



this is
the fundamental
loop
things change
but the 13
constants

“Though human beings may lack most direct access to the opacity of contemporary algorithms and networks, video games extend our perception into this media ecology and allow us to experiment with it through various forms of play” (Jagoda).

Through an opaque and technical language that is often otherwise inaccessible, video games reflect humanity. Rather, they extend humanity into inhuman realms. Perhaps I sound like a broken record, but I would love to turn again to *Disco Elysium* for this discussion. *Disco Elysium* measures and quantifies political beliefs and then systematically impacts the player experience through internal algorithms and calculations. However, players do not experience these calculations in ways that are as impersonal as algorithms. Instead, players follow a broken man undergoing an identity crisis, a man who manipulates subtle political leanings and explores those ideologies in their most extreme state. The calculations appear through meditations on capitalism, communism, on centric politics and shivers. Mechanics guide art, and art provokes the mind.

As the game of the week, *Braid* should, of course, also contribute itself to this discussion. Thank you, *Braid*. I'm happy to have you.

Braid may present as a standard 2D platformer, but it has one central mechanic distinguishing its game loop from other games. In *Braid*, you can manipulate time. At first glance, this may only appear to allow players to undo their mistakes, but it eventually enables players to complete puzzles and navigate in new, creative ways. The mechanic also evokes the many implications of inconsistent time, including regret, perfectionism, and sometimes dread. As with *Disco Elysium*, technical mechanics inform player experiences that are expressive, informative, and thoughtful. A game loop is not merely a system of play but a practice in a game's central ideas and themes. I use the word “practice” here because the loop allows these ideas to engage continuously with the player. An effective loop will prod the mind, even if just subtly, through every moment. *Braid* never permits its players to evade its meditation on time, as *Disco Elysium* does not allow players to look away from what it is like to battle one's own mind.

I would like my game loop to continuously prod at themes of memory, care, and healing through acts of shared love. I believe I will likely remain with my initial idea of using energy to care for ghost animals. While practical acts of animal care are obvious systems to prompt my “care” idea, I find that my previous plan had no good mechanics for sharing animal memories in ways that are significant not only thematically but in the gameplay itself.

When I'm lonely, I'm tired. I think purgatory, an eternity of potential loneliness, would likely lull ghosts into perpetual inaction. I don't think that a day should load with automatic energy. Rather, each morning begins with a ritual of flying around collecting the memories of the pets you care for. These would present as short scenes or clips of dialogue that allow players to learn about their friends and best assist them in finding partners and moving on. Furthermore, you feel like you are sharing your (somewhat) life and are more ready and willing to carry out your day.

I think this change makes for a better game loop that makes more effective use of digital systems for creating a world and experience that feels loving, sad, and intimate.