


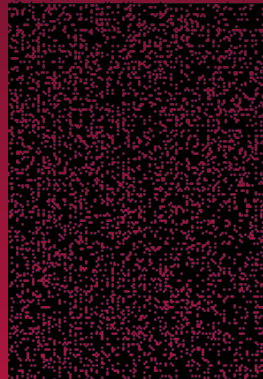
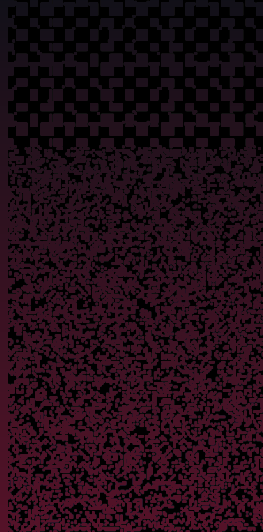
Avatar

an exploration of the malleability of online identities through
character creation sandboxes

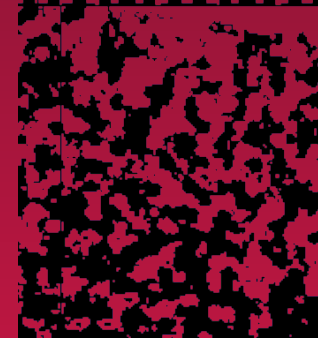
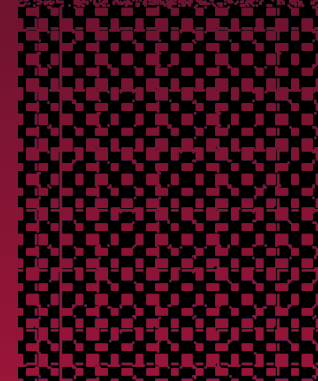
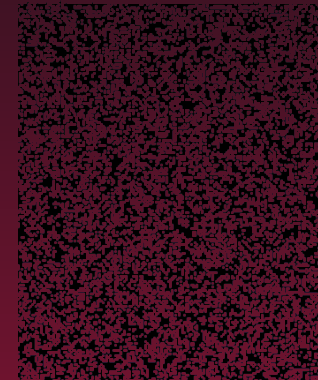
by wilson "iris" li (13532712)
87849 emerging and speculative technologies 2020




Avatar



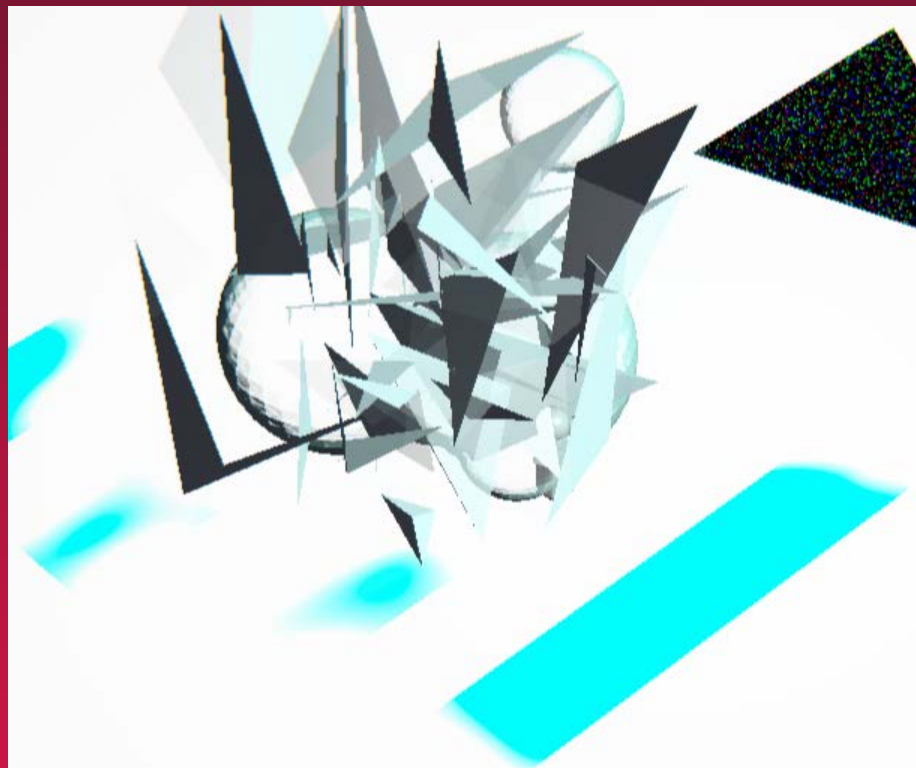
prototype accessible at: <https://axoletl.itch.io/mx-media>
password: hello123





mx. media is an interactive video game project exploring the malleability of identities online, the dynamic of this identity in opposition to the immediate self, and the players personal bounds in this.

In doing so, this project aims to make its online audiences more aware of the ways they consume and interact with online spaces in the hopes that they may make more conscientious decisions about the boundaries they place between themselves and the digital, whether to strengthen or otherwise.



The project accomplishes this utilising mechanics inspired by character creation systems and physics based sandbox games in order to create an environment that analogises and tells a narrative of a newcomer to the online world. An avatar that is controlled via mouse drag and drop provides the medium of which the player interacts with this world, letting them crash the avatar into objects to take on aspects of it as a part of their avatar's body.

This is the main inspiration of the project's naming, a play on the gender non-specific title *mx.* as a reference to the de-emphasis of some core identity to the avatar as it shifts and changes in the world to metaphorically discover itself, as well as mixed media, an art term describing the pastiche of different mediums in the creation of a whole piece.

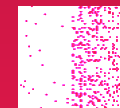
mx. media is presented as a prototype stage, with limitations on aspects such as scope in being single player experience. It would be interesting to explore the mechanics of this game and what they represent as a truly online space.



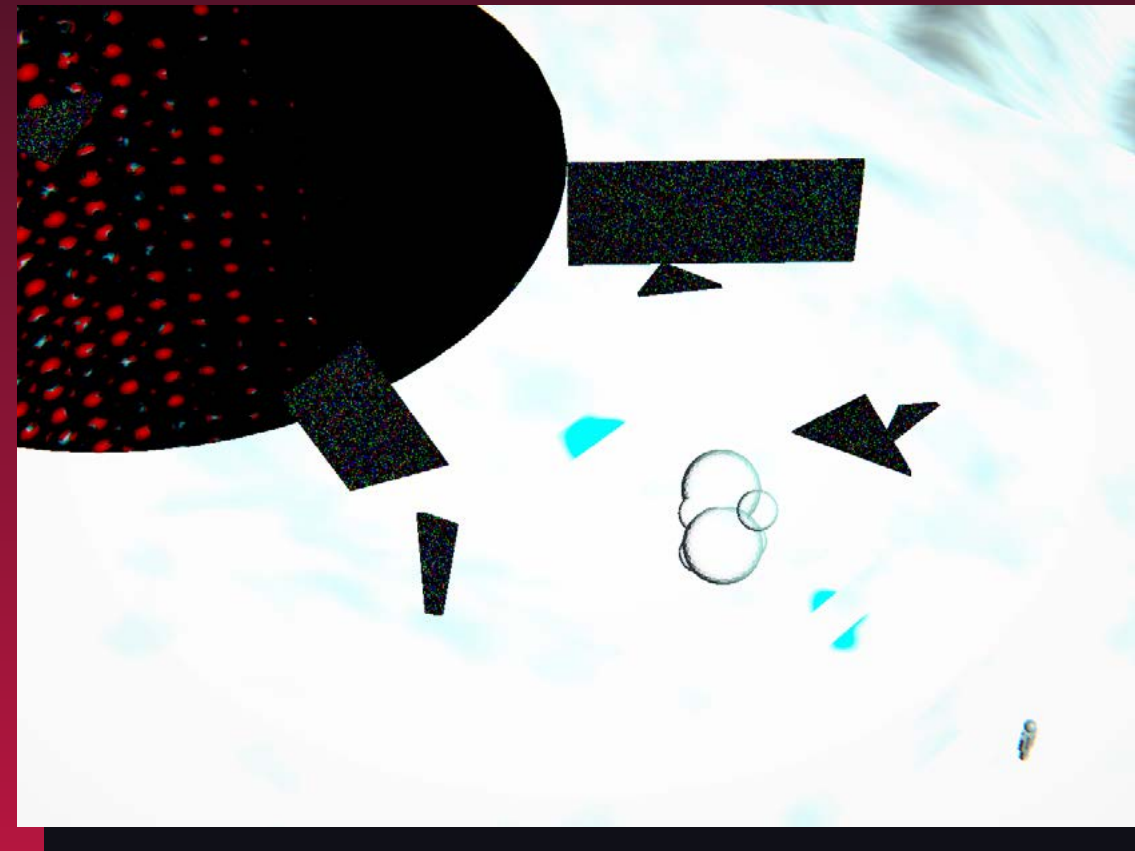
mx. media begins on a login dialog. The screen asks the user to input their username and name. As a single player browser based game, this serves no mechanical purpose in its prototype stage. However, conceptually it sets the player up to separate themselves from their username or persona, manifesting in game as the avatar later. On many websites and communities, the following field to a username is usually a password, thus making the inclusion of a name field in particular distinct.



A login dialog box with a light blue background. It contains two input fields and a button. The first input field is labeled "Username" and contains the placeholder text "Enter username". The second input field is labeled "Name" and contains the placeholder text "Enter name". Below the input fields is a button with the text ">>".

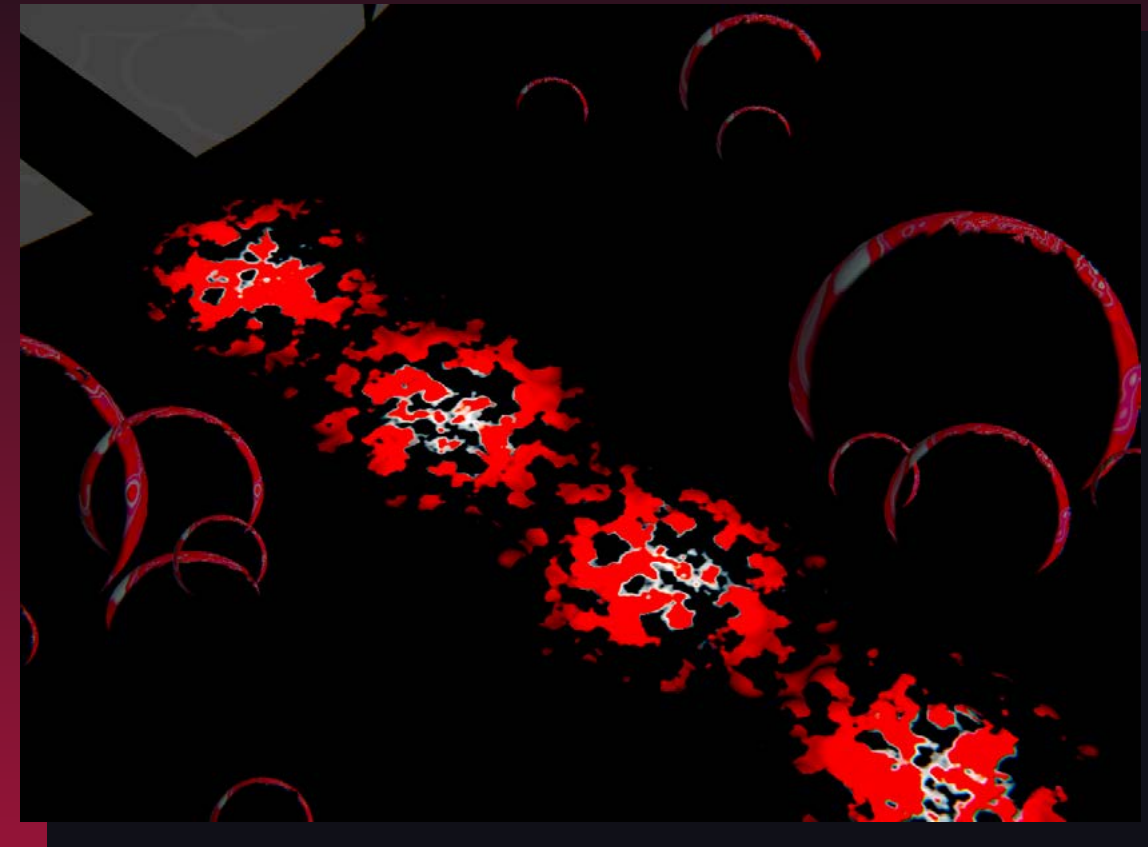
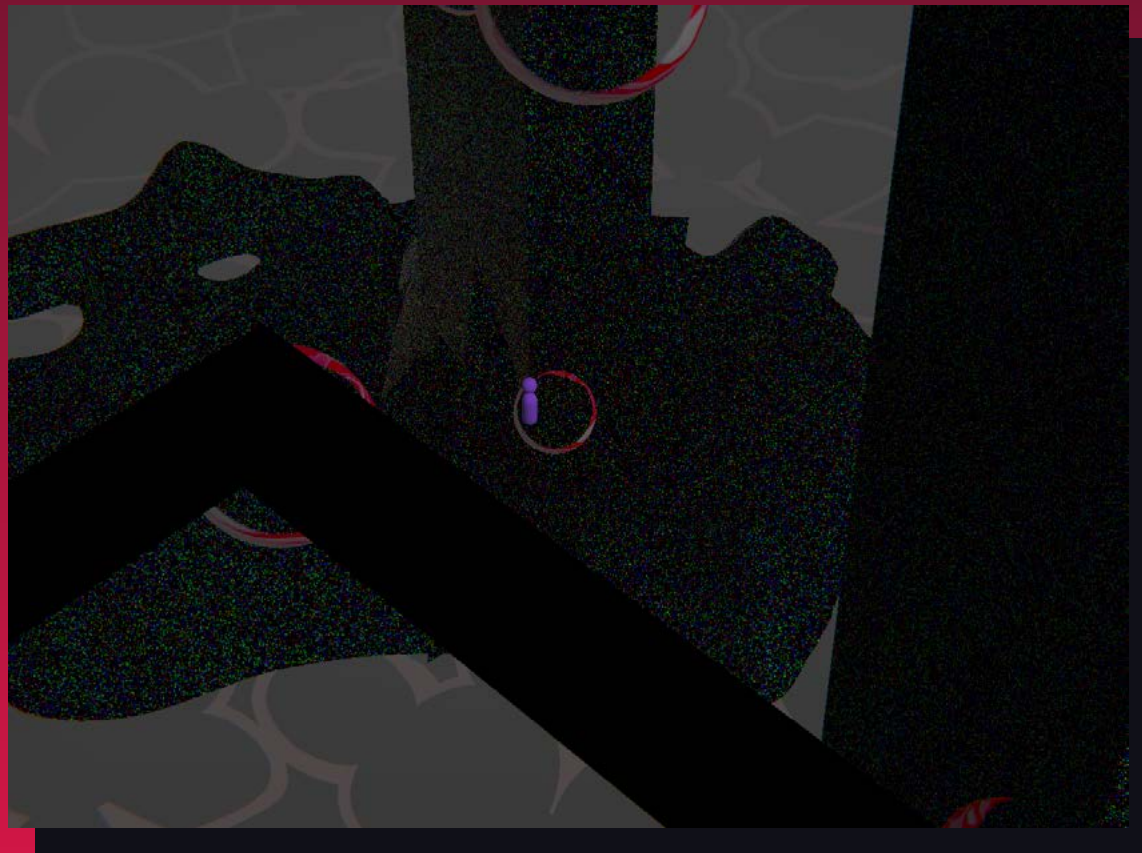


The player is presented with the first screen in which they may interact with their avatar, internally dubbed Corporate. Corporate is representational of the clean optimistic tech forward face of the internet; a jingle greets the player into a new world at the control of a glossy plain avatar standing on top of a caged sky. A glass sculpture rotates in front of the avatar, enticing the player to consume its sterile contents, and yet around it jut the staticy voids of advertisement screens, belying the nature of the corporate that lies just under the surface. Eventually, the player too goes under.





From Corporate, the player falls into Forum, the living, breathing and writhing lifeblood of the digital world. Countless voices talk amongst themselves in indecipherable lexicons, forming insular bubbles of community that the avatar may intrude upon, taking on a bit of them with it.

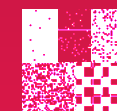
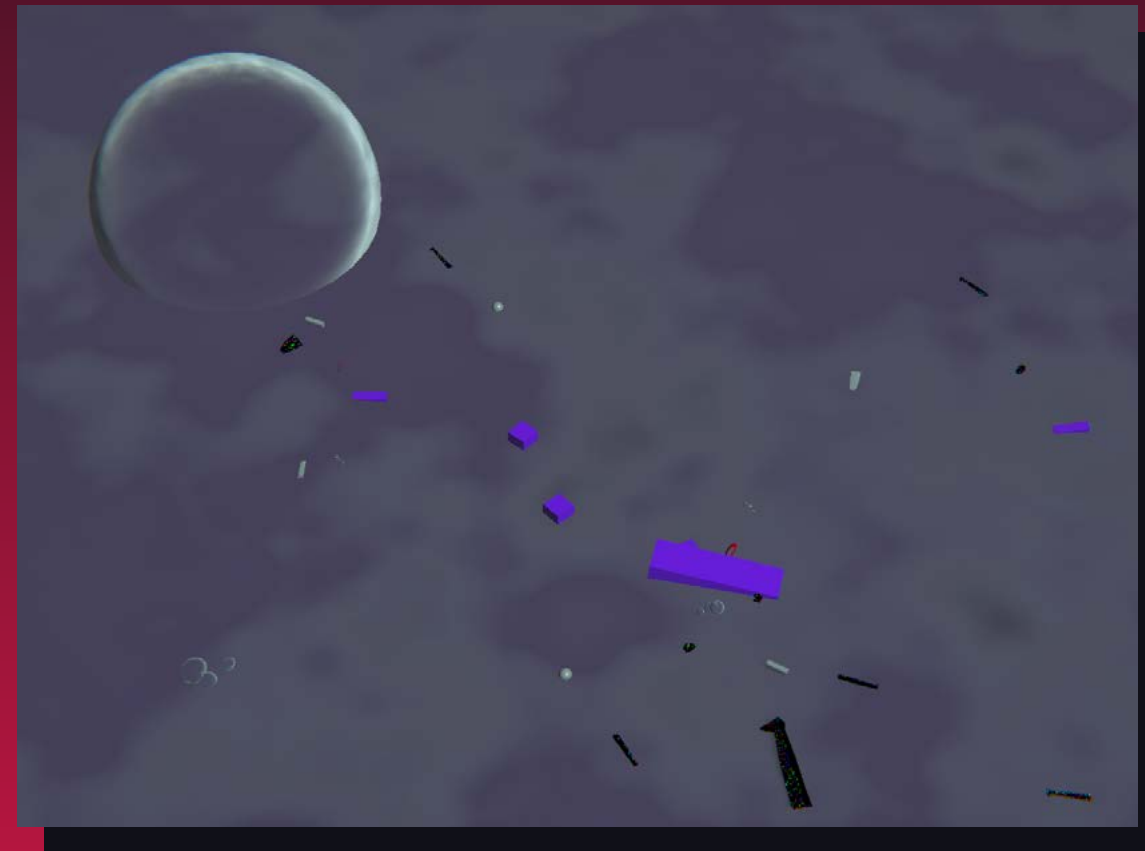


The player leads the avatar into a maze, a labyrinth manifested of the player navigating through and finding their place in the new world, as others whizz by, lives briefly intersecting to imprint themselves on the avatar. In the background looms the long maintained pillars of the early internet's systems; software, communities and ideas clinging to aging structures that provide the foundations for the clean surface of the internet.



Coming out of the maze, the player finally finds their place ending in Social, the aftermath of the many in the online world finding themselves. Social is representative of the end point of many peoples journeys online, social media. It is a sea of different aspects of many people, a junkyard of selves put forth into potentially infinite others. It is shifting and disorienting, the path forward found only by breadcrumb trails of the different pieces of others.

The player may stop the avatar here, or for that matter any point in this journey, but the light of the surface gleams off an object ahead, a way out of this diorienting, disembodied sea. The player can log out.





The avatar floats towards the surface, a remnant of its sound echoing through, but not before the game asks a couple of questions of the player. "Is this You? Do You accept this?" is asking the player to reflect on the distance between the digital self and the physical self.

Answering "Yes" will lead to a black screen, turning the screen into a reflective mirror where the player sees themselves where the avatar was previously. A synth heartbeat and single voice play, mirroring a sense of being within a body as one soul.

Answering "No" will bring another question, "Will You ever find Yourself in this?", asking if the player may ever find themselves in the digital world. Answering "Yes" brings the player to the login screen, logged out but destined to login again so they may continue to find themselves, Answering "No" will either exit or crash the game, locking the player out, as they have determined they will not find themselves in the digital world.

