

Comp 388/488 - Game Design and Development

Spring Semester 2019 - Week 12

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Characters, Conflict & Challenge

too difficult?

- point when some games push a sense of conflict too far?
 - *perception that difficult games will not sell,*
- difficult game does not need to resort to trick mechanics &c.
- many early games were intentionally difficult
 - *hook to encourage money to be spent at arcades*
- designers of early arcade games transferred into growing console industry
 - *challenging design philosophy followed as well...*
- initial games and difficulty often worked well
 - *a sense of value and longevity*
- as development cost rose & some challenging games struggled with sales
 - *perception of games for all*
 - *quick and easy*
- some good games emerged
 - *World of Warcraft...*
- heritage of Castlevania &c. lost?

Characters & Challenge

balancing a difficult game - part I

- difference between a punishing and challenging game?
- consistency of rules is a good place to start
- e.g. Dark Souls
 - *every character that appears follows all of the rules of the game*
 - *every NPC, monster in set-piece moment can be killed...*
 - ...
- also, no arbitrary invisible walls or invulnerable monsters
 - *doesn't restrict boundaries and objects*
- as difficulty increases in your game
 - *less you can mysteriously change your rules as you go*

Video - Challenge & Balance

Dark Souls Story

Dark Souls Story in 5 Minutes



Characters & Challenge

demo games

- arcade original vs console - arcade mario, super mario bros
- hidden concepts & mechanics - metroid, mega man...
- ...

Characters & Challenge

balancing a difficult game - part 2

- also consider giving a player sufficient tools to work with and use
- e.g. consider the concept of **telegraphing**
- players need the ability to make informed choices about the game
 - *even split second decisions and options...*
- ill-informed choice is not actually a choice
 - *objects &c. should try to hint at their consequence*
- e.g. **Fire Emblem Awakening**
 - *perceived issues with enemy units*
 - *unexpected appearance behind player lines*
 - *out of turn play*
 - ...
- Nintendo site - <http://fireemblem.nintendo.com/>

Video - Fire Emblem Awakening

Nintendo 3DS trailer

Nintendo 3DS - Fire Emblem: Awakening Trailer



Games and development

quick exercise

Consider the following game characters and objects,

- a mediaeval knight
 - *carries a sword, may ride a horse, fighting skills, finite health...*
- a squire
 - *attends to the knight*
- a semi-intelligent/aware mob object - e.g. an ogre
 - *carries a club, may ride horse-like animal, fighting skills, renewable health...*
- a series of huts, caves &c. in the gaming world

Each of these characters or objects may be pre-defined or created with a sense of free will.

Define the following,

- rules for each character and object
- a brief outline for a game with these characters and objects

Then consider the following,

- how might free will affect the rules and outline for your initial game?

- what type of unexpected glitches, interactions, and features may result due to free will in this game?

Video - Characters & Challenge

Designing Bosses

Good Game Design - Bosses



Game designers

Designer example - Jenova Chen

- Jenova Chen is a Chinese game designer and director, now based in Los Angeles, USA
- after creating an experimental game called *Cloud* with Kellee Santiago
 - whilst a student at USC's Interactive Media Division
 - Chen briefly worked on *Spore*
- Chen is best known for games such as
 - *Cloud*, *fIOW*, *Flower*
 - and most recently *Journey*
- co-founded *ThatGameCompany* with Kellee Santiago
- landed a three game deal with Sony, which included *fIOW*, *Flower*, and *Journey*
 - games exclusive to PlayStation consoles
- his games are known for experimental use of narrative and structure
 - and attempts to simply push what we perceive as a game...
 - e.g. his development of *Cloud* as a student
- his collaboration with Austin Wintory on the music for *fIOW* and *Journey*
 - represents a desire and commitment to integrate various dramatic elements
 - music, sound effects, shapes, colour &c. into the overall gaming experience
- underlying trend and theme to the design of his games
 - tries to make games that don't fit cultural preconceptions
 - interested in sparking universal emotions and feelings beyond culture...

Resources

- Cloud

- flOw
- Flower
- Journey
- Journey - Wikipedia
- ThatGameCompany

Image - Journey



- Source - ThatGameCompany

Games and dramatic elements

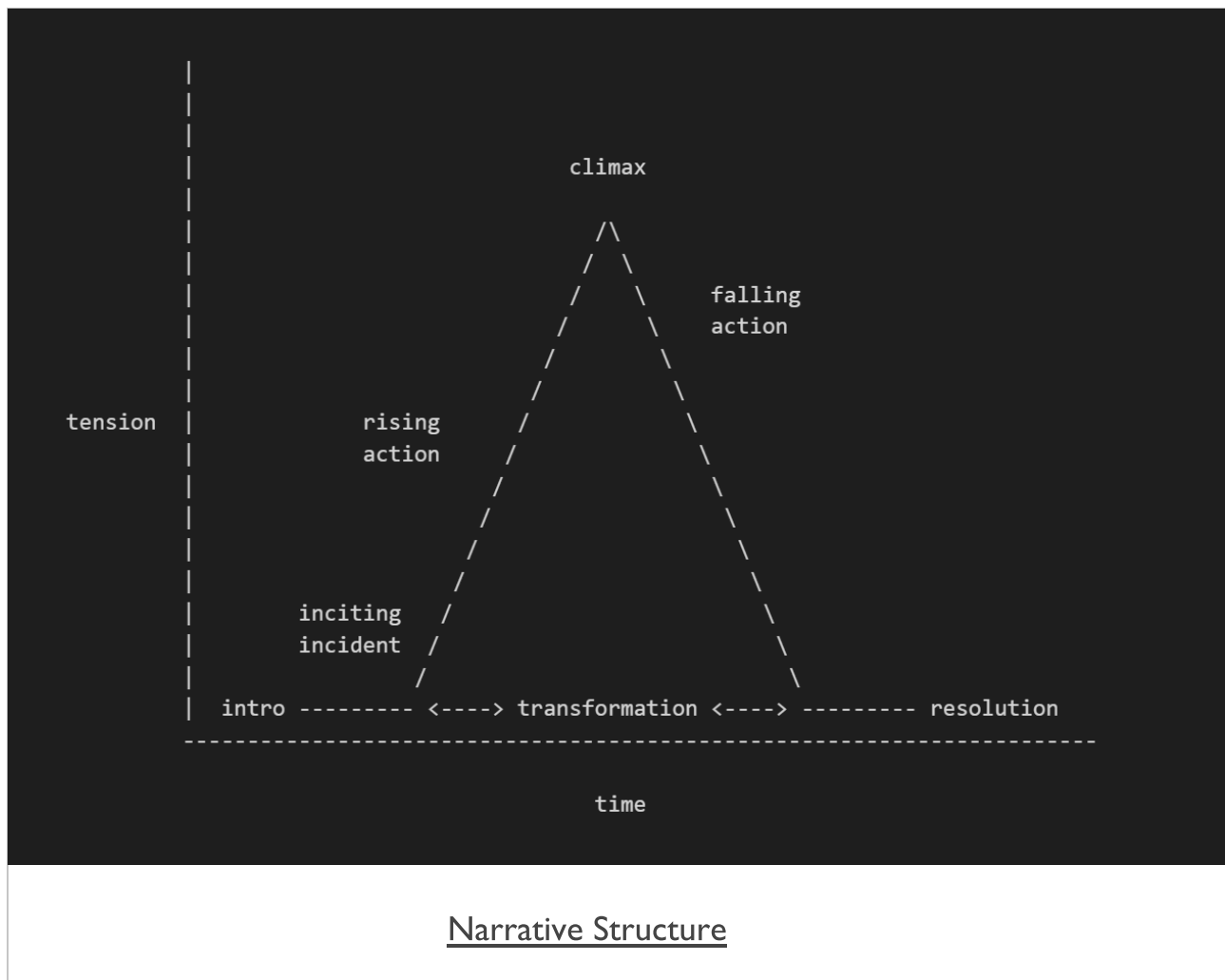
games and narrative structure

- **traditional drama** perceives the following categories as useful options for conflict
 - *a single character vs another single character*
 - *a single character vs their environment*
 - a character battling the forces of nature &c.
 - *a single character vs a machine*
 - many examples in movies...
 - *a single character vs their own inner demons*
 - a consideration of experience, morals, insanity &c.
 - *a single character vs perceptions of fate*
 - something is inevitable, bound to happen, can't be changed &c.
- a **game** will employ similar categories for its players, in particular the protagonist
 - *a single player vs another single player*
 - *a single player vs the game*
 - *and so on...*
- as these categories are played out in our games
 - *the sense of conflict they create will usually follow a discernible pattern*
 - *this pattern will escalate to a final resolution*
- escalating conflict will create a sense of tension in the gameplay
 - *usually matched and reflected in the story*
- gameplay may respond to the story, including corresponding elements
 - *such as music, visuals, speed, and a sense of risk*
- this tension will also tend to get worse, or more dramatic
 - *before it is resolved and gets better*
- this forms a classic **narrative structure** or **narrative arc**
 - *it becomes a useful tool for storytelling in games*

- forms the framework and support for all dramatic media
 - **games** *are not excluded...*

Image - Narrative Structure

conflict in a game's story



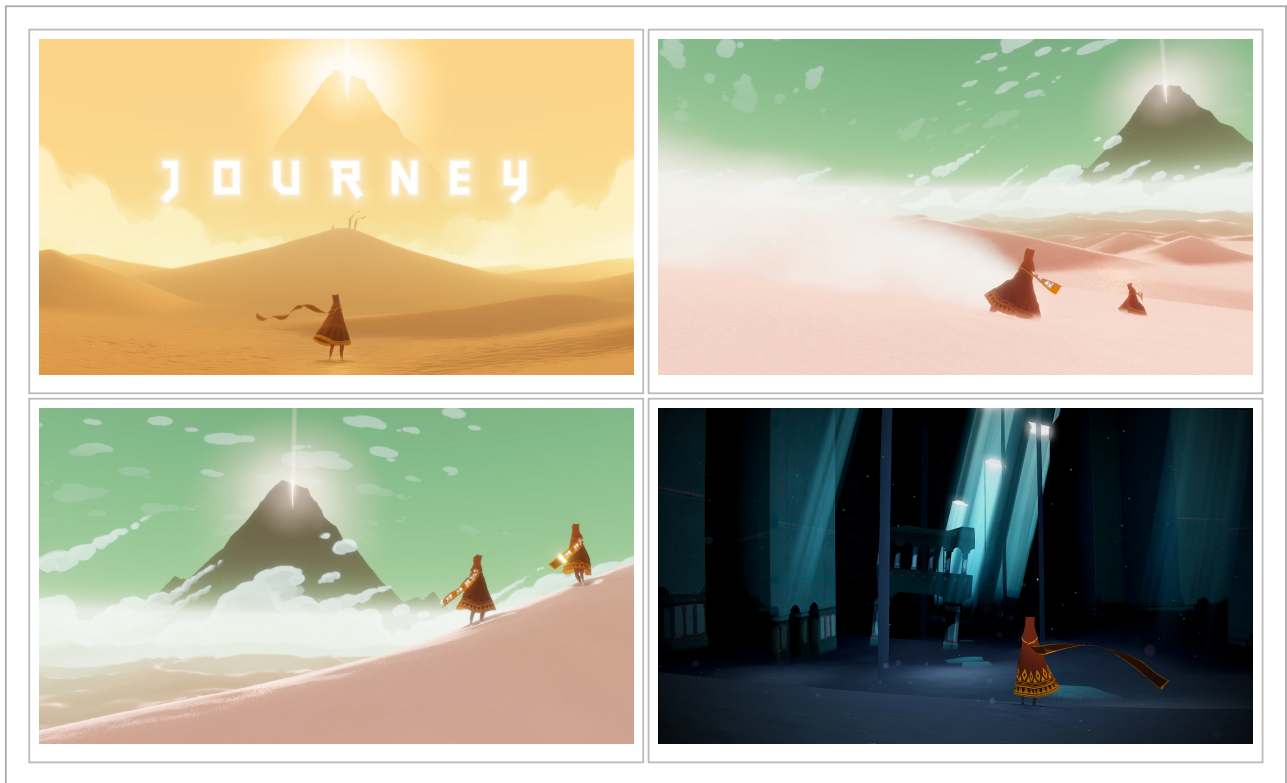
- Source - Building An Arc: Bringing Narrative Structure To Your DJ Sets

Games and dramatic elements

Journey to a narrative structure

- a recent example of narrative structure in gaming was the 2012 release *Journey*.
 - *designed by ThatGameCompany, and directed by Jenova Chen*
- its underlying design and story was inspired by *The Hero's Journey*
 - *a structure and outline for myth and story telling prescribed by Joseph Campbell*
- Campbell defined twelve stages on the *Hero's Journey*
 - *set a structure that follows the narrative arc along the path of the story*
- initial incident is an effective acknowledgement of the limits of the current environment
 - *the encompassing world for the hero*
- the hero must now leave this environment, this comfort zone of sorts
 - *embark into unknown, commonly dangerous territory*
- this journey will normally include many trials and tests
 - *the challenges we expect to introduce to many games*
- trials are not simply physical, but may also include
 - *aspects of temptation, mental reasoning, emotional dilemmas...*
- player will normally be expected to reach a defined low point on the journey
 - *the abyss that defines and shapes the counterpoint to the story and game*
- introduction of an extreme low point, the *abyss*
 - *allows the character to metaphorically die*
 - *then be reborn ready for the final challenges of the journey*
- the hero will then return to a point of calm and resolution
 - *transformed and free of the issues, fear, and doubts that initially defined them...*

Image - Journey



- Source - ThatGameCompany

Video - Journey

available on PS4



- Source - Journey PlayStation 4 Official Launch Trailer - YouTube

Games and development

minimum viable product

- how do we determine our game's minimum viable product (MVP)?
- find a minimum set of features that will not affect core development
- e.g. can we cut a feature, and still release a viable game
- if a feature can be cut, it may not part of the MVP
- consider a core feature set
 - *acts as a basis for continued iterative design and development*
- also helps with
 - *testing*
 - *performance*
 - *scope*
 - ...
- e.g. a consideration of Super Mario Bros.

Games and development

minimum viable product - Super Mario Brothers

- consider console release of Super Mario Bros.
- what do we need for a test of fundamental gameplay of Super Mario Brothers?
 - *e.g. is the game engaging?*
- what is the minimum build and testing before considering extra features, expansion &c.?
- for Super Mario Bros, do we need the following for a MVP?
 - *bowser*
 - *extra lives*
 - *fire flowers*
 - *hidden blocks*
 - *koopas*
 - *mushrooms*
 - *water levels*
 - *...*
- all we need is a single level with initial character mechanics, basic objects...
 - *move, jump, fall into pits...*
- if basics are engaging, logical &c. - we now have a MVP
- if core mechanics and features do not work as expected, perhaps slow & awkward
 - *extras will not save a bad core game experience*
 - *might add some common utilities to help with testing, reduce player cognitive overload &c.*
 - *a reset option for the level*
 - *expanded character movement - variance between walk and run...*

Video - minimum viable product

Super Mario Run - gameplay

SUPER MARIO RUN Gameplay



Games and development

quick exercise

For the earlier game, characters, and objects you defined, consider the following

- reduce this game's outline to its bare essentials
 - *i.e. which shapes, patterns, colours, objects &c. are still necessary to define your game's story?*
- outline the narrative structure for this game using these bare essentials
 - *where is the conflict in this story? the rising action, climax, falling action &c...*
 - *how is the resolution achieved for this game's narrative structure?*

Then, re-consider the role and influence of free will or emergent systems on this narrative structure

- what type of unintentional features, dead ends &c. may be introduced?
- how do you allow for such potential issues in your narrative structure?

Games

- [Dark Souls](#)
- [Fire Emblem Awakening](#)
- [Journey - ThatGameCompany](#)
- [Journey - PS3](#)
- [Journey - Wikipedia](#)
- [Mario Bros - arcade](#)
- [Super Mario Bros - console](#)

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- Dubspot - Electronic Music Production and DJ School
- The Sims - Free Will
- ThatGameCompany - Hiring