Computer Games
Design, Production & Critique

Professor Tom Ellman
Lecture 2
To use this lens, stop thinking about your game, and start thinking about the experience of the player. Ask yourself these questions:

- What experience do I want the player to have?
- What is essential to the experience?
- How can my game capture that essence?
“As a game designer, a large part of your role is to keep your concentration focused on the player experience and not allow yourself to be distracted by the other concerns of production.”

Game Design Workshop, Ch. 1, p. 2.

“...playtesting … playtesting … playtesting…”

Game Design Workshop, Chs. 1-16.
MDA Framework
(Hunicke, LeBlanc & Zubek)

Player’s Perspective:

Mechanics → Dynamics → Aesthetics

Designer’s Perspective:

Mechanics ← Dynamics ← Aesthetics
What are the aesthetics of these games?

- Halo
- Portal
- The Sims
- Civilization
Definitions (Hunicke, et al.)

• Aesthetics: The *desirable emotional responses* evoked by the game dynamics.

• Dynamics: The *run-time behavior* of the mechanics acting on player inputs and each others.

• Mechanics: The rules and concepts that formally specify the game as “mechanical” system.
Classification of Aesthetics
(Hunicke, et al.)

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*

What else?
Classification of Dynamics
(Brathwaite & Schreiber, Challenges for Game Designers)

• Territorial Acquisition
• Prediction
• Spatial Reasoning
• Survival
• Destruction
• Building

• Collection
• Chasing
• Evading
• Trading
• Racing

What else?
Figure 1. Possible main relationships between basic emotions and instincts. Solid lines indicate instincts to emotions; dashed lines, from emotions to instincts; dotted lines indicate interactions within the same group.
Aesthetics
anger
collecting
revenge
survival

Dynamics
escaping
chasing
attacking
reaching

Mechanics
moving
eating/taking

On the way to Fun: Pac Man

Identification

Collecting

Competition (2P)

Color Appreciation

Fear

Survival

Anger

Revenge

Greed

Pride

Joy

Dynamics

Escaping

Chasing

Attacking

Dynamics

Reaching

Mechanics

Moving

Mechanics

Eating/Taking

Screenshot from the original Pac-Man arcade game. Ready, set, go! The game begins!
Iterative Design

- Brain Storm
- Physical Prototype
- Play Test
- Digital Prototype
- Play Test
Aesthetic Play Assignment

• Posted on the class wiki.

• Note the schedule of due dates.
Campaign Trail

Let’s make a game about running for President of the United States!
Aesthetics

• The thrill of the roaring, adoring crowd.
• Exasperation at the hounding media and your lying, cheating opponent.
• Anxiety about the lurking assassin and your deep dark secret from the past.
• Delight in making fun of the real world candidates we love to hate.
Setting and Context

Players take on the role of candidates in a U.S. presidential election: choose where to campaign; give speeches; shake hands with voters; raise campaign funds; meet secret lovers; respond to scandals; and evade assassins and pesky news reporters.
Abstract Dynamics

• Territorial Acquisition.
• Collection.
• Evading.
• Destruction.
• Survival.
Dynamics

- Debates
- Press conferences
- Polls and momentum
- Kissing babies
- Fundraising
- Evading the press
- Meeting secret lover
- Smear tactics
- High road / low road
- Cloak and dagger
- Scandal eruptions
- Public apologies
- Assassination attempt
- Comeback
Mechanics

- Speeches: Just mentioning words like taxes, unemployment, terrorism, human rights, government regulation, pollution.
- Run around maze-like hotel to avoid press. Answer tough questions when they catch you.
- Walk around shopping mall shaking hands and winning voters, unless one is an assassin.
- Poll calculus:
  - Appeal to local crowd will raise poll numbers, but inconsistency across speeches lowers poll numbers. Random weighting of crowd appeal v. consistency.
  - Handling scandals w/ four random outcomes:
    - Deny wrongdoing versus apologize for wrongdoing.
    - Scandal blows over versus proof of guilt becomes public.
Mechanics, Cont’d

• Look at map and decide where to campaign. Locales have varying political leanings.
• Arrive at airport and answer press questions.
• Go to campaign rally and give speech.
• Press will remember and evaluate what you said.
• Go to shopping mall and work crowd.
• The more hands you shake, the more votes you earn, but watch out for the assassin.
• Go to hotel and maybe meet …um.. a friend.
• Watch evening news, commentary and new polls.
Physical Prototype

• Map of USA shows current poll numbers in each state. Payer picks state. Opponent cannot pick state for three turns.

• Cards for Campaigning:
  – Speech Cards with policy opposites on sides.
  – Speech is playing three or more cards indicating your positions.

• Table for calculating impact of speeches:
  – Each city has an index card with its leanings.
  – Row points show ratings based on local leanings.
  – Column points account for (in)consistency.
  – Randomness in point calculations.
Physical Prototype, Cont’d

• Shopping mall map shows paths broken into tiles.
• People are scattered along sides of paths. Most are normal people. Fixed number $H$ are hecklers where $H$ depends on locale. Kind of person depends on proximity to stores and positions you have taken.
• Player rolls dice number $N$ to move $N$ spaces.
• Player may shake any hand along the path.
• Most handshakes increase poll numbers.
• Shaking hecklers hands lower poll numbers.
• One assassin is hidden among the mall people.
• Shaking assassin hand outcomes:
  – Minor injury leads to sympathy from voter.
  – Major injury or death loses election
Brainstorming

• Taking turns, one person thinks aloud while the other takes notes.
• Say anything that comes to mind. Don’t censor yourself.
• Come back and review the ideas later.
Random Idea Generators

• Exquisite Corpse stories on Moodle.
• Free writing: Stream of consciousness.
• Random articles/words from Wikipedia/Wiktionary.
• Browse a library or bookstore.
• Matching items on lists, e.g., hobbies and locations.
• Snippets of overheard conversation.
• Your last dream, meal, TV show, movie, news article, Vassar class, etc.
Exercise

• Brainstorm with your partner for twenty minutes.

• Come up with three distinct game ideas.

• For each idea, describe:
  – Your aesthetic objectives in designing the game.
  – The setting or context in which the game world exists.

• Enter them into the Aesthetic Game Design forum.
Final Project

• WTF?
• Dream Game on Moodle as starting point.
• Inviting comments by classmates.
• Please be constructive.
• (If you did not post to the GG/BG forum, or did not post your “Dream Game”, please do so ASAP.)