'First Day' : Playing the 1975 Parliamentary Crisis

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Keywords
Interactive fiction, Australian history, Education, Game Design

Format of work
"First Day" is a working interactive fiction prototype hosted online via Twine (twinery.org).

DESCRIPTION OF WORK
This work is the first playable prototype for an upcoming interactive fiction game created by the History Trust of South Australia, entitled "First Day". It follows a young Labor staffer (you) who turns up for their first day at Parliament house on 11 November 1975, and who must then navigate the turmoil of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's infamous dismissal. Developed for the Centre for Democracy to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the dismissal, this game aims to explore the complexity and impact of democratic processes in a way that challenges perceptions of Australian civics education as 'boring'.

RESEARCH STATEMENT
Within Australian collections (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums), digital games are an underutilised tool for engagement and education. The reasons for this are multiple, but often hinge on professional perceptions of games as difficult, expensive, and time consuming to produce (Booij, 2024). This therefore limits both the production of collections-specific games for learning in Australia, as well academic writing around this subject. Notable exceptions to this statement are the Australian National Maritime Museum's suite of online games (including *Wreck Seeker*, *Views from the Shore: Cook's Voyages*, and *The Voyage*) and more recently the *Eucalara Commons* interactive fiction game by MOD. Adelaide.

"First Day" therefore responds directly to both a wider sector interest in games for education, and what that might look like, and an ongoing interest of the History Trust of South Australia in producing educational content around civics and citizenship re: the Centre for Democracy. With the new South Australian curriculumn for Public Education imminent, the History Trust uses this game to explore if and how

interactive fiction can interact with a state-specific concept of the 'whole' learner and overarching goals of the national curriculmn re: democracy education. It seeks to de-mystify parlimentary process and familiarise players with complex concepts (i.e. double dissolution), whilst also promoting understandings of their significance (i.e. why does it matter that supply was blocked? Should the Goverer General have that power? Were the C.I.A involved?!). Through the lens of an infamous event in Australian political history, "First Day" aims to assist students to make sense of our current democratic system and compliment existing civics learning content within South Australia.

This game sits as a direct extension of the lead author's PhD research into game design for collections contexts. It's development utilises and informs her ongoing work on a 'how-to' game design guide for Australian collections educators, which focuses on low-tech and low-cost options for translating traditional curatorial narratives into interactive stories.

It also sits as one of the first historical interactive fiction games created for an Australian context and from within a collections organisation – as opposed to through collboration with external consultants (for instance *Home of the Blizzard: An Antarctic Adventure* from the National Film and Sound Archive). It is also a first for the History Trust, who have yet to publish any digitial games for any of their four museums. "First Day" hopes to join a growing genre of digital interactive fiction for history learning, and learning in general, with this exhibition showcasing the design stages leading up to and including this first playable prototype.

EXHIBITION
We envision the work being displayed on a wi-fi connected screen, either a monitor or iPad, and interacted with by visitors at their own pace. We would also like to put up a poster about the game (with some initial graphics) above the screen.

BIO
Sophia Booij is a second-year PhD candidate in the University of South Australia Creative faculty, researching strategies to promote the development of narrative-based learning games by and for Australian collections. She is currently working on an introductory 'how-to' game development guide for industry professionals, in partnership with the History Trust of South Australia. Her work is informed by a background in interactive fiction, digital humanities, museum studies, collections management, and digitisation. She is particularly interested in enabling and encouraging games that tell regional and rural Australian stories. Sophia is supervised by Ass. Prof. Erik Champion, Dr. Lisa Bailey, and Dr. Susannah Emery.

Michelle (Head of Education) and Amy's (Curator of the Center of Democracy) bios to follow if abstract accepted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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