

Societies and their Q3 Maps

SPACES : In a contemporary society an empty space is somewhere on or in a terrain, where nothing was made for people to live, like a piece of land or a free place within a space. As our terrain is getting more and more expended in virtual fields such as Internet, role playing game's univers, video game's landscapes, more and more of the spaces we use and design are virtual.

Every different society has its own needs witch drive it to some very original process of building its spaces.

Let's take the example of the space of a city. An American city is obviously completely different from an Italian city and the way American peoples use their city and the way Italian peoples do is also fundamentally different. The relations people has to public spaces come from the way the spaces they live in are. Leaving in a space and building it are 2 linked process, the way societies build their spaces is part of their way of living.

At the time when I was spending all my days making custom maps for a game called Quake 3 Arena, I was completely surrounded by this world of custom levels and custom level making peoples coming from different countrys. I started to notice some details, some differences that most of the time really made a map a American or European. I've been in an American society for 4 month, and all those details and differences I noticed is those maps came back to my mind as I was discovering some completely different spaces and people.

what is this thing gamers call “MAPS” ?

More and more game give gamers some tools to help them to build their own content and customize their gaming experience. It's first of all a commercial strategy designed to help the game to be played longer, which really worked for a lot of game, and created this whole society of “non official game designers” all around the world. I would say that the term «Map» comes from the fact that it doesn't nominate a new level but just a new Space where people will be able to play the game. It does not change the rules of the gameplay or the scenario of the game. It's just a new space build from an empty space within the territory of a game. Some people creates those spaces, from my point of view they unconsciously create a link between their society and their realisation.

what is a map ?

A map is a model built from a territory. People uses it to analyse the territory, talk about it and understand it. The answer to “what is a map” is the first step that will help us to understand the relations between maps and people.

Let's have a look to the definition people from France and people from America give to the term MAP (thanks to wikipedia) :

en.wikipedia.org : A map is a simplified depiction of a space, a navigational aid which highlights relations between objects within that space. [...]

fr.wikipedia.org : Une carte topographique est une carte à grande échelle représentant le relief et les aménagements humains d'une région géographique de manière précise et détaillée. [...] *(A topographic map is a large scaled map that gives a precise and detailed representation of the relief and human installations of a geographic area).*

So according to those 2 definitions an American map will describe a space and talk about relations while a French map will be a detailed representation of the space. It sounds like two different things !

According to my experiences those differences can definitely be applied those virtual spaces called Map and reflects how peoples from France and from America live and think.

Let's look at some Maps made for the game Quake 3 Arena, here is a little list of some American maps and French maps. As a big Quake 3 player who tested all the maps he could, I can tell that being in those made in US or made in FR maps is very different.

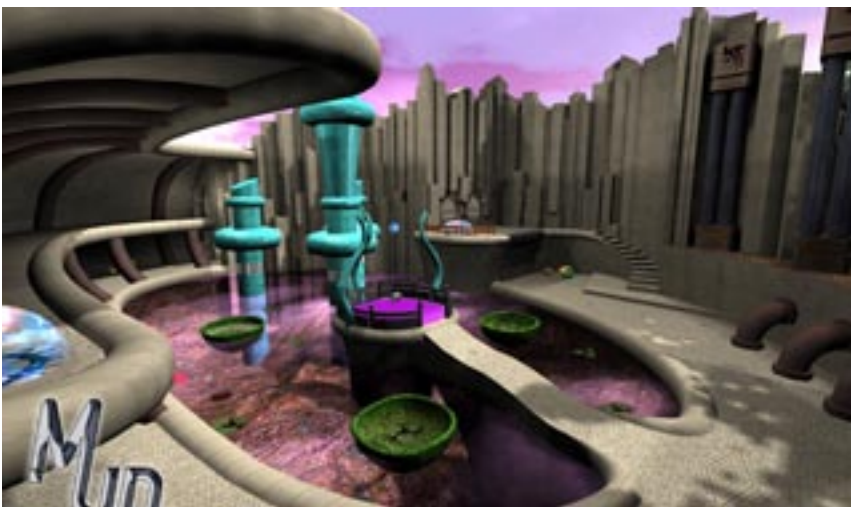
French maps are most of the time really boring to play, and don't improve the gameplay at all. In fact they destroy the gameplay and turn the game into something not fun at all. On the other hand they are pretty nice and sometime you can even feel some sensation the mapper might wanted to express. The main point of their construction is 99% of the time about visual design and what is being represented.



A-Spec

by Gaël

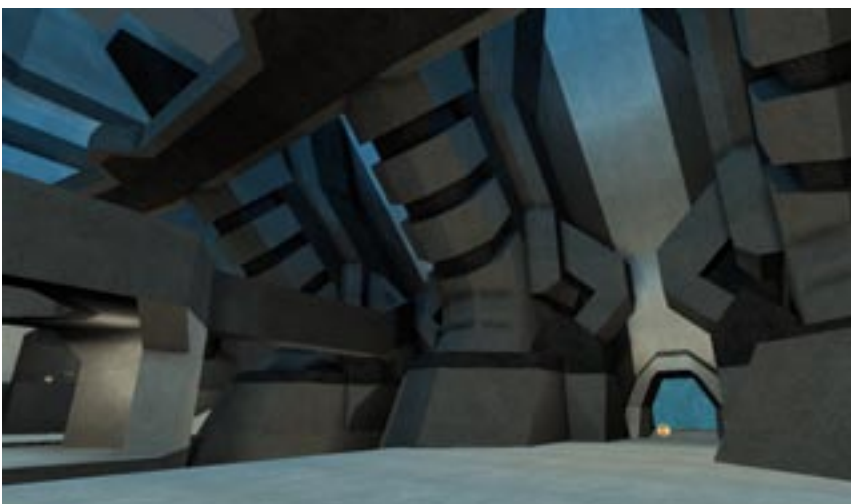
<http://sylvain.douce.club.fr/aspec/>



Q3FF7

by Kamaji

<http://media4d.planetquake.gamespy.com/>

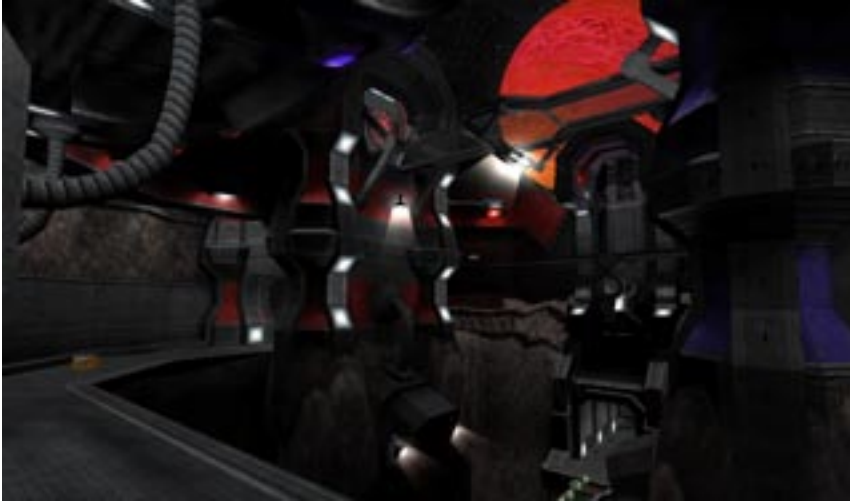


Platypus

by Nunuk

<http://nunuk.planetquake.gamespy.com/>

American maps are much more fun. Most of the time they really improve the gameplay by giving the player a lot of possible interaction. Every single polygon of the map is designed to give the player more possibility in the game and interaction with the environment. On the other hand they all look the same and their graphics are not original. Most of the time mappers will use the textures and object already used in the original game or just follow the heap.



Spill the Blood

by Quaker-X

<http://quakerx.planetquake.gamespy.com/>



Swiss Cheese Trickster

by Q-Fraggel

<http://quakerx.planetquake.gamespy.com/>



noQ3DM5

by noname



Black Town

by XPac27

<http://xpac27.new.fr>

A french mapper needs to represent what he think and will focus on all the details that makes the space look like it have to. He will spend all his time making shaders, looking for textures and debugging his map because it has a lot of issues with the compiler.



Beatbox

by ZTN

<http://ztn.planetquake.gamespy.com/>

An American mapper needs to describe his goal by focusing on the interactions between the elements of the space, the space itself and the player. He will spend a lot of time testing beta versions of his maps with other people to adjust it, improving the gameplay.

Because they are Virtual spaces and designed for and by the gamer's community, those kind of space are mainly defined by the way they look like and what they are made for. Those two dimensions are the main attributes that make the maps what they are. A virtual map in a game include the list of all the geometry, objects, powerup, playerspawn, items, weapons, ... present in the space. It is a model that helps mappers to understand what is going on while look at his creation by giving him a visual representation of the situation. So coming back to the 2 definitions of a map taken from wikipedia, we can see that there is some obvious links between the way American and French people make and define a map.

The technical concept of making a map is interesting to consider. A new map starts from a terrain of empty space with nothing at all but an infinity emptiness. When building a map the mapper will add volumes in this space building different shapes together and finally close the space by making a big shape (most of the time a cube) that surround the whole map. But the space between those shape's surfaces and the player is still empty and those surfaces witch is what the mapper built and witch makes the map are always next to the player and the player is actually never in the map. He is in front of his screen of course, but his point of view that gives him the sensation of being in the map is out of the map. The same way the burger you've eat last week wasn't at any time in your body but went through it.

There is mainly two way we can feel a space like this one : by interacting and by observing. I would say that any space never come in people's life, but life flows trough those spaces. It shapes them and change them all the time.

As a conclusion, regarding to my recent experiences, I can say that it was pretty difficult for me to shape in an American space where every thing is designed for a specific use or to help you in your goals. Some time the space explicitly tell you what you have to do to use it ("walk", "stop", "eat", ...) and a lot of peoples are here to make sure you do. As their Quake 3 maps, American people's spaces are very well optimized and designed to improve your activity's.

A french space is always something interesting to wander in and doesn't really have any goal, which often brings people to some conflict. It's extremely difficult to navigate and find your way in french cities because each city is not really shaped by people's goals but by some many things else, that always makes it very typical. As their Quake 3 maps, french people's spaces are charming and pretty disordered.

I don't know if an American mind is optimized and a French mind charming, but American society aim to optimisation when french society aim on charm, you can feel this in their talking, you can feel this in their cities and spaces, and you can also feel this in their virtual spaces.

Are new countries going to appear in those new virtual spaces ? Is it the beginning of a new history of crusade, war, guild and brotherhood ? I just hope we will keep on forgetting the notion of boundaries while building them.