Game Feel

In his 2009 book, *Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation,* Steve Swink provides his definition of game feel as "real-time control of virtual objects in a simulated space, with interactions emphasized by polish." Swink's definition of game feel, and subsequent analysis of game design, applies specifically to real-time games in which you control a player avatar in a virtual world. This limits the analysis of, in Swink's words, "true game feel" to the feel of a small slice of game designs. Each of the component elements of this definition of game feel, real-time control, spatial simulation, and polish, have their own definitions and requirements.

The first element of game feel, real-time control, can be described as the constant and instantaneous flow of information and control between the player and a moving avatar. Games like Halo and Mario, where the player is in constant control of their avatar, are prime examples of this component of Swink's game feel. Games which would not adhere to Swink's definition of real-time control include Tetris, in which control is impulse based instead of real-time, and Starcraft, in which the player does have real-time control of the camera but not of a player avatar.

The second element of game feel, simulated space, can be described as the collision detection and interaction between the player avatar and the objects and geometry of a virtual world. This includes the level design of the virtual worlds that the player avatar interacts with. Every game has some form of simulated space, but Swink's definition limits applicable games to those which display real-time environmental interaction. Examples of this definition of simulated space include games like Sonic and Peggle, where either the player or other objects in the world interact with one another and the environment. Games like Civilization and Cities Skylines, where physical interaction is assumed but not shown, do not fit Swink's definition of simulated space.

The final element of game feel, polish, can be described as all non-gameplay elements of a game that are in place in order to make the underlying game mechanics more appealing. This includes both the visuals and audio which act to emphasize gameplay, and all games contain some amount of polish as described by Swink. In even the most minimalist of games, the choice of shapes and colors affect the overall feel of the game.

When combined, these three elements of game feel pave the way for an engaging and rewarding experience in gameplay. Swink defines a series of five common experiences which appear frequently when the three elements of game feel combine, which include: the aesthetic sensation of control, the pleasure of learning a skill, the extension of the player's senses and their identity, and the interaction with a virtual world.

The experience of an aesthetic sensation of control, the pure joy of playing and interacting with a game, is the first experience common among games that conform to Swink's definition of game feel. An example of this experience is found in the gameplay of Death Stranding, wherein a large portion of enjoying the game hinges upon the feel of controlling the character as you navigate the world on foot. Much of the divisiveness of Death Stranding come from the differing sensation of control among players, since it plays such a huge part of the game.

The pleasure of learning and mastering a skill is the second common experience among games that conform to this definition of game feel. Games which challenge the player through real-time interaction and tests of skill are ones that exhibit this experience. One example of this experience is the Dark Souls franchise and associated games, which offer what seems like an impossible challenge at first due to the unforgiving controls and enemy design. Players are encouraged to grind themselves against each new challenge ad nauseum in order to hone their skills and improve to advance, which is exactly the experience of mastery.

The third experience common among games conforming to Swink's game feel is the extension of the senses, by which the player experiences the senses of their avatar as if they were their own. An example of this experience can be found in any entry in the Monster Hunter franchise, wherein players' senses are extended into their hunters. This extension of the senses allows players to learn to precisely gauge how far their weapons extend during each attack and how best to avoid incoming monster attacks, as if they were themselves a part of the fray.

An extension of player identity is the fourth experience common among these types of games. This extension of identity sees the player inhabit the body of their avatar, at least metaphorically, in that they experience the game's world through the identity of their avatar. Multiplayer games such as World of Warcraft are a common genre where this experience can be seen, with players inhabiting their customized avatars and feeling the lows and highs of gameplay through the identity of their character.

The final experience common among games conforming to Swink's game feel is the interaction with a unique physical world within the game. Games provide the unique opportunity to interact with impossible worlds in a way that can feel reasonable to the player. An example of such an experience is the gameplay of Portal 2, with the player interacting with multiple unique physical oddities in the game's unique world such as teleportation portals and bounce gel. These experiences are otherworldly, but in the context of the game's unique world seems perfectly reasonable.

Overall, Swink's definition of "true game feel" and the component elements of real-time controls, simulated space, and polish, effectively limit the problem space of analyzing game design by applying to only games which share large commonalities. This restriction of the games which Swink's game feel applies to is both expected and understandable to form a shared foundation atop which to discuss and analyze game design of games that conform.

References

Swink, S. (2008). *Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation*. [VitalSource Bookshelf]. Retrieved

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