

Social Contact

MFA Thesis by pierre depaz

ON COMPUTING

Social Contact is a digital simulation of political philosophy. The intent was to take the medium of computing and apply it to existing principles that have been embedded in our societies for centuries. More specifically, I wanted to look at how the ability of computers to create emergent states from an existing set of specific instructions can act as a mirror for our own political thoughts.

ON RULES

The player is given the affordance to manipulate the software into shaping uncertain patterns. She is then presented with simulated results, which often don't conform to what she would have expected. The game features two sets of conflicting instructions. As one setting is picked over another, a mental model is formed around the expected result from that choice. This first set of instructions is the behavior expected from the player's perspective. However, when the software itself interprets these instructions, it does so in a very different, mathematical and logical, way. These settings, as embodiments of choice, are interpreted in an essentially different way. From this difference a space for thought is created.

ON POLITICS

Despite being the result of the interaction between the human and the machine, Social Contact chooses not to look primarily at either of them. The subject of Social Contact is deliberately political. Faced with the increasing disinterest for programming and political matters of our generation, this project aims at reinvigorating curiosity and reflection around both.

ON DISINTEREST

There is a natural tendency to take things for granted when one has not witnessed their coming into being. Our generation is characterized by the very fact that those expressing this disinterest were born after both the popularization of microcomputers and democratic revolutions. This lack of passion for political thought in western countries might have stemmed from our taking for granted of these democracies, and even their multiple limitations do not appear to trigger conscious philosophical thought and speculation. Presenting a certain version of political philosophy as a game -the most emotional genre of interactive software- is therefore my attempt at presenting old ideas through new media.