

Emotion in Games

Day 1

Elisa Mekler

Contents

- **Introductions**
- Admin
- Why care about emotion in games?
- MDA Framework
- 4 Keys to Fun

Main Questions

- What emotions do games evoke?
- What are some of the most well-known theories of emotion?
- How do games evoke emotion?
- Do theories and concepts of emotion help us understand games better?

Program (tentative)

- Day 1: Introduction, MDA, 4 Keys to Fun
- Day 2: Emotion Theories
- Day 3: Perception and GameFeel
- Day 4: “Deep” Games
- Day 5: Character Attachment

About Elisa

- Since August 2019 at Aalto Uni
- CS Dept, but PhD in Psychology
- Researching games & human-computer interaction, focus on user experience

“An Odd Kind of Pleasure”: Differentiating Emotional Challenge in Digital Games

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“Whatever the Emotional Experience, It’s Up to Them”: Insights from Designers of Emotionally Impactful Games

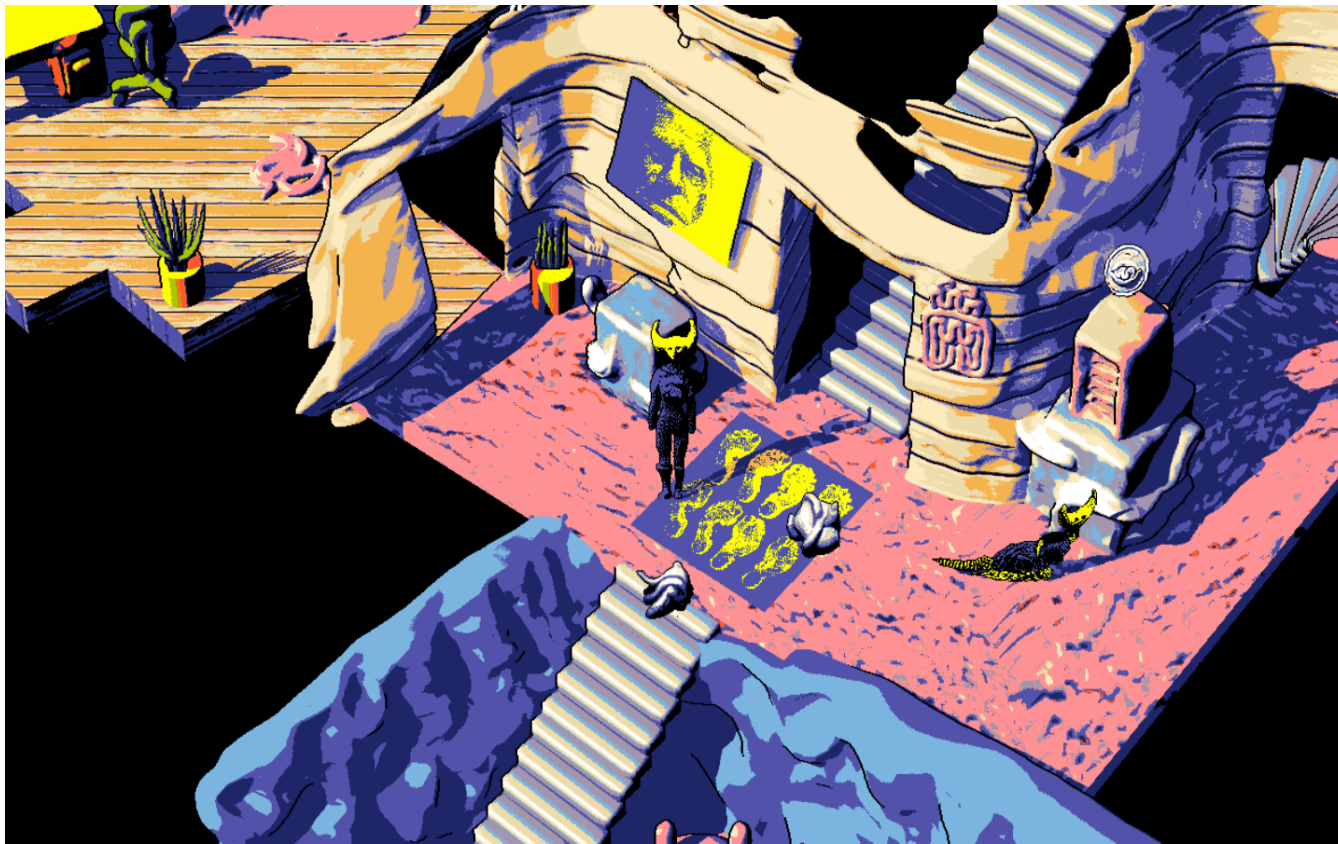
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Last played: Hylics 2

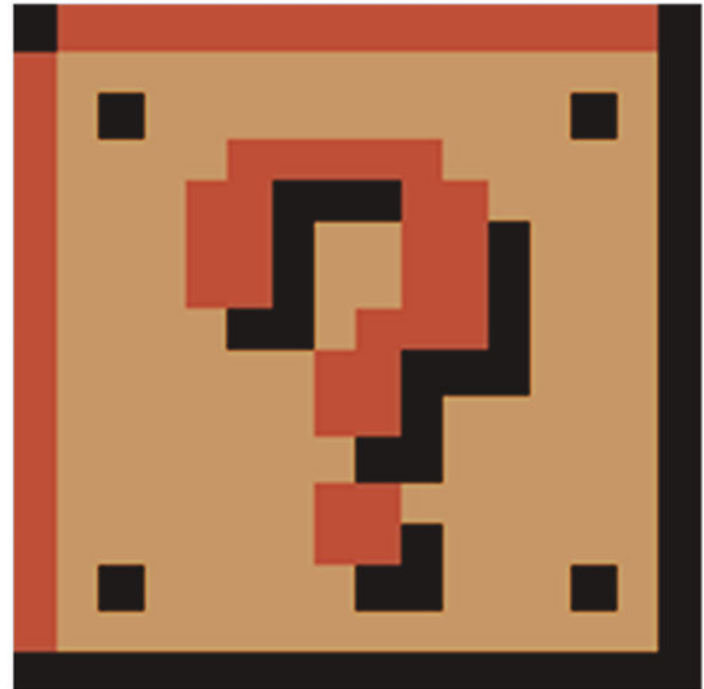


Most played: Slay the Spire



Introductions

- What study program are you in?
- What would you like to know about emotion in games?
- What's the last game (digital, analogue, or otherwise) you've played?



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This course is a ***work-in-progress***.

- You are the “study subjects” to figure out how to improve the course
- Let me know what you’re interested in!



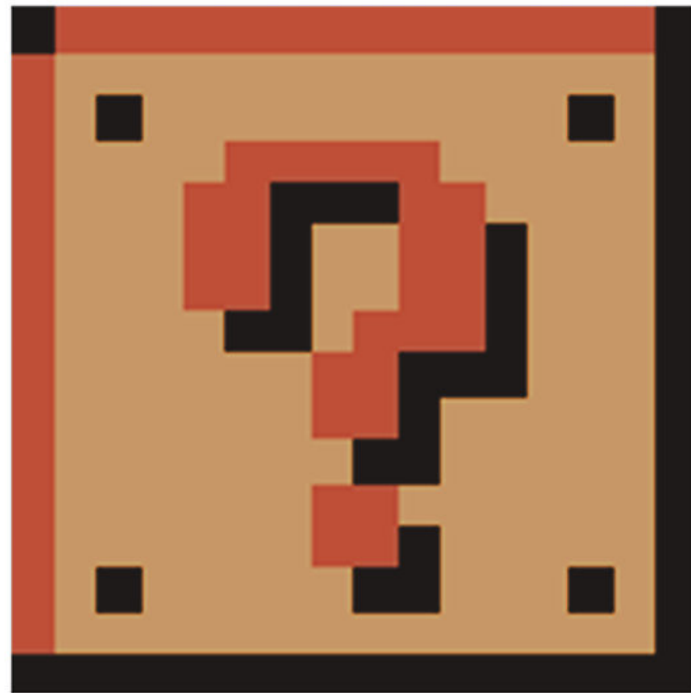
Participation

- Please participate in any way that works for you. If you have a comment, question, or experience to share raise your hand in Zoom. If you know of a cool game, video, or article. Post on Discord!
- **The more discussion, the more interesting the course.**
- Research on emotion in games is surprisingly scarce, and there are limited resources on designing for emotions. It's therefore interesting to discuss whether we dis/agree with existing work
- Sometimes it's useful to discuss personal emotional (non-game) experience to get a better understanding

Course Credit

- Attend / participate during the course
- Write an essay which (1) analyzes a game based on MDA and emotion theories, as well as any of the concepts introduced during the course;
- or (2) create a game mock-up and document design decisions based on emotion theories and concepts introduced in the course.
- **Deadline for the final assignment is June 30**

Questions about Admin Stuff?

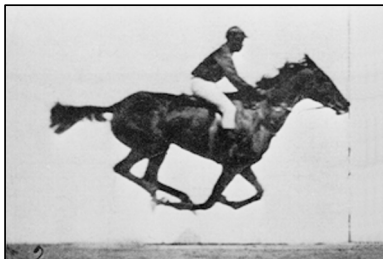


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Evolving a medium

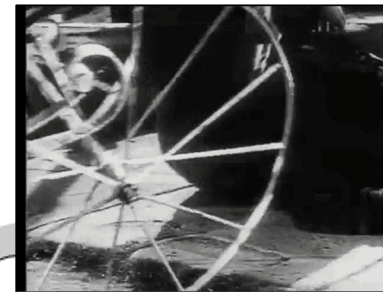
Media evolutions follow similar patterns across technologies
(Bowman, 2020; Stober, 2004)



Demonstration



Replication



Extension

Evolving a medium

Media evolutions follow similar patterns across technologies
(Bowman, 2020; Stober, 2004)



Demonstration



Replication



Extension

Art is something designed to evoke emotion through fantasy...The computer game is an art form because it presents its audience with fantasy experiences that stimulate emotion.

Chris Crawford

The Art of Computer Game Design

CAN A COMPUTER MAKE YOU CRY?

■ Right now, no one knows. This is partly because many would consider the very idea frivolous. But it's also because whoever successfully answers this question must first have answered several others.

● Why do we cry? Why do we laugh, or love, or smile? What are the touchstones of our emotions?

▲ Until now, the people who asked such questions tended not to be the same people who ran software companies. Instead, they were writers, filmmakers, painters, musicians. They were, in the traditional sense, artists.

■ We're about to change that tradition. The name of our company is Electronic Arts.

SOFTWARE WORTHY OF THE MINDS THAT USE IT.

We are a new association of electronic artists united by a common goal — to fulfill the enormous potential of the personal computer.

● In the short term, this means transcending its present use as a facilitator of unimaginative tasks and a medium for blasting aliens. In the long term, however, we can expect a great deal more.

▲ These are wondrous machines we have created, and in them can be seen a bit of their makers. It is as if we had invested them with the image of our minds. And through them, we are learning more and more about ourselves.

■ We learn, for instance, that we are more entertained by the involvement of our imaginations than by passive viewing and listening. We learn that we are better taught by experience than by memorization. And we learn that the traditional

distinctions — the ones that are made between art and entertainment and education — don't always apply.

TOWARD A LANGUAGE OF DREAMS.

In short, we are finding that the computer can be more than just a processor of data.

● It is a communications medium: an interactive tool that can bring people's thoughts and feelings closer together, perhaps closer than ever before. And while fifty years from now, its creation may seem no more important than the advent of motion pictures or television, there is a chance it will mean something more.

▲ Something along the lines of a universal language of ideas and emotions. Something like a smile.

■ The first publications of Electronic Arts are now available. We suspect you'll be hearing a lot about them.

Some of them are games like you've never seen before, that get more out of your computer than other games ever have. Others are harder to categorize — and we like that.

WATCH US. We're providing a special environment for talented, independent software artists. It's a supportive environment, in which big ideas are given room to grow. And some of America's most respected software artists are beginning to take notice.

● We think our current work reflects this very special commitment. And though we are few in number today and apart from the mainstream of the mass software marketplace, we are confident that both time and vision are on our side.

▲ Join us. We see farther.



STUNTMAN-LIZENZ
ABS/OPSU

Name _____
Nr. **N64/0098/433SP**
Ausgestellt am _____
Unterschrift _____

Hier Foto einleben



NINTENDO 64
FEEL EVERYTHING

FREUDE.

NIEDERGESCHLAGENHEIT.

FURCHTLOSIGKEIT.

EUPHORIE.

FRUST.

ÜBERMUT. Nur eines der Gefühle, die Sie beim Spielen mit F1 World Grand Prix erleben.

ANGST.

AUSGELASSENHEIT.

Mit dem neuen F1 World Grand Prix von Nintendo erleben Sie sämtliche Gefühle noch intensiver. Selbst die, die Sie vorher überhaupt nicht kannten. Wenn Sie zum ersten Mal einen F1-Titel geholt haben, erleben Sie einen Übermut wie schon lange nicht mehr. Seien Sie aber nicht so leichtsinnig, zu glauben, F1 sei einfach. Ein Schubsler von hinten oder ein zu langsames Boxenteam und Sie verstehen zum ersten Mal, was es heißt, sich richtig zu ärgern.



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NINTENDO 64
FEEL EVERYTHING

FREUDE.

NIEDERGESCHLAGENHEIT.

FURCHTLOSIGKEIT.

EUPHORIE.

AUSGELASSENHEIT. Nur eines der Gefühle, die Sie beim Spielen mit Zelda 64 erleben.

FRUST.

ÜBERMUT.

ANGST.

Das neue The Legend of Zelda - Ocarina of Time von Nintendo stimuliert ganz bestimmte Gefühle. Jedes Mal, wenn Sie es spielen. Nach der ersten Begegnung mit Prinzessin Zelda werden Sie eine Ausgelassenheit erleben, die Sie so schnell nicht vergessen. Doch schon die nächste Herausforderung kann Ihnen unsagbares Kopfzerbrechen bereiten. Das Resultat ist eine Depression, aus deren Tiefe Sie erst herausfinden, wenn Sie weiterspielen.



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PS2 Emotion Engine



**SonyComputer
Entertainment Inc.**

EE
EmotionEngine™

© 2000 SCEI ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
CXD9615GB 0047HAL
P22838B

Why Emotion?

- Focusing on emotion in games counters common game (research) tropes
- E.g., much focus on motivation, retention, time spent playing, formal elements of games
- Emotion is about the player experiences, what make games more memorable, may leave a strong impression on players long after playing



NTSC U/C

PlayStation™

TEEN



AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
SCUS-94163
94163



FINAL FANTASY VII

3 DISCS

SQUARESOFT



FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

Er....

Five Things Females Like to See in Games

Females want experiences where they can make emotional and social discoveries that they can apply to their own lives.

—Heidi Dangelmeier

1. **Emotion:** Females like experiences that explore the richness of human emotion. For males, emotion is an interesting component of an experience but seldom an end in itself. A somewhat crass but telling example of this contrast can be found at the ends of the “romantic relationship media” spectrum. At one end are romance novels (one-third of all fiction books sold are romance novels), which focus primarily on the emotional aspects of romantic relationships and are purchased almost exclusively by women. At the other end of the spectrum is pornography, which focuses primarily on the physical aspects of romantic relationships and is purchased almost exclusively by men.

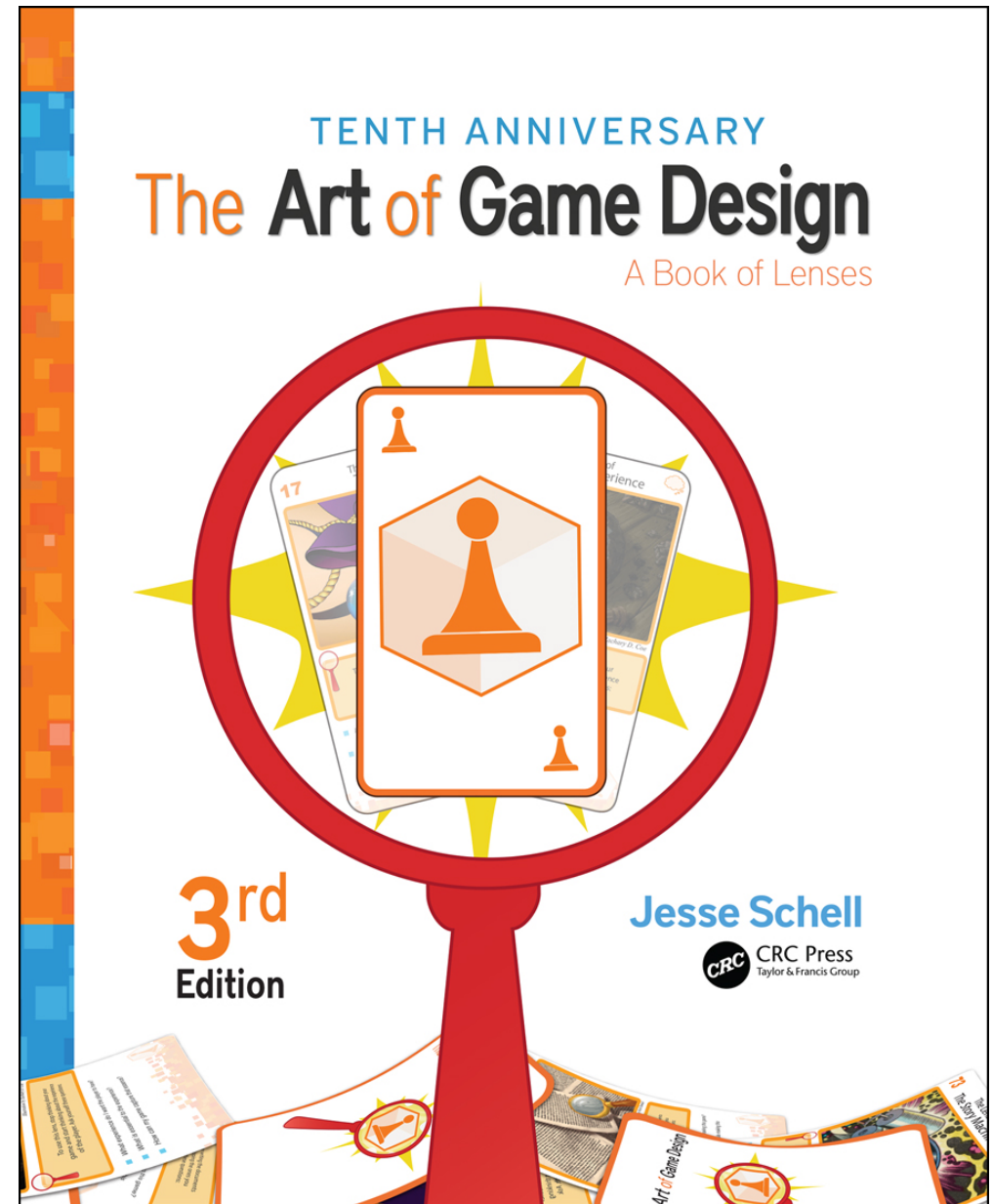
The tricky part

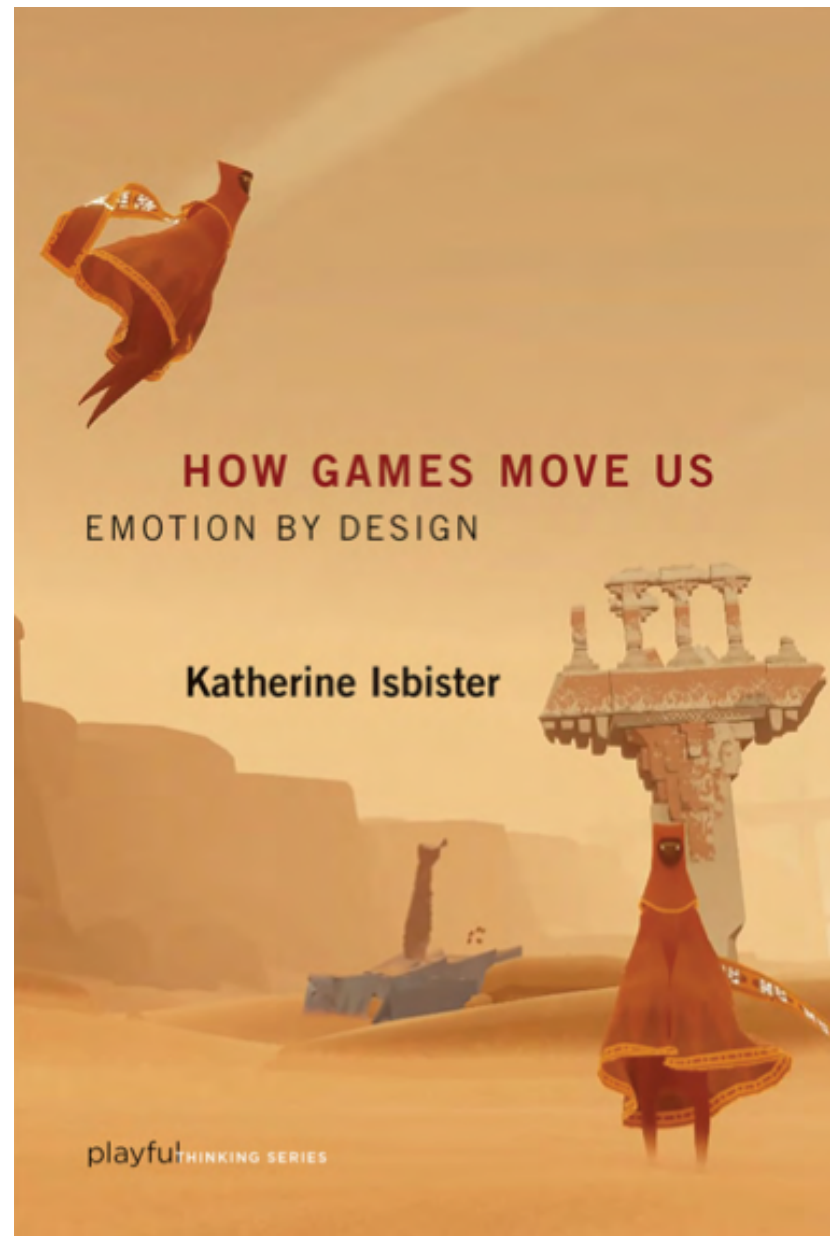
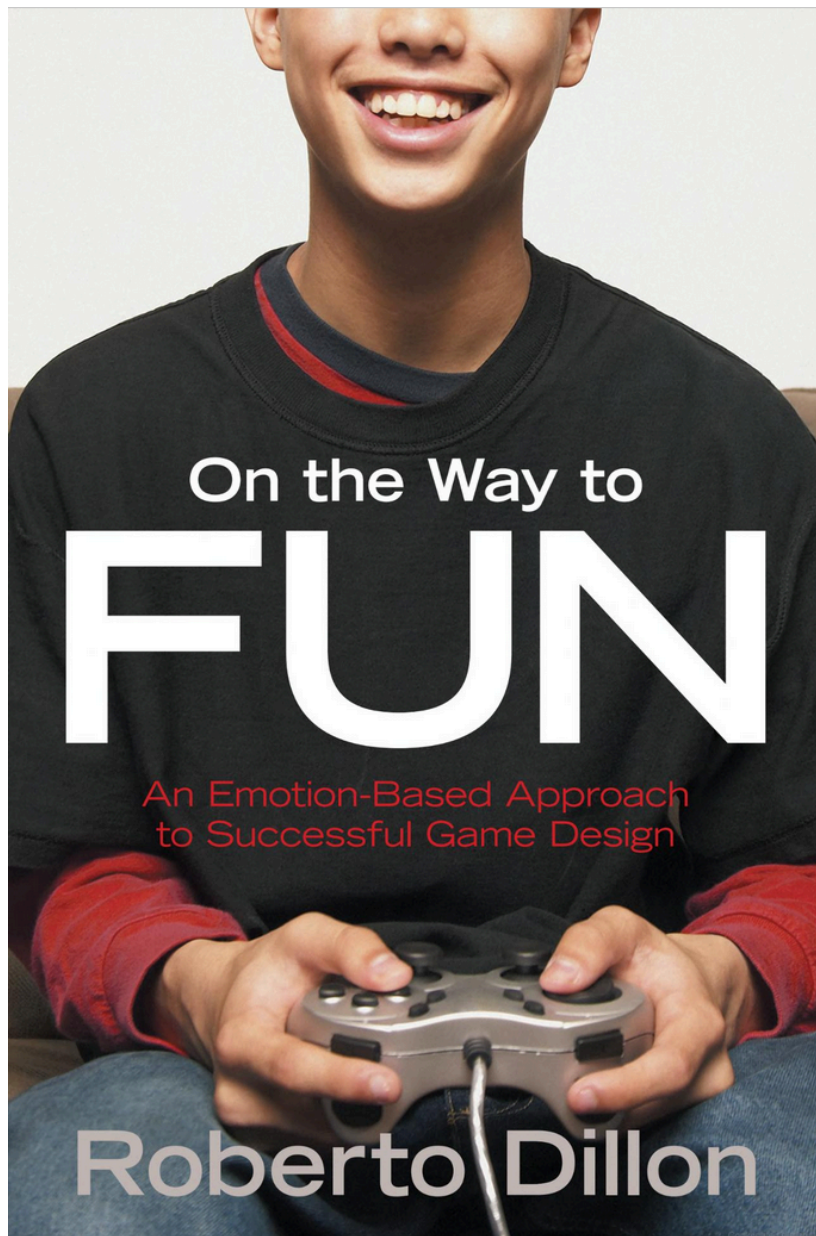
Emotions can be quite ephemeral. We
cannot *design them*

Hassenzahl (2004)

The Lens of Emotion

- What emotions would I like my player to experience? Why?
- What emotions are players (including me) having when they play now? Why?
- How can I bridge the gap between the emotions players are having and the emotions I'd like them to have?



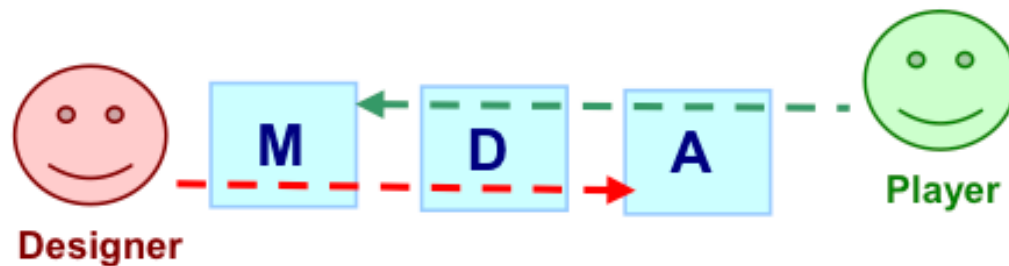


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MDA Framework – Hunicke, LeBlanc & Zubek (2004)

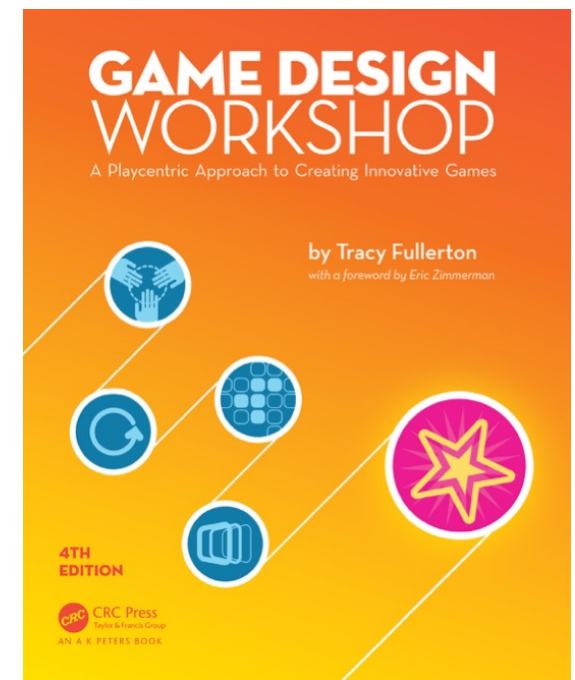
- *Mechanics*: Game rules and actions players can take
- *Dynamics*: When players actually interact with the game mechanics, which actions do they take? Which strategies emerge from the interplay of mechanics?
- *Aesthetics*: What's the player experience like? E.g., Do players find the game fun?



Mechanics – Formal Elements

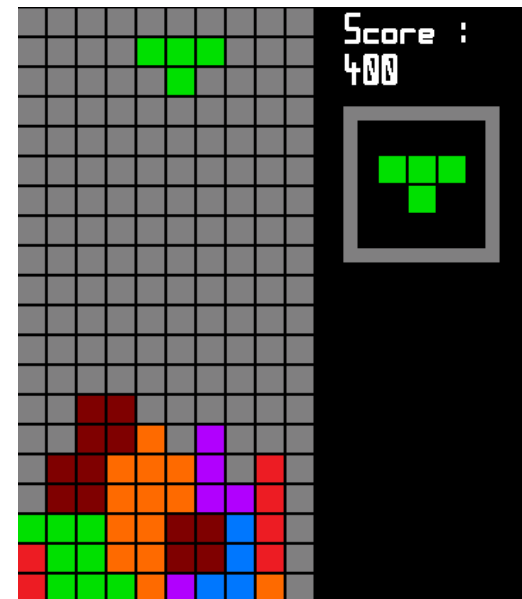


- *Mechanics*: Rules of the game, as well as actions players can take
- Formal Elements (Fullerton, 2014)
 - *Objectives*: Goals, which the player tries to achieve given the game rules
 - *Procedures*: Actions, which the player can take to reach the objectives
 - *Rules*: Rules that define the game objectives and player actions
 - *Resources*: Resources that are used to reach the objectives
 - *Conflict*: E.g., obstacles, enemies, difficult decisions prevent the player from directly reaching their objective(s)



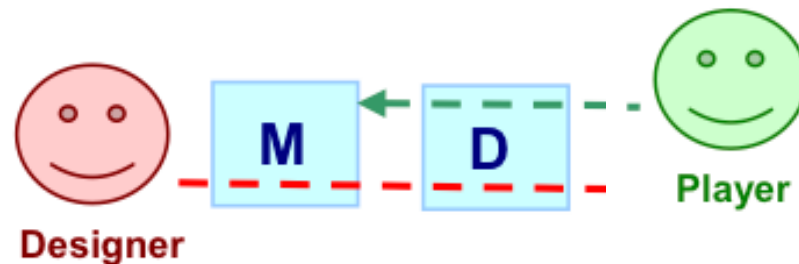
Formal Elements of Tetris

- Objectives: Reach a high score
- Procedure: move block left/right, accelerate, rotate
- Rules: Fill a row to clear a line, clearing more lines at once nets you more points, if blocks reach the top the game is over
- Resource: Next tetris block is displayed, which allows planning ahead
- Conflict: Game speed increases over time



MDA Framework – Dynamics

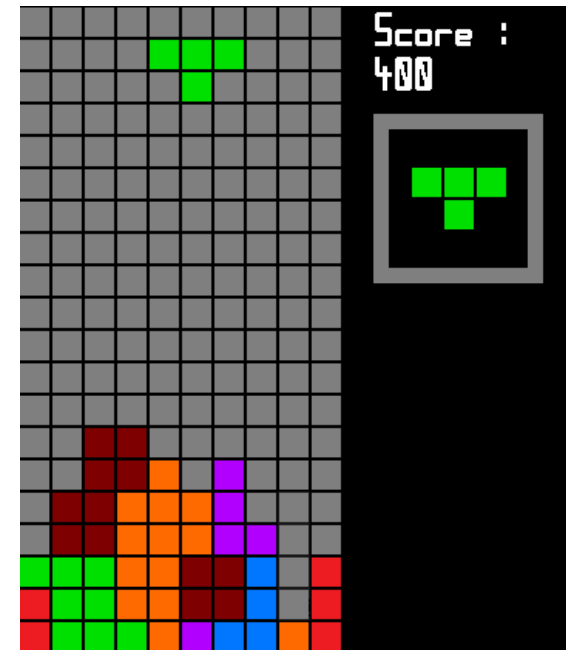
- *Dynamics*: What actions do players actually take? What play strategies emerge from the *mechanics*?



MDA Framework – Dynamics

Dynamics of Tetris

- Risk v reward (may depend on playstyle):
E.g., fill in rows asap, or build up gaps to place blocks for more points
- Rotate a tetris block at the last moment to make it fit



Spawn Points / Respawn

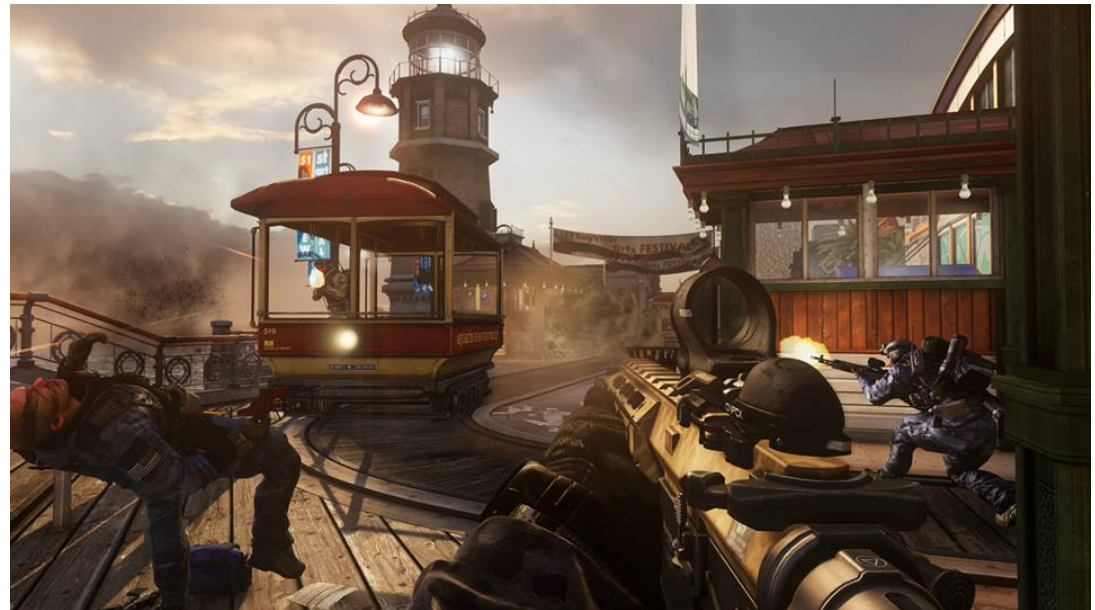


MDA Framework – Mechanics

- Example *Call of Duty Black Ops 2*

- Typical Game ***Mechanics***:

- Shoot
- Run
- Reload weapon
- Change weapon
- Spawn Points
- Points for kills
- Etc.



MDA Framework – Dynamics

- May lead to *Spawn Camping Dynamics* ...

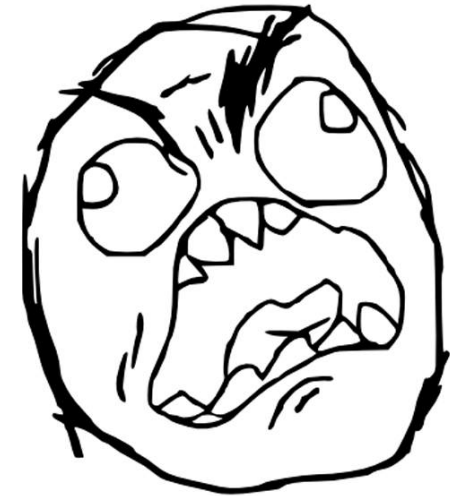


MDA Framework – Aesthetics

- Which may result in a certain *Aesthetic* (i.e. experience) for players
 - E.g., feeling of accomplishment for camping players (and eventual boredom?)
 - E.g., frustration for players who keep getting killed at the same spot whenever they respawn

Discussion – Frustration! What can be done?

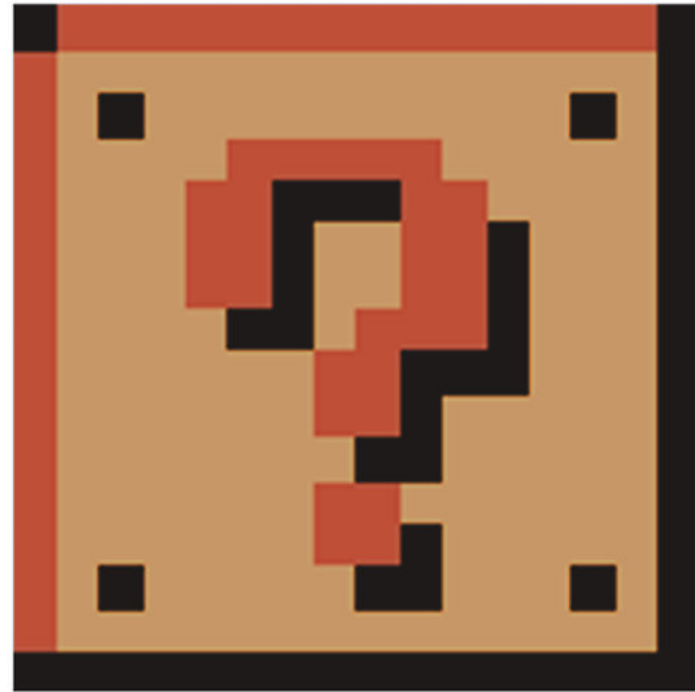
- What could game designers do to avoid such a frustrating player experience?
- Take 2 - 3 minutes to write down ideas
- *Aesthetics* cannot be directly designed for. E.g., You can't tell players not to get frustrated.
- *Dynamics* cannot be directly designed for. You can't prescribe players how to play your game.



Typical Game **Mechanics**:

- Shoot
- Run
- Reload weapon
- Change weapon
- Spawn Points
- Points for kills
- Etc.

Discussion: How to fix Spawn Camping? How does it affect the experience?



MDA Framework – Mechanics Shape Experiences

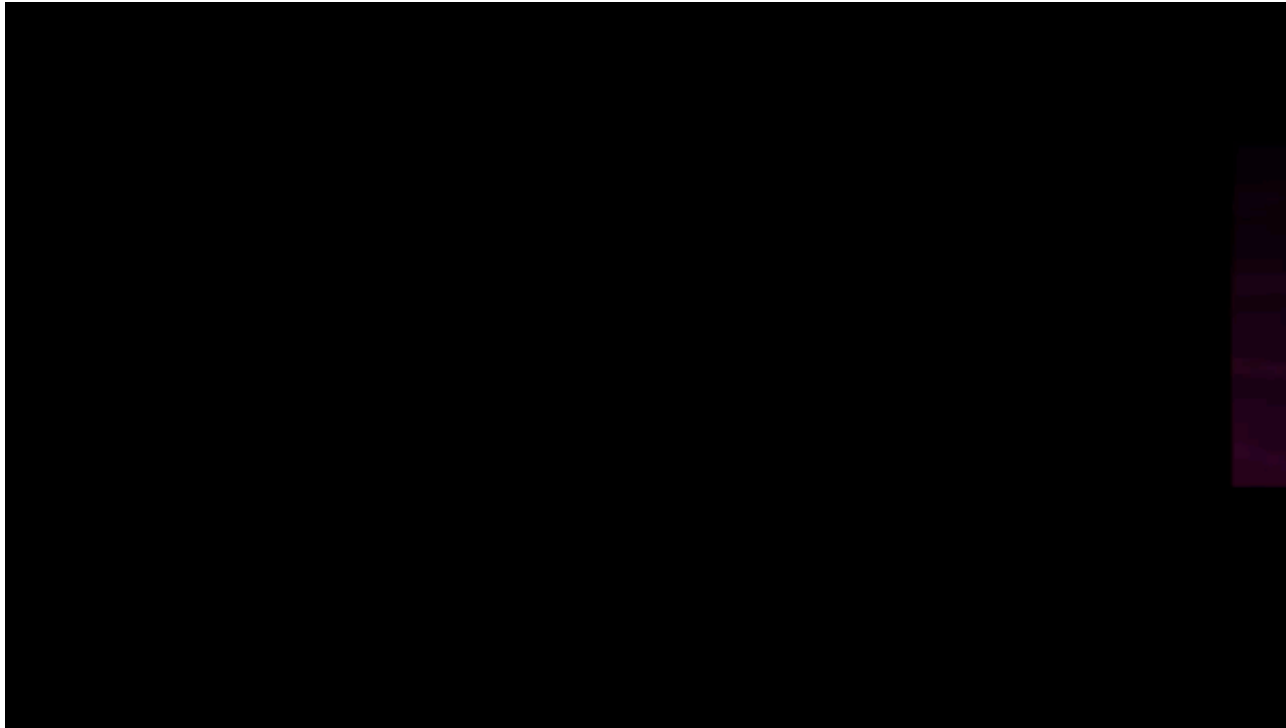
- Change Mechanics to shape the Dynamics in such a way that the intended Experience is more likely to emerge. E.g.,
 - Random spawn points: Spawn camping Dynamics no longer possible
 - A few seconds of invincibility for respawning players
 - Etc...

MDA Framework – Aesthetics -> Mechanics

- While game designers may not directly design an experience, they can still *start a game design with the experience in mind they want to impart* .
- Aesthetics may inspire certain Mechanics

Hotline Miami

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBaSQbUeSY0>



MDA Framework – *Hotline Miami*

Mechanics

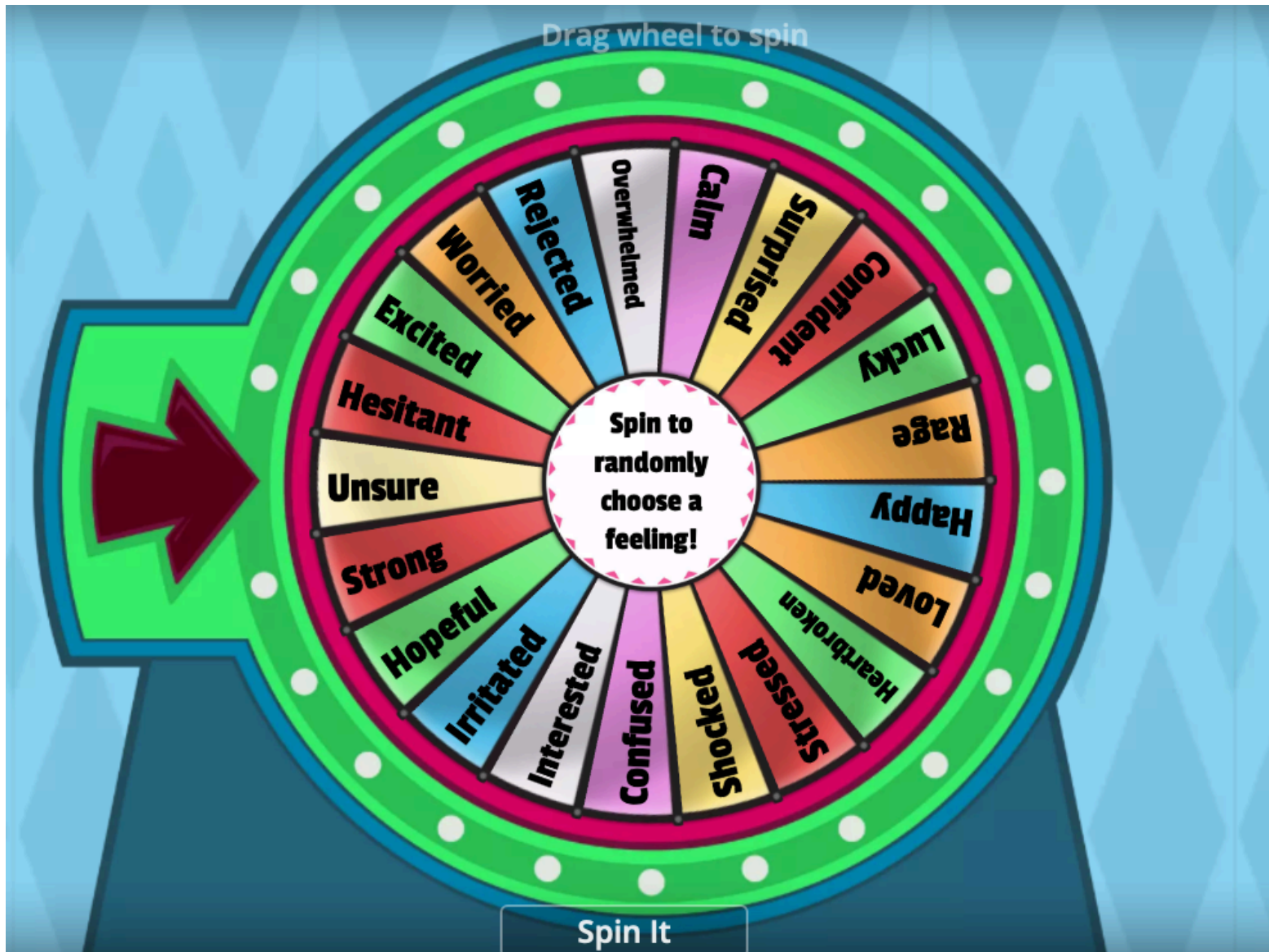
- Fight, Run
- Killed enemies remain on map
- Kill all enemies to complete level
- Get back to beginning of level afterwards
- Etc.

Dynamics

- Backtrack through loads of pixelated gore – all caused by the player themselves

Aesthetics

- A certain sense of pride and accomplishment?
- Revulsion and discomfort?
- Maybe all of the above?



MDA and Emotions

- Spin the Wheel 3 times:

<https://wordwall.net/resource/1787517/random-feelings-generator>

- For each feeling you roll, think of an existing game that expresses this feeling.
- Discuss how the game mechanics give rise to this emotion

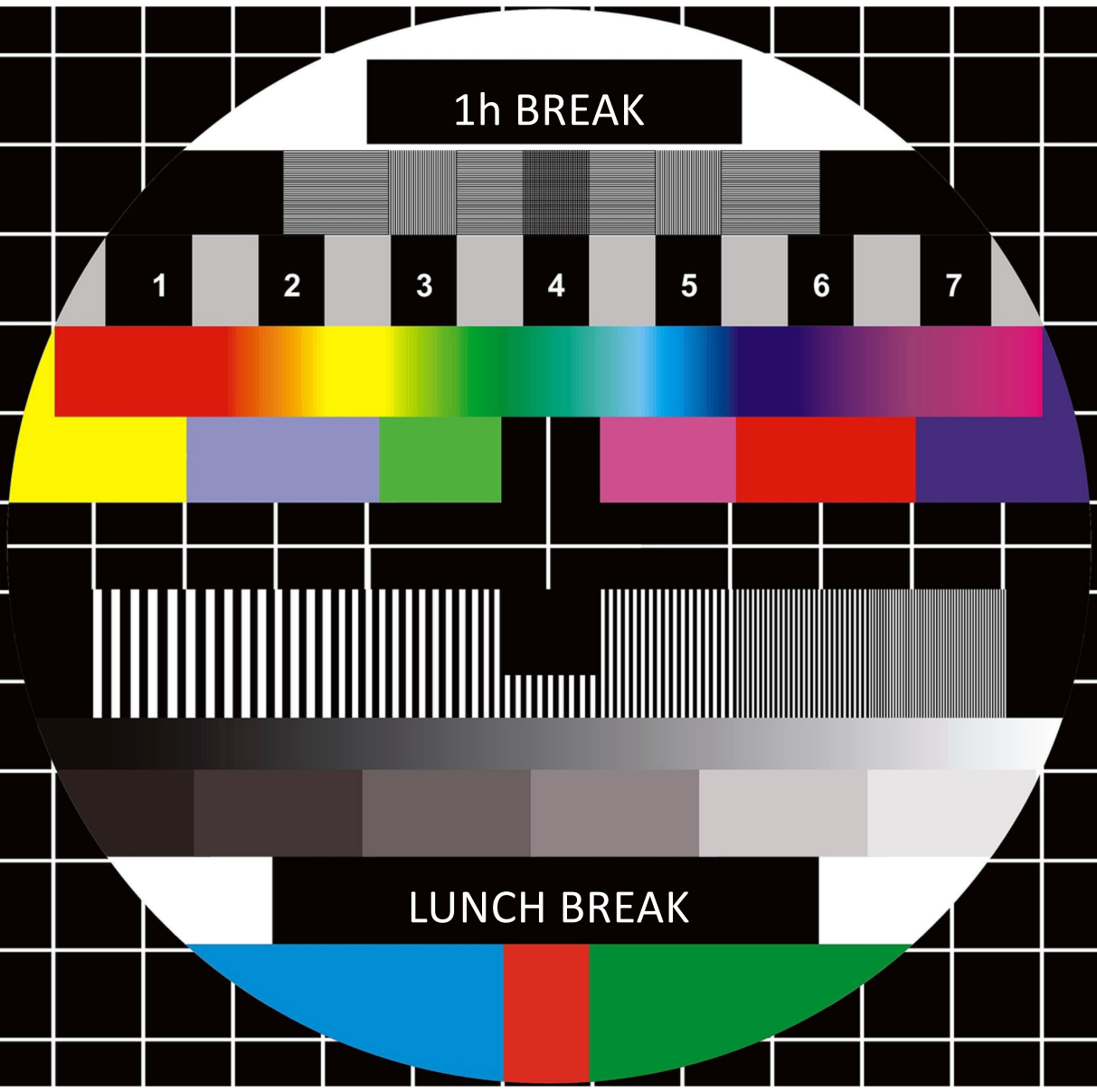
Present ...

- Was it difficult to think of game examples? For which feelings did examples come easily? Which ones were more difficult?
- Was the MDA framework useful for analyzing all the different feelings?

1h BREAK

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

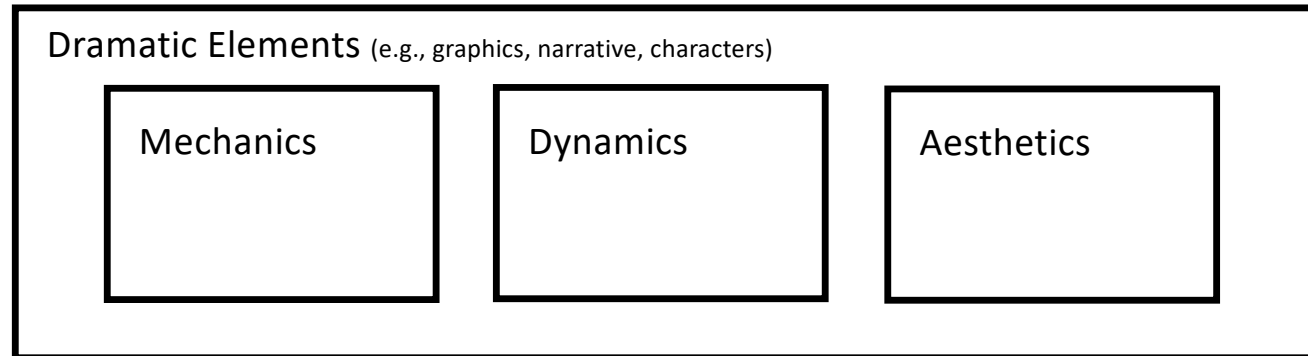
LUNCH BREAK



Present ...

- Was it difficult to think of game examples? For which feelings did examples come easily? Which ones were more difficult?
- Was the MDA framework useful for analyzing all the different feelings?
- Why were some feelings more difficult to think examples for?
- Why was the MDA framework more difficult to use for certain feelings?

MDA Framework – Critique



Player Characteristics

- Personal preferences
- Previous experiences
- Familiarity
- etc

Social Context



VS

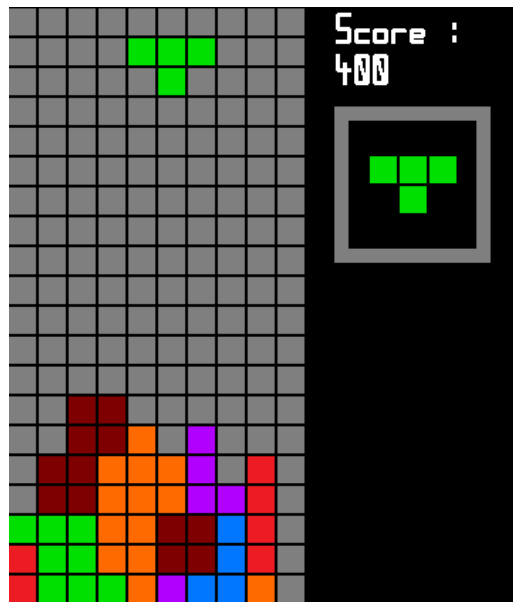


Dramatic Elements (Fullerton, 2014)

- Premise
 - Setting (e.g., «Alien-Invasion»), Game world
- Story
 - Narrative, what happens in the game?
- Character
 - The characters you play as and encounter
- Dramatic Arc
 - What is the central conflict? How does the player get there?

Dramatic Elements Tetris

<http://www.onlinespiele-sammlung.de/tetris/tetrisgames/lodo/>



Other contextual aspects?

- Can you think of other contextual aspects, besides the social context?
 - E.g., playing a horror game in broad daylight

Game Design & Context

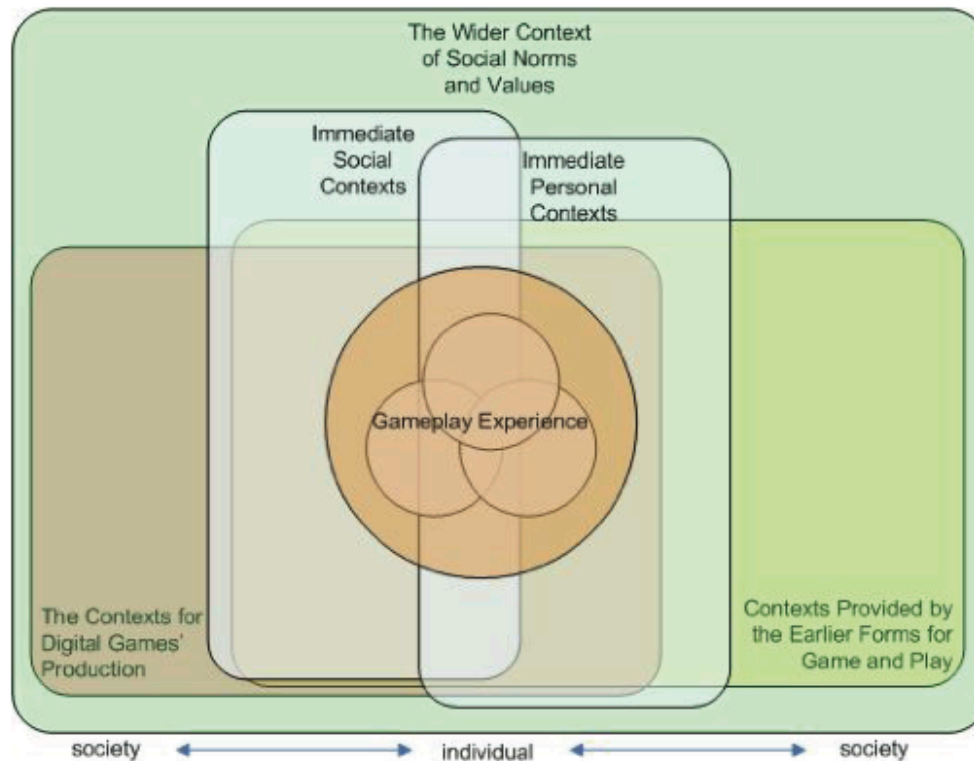
- Which games do you know that incorporate contextual aspects?
- What games? Which context aspects? How do they shape the emotional experience?



Game Design & Context – Boktai (Konami, 2003)



Contextual Game Experience Model – Mäyrä (2007)



The Contextual Game Experience: On the Socio-Cultural Contexts for Meaning in Digital Play

Frans Mäyrä
Hypermedia Laboratory
FIN-33014 University of Tampere
FINLAND
frans.mayra@uta.fi

Contextual Game Experience Model – Mäyrä (2007)

- Player experience is shaped by different contextual aspects
- **Immediate Personal Context:** Player Characteristics, situation, place
- **Immediate Social Context:** Who is there? Who are you playing with? What do they think of games?
- **Historical context:** How has technology evolved? How have gaming habits changed?
- **Social norms and values:** Cultural differences

Mystery House (1980)



Final Fantasy VII (1997) (how we remember it)



Final Fantasy VII (1997) (what it looked like)



Final Fantasy VII (1997) (what it looked like in-game ...)



Cultural Differences – American Kirby is Hardcore



Cultural Differences – American Kirby is Hardcore



Cultural Differences – American Kirby is Hardcore



Kirby's rapturous expression was toned down in the international versions.

Societal context: What has changed?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTzyz2TgGls>

Nowadays: PS4 Pro– Feel the Power



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvbljgpn8cA>

MDA and Emotions

- Spin the Wheel twice:
<https://wordwall.net/resource/1787517/random-feelings-generator>
- How would you adapt Space Invaders to express these feelings?
- Brainstorm a game idea that modifies the game to express the two feelings – they don't have to occur together
- You can modify mechanics, as well as dramatic elements

MDA Framework – Space Invader



- *Mechanics:* Move left/right, shoot, take cover, cover can be destroyed, aliens descend
- *Dynamics:* Distribute damage, duck and cover
- *Aesthetics:* «Last Stand», «Independence Day»

MDA Framework – Space Invader

- Did you adjust mechanics or dramatic elements?

Thank You!

