in the portal at the end of each race. Every race will have enemies that shoot, obstacles to dodge and some pick ups to use against the enemies to win.

We were split into separate groups based on the roles that we wanted at the start of the semester. We all worked on a level per team and there were three main teams.

My leading role was the Unreal Engine artist for the Overgrown Team. Although this was my main role, I also had other jobs involved with he creation of the game, by making sure the mechanics all worked as they should and creating the menu system for the game.

I had to create the level in the Unreal Engine based on what the Level Designer and Modellers wanted in the level. We worked together to make sure what we envisioned was possible or had to be a feature we add in the game at a later date.

Before everyone was put into groups me and a few others figured we needed some sort of project manager for the project. This gave me another role as I needed to put everyone in teams based off of work from last year but also what everyone wanted to do this year. I also gave everyone tasks to complete in their teams (feature and priority list) getting the project started.

Research Evaluation

My research was very explorative since this was my first semester really using the Unreal Engine (Sweeney, 1998) to make a game. Since I had not used Unreal to this extent before, everything was new to me and I had to do a lot of research based on what we wanted out of the game.

It required lots of meetings based on what we thought was possible for us to complete right now. For example, we were set on having some kind of local multiplayer but was a huge task to undertake and we had to change our scope. These meeting changed our overall scope almost weekly since the iterative process of making a game is unpredictable.

Games Design Theory

I did some basic Game Design Theory research for the level I was creating. Using Richard Rouse's Game Design Theory and Practice. (Rouse, R. 2004).
I followed up on the players wants and expectations when playing a game.

Expecting:

- Some Setbacks
- Immersion
- Direction

Wants:

- To Fantasize
- Bragging Rights
- A Dynamic Solitary Experienc

Technical Research

I used the official Unreal forums, documentation and YouTube tutorials (Referenced below) to try and fix a lot of the problems I had when creating my level. All these platforms had the answers to most of my questions. Using what we learned in Creative Practice we could manage our project more professionally and keep our time management better.

Contextual Research

I had lots of inspiration from the Neo Tokyo genre when conceptualising the game. Using Pinterest (Pinterest, 2019) helped me create a mood board and help give the idea more life when trying to think of visual designs.

When it came to creating the hologram for the Neo Tokyo, I used films like Blade Runner (Blade Runner, 1982) (Blade Runner 2049, 2017) and TV like Altered Carbon (Altered Carbon, 2018) for inspiration.
For the Overgrown city I have not done too much design work, but I was going to use a film like "I am Legend" (I am Legend, 2007) for inspiration.
I also used music to help me with ideas, using the Synthwave genre of music.

When it came to assessing the quality of the research, since it was mostly used for inspiration it was very subjective to myself.

Game Research

Some games I used as reference/ inspiration included;

Power Drive 2000 (Greb, n.d.) since the game was almost what we wanted our game to be.

I also used Wipeout (Wipeout, 1995) as a reference to the hover mechanics and A.I shooting.

Quantum Redshift (Burcombe, 2002) was also a good reference for mechanics, using weapons and hover car combat.

Research Conclusion

I feel that I could have researched a lot more into the project management and game design theory when creating the game. I think next semester I will try to use game practice and theory to make the game better. If I am going to keep the role as some kind of project manager for next semester, I will also need to research into more effective production techniques to use.

The lack of theory I put into my level, resulted in some of my peers telling me how boring the level was, which I will change next semester.

Technique Evaluation

This was my first time using the unreal engine to create a game. I had some experience in setting up lighting from last year, but not enough to create a working demo for a game.

So, my technique was entirely from scratch. Using tutorials online and using what I learned from other tutorials to fix any problems that came up.
One example which I found difficult was the 3D dynamic menu I created. The only tutorial I found that showed the menu I wanted was in French and was also an earlier version of the unreal engine. This led to different techniques of working that was different from what I am used to.

I also used project management techniques to make sure the project was planned out and completed on time. Using Gantt Charts, priority lists, flow charts/diagrams.

Development of Techniques & Skills

Since Unreal was still new to me, I had to learn everything. This took most of my time when creating the game. Since most of the time was spent researching “how to” videos and forums, making all the mechanics work with each other.

This process worked for me since we had a deadline. Using this we could plan out our time and work so that we could learn what we needed and also put it into action.

Overall Quality of Work Produced

I am personally happy with the work I produced. But I do not think it is to a professional standard as of yet, since there were a few issues we still need to address. We were limited to a deadline and everyone needed to learn the engine before we could even start making the game.

This put us under pressure since we needed to know the engine enough to make a decent demo. Since this is our first attempt, I believe any future demos would become better with more practice. To meet future expectations will require more work and practice with creating games and applying theory to our work to make it better than it is.

Technique Conclusion

I feel that I am now confident enough to start making my own demos for myself compared to the start of the year. I feel more confident with the engine and have learned more game theory, so I can start working on my own projects.

Development Evaluation

My development process was using what I knew about project managing to help me plan out and work on the game. Since the game can break at any time it required lots of prototyping and testing, so it will all work with each other.
Using what I knew about project planning (Gantt Charts, flow charts, Priority lists) I was able to keep up to date and deal with problems that arose. For example, I gave myself two weeks of extra time to make sure that if any problems did arise, I could use the extra time to fix them. Such as the menu, which took much longer than I expected so I used my extra time.

Creativity

An example of my own risk and originality, would be the menu system I created. Although in hindsight the time spent working on it could have been used on better mechanics. But I had to go out of my own way so that the menu looked and worked exactly as I wanted it too. Using the only non-working tutorial I could find (was also in French) as my guidelines I am happy to say that it turned out exactly as I wanted it too. Which was a risk since it was my first time using the engine, but I decided to make it my own instead of a simple menu system which could have quite easily been used instead.

Contribution within a group (group projects)

We had weekly meetings every Thursday on our allocated lesson that day. We all went around the room making sure everyone was working on something or if there were any problems.
Since we needed to change our scope for this semester, we had to change lots of things about our game for example;

Multiplayer
More levels
More vehicles
Guns

These were a few and some will be completed next semester.

Working Alone (individual projects)

Despite our weekly sessions most of our work was completed alone. Unless we had a problem that needed everyone’s attention, then we would bring it up in our weekly sessions and help fix it.

I would use tutorials and forums to help solve a problem, but if it could not find the solution, I would get help from my team.

Iterative Design Practice

An example of our iterative design process could be the block out levels I created based off of the level designers. I would try creating a one to one scale of the map they had created and give them the time it would take to get around the map. Which the level designers would use to make a new iteration of the level.

This helped build a better-quality level, but much more playtesting will need to be done to make sure it everything is alright.

Time Management

Using my Gantt Chart, I was able to plan out my weeks. I feel as if I could have improved on using my time more effectively, since there were other tasks that needed to be pushed to next semester. However, I did have contingencies in my plan if there was a major problem, by planning more time.

Since it was our real semester using Unreal Engine it was harder to plan out the tasks since we did not know how long they would realistically take. This caused a few issues of some pushed tasks, but we managed to get a working demo.

Development Conclusion

The main issues in my development process was that it was difficult to plan out the tasks since we had not used the engine, so our time management suffered. But next time it will be easier for us since we have become slightly adept at using the engine.

Analysis

Contextualising your work within a wider theoretical practice

Using some YouTube and a game design book, I used some theory when creating my level and part of the game.

Using player wants and expectations to help shape what level I had. I used different types of tutorials to learn producing a game (Team Managing) in game design and “making your first game” both useful tutorials I found on Extra Credits (Extra Credits, 2012) playlist on game design on YouTube.

Critique of the work you have produced

From my own side of the work, I have found a few problems with my level. Problems I would not have thought of if it was not tested by my peers and friends. The level was very bland and got boring due to how long the level I created was.

In the future we will more than likely add in more mechanics, like shooting, A.I, pickups, leader boards and multiplayer. For the moment we want to keep the scope small, so we will work towards the more difficult mechanics later on in the development and focus on the easier more applicable mechanics for now. I will also need to work with the level designer to make the level more entertaining and more enjoyable.

Critique of your own practice (and action taken)

I prefer to work alone, but this semester had me working with everyone, since the game was being created by the entire class. At the start it was my first time working as some sort of project manager and required me improve on my own teamwork skills and planning skills. After some work by setting up collaborative software, giving everyone tasks, putting everyone into teams and pointing everyone in some sort of direction, it turned out better than what I had hoped. Although I could have improved by learning more project managing techniques and working more closely with every team.

The collaborative software set up was a Google Drive, Facebook messenger group and Trello. Which gave everyone a place to share and critique work. Although no one used Trello, the other systems worked well and had lots of interaction among every group.

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