

## **An essay: LeBlanc's Taxonomy**

Often people describe games they come across as 'fun' to play. For any game, such a loosely defined term can pass off for the occasional participant. However, for the game designer, who aspires to create the most compelling experience possible, one has to consider three important factors – aesthetics, dynamics and the mechanics of a game. A compelling game is one where the designer carefully selects certain aesthetics as goals in the game and allows participants to realize them via a robust game mechanic and the resulting interaction with the system.

Marc LeBlanc's taxonomy of game pleasures for participants identifies 8 fundamental aspects to fulfilling their emotional needs – sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression and masochism.

To better understand LeBlanc's classification, consider the game of Half-life 2: This game involves elements of fantasy, narrative, sensation, challenge, discovery and masochism. Note that despite the absence of fellowship and expression on the list, the game still presents itself as immersive within its own universe and definitely 'fun' to play. The fantastic nature of the game manifests itself not in the form of a futuristic war zone but rather from the suspension of disbelief generated while posing as Gordon Freeman on each of his escapades. Dialogue with the numerous NPC's and covert operation style communication via radio messaging portray a sense of emergency. This indirectly reinforces the specific fantasy function this game brings.

Narrative plays a really vital role in the remote manipulation of a player's mind. To effectively drive a sense of increasing tension and drama over time warrants riveting attention from the person immersed. I do feel drama is a strong candidate for aesthetic requirement. This is where narrative ties in with sensation. Thematic audio-visuals and

the absence of cut-scenes in this case, explain the many a time ‘this feels so right’ response the game evokes. Drama further engenders questions such as “What is the inherent source of uncertainty and/or inevitability in the game?”. This leads us to the inclusion of challenge as a fundamental support factor to aesthetic (goal) design.

Challenges dictate the dynamic interaction with the game system. They could be broken down into mental and physical provers, creativity, bluffing, execution, probability and memory sometimes. They play the dual role of an obstacle course for the player and a test for how well the game mechanic serves the purpose of keeping the player engrossed. The insurmountable urge to triumph over a challenge posed has been observed to be the hardest to dispense with. Like Tom Robbins once said “ Difficulties illuminate existence”. For Half-life 2, this could vary from the extremely counter-intuitive physics based puzzles to the obvious yet skill demanding tasks encountered.

Discovery caters to the element of surprise players look for in a satisfying game-play experience. This can be described as the feeling one gets when they unlock some secret power or when they stumble upon a hidden alley and venture into it. LeBlanc mentions the occurrence of masochism through submission to game structure. I disagree with the latter, with the argument that the player experience takes precedence over anything else. As long as the player is not dominated by game structure and can conceivably conquer challenges set forth, he/she should would find satisfaction and pleasure. Thus, the deconstruction of LeBlanc’s taxonomy using Half-life 2 as an example, sheds light on crucial game design elements that go into providing an emotionally compelling and satisfying interactive game experience.

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