Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

week ten, lecture one
Today

• Announcements / reminders
• The concept of flow and why we do things
• Jenova Chen’s games
• If time permits: More on fun and pleasure
• If time permits: Quiz
Final games due in section

• Don’t forget to name your game according to the website guidelines

• Don’t forget to practice your presentation (3 min — we have to be time efficient)

• Don’t forget you need both a game and a manual
Final exam plan

• 8am next Monday
• Clicker questions
• Presentations of finalist games to judges
• If you’re a finalist you will hear Saturday (check your email!)
• Best games selected for Sammys
What are some things to think about for making a basic game better?
Flow
Why do we do things for their own sake?
What makes us feel meaning and happiness?
Flow

These exceptional moments are what I have called "flow" experiences. The metaphor of flow is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as "being in the zone," religious mystics as being in "ecstasy," artists and musicians as "aesthetic rapture."

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
Flow’s characteristics

First, the experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing.

Second, we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing.

Third and fourth, the concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals and provides immediate feedback.

Fifth, one acts with a deep but effortless involvement...

Sixth, enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions.

Seventh, concern for the self disappears, yet... the sense of self emerges stronger...

Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered...
HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE IN FLOW?

1. Completely involved in what we are doing – focused, concentrated.
2. A sense of ecstasy – of being outside everyday reality.
3. Great inner clarity – knowing what needs to be done, and how well we are doing.
4. Knowing that the activity is doable – that our skills are adequate to the task.
5. A sense of serenity – no worries about oneself, and a feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of the ego.
6. Timelessness – thoroughly focused on the present, hours seem to pass by in minutes.
7. Intrinsic motivation – whatever produces flow becomes its own reward.
Flow

Can games help more of life be flow?

Common games-oriented description of the pleasure (and problems) in challenges
What do you notice?

Clearly inspired by Csikszentmihalyi’s ideas (you can download Chen’s MFA thesis)

Has varying level of difficulty, controlled by player — can be blissful to anxious

Has no clear goals, no way to complete

Is really pretty

flow
Flower

- What do you notice?
- Has very clear goals
- Is compleetable
- Has varying level of goals selectable by player — can be blissful to masterful
- Is really pretty
Journey

PS3 download
Obviously, games can help produce flow
Flow is part of what makes games enjoyable

But we might say it’s only “one kind of fun”
Flow reconsidered

• “Here's all the motivation you'll ever want: get that action again, those last few bricks left and that eery lobbing interim as the ball floats about so you never know when it'll hit and you don't dare try placing a shot because you're more than happy just to hold on with your eyes glued to the ball.”

— David Sudnow

• A valuable, partial concept
Flow reconsidered

• An attractive theory — the best parts of gameplay clearly seem to be flow

• But this theory of “exceptional moments” probably overused/extended in discussing everyday gameplay

• Think of your own play experiences — some flow, but not first and always
Fun
Raph Koster’s
*Theory of Fun*

buy the book!
The other day I played a typing game on popcap.com... I got really far and did really well, and there came a point where I got bored.
People are amazing pattern matching machines.
Look at the places we can find a face
When we grasp a pattern, we usually get bored with it and iconify it
When we meet noise, and fail to make a pattern out of it, we get frustrated and quit.
Once we see a pattern, we delight in tracing it, and in seeing it reoccur
What’s fun is exercising your brain
Games are puzzles
—they are about cognition,
and learning to analyze patterns
When you’re playing a game,
you’ll only play it
until you master the pattern
once you’ve mastered it
The game becomes **boring**.
Basically, all games are edutainment
Koster’s fun

• Learning is central to game fun
• Not necessarily learning rules — we keep being challenged to learn from Chess long after knowing the rules
• Intellectual, physical, interpersonal, etc
• Engages contemporary cognitive science
• But is all learning fun?
• And is all fun learning?
Marc “Mahk” LeBlanc’s 8 Kinds of Fun

... will be covered at a sprint
Eight kinds of fun

1. **Sensation**
   Game as sense-pleasure

2. **Fantasy**
   Game as make-believe

3. **Narrative**
   Game as drama

4. **Challenge**
   Game as obstacle course

5. **Fellowship**
   Game as social framework

6. **Discovery**
   Game as uncharted territory

7. **Expression**
   Game as self-discovery

8. **Submission**
   Game as pastime
Games combine them

- Charades: Fellowship, Expression, Challenge
- Quake: Challenge, Sensation, Competition, Fantasy
- Final Fantasy: Fantasy, Narrative, Expression, Discovery, Challenge
These types of fun are the “aesthetics” LeBlanc proposed

... in the mechanics, dynamics, aesthetics framework we discussed earlier
But is play always about fun?
Flanagan’s “critical play”
Procedural rhetoric
Alternatives to fun
Other psychological pleasures

- Emotional activation — optimistic focus on what we’re good at
- More satisfying work — clear goals, actionable next steps
- Better hope of success — a task we know we can succeed at
- Being part of something bigger — epic!
- For more see *Reality is Broken*
Designing for pleasure

• The progression of skill and challenge that is a prerequisite for flow
• The “same but different” variations on a core mechanic that draw people in
• The preconscious entrained rhythms we learn for platform jumping, combat combos, vehicle cornering, etc
Designing for pleasure

- Not just the momentary pleasure of the well-designed core mechanic, but a long-term goal
- Not just a long-term goal, but short-term goals as well
- Subgoals at different levels of granularity, with player choice and construction, the concept of player intention
Is pleasure the only thing at work?
Conditioning

- Sudnow realized arcade games condition — and so have many designers and scholars
- Positive reinforcement (getting the good)
- Negative reinforcement (removing the bad)
- Punishments (adding something bad)
- Games moving from punishment (death!) to positive reinforcement (achievement!)
Reinforcement schedules

- Fixed ratio (every \( n \) times)
- Fixed interval (every \( n \) minutes)
- Variable ratio (slot machine)
- Variable interval (random timer)
- Games with “too many” rewards or punishments are boring, but finding the right schedule is tricky (playtesting)
Motivational Game Design Patterns
From Chris Lewis
Behavioral theory

MGDP in ‘Ville games

MGDP in other games

Fixed Interval Schedule

Harvesting

Animal Crossing’s Redd
Behavioral theory

MGDP in 'Ville games

MGDP in other games

Sunk Cost Fallacy

Withering

Ultima Online housing
Behavioral theory

MGDP in ‘Ville games

MGDP in other games

Reciprocal Altruism

Gifting

Forza Motorsport
Quiz
Canceled
Looking forward to seeing your final games!