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The Oral History of Video Games 2016

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THE ORAL HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES 2016

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report

submitted to the Faculty

of the

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

by

Nicholas Chaput

Maurizio Vitale

Submitted to:

Professor Dean M. O'Donnell, Advisor

February 26,, 2016

This report represents the work of one or more WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review.

Abstract

We interviewed game designers Brenda Romero and John Romero to add to the IGDA Game Preservation SIG and Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Oral History of Video Games project. Prior to this, we researched curated, oral histories, studied existing documentaries, and performed mock interviews with members of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute community, in order to learn effective interviewing and video editing techniques. After the interviews, we produced sample clips for each interview and updated the Oral History of Video Games website's design.

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Brenda Romero &

John Romero

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Travis Simoneau,

Devon Coleman,

Joe Hill &

Artian Kica

For participating in our practice interviews

Authorship Page

Prior to the interviews with Brenda Romero and John Romero, the majority of work was shared evenly between Nicholas Chaput and Maurizio Vitale. Both members researched oral histories, documentaries, and interview techniques. Both members also reached out to community members to find practice interviewees and subsequently worked together to prepare the interview questions for the practice interviews, and later to prepare the interviews with Brenda Romero and John Romero, as well.

Nicholas was the primary editor and proofreader for the various documents written during this project and interviewed Brenda Romero. Nicholas was responsible for writing initial biographies for potential candidates as well as the final biography and interview questions for Brenda Romero. After interviewing Brenda Romero, Nicholas then cut sample clips out of the interview footage which were added to the website, along with further expanding Brenda Romero's biography. Nicholas additionally did the camera work for the John Romero interview.

Maurizio was the primary programmer behind the website's changes and interviewed John Romero for this project. For John Romero, Maurizio was in charge of writing interview questions in short notice, as his participation in the project was dubious at first. Once the interview occurred, Maurizio then proceeded to cut the interview into sample clips. Modernizing the website turned out the bigger challenge of the two. Maurizio went through several prototypes of the website until a scholarly yet modern design was reached and a convenient layout was chosen to browse through content faster. As a side effect of this redesign, the website can now be viewed in mobile and other devices which were not supported before. Additionally, Maurizio

provided the camera work for Brenda Romero's interview, along with additional editing advice for Nicholas.

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Introduction

This oral history, an ongoing joint project between the IGDA's Game Preservation SIG and Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Interactive Media and Game Design Department, began in 2007 with an interview of Ralph Baer, often touted as the father of video games. It has since featured numerous former members of the game industry, including Brian Sullivan, Jennifer Lesser, and R.A. Salvatore.

The project seeks to maintain a consistent, high level of quality among interviews, by ensuring that the same equipment is used from year to year, that the students learn appropriate interviewing techniques leading up to the interview, and by only interviewing individuals who have left the industry, ensuring they have as few restrictions as possible on what they are willing and allowed to discuss.¹ By following these policies the project hopes to preserve the real experiences and memories of the people at the deepest level of the game industry, tinged with every subjective thought and bias they are willing to share.

The project hopes not just to document historical events, but rather to demonstrate the beliefs, opinion, and culture of the people who lived through the beginnings of the games industry. When an audience watches these interviews, they have the chance to learn not only what the people did in their lives and careers, but also who they were.

¹ <http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/>

Literature Review

The Oral History of Video Games 2015 (Guerra, Hawes, Wentzell, 2015)

This was the previous year's project report. We received advice on pacing for the project and on where to look in earlier project reports for specific guidance on a number of the tasks we would be responsible for. We also referred to this report frequently to resolve any confusion on the format of the paper.

Oral History of Video Games 2012-13 (DelPrete, Graedler, 2013)

An earlier year's project report. As recommended by the 2015 report, we looked to this report for guidance on how to set up the cameras effectively. We also looked to this paper for further reference on writing this report properly.

Oral History Project: A History of the Video Game Industry (Bruzzese, Baicker-McKee, 2011)

An earlier year's project report. As recommended by the 2015 report, we looked at this paper for some further advice on editing our sample clips. Though we did return to this paper while writing our report, we often found it format to conflict slightly with the two more recent reports, and generally sided with those more recent reports instead for formatting. It is worth noting that we looked at project reports from earlier than this one, but the information was nothing that the more recent reports did not include, and the scope of those earlier projects seems to have been slightly different, making it more difficult to apply their findings and advice.

BBS: The Documentary (Scott, 2005)

BBS: The Documentary helped with basic documentary techniques. We focused on the use of cuts and b-roll to maintain the appearance of a smooth dialogue, and how the framing and lighting of a scene affects viewers' impressions of an interviewee.

Get Lamp (Scott, 2010)

Get Lamp was a documentary about text adventures. Similar to BBS: The Documentary, we focused on the editing techniques and camera work that contributed to this professional work..

The Unknown Known (Morris, 2013)

This was an incredible documentary about Donald Rumsfeld. The major takeaway was learning to use b-roll effectively. This documentary was also the first source we learned from that focused on a single interviewee, which made many of the editing choices more relevant to our project.

First Person (Morris, 2000)

Documentary about several subjects whose works involved death. Each episode was a separate interviewee, so this documentary once again provided a very relevant reference for how to edit a person's speech to keep in engaging without changing the meaning.

The Aristocrats (Provenza, Jillette, 2005)

A documentary about an inappropriate joke. Shows many examples of scenes with poor compositions, and describes what made those compositions bad in the director's commentary. Demonstrated effective use of editing techniques to pull together related comments that occurred

across a variety of interviews. Additionally, demonstrated use of several background sets to describe the interviewee.

Tim's Vermeer (Teller, Jillette, Ziegler, 2013)

A moving documentary about the possible rediscovery of a lost art technique. We learned several techniques that can be used to maintain a consistent atmosphere throughout a video.

The King of Kong (Gordon, 2007)

Perhaps one of the most critically acclaimed Video Game related documentaries which provides a deep insight into the Donkey Kong niche community. Professor O'Donnell recommended this film as a way to us to learn how to manipulate the truth to create compelling stories, which he then advised us not to do.

Playing Columbine (Ledonne, 2008)

We learned how editing can be used to portray very clear meanings that were not in the original videos. We also learned a bit about how to handle more controversial topics in an interview-based medium.

Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture (Kushner, 2004)

Had a very detailed chapter on John Romero's early life along with his whole history while in id Software, we consider it essential as to learn about John Romero's personality throughout the times.

Background

Defining Oral History

An oral history is a collection of words and memories from people which aims to preserve these things for future generations to observe. Such projects are important because they reveal not the events that took place, but rather how the person in question thought and felt during that time. They convey a person's memories and experiences rather than their biographical information.²

A key element of a modern oral history is the fact that it is a physical article, whether it be a transcript, a book, a video recording, etc. As such, the interview becomes an historical artifact which can be catalogued and maintained for future generations. They are able to capture the subjectivity in human history and pass it on without being distorted by the views of those whose hands they pass through.

There are other mediums that can preserve the beliefs and experiences of people. Opinion articles in newspapers and open letters published through a variety of mediums also contain such information and can be preserved in many of the same ways as an oral history. The key differences come from the purpose and the presentation. As an oral history is typically created by a second party, the motive is much more likely to be about the historical significance and not about pushing a personal agenda. Furthermore, the involvement of this second party leads to a discussion that straddles the line between an interview and a conversation. This causes the

²Oral History Association, *Oral History: Defined*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>

interviewee's personality and beliefs to flow out naturally, rather than only when the interviewee wishes to show them.

Our oral history hopes to preserve the wisdom and experience of the game industry's veterans. We have unfortunately reached the point in time when the earliest pioneers of the industry have begun to pass away, and with their passing we have already and will continue to lose some of the oldest and most influential views that created and shaped the industry. Warren Robinett, creator of the Atari 2600's *Adventure*, who expressed interest in the project but was unfortunately not available for an interview, expressed that watching the project's interview with the late Ralph Baer immediately showed him the value of this project.

Brenda Romero

Brenda Romero was born Brenda Louise Garno in October, 1966, and married John Romero in October, 2012. She entered the game industry at the young age of 15, working with the *Wizardry* team at Sir-tech Software. In her 18 years at Sir-tech, Romero steadily climbed through the ranks, beginning as a play-tester, joining the writing team, and eventually moving to the design team. During this time, Romero contributed to several other games, notably the *Jagged Alliance* and *Wizardry* series.

Following her time at Sir-tech, Romero joined Atari as the lead designer for *Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes*. In 2003, she joined Cyberlore Studios, where she served as the lead designer for the game *Playboy: The Mansion* and provided additional design for the expansion *Playboy: The Mansion - Private Party*. Romero would later publish her research for this game in the 2006 book "Sex in Video Games", and speak about the topic at several conferences. The final

traditional video game that Romero worked on was Electronic Arts' *Def Jam: Icon*, a 3D fighting game featuring several hip hop artists, released in 2007.

Since then, Romero has shifted her focus toward alternative forms of game design, including non-digital games, mobile games, and games on social media platforms. She created her first non-digital game in 2008, titled *The New World*, as a tool to teach her daughter about slavery. She went on to design *Siochan Leat* and *Train*, along with three others which are still in various stages of design. These games comprise the series *The Mechanic is the Message*, and aim to take advantage of the interactivity of a game in order to convey the experiences and feelings associated with a number of painful events in human history. To put it another way, the message of each game is conveyed by its mechanics. These games are not commercially available. They were originally released by mistake when Romero gave a private talk about *Train*, unaware that a reporter was in the room.

Romero spent a couple years designing mobile games. In 2009, she worked as Creative Director at Slide, Inc., where she worked on *Top Fish* and *SuperPoke Pets*. She went on to hold the same position at Lolapps the following year, where she contributed to *Garden Life*, *Critter Island*, and *Ravenwood Fair*. She is now the COO of LootDrop, a social and mobile game company she co-founded with her husband, and she was recently appointed as the first Game Designer in Residence at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

From 2008 to 2011, Romero wrote numerous articles which addressed several aspects of game design. She also wrote two books on the topic with Ian Schreiber, titled "Challenges for Game Designers" and "Breaking Into the Game Industry: Advice for a Successful Career from Those Who Have Done It." Though the topics are varied, these articles and books mostly discuss

the challenges game designers face and what they can accomplish by overcoming those challenges. She often mentions the importance of understanding perspective and having an open mind, enabling one not only to research topics related to their design, but also to question the most basic aspects of design. Since then, she often speaks at conferences and colleges about these topics.

John Romero

John Romero was born in October, 1967, and married Brenda Brathwaite in October, 2012. Romero began designing games in 1979 and has since founded 8 successful game development companies targeting a wide variety of demographics. His current focus is on games on social media sites and mobile phones, under the Loot Drop company .

Romero entered the industry formally in 1982, with *Dodge 'Em*, published by Capitol Ideas Software and later on in 1984 when he began writing for inCider Magazine, where he created and published *Scout Search* for the Apple II. He later worked at Origin Systems before co-founding two companies, Inside Out Software and Ideas From the Deep. Romero later worked for Softdisk, where he met John Carmack, Adrian Carmack, and Tom Hall, with whom he went on to found id Software. At id Software, he was involved with *Dangerous Dave*, *Commander Keen*, *Catacombs 3-D*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, the *Doom* series, and *Quake*. After time constraints, cut content and other issues with the development of *Quake*, Romero eventually moved on from id Software to start Ion Storm with Tom Hall.

Romero went on to found several companies, most of which proved to be successful. Ion Storm aimed to create hardcore games, and is most often remembered for *Deus Ex*, though

Romero was not part of that project. Instead he spent most of his time with Ion Storm working on *Daikatana*, which after numerous development and marketing issues ultimately proved to be a game with mixed reception. Monkeystone Games, which he founded in 2001, focused on smaller games for systems like the Gameboy Advance or the Nokia NGage, and worked there until 2003 when he left to work on *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* with Midway Games. Months before the completion of the game, Romero left to co-found Gazillion Entertainment, which produced computer games such as *Lego Universe* and *Marvel Heroes 2015*. Romero is now the president of Loot Drop, which he co-founded with Brenda Brathwaite, now his wife. This company focuses on developing browser games like *Ghost Recon Commander*. He also works alongside his wife as Creative Director for the Master's Program at UC Santa Cruz and as a member of Full Sail's Advisory Board.

From 1997-2009, Romero was the chairman for the advisory board of the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL), a pioneer in worldwide video game tournament organizers that currently runs annual tournaments in China. As chairman, he announced a CPL project to create an FPS called *Severity*, though he was soon left out of the loop and led to believe development had halted almost a year before the project was actually cancelled. Romero was also a member of the Smithsonian Board of Advisors for Game Exhibit³ [sic] in 2009 until he resigned due to the removal of the Apple II from the exhibit.

Currently, Romero is on the Board of Advisors for The Strong's National Museum of Play since 2009. This museum features a collection of interactive exhibits that are devoted to the history and exploration of play. He is also an invited member of BAFTA since 2012, where he

³Romero, John, *Biography*, <http://romero.com/bios/>

lends his expertise to the organization dedicated to the support, development, and promotion of various forms of art.

Methodology

The scope of this project is to add to the ongoing Oral History project which have featured developers who have been influential to the game industry and can provide an interesting insight towards their own personal and professional experience of the history of the industry. In order to maintain the level of quality throughout this project the following methodology was taken:

Preparation

In order to first attempt to interview a developer we had to learn how to use the equipment, how to edit videos and learn editing styles that would keep out interview's story consistent and interesting for the viewer. Our first term consisted on learning the skills necessary to carry out an interview, getting comfortable with acquiring video and audio from different sources and finally, learn the editing techniques necessary to achieve a high level of quality expected from an ongoing academic project.

To first get access to the technological equipment needed for an interview and learning how to use them, we headed to WPI's Academic Technology Center, which serves as a hub for media-based technology such as Cameras, Microphones and any other instrument necessary for our project. We first asked for a simple, enthusiast camera, a Sony Handycam, which was accessible for beginners due to its portability and digital convenience. We additionally obtained a concave digital microphone for easy audio setup. This made sure we could first focus on lights

and background setup without worrying about how to operate a production ready camera and audio equipment.

Both team members then proceeded to record and edit a first round of interviews. A controlled environment was chosen for this pair of interviews, each team member chose the background setting and an interview topic of our choosing. For each interview, one team member would do camera work and the other member would interview the participant. Joe Hill and Artian Kica were chosen for this first set, two members of the WPI Community and both members of the WPI Smash Club. The subject material was based in the interest of the WPI Smash Club and was largely the same in both interviews.

For this first set, having the background set controlled made us realize the importance of lighting and framing with the camera, as it affects the impression that the audience has while watching and the perception of the person who is being interviewed. Additionally, having an idea of what kind of content we could discuss during the interview allowed us to be more comfortable when choosing cuts during the editing phase.

After finishing this set of interviews, we proceeded to learn more camera framing techniques, along with B-roll and a way to make our cuts seem more natural and less jittery. “BBS: The Documentary” (Scott, 2005) was fundamental in learning the techniques to create a smoother clip when using cuts, often speeding up moments of silence and showing in a perfect fashion how to create a consistent story with several non-continuous shots. “The Unknown Known” (Morris, 2014) helped us understand how to structure different stories out of a continuous shot, and also provided us with a perfect display of the utilization of B-roll, which proved useful on our final cuts.

Finally, a second round of interviews were performed. For this set of interviews we elected to have a production-standard camera, a set of topics up to the choosing of the participants and a background set of their choosing. Devon Coleman and Travis Simoneau were chosen for this second round. We did some brief research based on topics they told us about beforehand, but the bulk of the interview questions were actually composed on the spot. Devon's interview ended up being mostly about his experience in fraternity life, while Travis spoke primarily about *Bethesda*, a charity gaming marathon he ran with his friends several years ago.

Many new skills were tested during this set of interviews. The most important skill practiced was setting up the recording equipment in an environment we had not seen before. We had to examine the space and lighting to determine where the interviewee should sit and where we should position the cameras. We had to then adapt and improvise new questions to maintain the flow of the story the participants wanted to convey. B-roll was added to the cuts to add validity to the participant's claims. These sets of interviews then were submitted under two different cut styles, a first edit was made to make the stories short, to the point and as accurate as possible and a second edit was made to make the stories longer but with the meaning of it changed.

Determining Candidates

Carrying out an oral history on members of the game development community proves to be difficult at times. Due to the fact that active developers are tied to contracts, such as Nondisclosure Agreements, there is very little they are allowed to talk about. This is why the scope of this project targets retired or veteran members of this community. They can provide useful insight on how the community has grown, how corporations have risen and overall give a unique perspective on video game history.

To find developers we established some basic search conditions, either the developer must be retired or the company the developer used to work in is now closed, hence they're free of contractual obligations. Luckily, we found a Google Fusion Map that merged every video game company listed in Wikipedia with Google Maps, which helped structure our search visually⁴. Our main approach to finding developers was to start by looking up game studios in the North East. We would then find any game by from that studio that is older than 10 years and look up each name in the credits. More often than not, we either found no information and could not prove that the information belonged to the same person. If we could do so, however, we would add that person to a list and continue researching them.

After performing a search in the North East, we started branching out to the East Coast, considering companies in Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina. Eventually we also included California as a What-if scenario, due to the fact that the game industry seems to have settled there in the past years. We separated the developers into three priorities afterwards:

⁴ *List of Video Game Developers*, last updated November 1, 2012
https://www.google.com/fusiontables/DataSource?docid=1k3BagOaN4qFW74QrNkIPdesKyr5ds_68_qtnBvY#map:id=3

nearby developers, who worked or were retired in the Massachusetts area, road trip accessible developers, who live or used to work in companies in the New England and east coast area and finally, the California list, which was our most desperate list in the case we wouldn't manage to get a reply from any developer in the previous two lists.

Only one developer showed interest towards being a part of the Oral History project, Warren Robinett, but we lost contact with him after a blizzard occurred in North Carolina, and still have not heard from him since then. Eventually, the possibility of interviewing Brenda Romero came up because the IMGD Program had invited her to WPI to give a talk on game design. Professor O'Donnell had us prepare for the interview just in case while he and Professor Moriarty spoke to Brenda Romero, and eventually she agreed to sit down with us. Shortly before the interview, we found out the John Romero would be traveling with Brenda, and once again we prepared for an interview just in case, however our time was very limited. John turned out to be interested in the project, and officially agreed to an interview after some simple urging from Brenda.

Preparing Interviews

Preparing for the interviews was crucial in order to guarantee that they met the goals of this oral history project. We needed the interviewee to share more than just an answer to our questions, and we needed to make sure that they discussed topics that they had not already discussed several times in other mediums. All of these things depended on our ability to learn about the interviewees and ask thoughtful questions.

The first step was to find biographical information about our interviewees. We started with their personal web pages to see what information they explicitly wanted people to know about. We then found a few biographies written by others about Brenda and John, such as *Masters of Doom*. From this basic information, we noted any topic that seemed to represent a notable event in the interviewee's life, most often games they designed or worked on. We would search for any information we could find about that event, and once again note any new topics that struck our interest, as long as it was still relevant to the interviewee. We repeated this process until we felt that the new topics we found were either too difficult to find information about or simply not directly relevant to the interviewee.

The next step was to find any previous interviews that the interviewee participated in. The purpose of this was to learn what questions they have already answered and avoid repeating the question. In the case that we wanted to hear more detail about a particular answer, we would note that down and later come up with a question regarding that topic. Once we were confident that we knew what questions had already been asked, we went back to our biographical notes and wrote down the topics we were most interested in, before going through each topic and attempting to write a handful of questions for each one.

Finally, after we wrote our questions, we allowed some time to pass and then spoke each question out loud to each other in order to make sure the question sounds the same out loud as it did in our heads. If not, and we felt it might be offputting for the interviewee, we struck the question and tried to think up a new one on the same topic. In the end, the questions were only good enough if they would evoke memories of the time instead of just simply getting an answer.

Conducting Interviews

Conducting the interviews themselves was perhaps the most important part of the project. This was where we produced the actual content we were responsible for outside of this report. There were countless ways to screw up the recordings, from technical mishaps to making our interviewees uncomfortable. Since the ideal interview for an oral history is more like a conversation, it was especially important to conduct ourselves professionally and ensure that we made our interviewees feel as comfortable as possible sharing their experiences.

This meant we had to continually show our interest without actually responding and interrupting them. It also meant our questions for them had to be adjusted on the fly to ensure that we were following a flow of conversation, rather than rigidly asking questions about predetermined topics.

The interviews were nerve-wracking, as we have a tremendous admiration for Brenda and John Romero, and neither of us are confident speakers. In spite of this, it was important that we speak clearly when asking our questions and that we remember to respond non-verbally during the interview in order to ensure that we did not ruin the audio recordings or make it difficult to understand what they said, and most importantly, to ensure that we did not interfere with the flow of their story.

While we had a list of questions prepared in advance, we also prepared ourselves to ask questions about unexpected topics that arose. Sticking to our questions too rigidly would prevent the interviewee from developing a flow for their stories, making them less likely to delve below the surface and share the more interesting aspects of the story. Instead we used our prepared

questions as a guide for topics we wanted to hear about, and tried to steer the stories those topics without actually stopping the story that was being developed in order to ask the exact question we prepared.

For both sets of interviews we tested different light setups on Nicholas until we could get desirable results we would expect out of a professional level interview. The room we worked in had two windows that cast light into our scene, so we chose to use these and one artificial point light as a three point light fixture. For our production camera, the scene looked fantastic, we got good highlights and shadows out of the participant and it resulted in a very nice image. Because the optics for our side camera were significantly worse than our production camera, the colors in the resulting image seemed washed out but the highlights and shadows were maintained, so a simple color correction would be enough to cope with this downside.

Setting up cameras proved to be the easiest in theory, as there is are very effective layouts that work extremely well for interviews. For these interviews we decided to perform two separate angles, a close up view for emphasizing facial expressions and a full bust view, to emphasize hand movements. These two angles proved effective when carrying the interview as John Romero and Brenda Romero were very expressive with their hand motions and facial expressions when expressing sequences of time or simply small, personal events. This gave us a great amount of actions to highlights which made finding cut points easier during the editing process.

Editing Interviews

The end goal of editing is to produce a fluid cut showing the interviewee's discussion of a single topic. There are necessary steps required to successfully maintain action, along with a universal language and techniques most editors follow to convey a story in edited footage. For this project, it was expected that after an hour session of an interview we'd be able to do short clips that would convey a single topic from the participant's interview, complete with an introduction, development, and a conclusion. Attempting to keep a flow for most of our clips proved cumbersome and helped us gain an appreciation of the medium. Described in this section are steps and measures taken to maintain said flow.

The most common and important technique we used was action matching when cutting the video. It consists on making a cut when the interviewee is moving a part of their body which could allow us to move into another angle or scene altogether. Action matching allowed us to remove certain stutters, certain silence moments and connect answers to separate but relevant questions. When using this technique it was extremely important to make sure that the intention of the interviewee when expressing those words was maintained, so careful consideration of the order of these cuts had to be enforced. This technique proved the most resourceful in the end, it allowed us to gather multiple statements about a single topic and made it seem continuous.

Another technique we used to create continuous action in the interviews was staggered audio. Staggered audio consists on shifting audio from the next clip into the current clip, so the transition to said next clip could feel more natural. This technique was used mostly when the interviewee was not performing actions but their bodies were in different positions, and

permitted to make an angle change without having a jumpy transition. It was applied during filler words which were purposely kept for this technique, during “uhms” or simply stutters.

Finally, when both techniques were not enough to maintain consistent action, we’d look into integrating B-Roll and covering the cut with it. This technique allows you to contextualize and verify the claims of the interviewee and additionally allows the editor to hide rough cuts. We tried to integrate B-Roll in the forms of images with a Ken Burns effect or by providing footage of the game the interviewee was mentioning in the relevant scene.

The last technique we used was only to speed up stutters or filler words the interviewees used in between questions or statements. We saw this technique being used in “BBS: The Documentary” (Scott, 2005), and noticed that speeding up these scenes to 150 percent of its original speed would lead to natural-looking and natural-sounding results. It was used scarcely and only when necessary, but in the small cases it was used, it ended up producing a very satisfying result.

Website

Part of ensuring quality in an ongoing project is to have every medium it resides in represented at its best for the time it resides on. For us, the website where our videos will be hosted is no exception. Thanks to recent technologies, hosting videos is no longer a hassle and these solutions cover more devices than before. As a project that desires to host oral histories, it is absolutely necessary to cover as many devices as possible and to stay relevant with current technologies. It is then why the Oral History’s website was redesigned to take as much advantage of these new advances, so our medium could be preserved for the years to come.

The first step towards modernizing the website was to settle for a design which would maintain the principles that the original website had, yet with compliance to the current standards. The old website's primary features included a banner with the two organizations behind the project, a description of the project with the logo of the IGDA Game Preservation SIG and links to the interviews, complete with a description of the participant and the year it was conducted in. The website had a vertical orientation and followed a traditional F-pattern⁵, suited for western use, which is the target audience the website most likely had in mind.

The new design then proceeded to keep this orientation and pattern but had a heavy emphasis on bigger text, color coding and using a sans-serif font so it's more pleasant to watch in a screen⁶. The website went over three revisions under supervision by Professor Dean O'Donnell, until finally a design that had the values Professor O'Donnell envisioned was agreed on. The final result used Worcester Polytechnic Institute's crimson red as a way to discern the interviews from the initial description text and footer and bigger images and heavier text weights for each interview description, to emphasize legibility and contrast.

Finally, we made sure the website would be compatible with modern browsing devices such as mobile phones, tablets and browser-based operating systems. Thankfully, the new HTML5 standard provides a native implementation of web video that allowed us to move away from proprietary formats such as Flash and instead have better encapsulating technologies which future groups would find more accessible. For implementing the player we used JSVideo, which plays well with the markup code and requires almost no setup for it to work, this gave additional

⁵ Jacon Nielsen, *F-Shaped Pattern for Reading Web Content*
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/>

⁶ Stacey Kole, *SERIF VS. SANS: THE FINAL BATTLE*
<http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2013/03/serif-vs-sans-the-final-battle/>

functionality to the project's website by allowing for the user to scroll back and forth in a video, which our previous Flash player did not include.

The end result is, in our experience, a simple to expand website, with a simple to follow file structure and unified file formats which are open and native to most popular operating systems. This not only guarantees that the website will be supported in the years to come but also helps out future members add their videos to the website without adding any other steps to ensure compatibility. We additionally found out previous members had added their reports to the website's server but never linked them in the website, so in order to fulfill their desires added a section to the "Important Links" page in the website which links to their reports and any future reports if members wish to add them later on.

Conclusion

This project was completed through a fairly large stroke of fortune. While many aspects of this project went well for us, in the end it proved extremely difficult to find interview candidates. Many candidates mentioned by previous groups have since left the region, and in some cases were not actually here to begin with. The only candidate who replied to us was Warren Robinett, creator of Adventure for the Atari 2600. Unfortunately, while discussing a time and place for the interview, Robinett's region experienced a blizzard, and we did not hear back from him after that.

We were able to complete the project due to the very generous efforts of Professor O'Donnell and Professor Moriarty, who discussed the possibility of an interview with Brenda Romero during her trip to WPI to give a talk. Furthermore, John ended up coming as well, and also agreed to speak with us. Though we may have been able to start arranging an interview with Robinett sooner if the Romero interviews had not happened, it is just as likely that the same results would have occurred and we would not have been able to secure an interview to complete the project.

In spite of the close call, we are very satisfied to have worked on this project. We learned a substantial amount about interviewing and camera work, and it culminated in interviewing two figures in the game industry whom we greatly admire. We were also able to make a very healthy change to the website, upgrading it to adhere to more modern, though still quite simple, standards in both appearance and structure. Though our work ethic suffered greatly after the

Romero interviews, we were able to complete the project and leave it in a state we are comfortable with.

Considerations

For the Future of the Project

This project from the beginning was known to be hard not for the near-professional level of execution or amount of work required to maintain or edit the videos, instead it's hard because most of the game industry has moved and stayed in the West Coast or the South West. Finding retired developers in the North East who are still willing to provide information is a rarity nowadays, most have moved on to other sections of the workforce, as is the case with Omar Khudari, who now is a consultant for Steve Normanton's Grass-fed Beef and Adam Levesque, who now works at Griffin Properties, a real estate agency.

We recommend to the IMGD Faculty then to promote this IQP into an off-campus opportunity in the West Coast area in project centers such as Silicon Valley or any other California based center in which new developers from untouched companies can provide new insights for the project. We do not believe more than one more group is likely to complete this project without traveling half the country or more for their interviews. We also believe that the PQP and ID2050 followed by a single term dedicated only to this project will provide much more natural pacing for the project, avoiding some of the pitfalls that we, and evidently a few of our predecessors, fell into. As a small benefit, if this were indeed moved to California, the benefit of more consistent weather would also be a major bonus for a project that relies so heavily on being able to schedule a meeting and have it go as intended.

For Future Groups

The most important advice we can offer is to frequently look back at previous groups' reports. Whenever Dean asks you to work on something, figure out which sections of the report apply to it and do the write-up as soon as you finish it. Usually there will be 3 sections relevant to each task: one section depending on the task, one piece of the methodology section where you discuss what you did, and one piece in the literature review where you discuss what sources you used and how you use them. We were not consistent in doing this and left ourselves a lot to go back and write up formally at the end of the project.

If at all possible, we strongly encourage you to plan your meetings with Dean so that you can leave the meeting and begin working immediately. At the very least, you should go over everything you were asked to do so that everyone in the group is on the same page while the information is still fresh, and so that you can quickly email Dean for clarification if you cannot agree on something.

We recommend you do practice interviews both with and without questions prepared ahead of time. Though we call them interviews, you are not asking questions strictly to hear the answer. You are trying to give your interviewee something to talk about. In this way, these interviews are almost more like conversations, and they certainly require you to use your conversational skills to coax out stories that are more personal and less facts of history. We were fortunate to practice this way by chance, due to the difference in our relationships with our practice interviewees, and we found the experience invaluable when we interviewed the Romeros.

As a general note, winter is awful. The weather will absolutely ruin a handful of your plans. If you stay on top of this project, you might only have to worry about it while writing your report. If not, you will have to be prepared for the weather to interfere with the actual interviews as well. Remember that even if the weather is alright here in Worcester, it may not be alright elsewhere. We lost contact with Warren Robinett when North Carolina experienced a blizzard, and were not able to get in touch with him again after that.

Maintaining the Website

This year we made some significant changes to the website. While the changes themselves have been listed previously in the Results section of this report, we would like to leave clear instructions for future groups to add a new entry to the site, in case there is any confusion.

Thumbnails and Bio Pics have been standardized, both are in the Portable Networks Graphics (PNG) format. Thumbnails have a size of 150x150 pixels and Bio Pics have a size of 290x210 pixels. These sizes are the result of finding the maximum height and width for these categories according to previous project members. We would like to enforce these standards to keep the quality and load size of the page consistent.

Videos have all been encoded to work with open technologies and compatible with HTML 5 standards. They are encoded at 720p using MPEG4, you don't have to worry much about this, just throw your uncompressed videos at Adobe Media Encoder and select Vimeo 720p in presets for each video and you should be done. There's no naming conventions for the

videos as of yet, but try to include the name of the interviewee and the title of the video in the description. Lesser's videos were hard to encode and add to the website because of the naming convention chosen for her, please be considerate to future project members when naming your clips.

Additionally, the website no longer uses deprecated table tags to enforce a layout. It now uses div tags, which should make your life way easier when creating websites, try looking at Brian Moriarty's page as it contains a short amount of videos on how you should format these pages. Integrating video in the page is as easy as adding a video tag and adding a source, a better explanation can be found on the source code for the web pages.

A lot of time was spent attempting to enforce some type of file organization which makes sense. The previous site had unused folders, pictures and duplicate videos which were additionally out of place. Now everything is in a convenient structure, media, such as images and videos, go on the media folder and interview pages on the interview folder. Miscellaneous files, such as your complete raw footage should go in the files folder. Interview and media folders enforce an initials and last name naming convention, for John Romero you should be using jromero. This reduces the amount of guesswork when making new webpages, as everything is where you should expect it to be.

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Appendix A - B. Romero Questions

1. You began working at Sir-tech at the young age of 15. Did you know going into that job that you would like to build your career in the game industry?
2. When you joined the game industry, was it understood to be stable or profitable, or would you say it was still experimental?
3. How did you approach quality testing with the Wizardry series?
4. How is quality testing an RPG different from any other game?
5. Did quality testing the following Wizardry games change as the sequels were released?
6. Were you surprised to see the differences between the American Wizardry games and the Japanese Wizardry games?
7. How did your experience with RPGs transfer to the Jagged Alliance lore?
8. Was it difficult to start writing for games? Had you in some form already started to do that for some projects?
9. Did game development have any sort of consistent structure early on, or was it each project a unique experience? Has that changed over time?
10. How was approaching a strategy game story different from any other genre?
11. You had a more hands on role for Jagged Alliance 2, what did you learn in the previous iteration that helped Jagged Alliance 2?
12. How did you end up working on Wizardry 8 as a designer?
13. How did you attempt to separate the game from its Japanese branch?
14. How did you approach such a taboo topic as the Playboy Mansion and help define it as a game?
15. Did this carry over on to Def Jam in terms of handling celebrity appearances?
16. You had worked on a simulation game, an RPG series and a strategy series, how was approaching this fighting genre different?
17. Tell us about your Mechanic in the Message series, what inspired you to start to convey message through game design?
18. How is it different to create a digital or electronic game to a pure design perspective?
19. Do you believe games for young children lack substance and message?
20. How would you suggest approaching games for this audience?
21. After Train, Siochan and The New World, what's next for this design installation, what stories do you plan to convey, what experiences do you want to dissipate?
22. As a speaker, how have you found the medium to teach your experiences throughout all of your years to your audience, is it easier to show than tell?

Appendix B - J. Romero Questions

1. What drove you towards the industry, was it existing games or lack of them?
2. When you were developing Scout Search, what kinds of limitations did you encounter because of the tools available to you? How did you work around these limitations?
3. You developed Scout Search while working for a programming magazine. How did that experience differ from later projects at formal game development studios?
4. After your time at Origin Systems, one of your longest periods at a single company, you began to found your own companies rather than work for somebody else, the exception being your brief time at SoftDisk. Was there something in particular that led you in this direction?
5. Once you began to found your own companies, you seemed to have taken an immediate preference to doing so over working for someone else. How does the experience differ as an owner and why are you so drawn to that role?
6. How were you drawn in to SoftDisc after founding your first two companies?
7. From SoftDisc, most of the group, including yourself, left to found id Software, was there any specific reason why?
8. Commander Keen is probably the only franchise made for all ages that you developed at id Software, how was Commander Keen conceptualized to be a kid's friendly PC game?
9. In your opinion, what set Wolfenstein 3D and Doom apart from other FPS games at the time, including id Software's earlier title Hovortank?
10. When developing Wolfenstein 3D, did the Nazi scenario with mechanical robots occur to reflect current technologies or was it an idea you had in your mind beforehand?
11. Doom outdid Wolfenstein 3D from a technological standpoint, however it also featured a mixture of Sci-Fi and Hell mythology, what inspired this crossover?
12. In comparison to Doom's setting, what made Quake be just a deathmatch game?
13. What led you to found Ion Storm with Tom Hall after leaving id Software?
14. Coming from id Software and their breakthroughs in the 3D area, do you feel Daikatana needed more time to correctly execute the ambitions it had in the 3D space?
15. Your time at Ion Storm seems to have been one of the rougher patches in your career. Are there any major lessons from that time you've taken to heart?
16. You've also worked in other established franchises, such as Zork and Gauntlet, how did you approach development in these already established franchises?
17. One of your recent works involves a web browser with mobile-like influences, Tom Clancy Ghost Recon Commander, how did you choose to approach this platform coming from other platforms?
18. You've worked on games on a wide variety of genres and platforms. Are there any combinations you've found to have unique or interesting challenges during development?
19. Are there any projects or business proposals that failed even though you were sure they'd be successful? In hindsight, what do you think led to these failures?

20. Since having children, have you considered going back to a child-like setting such as Commander Keen's?