MTEC 3175

Week 3: "The Player Experience"
Lecture: Play Layers, Types of Players, Action Theory

Game & Reading Response, Again!

Brutal Honesty & Questions Still Appreciated

Playtimes from Howlongtobeat.com:

Limbo: 3.5 story, 4 w/ extras
Spelunky*: 17.5-23 story, 39.5-87.5 w/ extras
Super Meat Boy: 10 story, 18 w/ extras

I Have No Words & I Must Design:
Toward a Critical Vocabulary for Games

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I first heard the term "gameplay" when I interviewed for a job at Atari in 1982. It was used by someone who had just played a new arcade game, *Zaxxon*, I think. "It has good gameplay."

Since then, the term has become ubiquitous in the field. People talk about gameplay, as if it's some magical, mystical thing that games need to possess. Game designers like to paint themselves as "someone who understand gameplay," unlike all you coders and management types and artists. But actually, few do – because "gameplay" itself is a nebulous, and therefore pretty useless term. Saying "it has good gameplay" is about as useful as saying "that's a good book." Calling something "good" doesn't help us understand what's good about it, what pleasures it provides, and how to go about doing something else good.

THE GAME IS PLASTIC

"The game" is an amazingly plastic medium. It's adaptable to any and every technology, from the neolithic to the high tech. And an amazing variety of games have been developed over the years... Boardgames, wargames, tabletop roleplaying games, computer and console roleplaying games, massively

Greg Costikyan - "I Have No Words & I Must Design"

Phillip Toledano's "Gamers" Series

GAMES, DESIGN and PLAY

A DETAILED APPROACH TO ITERATIVE GAME DESIGN

Colleen **MACKLIN** | John **SHARP**

PLAYER EXPERIENCE

CONSISTS OF…

5 layers (sensory, information, interaction, frame, purpose)
theories of cognition
hand-eye coordination
information
interface design

Rest of Part 1 of This Lecture is About Those 5 Layers

"The best way to think about (action theory) is as a layered process through which players interact with videogames. In his book *The Elements of User Experience*, Jesse James Garrett outlines five planes of user experience..." *- Macklin & Sharp p.79*

HERE'S THE LAYERS DEFINED

- **Sensory** (the surface): What the player sees, hears, feels, smells, and tastes when playing the game.

- **Information** (the skeleton): Within the sensory layer, the information the player discerns about the game.

- **Interaction** (the structure): Given the sensory layer and the information, what the player understands they can do while playing the game.

- **Frame** (the scope): The player's understanding of the game's space of possibility informed by their experiences as a player and more broadly as a person.

- **Purpose** (the strategy): The player's goals for the game.

SENSORY LAYER

- *Prof. Levine says: Literally what you see, hear, feel, smell, taste*

- Player Point of View: How the player sees the game's world—2D vs 3D, side or vertical scroll, first-person vs. third-person view et al.

- Player Perception: How the world is represented. Graphical simplicity, pixel resolution, style/realism, shadows, image vs imageless (all text!), et al.
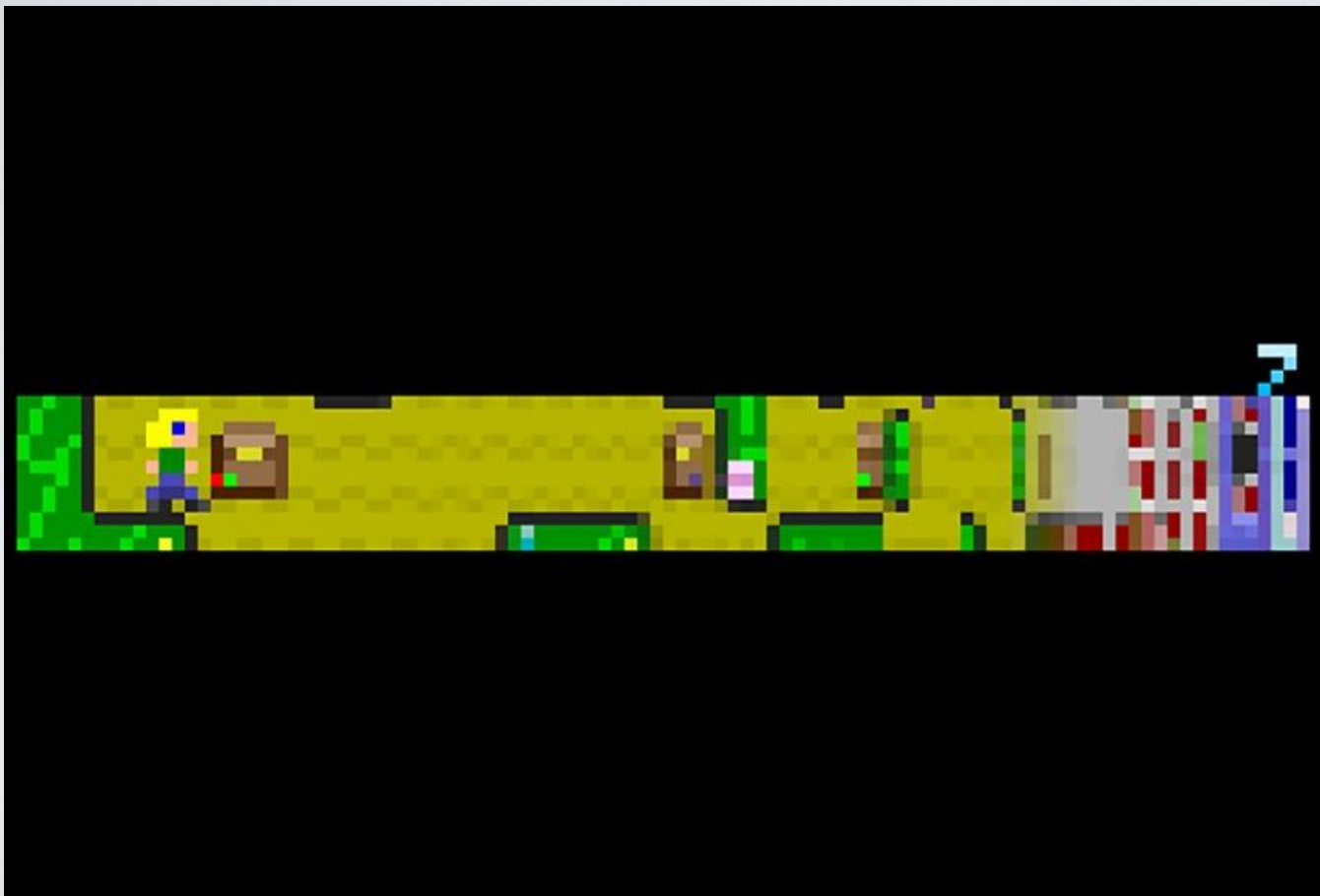
Grid 4

The Last of Us

Passage

INFORMATION LAYER

- Attention:
  1) **Reflexive**: a form of attention activated when loud noises, quickly moving objects or anything novel is presented to us
  2) **Executive**: things that we decide to pay attention to; looking at a health meter.

- Information Spaces
  1) **Imperfect**: not all game states are visible or accessible to players
  2) **Perfect**: visible, full access to current state of the game
  3) **Symmetrical**: all players have access to the same info about the game state
  4) **Asymmetrical**: players have access to different information about the game's state.

1m43cm1mm

2

Luxury Flower Vase

Katamari Damacy

Counter Strike

INTERACTION LAYER

- Perceptible Affordances: … wait, what's an affordance?

Aside: Affordances

- *"The **perceived properties** of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that **determine** just **how** the thing could possibly be used."*
  - Donald Norman, The Design of Everyday Things, 1988

- Fancy academic term, super super famous
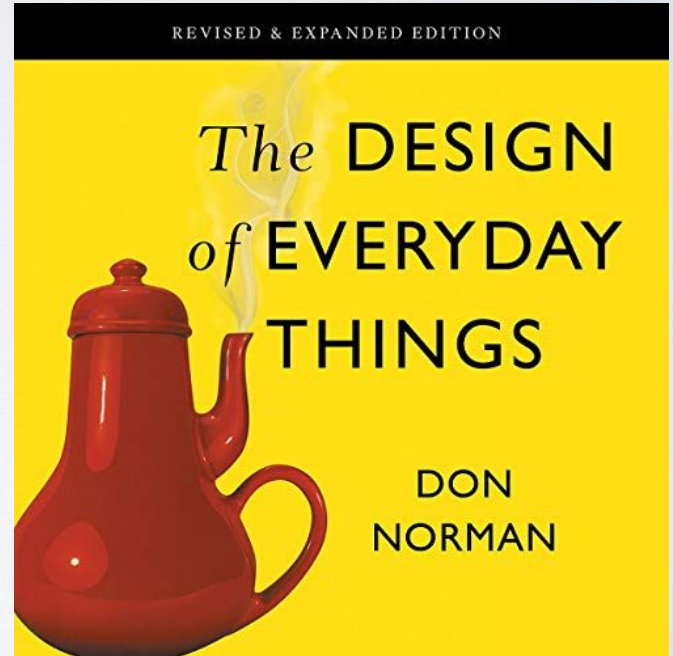
INTERACTION LAYER

- Perceptible Affordances: what a player assumes something does based on what they see, hear or feel.

- Hidden Affordances: an interaction which is present in an object, but is not obvious from its appearance. You wouldn't know that a brick up in the air could be hit in order to release a coin.

- False Affordances: misrepresentations of what an object can do. We see a door in a 3D game, but cannot open it.

- Mental Model: the player's understanding of the basic elements of the game; the playspace, the rules that govern their actions and interactions with the objects and other players, if any, and how all these relate to stated goals and build up to a coherent theme.

Machinarium

Portal

INTERACTION LAYER CONT

- Feedback: what allows players to assess what they are doing and how well they are doing it.

- Navigability: players understanding of their options (and constraints) within the game's space of possibility.

- Consistency: for a player to understand the feedback received from a game, they need consistent communication; the game responds to players actions in the same way every time.

- Intuitiveness: how easy it is to learn to play a game.

- Failure: this is a big part of how we learn games, which is why repetitive mechanics & grinding are sometimes pleasurable.
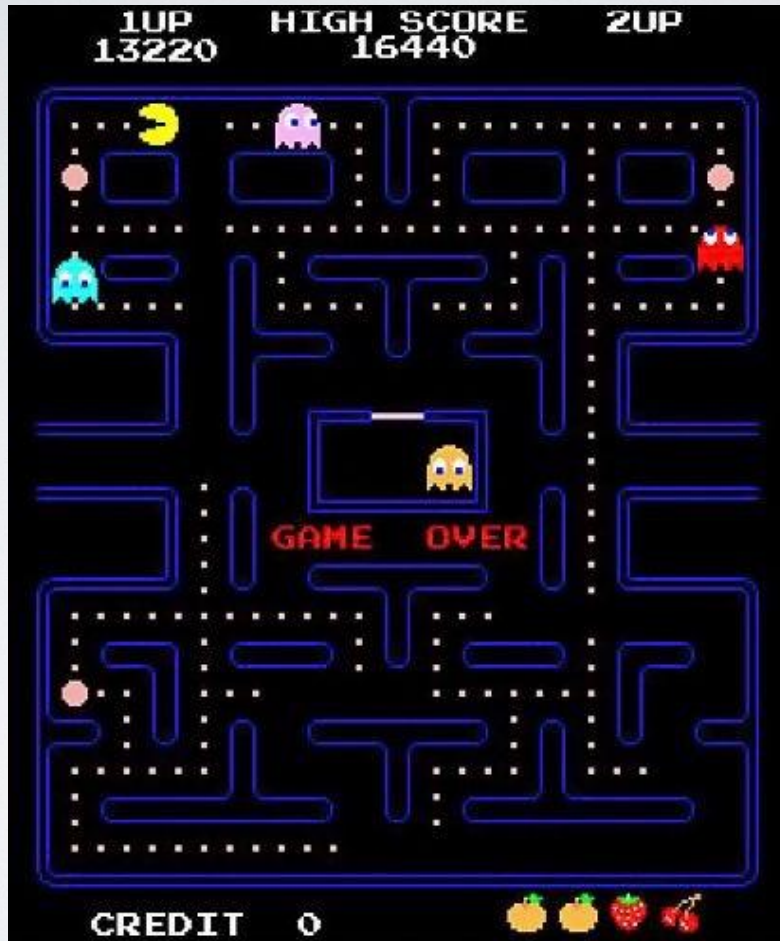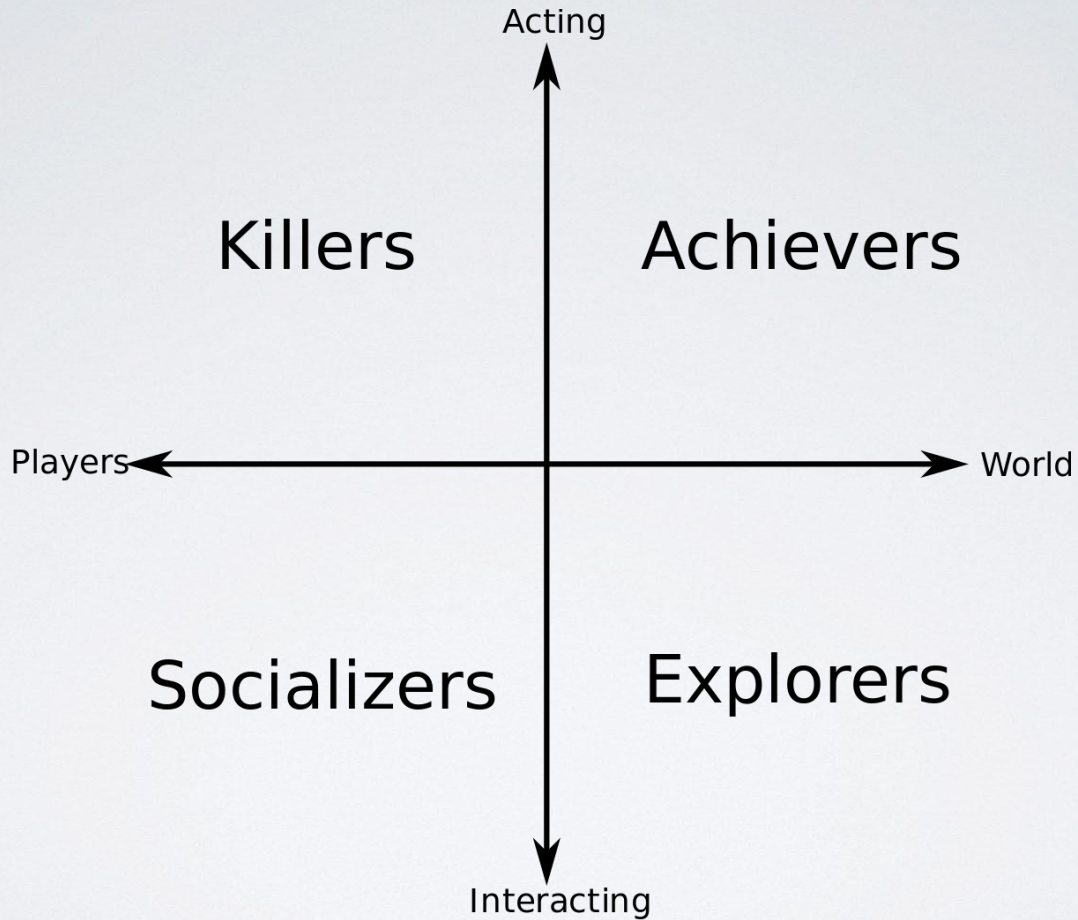
PacMan

Skate 3

FRAME LAYER

- the players understanding of the game's space of possibility informed by their experiences as a player and more broadly as a person.

PURPOSE LAYER

- why has the player decided to play this game? what do they hope to get from it? what do they actually get from it?

TYPES OF PLAYERS

BARTLES TYPES, 1990

- **Achievers**: are interested in setting & obtaining goals in a game.

- **Explorers**: like to understand the full breadth of a game's space of possibility.

- **Socializers**: are less interested in actions and objects unto themselves than they are in other players.

- **Killers**: like to impose their will on other players.

How appropriate. You fight like a cow.

MUDS… wait… this is Monkey Island…?

SCHELL PLAY STYLES, 2006

- Competitor: be better than the other players
- Explorer: experience boundaries of the play world
- Collector: acquire the most stuff
- Achiever: championship over time, not just this round
- Joker: fun and social
- Director: thrill of being in charge
- Storyteller: create or live in alternative worlds, build narrative
- Performer: puts on a show
- Craftsman: build, solve puzzles, engineer constructions

IN CLASS EXERCISE I

1) Form **pairs** with someone who did not play the same game as you. (Time to try Zoom Breakout Rooms again… fingers crossed…)

2) **Share the games** you played this week.

3) Swap the **sensory** & **information** layers from each game, then re-imagine the play experience.

4) Discuss how the change would impact the play experience.

ACTION THEORY

A SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT

established by Talcott Parsons (Harvard)
as a way to understand the dynamics of what happens when people encounter a given situation.

It proposes a cycle of interaction…
BELIEFS
REACTION
DESIRE
INTENTION
ACTION
REPEAT

Prof Levine says: Was new to me, but it's a real thing… see:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_theory_(sociology)
Very academic… from the 1930's….

HOW IT PLAYS OUT.

- Beliefs: a person has a set of prior experiences and belief systems that frame how they understand the world. *i.e. playing Super Mario Brothers.*

- Reaction: Given these beliefs, we encounter a situation and we form a reaction. *i.e. oh, no a goomba.*

- Desire: The reaction then leads to a desire. *i.e. i'd like to jump over that goomba to complete the level.*

HOW IT PLAYS OUT CONT.

- **Intention**: this desire leads to the formation of a plan of action. *i.e. i'm going to run toward the mushroom, then jump.*

- **Action**: with intention in place, the person then enacts the plan. *i.e. executes the moves to attempt to jump over the mushroom.*

- **Repeat**: with the action completed, we begin the cycle new, with the outcome of the action causing a response from the situation that requires us to once more react, establish a desire, create a plan and then conduct an action.
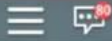
IN CLASS EXERCISE II

1) Work with same group of 2
(So… please hold for Zoom Breakout Rooms…)

2) Go to ~~Let's Play Games (~~http://letsplayvideogames.com/~~)~~ hmm… site is dead… YouTube

2) Pick a game walkthrough (**any game** you both want to analyze) & watch it

3) Re-watch it, this time each pick one decision point to analyze through "action theory" (i.e. define exactly what the *Beliefs, Reaction, Desire, Intention & Action* are)

4) Come up with an over-arching analysis of the core loop (i.e. write something about what makes the decision interesting, or the mechanic good or bad, or anything else that comes to mind)

5) Post on OpenLab (one post per team is fine, just mention teammate's name)

Questions?

HW: RR, GJ, & please keep thinking about what you'd like to develop!

Reading: LeMarchand, Richard. "Attention, Not Immersion: Making Your Games Better with Psychology and Playtesting, the Uncharted Way", The Game Developers Conference (talk), 2012.

Next Week's Playtimes from Howlongtobeat.com:

Gone Home: 2 / 2.5
Firewatch: 4 / 4.5
Dear Esther: 1.5