Exquisite Corpse Games

Background: An exquisite corpse is an art project created by multiple people. Each person is allocated a part of the project and may only work within their own part. For example a story could be written with chapter 1 belonging to author 1 and chapter 2 author 2 etc. A drawing or painting can be made with artist 1 working on the left side of the canvas and artist 2 working on the right. Sometimes exquisite corpses are made by obscuring part or all of the previously made parts. For example the left half of the canvas could be covered, and the second artist could be instructed to draw the right half of a body. The results are often wacky

Motivation: I saw a video where some game designers attempted something like this, thought they did not pay tribute to the surrealist namesake by which they were acting. It raised some questions for me. How should Exquisite Corpse be done in the context of game dev? Here I hope to come up with a few possibilities.

1. Zones

    Here I am taking inspiration from visual arts. Where we could divide a canvas into various parts, we can now divide the game world into parts. It may be possible to (partially) obscure zones that do not belong a given artist. Obviously this method works best if everyone can agree on fundamentals such game engine and general control scheme.

2. Temporal

    This one takes advantage of the technique that works with music, movies, and literature. Each author could have access to only a few seconds at the beginning and end of game play. This one would probably be more interesting to play. It's also interesting from a development point of view… For example the score or other factors from a previous game segment could be used in the next.

3. Domains

    So far, these techniques could apply to any medium that has a visual and temporal aspect to it, such as movies. This technique aims to take advantage of the unique aspect of video games: interactivity. Here one developer could interpret player input, while another handles rendering, another world layout, and finally someone for object behaviors. This is similar to how game development teams may normally operate, but here it can be brought to an extent of obscurity—by disallowing interpersonal communication.

4. Development

    This technique is a bit like Temporal, except it is concerned with the timeline from a development point of view, rather than the player's point of view. This technique resembles the one I saw in the video. Here developer 1 would pick an engine and establish a framework for the game, developer 2 might create peripheral routines and assets, and finally developer 3 would sequence an interactive story using the tools left behind.

I like Temporal the best, because I think it gives each game segment the best chance of being enjoyable and functional, while it still leaves much room for interplay between the segments. Lets try an RP example.

You are in a dark office, everything around you is set in hazy grayscale. There is a desk lamp and a small rotary fan. You open the only door, opposite from a window that unhelpfully faces a brick wall. In the top-right corner of the screen you see a label "Roaches" with the number zero next to it. In the next room you can see and hear several roaches scuttling about on office furniture. You smack one with you wrist, and the score value changes to -1. What the hell?

The walls and ceiling unfold like an origami in the microwave. The game is now set in sepia with a garish filmic aberrations. Outside there are high rises and a tremendous Roach, the size of a building ! *You killed one of my own. Prepare to Die.* Smacking additional roaches further negates the score.

The scene is set in color, with a faint bloom. The music is joyful ragtime piano now. The big roach reaches out its big appendage and smacks down on you. Where your body used to be a number of roaches equal to the negative of your score scuttle out. Life renews.