Lecture 2

Mechanics Revisited
Purpose of Today’s Lecture

• Give a review of formal **design elements**
  • Not everyone here has had the Intro Games course
  • And for the rest of you, it has been over a year

• Develop a deeper understanding of **mechanics**
  • Understand the important of interactions
  • Understand the **analysis** challenges

• Set us up for the **later lectures** on mechanics
  • Mobile game design and monetization
Actions

• **Verbs** that describe what the player can **do**
  - Walk  *(left or right)*
  - Run   *(walk, but faster!)*
  - Jump  *(up; jump/run for left or right)*
  - Shoot *(left or right)*

• Does not need to be attached to an avatar
  - Build  *(RTS or simulation)*
  - Swap   *(Bejeweled clones)*
  - Rotate *(Stacking games)*
Primary Actions

- How do verbs, goals relate?
  - Imagine there no challenges
  - What verbs *must* you have?

- **Example**: Platformers
  - **Goal**: reach exit location
  - Only need movement verbs
  - Killing enemies is *optional*
  - Other actions are *secondary*

- **Goal**: Focus on primary
  - Secondary verbs lead to bloat
  - Add features with interactions
Secondary Actions are Optional

- Often in **puzzle platformers**
  - Platformer verbs + something
  - “Innovation on the cheap”
- Verb that alters “geography”
  - Access hard-to-reach areas
  - Directly overcome *challenges*
  - Not directly needed for goal
- But do this sparingly!
  - Indies have one new verb!
  - Other features are *interactions*
Interactions

- Not a *direct* action of player
  - Outcome of the *game state*
  - Can happen without controller

- **Example**: collisions
  - Accidental or player forced
  - May be bad (*take damage)*
  - May be good (*gain power-up*)

- **Other Examples**:
  - Spatial proximity
  - Line-of-sight
  - Resource acquisition
Game Mechanics

- **Game mechanic**
  - Relationship between verbs and interactions
  - Often call this relationship the “rules”
  - **Gameplay** is manifestation of these rules

- **Example**: Joust
  - **Verbs**: Flap; go left or right
  - **Interaction**: Collision with opponent
  - **Rule**: If hit opponent, lower player dies
Gameplay Example: *Joust*
Design Goal: Verb Minimalism

- Can we limit to one verb?
- Mechanics are all interactions
- Common in mobile, tablet
- Due to lack of input modes

**Example:** Sneak Beat Bandit

- Has only one verb: *move*
- Rhythm game; move to beat
- All movement on rails
- If obstacle in way, turn
- Line-of-sight mechanics
Beat Sneak Bandit
Avoid Verb Proxies

- **Proxy**: verb that activates another verb
  - “Use an item” (what does the item do?)
  - “Shoot” (what does the weapon do?)

- Make the **outcome** of your verbs clear
  - Fire standard projectile (effects have “travel time”)
  - Fire continuous beam (effects are instantaneous)

- Important questions to ask
  - How does help reach the goal?
  - How is it outcome challenged?
Avoid Verb Proxies

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Understanding Game State

- Many game state values are spatial
  - Represent location of a game entity
  - Also physical values like velocity, acceleration

- Entities act as containers for non-spatial values
  - Values that never change: attributes
  - Values that can change: resources

- Attributes, resources can be global as well
  - Though most mechanics are at entity level…
Actions Affecting Spatial State

- Typically we would call movement

- But there are many ways to implement
  - Direct movement of avatar (e.g. WASD)
  - Indirect movement of avatar (e.g. pathfinding)
  - Alter the environment (e.g. removing platforms)

- Area of much potential innovation
  - Particularly given the limitations of mobile
Alter the Environment

- Found in “physics” games
  - No direct control of avatar
  - Can only remove/add/move obstacles in environment
  - Movement is “natural”

- **Example**: Screw the Nut

- Physics is a rule system
  - Interaction, not action
  - Takes one state to another
  - Also one that is complex to understand/model
Innovating Avatar Movement

• 2D games move on 2-axes
  • Classic: left-right/up-down
  • Unless top-down game, one of these axes is restricted

• Is jump the only option?
  • Launcher/trajectory verbs
  • (Limited) teleportation

• Example: Knightmare Tower
  • Launcher-style game
  • Vertical movement is boosts gained from killing enemies
Environment **AND** Avatar

- Possible to split the verbs
  - Some for avatar movement
  - Others for environment

- Found in “drawing” games
  - Draw missing platforms
  - Avatar walks on platforms
  - **Ex:** Max & Magic Marker

- Innovate by limiting avatar
  - Move on single axis
  - Combine with environment
  - **Example:** Swindler
Combining Actions

- Verbs can combine in interesting ways
  - Run and jump in a platformer
  - Strafing fire in a shooter

- Typically result of the interactions
  - Each verb interacts with environment in different way
  - Combination of two give extra feature for “free”
  - This is an example of emergent behavior

- Not all combinations are emergent
  - Example: Double jump is not a feature of interactions
  - This type of verb combination is a distinct action
## Combining Actions

### Running Jump
- Can move while in midair
  - Just horizontal movement
  - Not realistic; it is a game
  - Many platformer challenges assume this type of control
- Different than a *long jump*
  - Less height than reg. jump
  - No control once in the air
  - Would be a **distinct action**

### Strafing Fire
- Based on “real life” property
  - Bullets travel in straight line
  - Movement changes origin
  - Walking side-side makes a spray (used in covering fire)
- But some features are gamy
  - Bullets slower than life
  - Character faster than life
  - Creates interesting effects
Combining Actions

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Interaction(?)

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Interaction
Common Spatial Interactions

Collisions

- Can effect resources
  - Player takes damage
  - Player gains power-up
  - Player-NPC transfer gold
- Can effect spatial values
  - Bounce off collision point
  - Swing from attached rope
  - Attraction to magnet/charge

Detection

- Examples:
  - Line-of-sight (w/ obstacles)
  - Spatial proximity
- Can have direct effects
  - Alarms in a stealth game
- Can have indirect effects
  - Tower defense targeting
  - Adjust NPC reactions
## Resource-Spatial Interactions

### Resource Affects Spatial

- Resources can unlock areas
  - Keys are a trivial resource
- Also use resource thresholds
  - **Ex**: Collect all tokens to pass
- Resources affect difficulty
  - Adjust input device sensitivity
  - **Ex**: Deadeye meter in *RDR*
  - **Ex**: Jet packs to increase jump

### Spatial Affects Resources

- Resources made by entities
  - Have a spatial location
  - **Ex**: Time to transfer resources
  - **Ex**: Sources be captured
- Resource values are entities
  - Take up physical volume
  - Need space to acquire
  - **Ex**: Inventory in *Deux Ex*
Actions and Limitations

- You cannot always perform an action
  - Shooting may require ammo
  - Cannot (always) jump in mid air

- **Limitation**: requirement to perform action
  - Boolean test (like an `if-then`)
  - **Example**: double jump is different from jump

- Primary use of resources in game design
  - Presence of resource allows action; may consume
Balancing Resources

- **Sources**: How a resource can increase
  - **Examples (player)**: ammunition clips, health packs
  - **Example (external)**: spawn points

- **Drains**: How a resource can decrease
  - **Examples (player)**: firing weapon, player damage
  - **Examples (external)**: monster death

- Adjust sources and sinks to “balance” economy
  - Together, determine “price” of resource
  - Price of resource should reflect its “power”
Design Problem: Pricing Resources

Underpricing

- Cheap, powerful actions
  - Players favor these verbs
  - Limits play variety

- Buffs in *Might & Magic*
  - Same mana as attacks
  - Lasted all *day* long

- *Dragon Age* cold spells
  - Shattered enemy on critical
  - Rogues had auto criticals
Design Problem: Pricing Resources

Overpricing

- Expensive, weak actions
  - Usage is “penalized”
  - Waste of designers’ time

- Shredder ammo in ME2
  - Same damage as inferno
  - But inferno lights on fire

- Raise Dead in early D&D
  - Loss of stats (e.g. Con)
  - No easy way to regain
Design Problem: Pricing Resources

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- **Examples:**
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- Resource usage determines difficulty
  - *Resident Evil*: Availability of ammunition
  - Classic D&D: 20% resource per encounter
Summary

- **Mechanics** combine **actions** and **interactions**
  - Actions are a direct result of player controls
  - Interactions triggered by a particular game state
  - Input limitations make interactions very important

- Interactions depend on the **game state**
  - Spatial state associated with physics, detection
  - Resources associated with limitations, unlocking