

Psychology in Games

A Personal Study

by

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April 14th, 2009

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Summarized Findings

On the Psychology behind Motivation & Selection of Entertainment

In studying the reasoning behind why people choose to enjoy entertainment (and why specific forms), there seems to be one consistent element: the presence of need. Regardless of the exact form it takes, most motivation for playing specific titles stems from the desire to fulfill personal needs through entertainment.

Needs are listed in many ways in the readings: game elements that reflect behavioural patterns (such as 'Collectors' who hoard in-game collectibles or 'Competitors' who need the opportunity to challenge and defeat fellow players); familiarity; sense of fulfillment or reward (*Why People Play Games*, p.94), or imaginative freedom (*Fantasy and Imagination*, p.107). Users seek to fulfill some inner craving that entertainment can provide, but what that craving *is* depends greatly on the individual. There are too many possibilities to list, but they tend to follow similar lines: to feel competent and skilled, to be in control, to feel welcomed, to feel engaged, or to fulfill personal fantasies. The readings stated that most entertainment is intrinsic in that the reward for doing the entertainment is the entertainment *itself* (*Motivation*, p.5), a statement I agree with. The action is the goal *and* the reward. All other activities (such as eating, sleeping, digging a hole, etc.) typically require completion to be satisfying (imagine having your meal taken away before you finish). Depending on the entertainment, the same may be true (imagine missing the ending of your favourite soap opera), but this lacks any serious repercussions. Entertainment is still an optional activity in human survival, albeit needed for our mental well being. These needs are our own creations, although they may appear otherwise. That distinction can be expressed through extrinsic and intrinsic motivation: different sources for these needs.

A factor of these needs influencing motivation and selection was relatedness. People developed needs based on their desires, which are again based on their perspective and personal development. Depending on personal tastes and previous exposure to entertainment, we develop preferences for our needs (*Motivation*, p.8). Subtle experiences early in life can influence these, or even other forms of entertainment: perhaps a favourite animal, or genre of fiction. Many parallels to franchises (or brand familiarity) are given in the readings (typically referenced as television 'programs'). Users will seek out entertainment that offers specific characters, genres of fiction or reflects their own values and beliefs.

On the Psychology behind Social & Cultural Implications

One argument was prominently displayed through every reading on the social side psychology of games: social awareness and involvement. Every reading incorporated social interaction and self-identity as playing a part in entertainment, called Social Identity Theory [SIT], discussed this directly (*Social Identity Theory*, p.256).

Entertainment - even in a solitary format - affects the social behaviour of the user, or vice versa. Some users will select and enjoy entertainment based on their recognized social 'clique' (an argument of SIT), while others seek engagement with others through the entertainment (such as in *World of Warcraft* or the failed *The Sims Online*).

Regardless of the act itself, entertainment also spawns all manner of external effects in the user's social life: for better or for worse. Social networks (ie. subcultures) can be established based on the solitary or co-operative aspects of entertainment (*Playing Online*, p.298): online FAQ boards such as GameFAQs provide user contributed answers to game-related questions, and 'cosplay' (a Japanese-originated hobby) where fans meet dressed in costumes based on favourite characters from many different kinds of entertainment. On the contrary, entertainment can also have negative affects on the user's social life: poor body image as a result of the idealist portrayal of physical beauty (*Attachment, Media, and Body Image*, p.293). A crime with more guilty parties that just the entertainment industry.

Social identity can also negatively affect a person's enjoyment of entertainment, or cause fear and uncertainty in their own decisions when evaluated by the opinions of peers: this parallels the 'in-crowds' and 'out-crowds' in culture. Entertainment is a seemingly innocent act, not something you'd expect to be so socially influential. In a very specific example, given by the readings, the portrayal of idealized physical beauty can driven women to feel inadequate when compared to this larger-than-life characters and personas.

It appears that entertainment includes immense social & cultural implications, even when the activity isn't social in nature. A natural impulse to share our experiences with others, perhaps?

Also in the readings was a discussion of how individuals interacted over online entertainment, through MMORPGs or *The Sims Online*. Explored are topics on why people play online games, and why such a highly anticipated game *The Sims Online* failed so miserably to retain players' interest. Motivation for playing online was quite evident: the reasoning reflects much of the SIT concept, so I won't reiterate. Players enjoy social collaboration or competition in their games, which can be provided from the comfort of home by playing online. You can be sitting in your pyjamas but playing with people around the world, questing through caves and swamps as your virtual persona. What's key here is that there's a driving purpose and reward for interacting with other players online: they can support you, give you information or advice and allow you to

share your experience as you become stronger and more effective while playing together. The game changes drastically with another player (something shared by the recently released *Resident Evil 5* or older games like *Gears of War* and the *X-Men* arcade game). It was in this regard that *The Sims Online* failed. The designers provided plenty of variety and game depth, but failed to give direct communication between players any actual purpose (*What Went Wrong With The Sims Online*, p.313). The rewards for any in-game activities were not dependent on communication between players: some would even leave the keyboard after initiating an action with another player and return later when it was finished. There was no need to speak or interact beyond the pre-programmed, automated actions in the game. The player might as well have been communicating with the computer. Without meaning behind the interaction, players were simply not motivated to continue the game and went back to the original *Sims*, since playing alone felt no different than playing online.

On the Psychology behind Individual Psychological Experiences

A point stressed in several chapters in my readings is something I found rather unsettling. Entertainment, despite being completely fictional in nature, can have profound and lasting effects on individuals (*Power of Fiction*, p.172). Entertainment can be extremely influential to viewers regardless of their accuracy or intent. Individuals are just as inclined to be affected by fiction as they are non-fiction, albeit perhaps in different ways. This is further strengthened in the readings by the statement that characters in entertainment are evaluated by the same values that real people are: appearance, first impression, behaviour, abilities . . . all human traits (*Parasocial Interactions and Relationships*, p.296). There are no proper methods to judge fictional characters by, so this is a logical approach viewers would take: they evaluate characters using a system they are already familiar with. Viewers can develop relationships with these characters, wherein the character could become a object of worship, an example to follow or a subject of fantasy. Viewers become strongly influenced and attached to these characters, becoming another reason for the motivation & selection of entertainment.

Beyond this, the readings discuss how individuals are affected by specific events in entertainment and how they are emotionally engaged by what they experience. On the topic of 'Moral Sanction,' viewers are inclined to enjoy, accept or reject events in entertainment based on their own moral standings (*Basal Morality in Drama Appreciation*, p.55). For example, a typical viewer would become dismayed or angered by the successes of a villainous character against the protagonist, and delighted when that protagonist defeats and subdues the villain. This is a morally acceptable - and ideal - outcome for the viewer. However, should the protagonist go beyond simply subduing the villain and torture or maim them without just cause, this crossing the line of what the viewer is willing to accept as justified punishment. They may reject the entertainment in response and dissociate themselves from it to protect their own moral

conscience and comfort level, much like a viewer would avert their eyes from a violent scene in a horror movie.

Finally, discussed in the readings are the methods in which emotions are evoked from the viewers through the objectivity and subjectivity of aesthetics. Specifically, the application of subjectivity over objectivity (*Subjectivity, Objectivity and Aesthetic Feelings in Film, p.101*). Situations and events that are clearer conveyed and leave little room for doubt are open to logical analysis and evaluation, much like reading the facts in a history book: there is no mental stimulation or emotional involvement. Take that objectivity away, and the viewer is suddenly assaulted with images and sounds they must interpret on their own. The mystery of a fog-enshrouded alley, or the danger of an obscured silhouette: these are elements that present mystery and uncertainty to the viewer. They are challenged to use their creativity to fill in the gaps and interpret it as they will. The more you involve the viewer, the more immersive the experience, the more emotional involvement and the more imagination on the part of the viewer. True engagement comes from not what is seen, but what is suggested.

Lessons Learned

Concerning the Psychology behind Motivation & Selection of Entertainment

Entertainment was an activity that I'd always considered as 'optional' and 'unimportant' in many ways. I confess entertainment still monopolizes a large amount of my time, but I understand that I don't really benefit from it in any significant way or are fulfilling any important needs through it. From what I've read, I think that perspective isn't quite accurate.

Everything I've learned in these readings tells me that people have needs: undeniable, insatiable needs. They're not optional or unimportant. These are needs that *must* be filled, although the methods used to fulfill them vary greatly. Entertainment is just one possibility, and while it might pale in significance when compared to building a house for your family, that doesn't discredit the needs they're satisfying. Whether I need to feel loved by someone close to me or need to feel powerful and capable, entertainment can deliver me all of these things (especially games, when compared to more passive modes of play). These are completely legitimate - and essential - needs, and they can be fulfilled with entertainment. That makes entertainment just as essential in my eyes.

I understand that entertainment plays a significant role in the mental well being of the user, should we should treat it in such a way. This puts the onus on we, the creators, to treat our games with a significance I had not previously considered. Before, I'd merely believed that I would satisfied by creating engaging and meaningful game experiences.

Designing games mechanics and scenarios with this in mind would both propel my creations to critical and financial success, and fulfill my personal and career goals. If someone enjoys the games I create, that's fantastic, and another goal I was working towards. Now I consider that these designs are no longer just measures used to evaluate my success and the enjoyment of others, but instead a serious responsibility. A user who picks up a game I developed will begin the game with the intent to satisfy their needs. They believe - based on the marketing and information I provide about my game - that this game will fulfill those needs. My failure to design such an experience won't just fail to be fun for the user, but also leaves them unsatisfied, forcing them to seek alternatives. While I accept that my designs will never satisfy 100% of the user base, I don't think I can accept designing a game that fails to deliver what it promises.

Now, on what these needs *are* varies greatly. In the readings there seemed to be no end of examples: opportunity for imagination and individualism, Optimal Stimulation Levels (OSL), autonomy and the feeling of competence, etc (*People and "Their" Television Shows*, p.282). There are so many possibilities that you can't engage all of them at once. It's simply not feasible, and is a bad design approach anyway. "A jack of all trades is a master of none." You sacrifice too much trying to design a single product with a universal target audience. I'll explain more on this in relatedness.

On relatedness, I didn't learn anything quite so startling. Rather, it cemented previous knowledge I had about brand establishment and franchising. Relatedness (also termed 'connectedness') is typically an emotional value. People will seek out entertainment that fulfills personal needs and evokes specific emotions. This is found in entertainment that relates to their personal values, beliefs or background: elements such as a favourite animal, political activism or a film noir crime drama. These conditions will change from person to person, and reflect who they are and how they grew up. I know myself from playing many games and enjoying all manner of entertainment forms that there are specific traits I actively seek out, forsaking even the chance for new and exciting games over something familiar and comforting. I don't know how many times I've watched *Star Wars*, but I can recite most of the lines from memory by now. I haven't said much on this topic, but rest assured I will revisit it in the final section of this paper.

One final note on motivation is the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We are either motivated by ourselves, or for some external purpose. I confess I'd never considered this about entertainment, and how most entertainment is intrinsic by nature. We watch television not to accomplish some external goal (like writing a paper on the program's content, although that could be the case) but rather because we simply desire to watch TV. The activity and the goal are the same. Because entertainment is free of extrinsic goals, the sudden cessation of the entertainment is not as drastic as failing to finish going to the washroom, or eating (*Motivation*, p.11). You feel immensely unsatisfied (or worse) should you be rushed out of the washroom . . . and I don't think anyone truly benefits from that particular situation. Entertainment is free of that constraint, from needing to be completed in a single sitting. It can be metered out

across a period of time, partitioned for the user's sake. This is something that can easily be taken advantage of in game design.

Concerning the Psychology behind Social & Cultural Implications

I'm been constantly amazed and the communities that develop over entertainment media. Even the smallest things can lead to communities springing forth across the internet, evolving until they seem as professional as the entertainment that spawned them. Individuals associate themselves based on these groups, which can affect their opinions and attitude towards familiar and unfamiliar entertainment: the very basics of SIT that I previously mentioned (*Social Identity Theory*, p.256). Social involvement is present in any form of entertainment. From *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* costume events to conventions to www.gamefaqs.com, social communities of entertainment are varied and worldwide. Even when not interactive by nature, entertainment will still spawn these communities: an outcome I had not considered before. As I was arguing in previous sections, the needs of individuals give real value to entertainment, giving communities a foundation that's stronger than you would initially think. These groups can grow to have strong convictions in their beliefs and activities, much like any organization formed around non-entertainment industries. People work hard for what matters to them, and entertainment is apparently important enough to merit both the time and effort. A quick Google of the word 'fanboys' will yield more intensity and dedication over entertainment than you're likely to come across online.

There is that issue with purpose, though. In the readings, *The Sims Online* failed as an interactive entertainment source because interaction between players was ultimately meaningless (*What Went Wrong With The Sims Online*, p.320). No advantage was given for communication, and no meaningful goal as a metaphor for the interaction. To step back a moment, I suppose the intrinsic goals of typical social interaction (ie. meeting with friends at a bar) outweigh all else. The activity is the goal and the reward, and is secondary to no other activity. But when playing a game or watching TV, that is your current goal: to enjoy the entertainment. Social interaction is introduced to augment that experience, and now both activities coexist with a shared purpose. Remove that purpose (or fail to include it in the first place) and the primary activity takes priority. This is a careful thing to consider: spending the time to give users the communication options they need and depriving them of justification for using it is a major risk to a product's integrity.

Concerning the Psychology behind Individual Psychological Experiences

The biggest issue revealed to me was something that went against a harsh truth I'd accepted about pursuing a career in the games industry. I embraced the idea that no matter what I did or what I'd created, my work and achievements would have no lasting effect on the world. My games would not shape minds hearts of the users, nor leave a lasting impression in their minds or hearts. It appears that my perspective is again quite inaccurate.

The Power of Fiction. The very name just speaks volumes, and the arguments it makes are supported by content from *Parasocial Interactions and Relationships*. Simply put, fiction (ie. entertainment) as been found to be no less influential on the mind than non-fiction and people can develop significant relationships with fictional characters they can relate with (*Parasocial Interactions and Relationships*, p.295). People allow themselves to be persuaded and emotionally motivated by entertainment just as much as the news, or real experiences. On the school playground as a little boy, I ran around wildly with my friends pretending to be a Power Ranger fighting evil: as suggestible as children can be, to drive our imagination so powerfully is no small feat. I don't know why this may be . . . the readings describe how individuals are inclined to automatically accept the validity of information without later reviewing and dismissing it as fiction (*Power of Fiction*, pg. 164). We let all this fictional information into our minds and, without actively taking the time to consider and disprove it, it gets stored right alongside all our other factual knowledge. But that's not really what I wish to discuss. What matters here is that entertainment can be a powerful tool for affecting the minds of the viewers, conveying messages and emotional stimulation. The issue that fiction is . . . well, fiction . . . is not important and not actively registered by the viewers: they see what they see, and that's all that matters.

I understand that I can use fiction as a potent tool for affecting others, but there are variables that control how they can be influenced. The two examples in the readings were the balance of *Moral Sanction* and *Subjectivity in Aesthetics*. Considering that the majority of entertainment is visual and plot driven (at least, the forms entertainment significant to my studies), these are elements I need to consider. Moral Sanction is not an issue unfamiliar to me: I know that, as a viewer, I personally prefer happy endings for the protagonist that allow me to sleep better at night. However, I always prefer happy endings, and there's more to story construction than just sunshine and lollipops. A moral balance must be struck, which is sometimes ignored in the construction of Hollywood blockbusters or low quality cross-platform games. Also mentioned is the concept that different age groups possess a drastically different grasp on the appropriates of action and consequence (*Basal Morality in Drama Appreciation*, p.56). For instance, a young girl would not understand the severity of an action such as treachery, and instead looks to the punishment to gauge just how bad the initial action was: treachery, in some societies, is still punishable by death. They cannot

comprehend the depth of the cause, so they evaluate the much more obvious punishment. This is something to take note of: entertainment is created towards a specific audience, and I shall have to remember that what works for one audience will not work for another.

Finally, using subjectivity in aesthetics to provoke emotional and imaginative engagement. This is something I'd not considered before directly . . . at least, not with an understanding of the reasons behind it. A spooky forest is spooky because . . . well, it's dark and mysterious. Now I understand a little more than that: like a Rorschach test, abstract and interpretative aesthetics engage the viewer (*Subjectivity, Objectivity and Aesthetic Feelings in Film, p.95*). The use of subjectivity and objectivity to craft a narrative is also a way of distributing effort. To take an objective approach, you must carefully construct and explain an event which will have a single interpretation. That's a lot of work for only one message. A subjective scene can (potentially) demand much less time and effort, as the creator shows and explain very little and lets the viewer do all the work in filling the gaps. It's a mark of respect, actually. The creators trust that you have the knowledge and perceptive abilities to draw your own conclusions (ideally, the correct conclusions) without having to spell it out for you. Nobody enjoys having their hand held all their life. I understand that what I choose to include can be just as important as what I choose to omit. Finding a balance between the two will allow me to engage viewers in comprehending vague or abstract aesthetics, and employ objective imagery when I must convey a specific message to the viewer without room for misinterpretation.

Application to Games

Utilizing the Psychology behind Motivation & Selection of Entertainment

My argument really focusses on addressing and capitalizing on the concept of 'need' that I've discussed. If I consider that entertainment is fulfilling not just frivolous desires but important and deeply rooted needs, then I need to consider just how important that is in my game design approach. This extends beyond just the game experience, but the users perception and connection to the brand I develop through my designs.

One thing that observing the Global Game Jam taught me is just how important it is to focus on a core gameplay mechanic and base your design around it. If you have a fantastic and carefully tuned main mechanic, it becomes the pillar that the game rests on. No matter how weak other areas may be, the strength of the main mechanic supports and carries the game into the minds of the player. They remember that mechanic, if nothing else. I need to take that same approach with psychological

aspects of the game's design. The emotions, the feelings, the level of engagement, the OSL . . . everything must be pure. I'll explain in a moment.

I cannot shape the needs of the players. I also cannot design a game that addresses each and every one of their needs and relatedness requirements: it's a simple impossibility. I surmise that I must focus on fulfilling a primary need, and consistently address it throughout the entire game experience. Consistency of quality and purpose is the mark of a good game, and if I can achieve that then I can guarantee that the player will be more involved and satisfied than any game taking the 'Jack of all Trades' route. This accomplishes two goals: first, I fulfill my obligation to the player. They have selected my product because they believe it provides entertainment that will satisfy their personal needs, and I think we have a responsibility to give them just that. What 'need' in particular, of course, depends on the design and content of the title and the target audience research we conduct during pre-production stages.

The second goal this accomplishes is the establishment of brand loyalty, but not by the sleazy business conditions marketing is used for. If we can deliver the player's needs in our game, we can establish comfort and familiarity with our product and the support of both our franchise and the community around it. Individuals select entertainment based on their relatedness to specific traits that are a reflection of their own personal development. While we can't control what they choose to relate to, we *can* present elements of our game through research that will attract certain kinds of players. They play our game, and quite possibly enjoy the game and develop their own relationship with the title, and with it a new connection. With that connection, we can then build future games in the series that evolve and expand on the design and content of the original, just like any good game series does. While new players who have never played the original titles will still be wary and evaluate their own needs and compare them to what the game delivers, that won't be such an issue for returning players. A level of trust has been established with our title, and their relationship with our series is what will allow them to accept changes and embrace new experiences. Only the strength of the *The Legend of Zelda* reputation for quality was strong enough to permit such a drastic change in visuals for the excellent *Wind Waker*, despite still not winning over 100% of the returning players. Yet the game still contained the classic *Zelda* gameplay: there are still some needs that will not change, and need to be considered even in future games of the same series.

Lastly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Both of these exist in games, a claim most other forms of entertainment cannot share. Merely playing a game will satisfy the intrinsic desires, that has been established: a goal set by the player. But the game then presents all manner of goals and challenges that are set by the developers and *not* by the player. For them to satisfy their intrinsic goals, the player needs to play the game. The play the game, they must progress through the game by completing the extrinsic goals set by the developers. They fail to complete these goals, they cease to progress through the game, which diminishes the value of their experience and the satisfaction they receive. Certain challenges in the game make take upwards of 30 minutes or an

hour to complete, and failure at any stage frequently forces the player to start from the beginning. A frustrating result, and denying the player the satisfaction of completing any extrinsic goals. I believe it is important, then, to establish a reward and completion system that calculates progress using the smallest possible intervals in play. The recent *Resident Evil 5* is an excellent example of this: the main campaign is divided into tiny chapters, which can be replayed with ease to seek items or rewards the player has previously missed. Even better, the player has only a single active inventory, which carries over into any difficulty mode in any chapter. Progress made in enhancing the gear in the player's inventory is carried over, even if the player quits in the middle of a chapter. In success or failure, it doesn't matter: any time the player puts in is saved and rewarded. Considering how much time is needed to complete many games these days, it's unreasonable to demand so much time to progress even a fraction of the way through. The only reason a 10 hour raid in *World of Warcraft* is acceptable is because of the addictive nature of the gameplay, levelling system and immersion. If I created a single player experience with nothing by 10 hour boss battles, I'm fairly certain I'd be lynched within a week of release.

Utilizing the Psychology behind Social & Cultural Implications

This is a difficult topic to discuss for me, as I've a personal bias when it comes to the games I enjoy designing. I honestly prefer single player experiences, and designing game mechanics and story around them. Single player games traditionally demonstrate incredible stories, huge and immersive worlds, interesting characters and tons of emotion. I've never played a multiplayer game of I consider of equal quality, no matter how perfect I think *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* is. Considering how to apply social and cultural implications into game design remains a real challenge for me.

First off, I think the readings on *The Sims Online* stressed the significance of context and purpose in entertainment interaction. As much as players enjoy multiplayer games, there still needs to be a sense of purpose to guide all parties involved towards the same goal and give meaning and context behind their actions. Even in a game where you play with a friend with the original intent to support them in progressing through the game, there may be no extrinsic reward in the game for your involvement. At the end of the day, you may have the moral pride of having assisted your friend, but nothing to show for it. Only your friendship moved you to collaborate: how likely would you be to do the same for a complete stranger during an online matchup? I argue there *must* be some manner of reward or drive for any interaction between players, but I confess that's usually the case. Many games already incorporate independent rewards for multiplayer (the rise of *Achievements* and *Trophies*) and even casual play with strangers can lead to unlockable content (such as through points in *Killzone 2* or time played in *Super Smash Bros.*). Play a little or a lot, you still reap reward for playing with others.

This is, however, little different from what *The Sims Online* failed at. If the act of playing with others equals rewards, there's still may not be any distinction between playing with *humans* and playing against the *computer*. Concerning the unlockables in *Killzone 2*, there was an issue immediately after the game's release where players were hosting online games and populating the games with low-level bots and denying other players entry. Racking up points by killing off the unintelligent computer-controlled characters allowed them to quickly unlock new classes, but needed no actual human interaction. Although I don't have an answer to solve this kind of issue, when designing multiplayer aspects I need to consider ways to make the interaction between players in the game an intellectually engaging experience. I need to ensure that somehow - during gameplay between players - something is offered that cannot be emulated or imitated by the computer when acting in the same role (on an amusing thought, imagine the cult hit *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* as an online multiplayer game: problem solving to disprove the other player's statement and shouting 'Objection' at them). I may be able to combine another concept into this idea to make that work.

Returning to the idea of SIT, groups of like-minded individuals will associate based on their personal preferences and past experiences: 'in-crowds', 'out-crowds' and all that mess. With virtually no influence from the developers, communities can spring forth around entertainment and develop into deep, sprawling social networks all connected through a mutual passion for a shared piece of entertainment. An impressive phenomenon. I wonder why more games do not take advantage of such dedicated communities, or include the existence of these communities into their design? *LittleBigPlanet* is the first game in some time to be developed *explicitly* with the intent of creating social communities for gameplay to even be truly possible. As an offline title, *LBP* is tragically simple and short: not nearly worth the \$60 price tag. You are required to go online and play the created levels of others to even receive the full value of the game. But what about forums? Fan art communities? Question and answer boards? User walkthroughs? Fan fiction writers? So much content is produced by fans to support the games we play, at the expense of their own time and money. There must be a way to bring them into the fold and make all their effort significant to the game experience.

There's an old game called *StarTropics* for the NES. With the game came a innocent looking letter (an actual piece of paper) from the protagonist's uncle. During the game, however, the player receives a message from his uncle instructing him to "dip the letter in water." If the player was able to think outside the game and run the letter under some water, the paper would reveal a hidden code needed to progress through the game. Immersive and engaging, much like Meryl's codex frequency from *Metal Gear Solid*. Imagine that in this day and age, the player is provided with something parallel to that letter, but instead of water, is forced to dip it into social communities to progress? Suddenly, all the players with the game must collaborate outside the game to succeed and progress. I suppose games like *Pokémon* encourage players to do so in order to "catch 'em all," but the latest entries in the game make it a very impersonal experience.

I've no idea how to properly apply this method, though: it might demand some serious trial and error to gauge the possible applications.

Utilizing the Psychology behind Individual Psychological Experiences

With the concepts presented in the *Power of Fiction* and *Parasocial Interactions*, one thing became abundantly clear: there is the power to affect a lot of people through the characters and events portrayed in these games. Just as how games can be used to fulfill critical needs, I need to design the content of these games with care and caution. I'm not just designing a fun set of levels for the player to happily romp through, but potentially a set of emotions to experience and information to absorb. I can craft how they feel during the game, and feelings are tricky business. If properly done, experiences like the death of Aeris (sniffle) in *Final Fantasy VII* can be compassionate and inspirational, and a sad and tender scene can generate real emotions and care for the game's characters and propel the player through the game with a passion not created by the reward of mere 'bonus features'. What the player is willing to commit shall determine what they get back, and if I take advantage of this I can generate motivation in the player that I simply can't generate through normal gameplay. I believe there are similarities here to the idea of ensuring meaning and context behind player interaction: to generate purpose for their actions in the game is only half the equation. I need to match it with the drive to complete said actions. It's also part of a realization of responsibility: to date I've done my best to present meaningful messages in the games I've played, but out of my own personal preference, not any sense of obligation.

Applying the ideas of subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetics are one possible means to accomplish this, but I realized early they cannot be handled carelessly. Unlike film and other passive forms of entertainment, player involvement and comprehension is needed for a game to progress. The player must be able to understand the reality of certain situations in order to be able to address them. Subjective scenes may generate the engagement and emotion I need for that drive, but it can cause the player to lose their understanding of the situation at hand. To give a previous example from my summaries, in the *Metal Gear Solid* series the player is frequently assaulted with images that defy the rule of the 4th wall, and play with the player's head and preconceptions about the structure of games. This is a hallmark of the series and director Hideo Kojima has been lauded for it, but it's never employed so drastically during serious gameplay. To be sneaking down a corridor and suddenly have flowers springing from the walls would not be distracting: too much precision is needed to succeed in gameplay (and therefore, to progress). At these moments, objectivity and clarity is required to handle the demands of gameplay: what fun is trying to jump to another platform and falling to your doom because the edge was obscured by fog that was added to give 'mood' to the area? Understanding the OSR of the moment and designing the experience accordingly will be a tricky line to walk.

Moral Sanction provides additional guidelines to consider in constructing the player's experience, although the methods to do so are very well-defined. Finding appropriate responses to player successes and failures - alongside scripted events such as the achievements of the antagonist - will go far in inspiring the player to certain ends. If it is generally accepted that players like it when good things happen to good people and when bad things happen to bad people (and dislike the opposite), then I must utilize these as a source of motivation for the game. With games, however, there are multiple outcomes to a given scenario . . . even when one result leads to a loss condition that forces the player to restart. That failure is still portrayed in the game and, to the player, is still a real event. The moral implications of the result can act as a strong motivator to pursue or avoid these outcomes. A title like *Sly Cooper 2*, for instance, has special scenes only shown when you are defeated by a boss. While typically gameplay will automatically cease in a platformer and take you back to the last checkpoint when you lose, in *Sly* the boss will actually insult Sly (the lead character) and boast about beating him: it makes wiping that smile off their face during the next attempt all that more satisfying.

Closing Comments

This was a challenge for me: going through SIAT makes certain demands and develops specific skill sets, neither of which involve reading and reflection the way a research paper. I like to think I've done an admirable job, but regardless it was a learning experience for me. Changing my perspective to absorb and consider this manner of information was difficult, and although I might not have been completely successful, I think I did learn some key lessons.

Mostly, I think I learned to correct some flawed beliefs and preconceptions I had about entertainment and the value it has to people. Although passionate about it, I had a negative attitude about its importance that would have restricted my future development. I also learned to reflect more on specific aspects of game development and consider ideas such as purpose and motivation that I had never pondered before. Not all of my assertions and arguments will likely be flawless, but I think I did admirably for a first time effort. Not bad . . . I think I've allowed my self more room to grow in my understanding of this industry.

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On Motivation & Selection

Psychology of Entertainment

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Motivation

The primary message being delivered in this chapter is that 'entertainment' can be considered a primarily intrinsically motivated experience: that is, the objective of that activity lies within itself. People do not participate in entertainment for external reasons: a person may take an exam so they may get a good grade. The *grade* is the motivation, not the exam itself. With entertainment, the opposite is true: for the vast majority, you do not play Monopoly (the action) so that you may become more savvy with your money (the goal). You play Monopoly (the action) because you want to play Monopoly (the goal).

They break down the basis for which people seek and choose entertainment activities through three areas: Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness. Competence can be described as just how challenging an activity is. A user will seek only as much challenge as they are capable (or willing) of mastering. Any more, and the activity cannot be considered entertaining. People seek Autonomy in that are in control of their activity, and have the gratification of knowing that they selected the activity of their own free will and influence, despite much evidence that typically finds external influences to any decision we make. Even if it is not genuine, that false sense of Autonomy still counts for something. Finally, Relatedness is a more emotional value. Users frequently will seek what they can connect and relate to, even if the connection is not so obvious. To speak from experience, I will sometimes watch the same movie for the 10th time rather than enjoy an unknown film that I can't relate to. I do not grow from the experience, but I enjoy the older movie simply because I can (and have) connect with it. For a more relevant example, many players purchased the new game *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, which traditionally featured only Nintendo characters, because popular rival characters Sonic the Hedgehog and Solid Snake were included as playable characters. They may have not *touched* the series until now, but the introduction of their favourite characters likely guaranteed a purchase.

One other key comment from this chapter is that entertainment differs radically from other intrinsically motivated activities such as eating, sleeping and intercourse. Our reward is in the action itself, but if it is not completed (such as not finishing a meal), we are unsatisfied and frustrated. Something *must* be accomplished for it to be worthwhile. During entertainment, there is not accomplishment we are working towards, and if we are, it is a fictional.

Interestingly, video games have a relatively unique advantage of combining both intrinsic AND extrinsic motivation. Not only is it an entertainment where to merely play is the reward, but games present challenges and goals *on top* of this. Games that convey enjoyable accomplishment often give dozens or hundreds of hours of playtime to the player for a single purchase. The sacrifice, however, is that some of the goals present in the game may not be as enjoyable as others, and the challenge of completing them then introduces the same problems found in non-entertainment activities (like eating). Playing a game for hours and hours to defeat a boss, only to lose at the last moment is not only disheartening, but a waste of valuable time in which the player has accomplished nothing. People can sink vast amounts of time into games, and those with poorly planned rewards and progress systems will risk alienating players through harsh punishments for failure.

Playing Video Games

Part 2, Chapter 7 - Why People Play Games

A compilation of thesis's, each with a different perspective on why people play games. One finds that all players fall into specific types, the 'Collector', 'Craftsman' or 'Joker', and each seeks gameplay that reflects their types. For example, a 'Competitor' would play games so that he may become better than other players. Another thesis explains that players enjoy games for the control (illusion of control) it gives them, and some of these players will sacrifice other values (and accept inconsistencies) purely for the sake of greater control in those games. Other basic explanations state more about a player's desire to enjoy experiences unavailable to them, and another to escape into an alternate reality. On that line, another thesis covers the idea that games can provide a place for players to enjoy fantasy relationships without the risk of heartbreak or loss, while another states that people seek a way to express aggressive tendencies and stress through competition (with games as a socially acceptable and regulated way do so). The remainder of the chapter suggests ways to structure game development, but is not directly related to game psychology.

This is extremely important to video games, and already prominent throughout most titles. People — even if they aren't as unique and original as they might believe themselves to be — at least enjoy the idea of expressing themselves as an individual. Many games present the option to customize avatars or player statistics, and many games offer classes and jobs that specialize in all manner of unique abilities (not much different from 'Craftsmen' or 'Joker' in some cases). Some games will even allow the player to do as they wish, and then award titles and honours according to your behaviour, such as in *Fallout 3* or *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. To specifically discuss why players play certain games, though, is so expansive a topic that even this chapter can't help but offer multiple suggestions without isolating a specific one. Players are just as varied as the games that are designed for them, and I don't believe any single game will offer the quintessential experience for anyone . . . with a few exceptions, I suppose. Identifying specific reasons behind their selection and determining how to craft a game *around* those needs will prove a better investment in time.

The Psychology of Entertainment Media

Part 3, Chapter 15 - People and "Their" Television Shows

This entire chapter revolves around the concept of 'connectedness', which (if I understand it correctly) is very similar to the 'relatedness' mentioned in Chapter 1 of *Psychology of Entertainment*. Attempting to evaluate the kinds of relationships viewers develop with certain programs, they begin by defining 3 main types of relationships established while watching television programs. 'Viewer-Program' is between viewers and the program: they watch every episode, record it, follow it and organize their schedule so they will not miss their show. 'Viewer-Viewer' is when relationships form between viewers through their interest in the show: they may even identify themselves *through* the program. 'Viewer-Character' is when a viewer relates to a specific character, rather than the entire program. This can even evolve to the point of obsession and imitation: the choices, mannerisms, opinions and fashions of the character may begin to influence the viewer in their own behaviour. They also discuss how traits such as gender affect connectedness, most interestingly traits such as 'imaginal ability' and 'optimum stimulation level' (OSL). A very imaginative person is the kind whom develops fan fiction and other derived work based of a program. Maintaining an optimum stress level, on the other hand, has more to do with balancing the level of intensity in content the viewer is experiencing. If they are too stressed, they will seek less stimulating

entertainment: bored they will seek more. People with high OSL levels will constantly need new and stimulating entertainment, while low OSL viewers would be more likely to stick with a familiar program.

In my mind, this relates to video games in two significantly different ways. The first, motivation and selection, is fairly obvious. The idea of 'franchises' barely differs from this idea of 'program.' Some titles are based around characters with years of history in the industry (such as my personal favourite, Sonic the Hedgehog). The connection with a specific character, game developer, gameplay style (etc.) will keep that player coming back title after title after title, occasionally when the game might not even be worth a purchase (sadly, something that also plagues the Sonic series). And, just the same as above, a mutual interest in a game series might spark relationships where there were none, or even define the main method of interaction between players (such as those on Xbox Live or *World of Warcraft*). OSL also factors into this selection, basically unchanged. I myself do not usually play highly stimulating games like *Resident Evil* because I am not in the mood, but will play a few rounds of the more familiar *Smash Bros.* without hesitation.

That's all outside the game, though. Unlike television programs, players act *inside* the game as well, and have an additional world of options to choose from (akin to selecting a TV program inside another TV program). A game can offer a whole range of actions (with varying levels of stimulation) inside the game, and even a host of characters to interact with. Interestingly, games with equitable levels of stimulation in the primary gameplay may be chosen one over the other due to additional options to said gameplay. To compare, the titles *ICO* and *Resident Evil 4* both feature large, dark worlds with survival elements realized through intensely subjective environments. If the player is stressed and wishes to avoid too much stimulation, neither is a better choice over the other. *ICO* is a fixed experience, and there is really only one level of difficulty and challenge. *Resident Evil 4*, however, features bonus content that makes the main gameplay *drastically* easier and less stimulating, making the survival/horror elements almost non-existent should the player wish it. An interesting result of a very undemanding development choice.

Psychology of Entertainment

Part 2, Chapter 7 - Fantasy and Imagination

There are two rules this chapter bases virtually every argument on. The first is that 'Fantasy' is an activity with no distinct goal that is "separate from the context" it was derived from, and cannot be done while performing any other physically or mentally demanding task. The second is that 'Imagination' is an activity with a distinct goal that can still take place while the user is performing other tasks, and can still be attached to the context that influenced it. Imagination is akin visualizing a person's face from a novel, or the sound of their voice: these are creations of your imagination, but are based on immediate external stimulus.

Therefore, by this definition, a person cannot fantasize while enjoying entertainment media, but they instead fantasies affect what kinds of entertainment they choose to watch. They either choose something that is compatible with their current fantasies, about fantasies they are unable to create (akin to unsatisfied wishes or desires), or to escape from fantasies they find unpleasant (including boredom). I believe video games can typically be chosen based on all three methods for selection, and just like film or TV a variety of game topics will support a variety of different fantasies. However, games are *just* as likely to be chosen for the kinds of interactions they provide, which in term includes the kind of imagination that the player can express during the game.

The chapter discusses the importance imagination plays in entertainment media in allowing viewers to experience joy and emotions despite the fictional nature of the medium. While this connection is discussed in '*Power of Fiction*,' this chapter states that we use imagination to suspend disbelief and

consider events to be 'real' in their fictional worlds. This does not stop viewers from altering the degree to which they 'believe' in what they see: violence and brutality are frequently viewed with the knowledge it is not real, granted the individual is mature enough to strengthen their disbelief in the event.

In video games, however, the player must use their imagination beyond just believing the events in a fictional world. Games are an interactive medium, and the player is charged with navigating, exploring and acting in the game world from the perspective of an avatar that represents them in the game. Suddenly, they must imagine themselves as that character, and imagine how that character must behave in the context of the game world. A massive amount of imagination is required to understand how the player must play the game and receive enjoyment out of it . . . or at the very least, the correct *kind* of imagination. Older audiences may be gifted with an excellent imagination, but are unable to apply it in the context demanded by video games.

One final point made by the chapter that conflicts with video games is the statement that audio-visual entertainment requires and/or encourages less imagination than other non-visual mediums. I agree that this is generally the case, as much is presented to the viewer as fixed and beyond their control, limiting opportunities for imagination. However, games demand imagination due to the player's interaction with the fictional game world: the need to imagine themselves in the predetermined world and imagine what ways they can interact with it. A great deal of imagination is still required, but it is fundamentally different from the kind required by novels or verbal stories.

On Social/Cultural Implications

Playing Video Games

Part 3, Chapter 21 - What Went Wrong with *The Sims Online*

This article investigates why the online version of the massive The Sims franchise did so poorly when offering what players stressed they wanted: MMO-style interactions with The Sims-style gameplay. The result was disastrous, which according to this study had to do mostly with the psychology of the differing gameplay needs. Offline play in the original Sims required a player to control the world around their Sims (who were not intended to directly represent the player) and guide them through their lives, while enjoying the spectacle of their lives. Online, these Sims instead *represented* the player, but were still controlled through the same methods with similar results. In the original, you had no obligations or expectations about developing relationships with other players because *there were no other players*. Performing monotonous and objective actions yielded rewards that develop the Sims, and these actions carried over into the Sims Online. However, much of the game was predefined: people in a cultural environment want to feel like they belong and have some impact on the way the game plays out, but so much was already developed that new players had virtually no effect on the world. Rewards were independent of genuine social interaction mostly because the *action* could be just as technically rewarding without the *meaning* to enforce it. This, coupled with the fact that the position and status of the player's Sim had serious effect on how they communicated in the world, made the game a detached and mechanical affair.

With the genius of Will Wright behind the title and demonstrated ability to deliver what players require psychologically, I'm surprised this happened to such an anticipated title. One thing I criticize in many games I encounter is when they lack *meaning*, *context* and *purpose* in the player's goals, no matter how well implemented the gameplay. While *The Sims Online* had what I understand to be a moderately successful design for gameplay and interface, they failed to construct any lasting or visible importance to potential player actions. I'll give an example of a different title that evolved over time. *Jak & Daxter* is

core Sony series that is both critically and financially successful. The original game was a platformer in the style of *Banjo-Kazooie* or *Mario 64*, with much exploration and collection required. The player had a primary quest in the game, accomplished through minor quests throughout the story. However, most of these sub-quests had (as many platformers traditionally did) *no* connection to the main quest. Story-wise, they were pointless. Fetching a herd of sheep for a farmer did not tie into the quest of saving the world. Thankfully, everything else about the game was superb enough to support this weakness in the story. The sequel, *Jak II*, was nominated for game of the year by many publications. Improving on every part of the original, one of the key differences was a sense of *meaning* and *context* for every sub-quest. Each and every seemingly insignificant action ultimately played a role in the story, removing the tedium of functionally identical missions because of the meaning behind each one. This strength is also shared by another Sony property, the *Sly Cooper* series.

Playing Video Games

Part 3, Chapter 20 - Playing Online

Focussing on MMORPGs as the definitive online game once more, this chapter seeks to find reasons why players play online. Much of it is straight forward: often players of online games are of a different variety and are not attracted to single player games. Others play the online portion of the game solo, using the online aspects to merely bolster their experience at their whim. Collaboration comes as another obvious reason. More interesting in this chapter are ideas like how certain developers have created specific aspects of the game to stimulate conversation, such as specific quests, items and events. Given the open-ended nature of most MMORPGs, these experiences can include a wealth of features, and offering specific topics to discuss can assist players in interacting with one another in relevant ways. This communication is mentioned on several levels, most noticeably *outside* the game. MMO players have tendencies to develop unofficial sites dedicated to developing communities and sharing information about the game, creating entire sub-cultures to support the original game culture. There is no explanation or rationale given to these choices, though, beyond a deep need for players to have complementary material for the game and a way to communicate and network in ways outside of the (usually) restrictive in-game communication.

I've never really sat back and considered just how immense user-contributed support is for games. The website www.gamefaqs.com is the most comprehensive and accurate source for cheats, walkthroughs, tips, codes and more, and all of the content is freely contributed by common gamers with time on their hands. Youtube sees countless videos of players' competitive matches in organized tournaments, which are also carefully tracked on privately-run fan sites.

The Psychology of Entertainment Media

Part 3, Chapter 16 - Attachment, Media, and Body Image

Discussing topics on how media exposure will affect how viewers behave and react to social environments, this chapter discusses how women and girls are affected by "idealized images of female beauty", and the disturbing results that ensue. They explain a few different models for attachment theory, but most of the argument seems to deal with *real* media personalities and exposure: news/TV/movies actresses. Women with higher levels of body shame were more likely to idolize very thin and attractive characters, such as Rachel from *Friends*.

At the core of this is the way media can enter a viewer's life and act as "surrogate attachment figure," where the viewer will use this idealized character as a substitute source for intimacy and security OR use the character to create an idealized version of themselves, and simulate/rehearse future roles. The ultimate argument here is that "that a preoccupied attachment style may motivate individuals to use idealized images in the interest of obtaining a temporary sense of felt security, but fail. "Assimilation" is suggested to occur through this relationship, where a viewer will begin to incorporate traits of the character. Once away from media, however, they are faced with the reality of who they are, and "Contrast" comes into play: they suddenly become keenly aware of their differences (and inadequacies)

I don't believe these issues are as prominent in video games despite the industry being just as guilty as other entertainment forms in the prevalent idealization of characters. The Japanese-made *Soul Calibur* is particularly known for the objectification of female beauty (and against all logic: torn clothes instead proper armour in a weapons-based fighting game), such to the degree that they needed to introduce an attractive female character fully covered in plate-mail *just* to break the trend. The casual games market is still seeing a more even gender demographic, but 'hardcore' titles are still a male-dominated target for both development and marketing. The women being idealized are more for males' interest, who traditionally do not suffer from negative body image to the same degree as woman. The few female gamers who *are* playing these games, then, are exposed to obviously unreal characters: unlike TV and movies, there is no 'real' person on the physical side. There is no human body compare to. However, by the concepts presented in '*Parasocial Interactions and Relationships*' and '*The Power of Fiction*', fictional people can be just as influential as real people. So the effect stands. But the women in male-oriented games are strictly physical in their idealization: they do not possess the depth and character needed by female players to meet the minimum attachment requirements. On the flip side, games targeted towards female gamers can also idealize female beauty, but have more developed characters to cause attachment in the player and can still lead to poor body image. It is the middle ground that seems to avoid these issues: well constructed games that attract both gender markets (even despite intentions to do otherwise), and are so exceptional they do not rely on overly-idealized body types to attract and engage players. The strong but average-appearing Jade from *Beyond Good and Evil* is an excellent example, or Samus Aran of the *Metroid* series: she rarely even leaves her androgynous armour.

Psychology of Entertainment

Part 2, Chapter 15 - Social Identity Theory

Although this chapter also relates heavily to Motivation and Selection, it specifically focuses on the social groups involved, so I shall categorize it here. Social Identity Theory (SIT) is the idea that individuals both develop and define themselves into distinct social groups. These groups share interests and other social and/or personal traits, and maintain a level of solidarity within the group. These groups are used for strengthening self-esteem, social identification within society and comparing themselves to other groups (ie. the 'in-crowd' versus the 'out-crowd'). Decisions about entertainment can be made solely on the basis of what group they belong to, specifically tied to hobbies, age, gender, ethnicity, and more. Choices made can be made for both positive and negative reasons: they may select to enjoy specific entertainment because it is accepted and recommended within the group, or reject it because it is accepted by an external or opposing group. Beyond selection, the enjoyment they experience is also affected by how that entertainment media portrays or relates to their group. Even if the media in question is of the highest calibre, they may dislike it because it clashes with the defined preferences of their social group. This mob mentality means that a specific product may easily spread through a large number of consumers very quickly, but only if it can be accepted by a social group and spread from there.

Not much can be said about this and its connection to video games in particular: this affect can already be observed in one of the most common — and controversial — social groups around: fanboys. A term that

is treated with disdain in many places, it commonly refers to the association of players to specific consoles of the current generation (currently consisting of consoles from Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft). Even in the way I listed those 3 companies tells my personal preference: I associate with Nintendo first because of my social group. Sony I list second, because in my group I also prefer Japanese developed games and systems. Microsoft comes last, a result of my personal distaste for their products and business practices. This, of course, spreads to game genres, franchises and other methods of evaluating games by social groups. To utilize this uniquely for video games, though, is a difficult challenge. Unlike other entertainment forms, the gameplay (ie. interactivity) of video games can be used another topic for social groups. Similar gameplay styles will attract social groups that accept them (such as 2D sprite-based fighting games to traditional fighting game enthusiasts), but it all stills relates to marketing and enjoyment. It will affect whether or not they enjoy the title, will recommend it to their group, or even select the title in the first place. Nothing drastically different from other entertainment forms.

On Individual Psychological Experiences

The Psychology of Entertainment Media

Part 2, Chapter 9 - The Power of Fiction

The division of information gained through fiction and non-fiction is apparently a thin one. Seemingly discussing elements that overlap with viewer immersion, the chapter reviews the use of fiction and non-fiction in conveying information. Whereas non-fiction is considered to be fact and therefore should influence the opinions and beliefs of viewers, fiction is recorded as being just as persuasive, despite its basis in fantasy. Viewers are just as inclined to allow fiction to alter their perspectives on the world as they are non-fiction, partly due to the portrayal of this information. In some fiction, the only major difference between fantasy and reality is knowledge: some television programs portray events and characters with such a huge degree of realism that the viewer could mistake it for the reality. If that much of a piece of entertainment reflects reality, the information gleaned by a viewer is difficult to discredit. The mere labelling of a work as fiction or non-fiction can alter how a person will process that information, but nonetheless the strength that fiction has on a viewer's perspective can make it a powerful tool for shaping opinions and teaching.

Video games (almost entirely) fall within the realm of fiction, and I fully agree that they can influence people just as effectively. A common argument I make is that fiction in these games is highly dependent on the interactive parts of the game. Poorly designed gameplay will only aggravate the player, causing them disregard the fiction of the game (and vice versa). If the design is good enough to carry the player through the game, then the effect of that fiction may be seen. Of course, passive entertainment suffers a similar issue: even the best story can be ruined by shoddy acting, prompting walkouts from a theatre. J.R.R. Tolkien's magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings*, is a brilliant story with incredible detail and depth . . . but the book was never properly edited to make it exciting. Combined with the obtuse diction, many individuals will not even get past the first chapter due to the presentation style of the story.

Psychology of Entertainment

Part 2, Chapter 17 - Parasocial Interactions and Relationships

This chapter discusses the use of characters in entertainment media and the relationships that develop between the viewer and the character (or persona) onscreen. Specifically, the degree to which viewers will connect with specific persona from the connection will take. Some viewers will adopt intense worship of personae over attractive characteristics (either physical, social or task-based) and their relatedness. Viewers with different personalities will have different demands for these personae, as (for example) shy individuals may use them as an alternative to real social interaction. The chapter also describes these persona as having interactions with users that are very similar to real life encounters between people. Personae are affected by first impressions, and are evaluated by a wealth of traits such as physical appearance by viewers. Despite their fictional nature, they are judged by many real-life expectations to be accepted by viewers.

Video game characters are — theoretically — just as susceptible to this as other forms of entertainment, but with a few key changes. A player must actually interact with this characters in the game world, not just observe their actions (such as in a TV show). While a player might enjoy the aesthetics and behaviour of an excellently portrayed NPC, if that character is a boss and nearly impossible to overcome, then that will develop contempt, frustration and anxiety in the player directed toward both that character AND the game. This can result in several common outcomes: the player will either forgive seriously flawed gameplay because they adore the character, or they may become attached to a character due to their gameplay elements rather than their other characteristics. Basically, personae in video games are subject to a whole new level of evaluation due to games' interactive nature. A deep attachment to a personae may be terribly betrayed by unbalanced or poor game design rather than character development.

Moving Images, Culture and the Mind

Active Audiences - Basal Morality in Drama Appreciation

The use of right, wrong, good, bad and the definition of justice is discussed here, and how the amount and perception of morality affects the experience of the viewer. Understandably, they make the argument here that people enjoy seeing positive results of conflict that reward the deserving and punish the wicked. 'Moral Sanction' is the most important part here: the balance between an action and the consequence that is presented to the viewer. It is acceptable to the audience when a man is sent to jail for raping an innocent woman: this is a morally acceptable punishment. If the man were instead castrated, tortured and killed for his crime, this punishment is no longer reasonable or equivalent to the crime in the eyes of most people. Viewers will associate themselves with specific groups in fiction, and the benefaction and victimization of these groups determines the morality of the experience and their comfort.

Entire *games* have been designed around the ability for a player to choose: making clearly defined right and wrong decisions in games such as *Fable*, *Fallout* or *Bioshock*, or less-defined decisions as in *The Bard's Tale*. Unlike film, games allow the viewer to make the choices themselves, or at least control which choice the player character makes in pivotal points of the game. The chapter argued that the player's reaction to moral outcomes in fiction is also defined by their maturity and perspective in making moral choices. Younger children might think that the more severe a punishment, the more it was justified, and do not understand what might be appropriate. The highly public reports surrounding the extremely violent *Manhunt 2* is one example of how people reacted to the optional brutality that had be offered to the player through gameplay: it had passed the point of being a morally acceptable punishment to the game's enemies (no matter their transgression) and the ability for the player to enact such violence was too extreme to receive a marketable rating.

As these experiences are being designed for the player and all results in the game must be scripted, understanding of ideal moral outcomes is very important for the player to enjoy making rewarding and satisfying decisions. Without adequate reward or punishment, there is little motivation: even the fear or hope of an outcome without actually encountering said outcome can be motivation enough. The loveable characters of the *Mario* series appeal to all audiences: Mario's games allow him to travel all sorts of fantastic worlds to save his beloved princess. But in a level with water, the player might need to go diving to continue the game. Make a mistake, and Mario may visibly *drown* onscreen while gasping and floundering for air. Considering the feel and age group of the Mario games, this is a very unsettling sight for many players, as is the image of decapitation for the player character Leon Kennedy from the game *Resident Evil 4*. The grotesque death of the player is visually disturbing, but it is well employed: the sight is so disturbing that the player may become more driven to survive the game's many challenges. Both the player and non-player characters in the game will be punished or rewarded based on the player's actions (both successes and failures), but there is no written rule to define how these rewards and punishments will affect the player. The execution of the game's moral sanction will determine the title's success in motivating the player towards specific ends. I do believe erring on the side of weak moral enforcement will create a much less motivating game experience than overcompensating with more extreme outcomes. The rewards in games will not always be of a narrative nature, however: many rewards for the player character are usually instead rewards to the player (like a new level opening up, or a new character becoming playable) and lack any natural moral significance.

Moving Images, Culture and the Mind

Narrative, Reality and the Mind - Subjectivity, Objectivity and Aesthetic Feelings

Interesting — but very obtuse — this chapter discusses the moods, affordances and emotions in film as evaluated and viewed through objective or subjective means: rather, either through logic and explicit perception or imagination and implicit perception. Depending on the scene and the information given to the viewer, they may understand specific shots and scenes in several ways. Clear, straightforward and carefully illustrated scenes (or actions) will be easy for a viewer to comprehend and understand. Logically analysing these scenes will allow the viewer to follow along with ease, but is not mentally taxing or emotionally stirring. In other words, the scenes is very objective. A subjective scene will instead inspire and challenge the viewer: abstract images, distorted realism, non-linear storytelling . . . these will all demand creativity and interpretation on the viewer's part to make sense of the scene. By the author's own words, "Subjective experience is related to ways in which the enactional or perceptual access to a represented space is deviating or distorted." Subjectivity is the focus in this chapter, and the author discusses several methods for eliciting one. "By representing actions and process which deviates in some ways from normal 'objective' actions and processes," "by representing situations with a special or problematic reality status," and "by representations of deviant emotional phenomena and reactions." All are based on blocking the viewer's ability to propositionally logical.

Film can easily get away with this because regardless of the viewer's ability to understand what is happening in the film, the film will continue to play. But games must be *played*. The player must navigate and understand certain core rules and realities of the game world for the sake of progression. My opinion is that this chapter implies subjectivity means increased emotion and artistic depth in games, but sacrifices much to achieve this. Certain game genres cannot afford to be so open to interpretation: what if *Super Mario Bros.* featured fog effects throughout the first level? This would create mood and intrigue, but hinder the basic platforming that drives the gameplay. Recent titles that attempt greater subjectivity are frequently not restricted by 'loss conditions', such as lives in the Mario games. *Noby Noby Boy*, *Linger in Shadows* and *Katamari Damacy* are all titles that allow the player to explore and play more freely than other titles and receive enjoyment by merely 'experiencing' the game, rather than being 'challenged' with meaningful objectives. Other titles, notably the *Metal Gear Solid* series, experiment with

both elements. The objective and realistic gameplay is so challenging the player cannot afford to be distracted by abstract or surreal images during intense gameplay. Once the game takes over for story-driven cut scenes, the reverse becomes true. Multiple player perspectives, iconic and exaggerated character behaviour, 4th-wall trickery . . . sometimes the game stops taking itself seriously. I suppose my analysis is that game developers must walk a narrow path between objectivity and subjectivity, as only specific areas of the game (and only through certain kinds of implementation) will benefit from the emotional and artistic depth subjectivity can create. Fundamental gameplay mechanics must be exempt, or risk frustrating and confusing the player.