

Schematically Disruptive Game Design

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*Reanalysing Expectancy & Convention
in Games*

The Commercial Incentive

- A trend for relying on established Intellectual Property (IP).
- A “hamster-wheel”² mentality.
- Whilst questioning such business practice would be naïve, the question still remains;
 - what are we missing out on through this reliance?

Highest Grossing Retail Games, 2009-2010¹

1. *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*
2. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*
3. *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*
4. *Final Fantasy XIII*
5. *Wii Fit Plus*
6. *God of War III*
7. *Pokémon SoulSilver*
8. *Wii Sports Resort*
9. *Mass Effect 2*
10. *Pokémon HeartGold*
11. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour '10*
12. *Wii Play*
13. *Pokémon Platinum*
14. *Mario Kart Wii*
15. *Resident Evil 5*
16. *Killzone 2*
17. *Call of Duty: World at War*
18. *Street Fighter IV*

References

1. Retail Data courtesy of CNBC.com
2. Elliot, P. (2008). *Industry stuck in sequels “hamster-wheel” – Rare*. Retrieved from <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/industry-stuck-in-sequels-hamster-wheel-rare>

What is Wrong with Schematic Design?

- Pleasure comes from “immersion in a familiar schema”¹
- Co-opting schema minimises the effort needed to learn a game.
- Supporting schematically understood knowledge that the player already possesses is not a *wrong* approach to design...
- **over-reliance** on it however can have negative results.
- For example:
 - *Army of Two*² contains a ‘co-op- sniping’ mechanic.
 - The *Pokémon*³ series’ lack of evolution.

References

1. Douglas, J. Y. & Hargadon, A. (2000). The Pleasure Principle: Immersion, Engagement, Flow, in *Proceedings of the eleventh ACM on Hypertext and Hypermedia*. 153-160. Retrieved from ACM Digital Library. doi:10.1145/336296.336354
2. EA Montreal. (2008). *Army of Two*. Xbox 360, [DVD-ROM]: Electronic Arts.
3. Nintendo. (1995-2011). *Pokémon Series*. Various Platforms and Media: Nintendo.

Initial Line of Questioning

1. What is the impact on the game play experience of games which purposely disrupt player expectations?
2. How do games *currently* make use of schema and manipulate or live up to player expectation?
3. A very early hypothesis.

The Purposes of Play

- Pleasure: a game's primary function.
- If schematically disruptive design is the *cause*, we need to identify where we are looking for a possible *effect*.
- There are numerous elements suggested to facilitate 'pleasure' in playing a game. Specifically, I have so far considered:
 - Escapism
 - Immersion
 - Presence
 - Agency
 - Game Flow¹

References

1. Sweetster, P. & Wyeth, P. (2005). GameFlow: A Model for Evaluating Player Enjoyment in Games. *ACM Computer in Entertainment*, 3 (3), [24 pages].

The Purposes of Play

- **Flow**

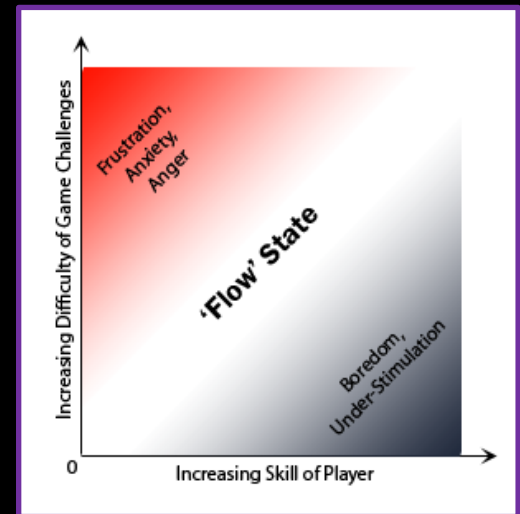
- “An experience so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern of what they will get out of it”¹.

- **Game Flow**

- A model adapting Flow to digital game play; the elements of Flow are able to be mapped to specific game characteristics.

- If ‘Flow’ is the culmination of game play, we can formulate some basic rules to control disruptive design.

- A balance between frustration and boredom; of over and under-stimulation.



References

1. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Rules for Controlling Disruptive Game Design

- Heavily disruptive games risk alienating all but the most determined players.
- Testing of player extremes.
- *Human requirements* as proposed by Maslow (1943)¹, noticeably crossover with Lindley & Sennersten's (2007)² *motivational drives*;
 - Games can satiate these drives or requirements over *short-term* feedback loops.
- Disruptive techniques deployed *alongside* mechanics that provide short-term positive feedback; likelihood of player acceptance should be greater.

References

1. Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50 (4), 370-396.
2. Lindley, C. A. & Sennersten, C. C. (2007). Game Play Schemas: From Player Analysis to Adaptive Game Mechanics. *International Journal of Computer Games Technology*, vol. 2008,[7 pages]. doi:10.1155/2008/216784

Framing the Research

- Bounding a wide reaching topic.
- Specific focus on Horror.
- Carrying out the research at a genre level seems to be the most practical solution at this stage:
 - Individual game analysis not broad enough – No commercial benefit.
 - Broadening too much will make any techniques identified not specific enough for designers to make use of – No commercial benefit.

Why Horror?

- Horror has roots reaching back to early works such as *Castle of Otranto* (Walpole, 1764)¹, *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare, c. 1588-1593) and is also strongly established in filmic media.
- Horror games add game-specific horror convention from early games such as *The Lurking Horror* (Infogrames, 1987)³, *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames, 1992)⁴ and *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996)⁵.
- Horror offers many conventions and tropes to manipulate, disrupt and distort.
- Horror has greater flexibility in relation to disruptive design.
- Horror games often come under scrutiny for their reliance on convention; why not attempt to shake up the genre's rules.

References

1. Walpole, H. & Lewis, W.S. (1998). *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Shakespeare, W., Mowat, B.A. & Werstine, P. (2005). *Titus Andronicus*. New York: Washington Square Press.
3. Infogrames. (1987). *The Lurking Horror*. DOS [3.5" Floppy Disc]: Infogrames.
4. Infogrames. (1992). *Alone in the Dark*. DOS [3.5" Floppy Discs]: Infogrames.
5. Capcom. (1996). *Resident Evil*. PlayStation, [CD-ROM]: Capcom.

Current Position & Questions

- In-depth textual analysis of a range of horror identifying the most widely utilised schematically based functionality.
- In conjunction with readings of critical and user responses to identify what was and was not found to be enjoyable.
- This should then inform the designs of original game environments and scenarios to be used to test the influence of convoluting/disrupting these common horror conventions.

Thanks for your time, and any questions?

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