

Project Proposal

Project Name: Errant Gaming 01 – Joking the Time

Investigator: Cliff Hammett

Hours on Project: 126 hours (14 hours a week)

Project Start: 28th February 2011

Project Duration: 2 months

Summary

Errant Gaming is an on-going project that aims to develop a methodology for researching strategies of response to disruption, particularly those that involve joking/comic structures, arbitrary connection and errant reasoning.

Joking the Time is the next stage of this project, will attempt to utilise varied and competing forms of time – physiological, environmental, machine-based – within a errant gaming structure and document the strategies of response employed in order to negotiate this structure.

Aims

- Develop the concept of errant gaming into a practical methodology for exploring strategies used in the negotiation of zones of indeterminacy and uncertainty, within social relations, and media ecologies and systems.

Objectives

- Create an errant gaming structure that allow critical examining of how the disruption of game-time is negotiated.
- Create one or more devices which allow temporal elements and other forces outside of conventional gaming structures to be brought within the project.
- Develop at least one technique to make the data gathered tangible/digestible to a non-specialist audience.

Case for support

Errant Gaming: a methodology in development

The main goal of Errant Gaming project is to develop understandings on the relationship between jokes/paralogics/arbitrary connections and anomie, zones that fall outside formal or social system. The focus is not in how such forces disrupt formal or social systems, (zone A in fig 1) but how they provide resources for negotiating such disruption when it occurs

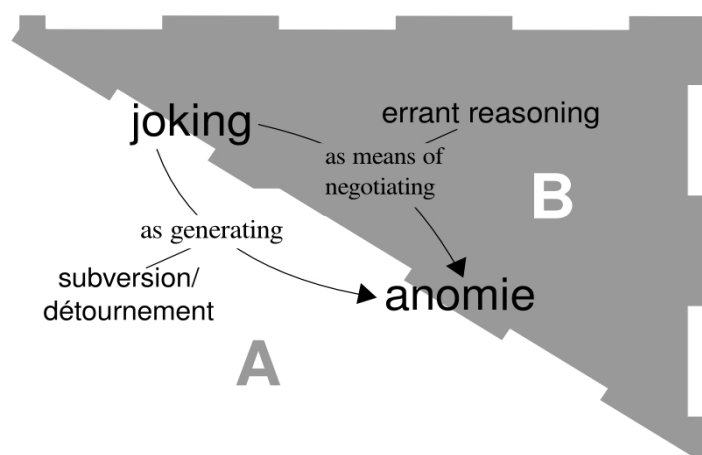


Fig 1

(zone B in fig 1)

An errant game should have the following two properties:

- i. it is in some way incomplete, there are holes where you wouldn't expect there to be holes, parts of the games are left open or undefined in such a way that it seems the game may topple or collapse.
- ii. it brings forces to bear within a gaming environment that would normally be excluded.

An initial example of an errant game has been developed in the form of a card game named *Anomie*. In it, players have one hidden 'objective' card, and attempt distribute cards between an 'in' and an 'out' deck with the goal of having similar cards *in* and dissimilar cards *out*. The course of the game however is entirely disrupted when a joker is played, allowing the player a complete free move. They may do anything – actions taken during trials included issuing decrees, taking a whole pile of cards to become their 'objective' cards and throwing the 'in' deck out of the window.

Joking the Time

The next stage of the project will be to create a game that makes players respond to a field of disrupted time.

Most games regulate time in a manner different to other spheres of life. In the majority of board and card games, the basic unit of time is a turn. To view events from the perspective of these games, it is of no consequence whether a turn takes two seconds or two hours. The player's perspective is of course very different – when a game runs out of sync with the player's perceived time (which may be different again from standard measured time), frustration results. Other games take other perspectives on time. Many single player computer games utilise (structured) user-centred time, whereby the temporality of the game world is regulated by the player's participation. If the user does nothing, nothing happens, time in the world stands still. It is only by participating in line with the structure of the game that time progresses.¹ Notably, a great many sports are regulated by standard measured time, with the exception of the race which is controlled by a single temporal event (the start) and then by the speed of the participants.

Although they have their rationale for being in place, none of these temporal structures are fixed. Imagine a game of chess, where instead of time being regulated in turns, it is determined by phases of their pulse rate. Between the 500th and 550th beat they can take whatever moves they wish, but at no other point. The player is not given access to a counter, only an indicator lamp. Here the game-time is governed to the player's physiology, which normally is removed for the most part from the game of chess.

Other temporalities are locatable through historical investigation and can also be brought into play. Prior to adopting the western system of time, the Japanese day was divided into two six unit sequences – from dusk till dawn and dawn till dusk. This meant that in summer the Japanese 'hour' was far longer in the day than the night, and *vica versa*. Prior to the invention of the pendulum clock in the 17th century, the heavens provided the primary measure of time, against which all others were secondary. From the 17th century onward, it has increasingly been the machine that forms the primary reference point. Systems of time have also had profound political significance – for instance, the shift in industry from paying by piece to paying by the hour.

Joking the Time will attempt to utilise varied and competing forms of time – physiological, environmental, machine-based – within a errant gaming structure and document the strategies of

¹ The game *Façade* gained a great deal attention precisely because it *didn't* utilise time in this way, with the game world progressing regardless of whether a player was participating or not.

response employed in order to negotiate this structure. Possible time structures and modifiers include:

Physiological

- Heartbeat/pulserate.
- Breath cycle

Environment

- Sonic guessing (attempting to infer time through noise levels)
- Temperature guessing (as above)
- Light/darkness
- Geographical (the time it takes to get to...)

Machine

- Computer processing time.
- Non-standard clocks (e.g water, sand, ball bearing etc).

This list will be expanded through research, and appropriate time structures will be selected based on sufficient difference from standard machine time, appropriateness for utilisation in game structures and possibility of interaction/cross-contamination (for instance, temperature based time with physiological time)

Outcomes of project

The speculative nature of the project as it stands means that it is not possible to produce a definitive list of outcomes at this stage. However, the following might be expected:

- The creation interactive modular temporal frameworks with other potential applications.
- Developing a game framework that may mediate social interactions in ways that suggest its application to other social ecologies and contexts.
- An improved understanding of the relation between temporality and computational systems.
- Insights that may begin to tease out some of the political underpinnings of certain conceptions of time, gaming and disruption.
- Concepts for further errant gaming projects.

Timeline

Week 7: Conceptualise game

- Decide upon basic temporal frameworks that can be utilised, starting from historical research but also with a mind to practical game implementation
- Examining existing game frameworks (e.g. from different board/card/computer/other games) and select one with potential for adaptation using the given game framework.

Week 8: Designing game and temporal game

- Breaking down game framework through experiments which involve twisting and skewering the rules of the game to the point of being barely functional. Use this to formulate a game concept.
- Design simple temporal devices, incorporating methods for data recording. Order components.

Week 9:

- Trial basic game concept in smaller setting. Try it with conventional temporal methods as a control, and also using manual/alternative methods of the temporal frameworks selected. Modify the game according to feedback from these trials.
- Begin building simple temporal devices.

Week 10:

- Continue build devices, trialling them for basic functionality.

Week 11:

- First trial of prototype game with devices.

--- Easter break begins ----

Week 12

- Consider feedback, using this to modify game and devices.

Week 13

- Either second game trial, or continuing work on modifying and improving devices
- Begin working on techniques to make data tangible.

Week 14

- Second game trial if this has not already happened.
- Work further on data. Begin planning next stage

Week 15

- Prepare presentation.

Budget

Travel/subsistence

2 x Research trips £25.00

Materials

2 x Arduino boards £50.00

Electronic components £50.00

Game components (pieces etc as appropriate) £25.00

Time: (Investigator's hourly rate= £19)

Total Investigator time (£19 x 126 hours) £2394

Total budget £2,544.00