

AFFORDANCES & INTENTIONALITY

This section is about visual communication through design (affordances) and how this supports conscious decision making (intentionality) by the player. These concepts are the link between the pillars of *Gameplay* and *Presentation*.

- Affordances

The intuitive communication of how something works, through its design.
Form conveying function.

In practice:

- o *Presenting navigation options, in relation to goals and obstacles.*

It is important to make a space and its path(s) of progression readable. This may be delivered through the principles of interior & exterior design.

- o *Displaying obstacles and how to deal with them.*

When we introduce a barrier the player must overcome, the object should afford its purpose and how to overcome it.

For example, when we have an obstructive device that must be disabled, perhaps we can trace the wires to the power source.

- o *Differentiating props that are interactive vs. non-interactive.*

The player should instantly know if an object is intractable or part of the backdrop. This can be done using recurring design choices - creating symbols out of usable/non-usable objects - and by visually pushing these elements in or out of focus.

For example: Using golden doorknobs to represent interactable doors, vs. standard knobs. Or even better, having all static doors destroyed, barred up or buried - if the narrative allows.

- o *Communicating how much agency a player has in their possibility space.*

By using the above techniques, and more, we can give the player a sense of the extent to which their actions influence the gameplay environment. We should give the player enough direction to get moving, but avoid the point where we are taking away from their sense of adventure. In this way we can surpass player expectation.

- Intentionality

The player's conscious decision making with specific goals and expectations in mind. This is key to creating a sense of adventure and self-fulfillment for the player, as they feel they are in control of their destiny. Gameplay mechanics should grant agency rather than serve as single answers for tedious puzzles.

Requirements:

- *Choice:*

The player should feel a sense of volition in their actions. It is important to prevent the player from doing something without knowing why - because the UI told them to, or because it seems like the only option.

Even in a linear setting, a good designer presents a situation where the player will act willingly, thinking that the solutions are their own ideas (think 'Inception'). By creating player motivation, we can align their choices with those that progress the narrative.

- *Motivation:*

By establishing short/long term goals and rewards along the way, we can create a drawing force that leads the player towards the end of the game. These goals and rewards should be things that are desired by the player - whether instinctively, by curiosity, or through - respectful - conditioning. It should be mentioned that "drip feeding" may lead to a player feeling unvalued.

- *Information:*

The player should be able grasp information from their surroundings, or at least a starting point that leads to further information. This can be done using clear and consistent affordances, and will prevent the player from becoming lost or struggling to find things to do. As a respectful form communication with the player, this alone can drive them forward as they feel rewarded by their intellect.

- *Processing Time:*

By avoiding twitch reaction scenarios, and therefore by giving time to process their surroundings, we allow the player to feel more present as they choose their plan of attack. This can be achieved through clever pacing and player initiated action - although a surprise cue can always be thrown into the mix to disrupt planning and challenge quick thinking.

WORLD BUILDING

The unique, cohesive and meaningful way the story is told - through the environments traversed and the populations met. This is the bridge between *Presentation* and *Story* that gives a vivid sense of place - one that makes it feel as if the world truly exists beyond what is seen on-screen, causing the player to crave to be a part of it.

"Why create a world only to discredit it with bogus details?"

In practice:

- *Be specific.*
Don't just establish genre. Identify and explore themes to better build world character. Characters and places may at first feel stale, but by layering relevant ideas you can build something that belongs in - or even enhances - the world, creating a fresh combination.
- *Take advantage of every opportunity.*
By treating World Building as a criteria of design, rather than just a part, we can have every crevice of the world bleed its narrative ideas. Every location, NPC, line of dialogue, objective, side quest, bundle of loot is an opportunity to build your sense of place. Should time allow, consider turning even mundane backdrop elements into areas of narrative exploration.
- *Communicate the smaller stories that frame the whole.*
World building is about stories, and stories are about people (for the most part!) Say something about the involved society: their themes, views and relevant human ideas. It is through these small parts that the player will construct their overarching view of the game world, one that is crafted from experience and packed with varied emotion... creating something much larger than what was simply experienced through gameplay.
- *Foreshadow the bigger picture.*
We can use landmarks as symbols that draw the player in. These, when used correctly, can embody an idea the character is in pursuit of. Symbols such as this can serve as a constant reminder to the player of the game's tone - an ideological anchor point - and as the player draws closer, ideas may become clearer... and new questions posed.

World building should be consistent, but also develop over time. This helps to create a firm narrative, one that the player can draw laws from and therefore accurately act & strategise within... but also one that keeps players guessing and growing.

INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE

The way that the elements of gameplay are bound with the story through deeper ideology. Interactive narrative connects the ideas of *Gameplay* and *Story* by using the unified two to convey emotion & ideas; empathetic plot.

In practice:

- o *Emotion:*

Through the alignment of character and player paradigm, we can create an emotional rhetoric - a passionate discussion between the player and the game. In turn, this will cause the player to act with *narrative intentionality*, the drive to act within the confines of the game world and fulfill their character's goals. This is far more memorable than completing a game by its gameplay goals alone. "Drama isn't when the actor cries, it's when the audience cries."

For example: When a building is crumbling to pieces and the player must escape, rather than using a cut-scene, why not have the player interactively sliding out of this collapsing giant. This will create a sense of panic within the player - one also felt by the character.

- o *Theme:*

By having the core game mechanics mirror a particular aspect of the story, you can introduce ideas that have relevance in the gameplay fundamentals. This creates a concise relationship between action and story, showing the player that their actions have a deeper meaning. A good way to create this sort of relationship is to craft both in tandem... asking questions and digging through both sides of the equation.

For example: When introduced to an oppressive faction, have the player make the active choice to obey or rebel using one of the main gameplay mechanics - mirroring the decisions of the oppressed faction and introducing the decisive power of their abilities.

Or: If a failed wizard feels he can contribute little to saving his world, what better power than death? (after being granted the mysterious power of immortality.)

- o *Literally Interactive Narrative:*

Allow the player to have some sort of input on how a situation plays out, showing that their actions have consequences. This causes the player to consider the outcomes of what they plan to do, and if these actions are relevant to their perceived role in the world.

For example: Create an NPC interaction that is meant to be interrupted, with outcomes dependant on how they handle the situation and what abilities are used in the encounter - reinforcing the idea that specific actions have consequence. This could be a flammable environment punishing those using fire abilities, symbolising fury as an answer with collateral.