Dynamical-meaning Focused Design: Overcoming Ludonarrative Dissonance

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Keywords

TEXT DESCRIPTION

My experimental submission is a stylistic game design document/bible that provides a comprehensive overview of the world, characters, plot, mechanics, items, and maps of an original game idea called *Elapse*. *Elapse* attempts to continue the conversation of games such as *Braid* (Number None 2008) and *Undertale* (Toby Fox 2015) with unique temporal mechanics (time reversal, meta time acknowledgement and save file manipulation, respectively) that forces the player to reimagine their role in the story. *Elapse* similarly will employ novel mechanics by experimenting with ratios of in-game elapsed time versus real-time, the passage of time in relation to location, and memory as a representation of chronology.

As a narrative game, *Elapse* attempts to create a personal connection between player and player character (PC) and takes a dynamical meaning-focused approach to design, which is a term coined by Jonathan Blow that describes the meaning communicated to the player by a system of behavior, intentional or not (2008). In alliance with Blow's contributions to the discourse, I view ludonarrative dissonance as a challenge of game design, not an inherent truth, which has arguably been conflated with the ludology versus narratology debate, although the originator Clint Hocking did not suggest so himself (2007). Newer conceptions on game design seem to agree, including research in "Choice Poetics" — the way choices and narrative harmonize, by indirectly opposing the inescapable ideal of ludonarrative dissonance (Mawhorter 2014).

The narrative thematic question behind my design is: "how do we live when time is fleeting?" *Elapse* tries to inspire reflection within its audience to consider that question for themselves alongside how their perception of time, often a subconscious understanding taken for granted, affects their view of themselves and others. Besides taking inspiration from the aforementioned games, a review of other time-driven narrative games to assess the current state of unique time mechanics and themes forwards the goal of creating something entirely innovative. Further, texts on game design and narrative

design supplements my limited experience as a game developer with the intent of learning the process of design on my own as an undergraduate.

REFERENCES

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