

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

CMS.608 / CMS.864 Game Design
Spring 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Fun: The holy grail of games, but an ill-defined term for purposes of game analysis. Marc LeBlanc's GDC speech on complexity warns against the word "fun" being vague. He describes ways in which players often derive pleasure from games. (Subsequently, we've added to that list.)

Clearing: Many games allow the player to clean up a scattering of interactive elements. There's a simple pleasure players seem to get from 'Hoovering' their way across a room full of gold coins or revealing the blacked out sections of the maps in RTS games or RPGs.

Collection: The act of accumulating things. (Could be referred to as Consumerism.) Sometimes tied to the desire to complete a set. Examples: Collecting coins in Mario. Collecting Magic cards. Buying things in The Sims.

Creation: Bringing something into existence. Building something that feels like it belongs to you. Examples: Constructing and growing a city in SimCity. Creating and arranging a fish tank in El-fish.

Discovery: Space to explore and gain mastery over. Sometimes conceptual space, like the rules to a new game. Examples: It's fun to range over a new (often blackened-out) map in many strategy games like Warcraft or Sacrifice. You can see players go through phases when playing successive games of Onhe Furcht und Adel—they gain enjoyment over discovering the parameters of the game (and the successful strategies therein), then mastering the game.

Diversion: Pleasure derived from performing routine game system activities—the mechanical act of manipulating the game. Examples: Playing an hour of Windows Solitaire.

Expectation: Waiting with exciting for some perceived reward or entertaining moment. Examples: The thrill of gambling; blindly waiting to see if you've 'won' playing slots. (DX1 featured a similar chest lock picking dynamic—the player spend a lock pick and waited for a few expectant seconds to see what he had won.)

Experience: Allowing the player to engage in a real-world activity that is beyond his practical means. Examples: Killing a person with a pistol. Flying a fighter plane in a flight sim. Driving crash-up derby cars in a mud arena car game. Getting to play against Tiger Woods in a golf match.

Expression: Self discovery/exploration. Identity expression. Examples: Choosing a self-gratifying nickname, character name or call sign in a game like Quake, EverQuest or X-Wing Vs Tie Fighter. Choosing a character race/group in an RPG that is

identified with an archetype or demeanor. Deck construction in Magic the Gathering.

Fantasy: Vehicle for imaginative or impossible activity. Examples: Flying on the back of a red dragon. Battling the undead. Piloting a space ship.

Fellowship: Social aspects of gaming. Examples: Working with squad mates in FireTeam to form a plan and attempt to score a goal. Standing around, chatting in the town in Diablo.

Goal-completion: Being given a clear goal and actually recognizing that it has been accomplished. Example: Completing a bridge level in Bridge Builder. Completing a mission in C&C (in which the player is often given very clear goals, like, "Build at least 12 tanks.").

Investment: Spending time on some game element and thus coming to value it. Examples: Slowly building up a 60th level druid in EverQuest.

Media-migration: Players desire to interact with familiar (and often well-liked) fictional elements from other media. The keys to this are familiarity (with the established fiction) and interaction. For instance, during beta-testing of the Aliens vs. Predator game, players demanded the option of carrying and using Hicks' shotgun, even though it was an antiquated, inferior weapon. In Star Trek games, players get excited at the option of attempting their own solutions to classic problems/encounters posed by the television series. Using a light saber from Star Wars carries its own appeal.

Narrative: Drama that unfolds over time, creates tension, engages us. Examples: Learning of "Tommy and Rebecca's" situation in System Shock 2 and finally seeing them run down the hall toward escape. (Embedded narrative.) The dramatic events that occur in a Quake deathmatch as a result of the players' actions. (Emergent narrative.)

Obstacle: Encountering a challenge and overcoming it. Examples: Making a difficult jump in SSX.

Sensation: Aurally or visually pleasing aesthetics. Examples: The first time the player steps out onto a hill and overlooks the world in Sacrifice, with its amazing art, he is in sheer awe and feels pleasure.

Victory: Putting the beat-down on an opponent. Some people are driven to compete and gain pleasure from winning. Examples: Players love being the top-ranking player in a Quake deathmatch.

Text courtesy of Harvey Smith. Used with permission.