



Ubisoft Unveils “NEO NPCs”, its First Prototype For GenAI-powered Characters and Gameplay

In a creative experiment shown during GDC 2024, a team of game creators explores the future of Non-Playable Characters, interactive gameplay, and emergent storytelling

PARIS, FRANCE – March 19, 2024 – Today, during the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Francisco, Ubisoft unveiled “NEO NPCs”, its first player-facing generative AI (GenAI) prototype that could transform the way players interact with non-playable characters (NPCs) in video games and open new frontiers for gameplay that natively integrates generative AI features.

NEO NPCs are the result of an R&D initiative led by a team at Ubisoft’s Paris studio and supported by Ubisoft’s Production Technology department. It puts creativity and narrative at the core of players’ experience and explores the use of GenAI as a central gameplay feature to create characters that are not only intelligent but also highly interactive and engaging. Enhanced with new neural functions – such as unscripted dialogue, real-time emotion and animation, memory, contextual awareness, and collaborative decision-making – NEO NPCs display unprecedented cognitive and interactive abilities.

For Ubisoft’s teams in charge of bringing these NPCs to life, using GenAI tools helps elevate and expand the level of the creative work needed for the demonstration’s narrative design far beyond what is usually required for traditionally scripted NPC interactions. Every detail – personalities, backstories, agendas, and emotions -- needs to be thoroughly crafted and programmed into the NEO NPC model. Each conversation between the player and an NPC then becomes unique and responsive to the players and their actions, leading to fully personalized and immersive experiences.

“My creative work has become much deeper since I get to work on their (NEO NPCs) psychology. I have to give them a soul and do so with a certain finesse that we have never before allocated to NPC creation,” said Virginie Mosser, Narrative Director on the project. *“As a writer, seeing my characters come to life and actually converse with me for the first time has been one of the most fulfilling and touching moments of my career.”*

In a private demo at GDC, Ubisoft showcased the potential of a new generation of smart NPCs to create deep connections with the player and to offer new gameplay strategies and emergent storytelling opportunities. In this creative experiment, players must engage in meaningful dialogues with NEO NPCs through voice-to-chat in order to reach their objectives. As the NPCs recognize the player’s intentions, they adapt emotionally and can

react in real-time based on the conversation. This allows the NPC to unlock new story elements in the demo or go as far as generating new quests on-the-fly.

The NEO NPCs situational awareness also gives them a comprehensive understanding of their environment, enabling them to react dynamically to points of interest (POI) within the game. This allows them to share insights, ask questions, plan actions or offer players the chance to influence decisions. This characteristic provides a glimpse of the numerous roles advanced NPCs could take within games, from quest providers to training partners and AI companions.

"It could be the start of a fantastic paradigm shift," said Xavier Manzanares, Director and Producer of the project. "For the first time, the game world actually listens to and dynamically responds to the players. Social interactions and skills become part of the gameplay. Smarter NPCs like our NEO NPCs have the potential to become a breakthrough addition to the traditional NPCs we see in games today. They provide the ability to create even more immersive worlds and emergent stories."

NEO NPCs are born from the close collaboration between Ubisoft creators and leading GenAI technology partners, Nvidia and Inworld AI. Inworld AI's Character Engine and LLM technology enable Ubisoft's narrative team to build a complete background, knowledge base and conversational style for each NPC, while Nvidia Audio2Face, part of NVIDIA ACE suite of technologies, is used to enable real-time facial animation.

"AI is a powerful tool that can greatly enhance players' experiences by making games more dynamic, immersive and unique," said John Spitzer, Vice President of Developer and Performance Technologies at NVIDIA. "We are thrilled to partner with Ubisoft on this project to leverage NVIDIA ACE in the advancement of digital characters."

"Generative AI brings unprecedented creative opportunities for our teams and players," adds Guillemette Picard, Senior Vice President of Production Technology at Ubisoft. "It is when they find the value it has for them that we start to see its true potential to transform the way games are made and played"

For more information about Ubisoft's NEO NPCs, please visit Ubisoft News:

https://www.ubisoft.com/r/ubisoft_new_generative_ai

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