An Experiential Typology of Games

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Initiative and Motivation
Current models for classifying games tend to be one dimensional, too general or vague. If we look at game genres they tend to be inflexible and struggle to describe innovative games in a useful way. Multidimensional systems have the pitfall of going into great detail and struggling to draw the line of relevance. The focus of current game typologies is on content or quality, and a model based on the users’ perceived experience of the game is not present. This report will describe a new model for doing just that; the experiential typology of games. The model is based on emotions reported by players and will shape a visual image of the experience of the game without directly taking content or quality into concern, but rather looking at the effects of this has on the player.

The report will begin with a description of how the model is structured and it will present examples of how the profiles of the different games are created from the reports. Next the model will be analysed through comparison with current models, and its strengths and weaknesses will be highlighted. The model’s limitations will be discussed and the report will be concluded and further development considered.

How the system works
The developed system functions similarly to other grading systems such as the Metacritic system. The basic attributes here, however, are the emotions experienced by the players. Rather than collecting scores from review sites, our system gathers emotions from players by having them evaluate their game experience in order to create a so called experience profile. The experience profile is a visual representation of the total amount of gathered data per game, depicting the relative presence of each emotion. Examples of this visualisation can be see on Images 2, 3 and 4 (See Appendix A).

As a foundation for the experiential system we used the categorisation of emotions in games as presented in the paper Why We Play Games: Four Keys to More Emotion Without Story (Lazzaro, N. 2004). The emotions proposed by Lazzaro, which the players can experience throughout the process of playing the game are as follows:
- **Fear** - Threat of harm, object moving quickly to hit player, sudden fall or loss of support, possibility of pain
- **Surprise** - Sudden change. Briefest of all emotions, does not feel good or bad, after interpreting event this emotion merges into fear, relief, etc.
- **Disgust** - Rejection as food or outside norms. The strongest triggers are body products such as feces, vomit, urine, mucus, saliva, and blood.
- **Naches/Kvell (Yiddish)** - Pleasure or pride at the accomplishment of a child or mentee. (Kvell is how it feels to express this pride in one’s child or mentee to others.)
- **Fiero (Italian)** - Personal triumph over adversity. The ultimate Game Emotion. Overcoming difficult obstacles players raise their arms over their heads. They do not need to experience anger prior to success, but it does require effort.
- **Schadenfreude (German)** - Gloat over misfortune of a rival. Competitive players enjoy beating each other especially a long-term rival. Boasts are made about player prowess and ranking
- **Wonder** - Overwhelming improbability. Curious items amaze players at their unusualness, unlikelihood, and improbability without breaking out of realm of possibilities
- **Excitement** - A feeling of great enthusiasm and eagerness
- **Frustration** - The feeling of being upset or annoyed, esp. because of inability to change or achieve something
- **Amusement** - The state or experience of finding something funny
- **Sensory pleasure** - A type of emotion you experience due to the atmosphere created in a game (by means of audio, video or others)

*Figure 1: Eleven emotion presented in: Why We Play Games: Four Keys to More Emotion Without Story (Lazzaro, N. 2004).*

In order to test the functioning of our system, we have created a website and asked people to join and evaluate the games they have played from the point of view of the emotions they have experienced.

*Image 1: The screenshot above is taken from the website [http://dortikum.net/templar/]*

In a relatively small amount of time, we have collected data from approximately 30 users. The evaluation system requires each player to create a profile, to log in, and to choose one of the following three options per emotion:

- You haven’t felt this emotion while playing the game
- You felt just a little of this type of emotion during the play
- This emotion was predominant while playing the game
All data has been collected in a database and has been fed into the profile visualisation in order to communicate and analyse the results.

**Evaluation and Comparison**

In this part the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed typology will be explored by comparing it to other current systems. Our proposed typology is based on ratings and is in that respect not unique. The widely applied and recognised Metacritic system, is also based on a number of ratings averaged out to a final score between 1-100. However this spectrum measures only the overall quality of the game in a vague and one dimensional fashion, which offers no information regarding the content or the experience of the game. Another potential issue when measuring by averages is that games appreciated only by a small target audience could risk getting a low rating by not appealing to the mainstream. Our system is based on ratios of emotions experienced in the game and represents the game with a variable for each emotion instead of just one variable representing quality. This model does not seek to represent quality, but instead seeks to map the experience of the game, by doing so games with small target audiences will be on even terms with more mainstream games.

Another categorisation model seeking to represent content and not quality of games are genres. Examples of genres might be *Action*, *Platformer*, *Adventure*, *Strategy* or *First Person Shooter (FPS)*. A game can have one or multiple of these genres attributed. Each genre carries a preconception of what kind of content or experience the game provides. Genres have multiple limitations, firstly they categorise by comparison with existing games and can therefore be hard to use on innovative games which are often forced to either combine genres or make up a new genre which might just contain that single game. Secondly genres are general and would not distinguish between three games such as *Counter Strike* (Valve Corporation, 1999), *Unreal Tournament* (Epic Games, 1999) and *Mirrors Edge* (EA DICE, 2008) which all belongs to the FPS genre, but offer very different game experiences. The genre system is helpful when seeking a quick generalisation of what to expect, but our systems offers a more detailed mapping of the game experience.

*A Multi-dimensional Typology of Games* (Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå 2003) describes an academical categorisation model which defines, in a detailed multi-dimensional way, the different aspects of the game such as the games relation to physical space, game time or character stance. From an analytic point of view this model offers a lot of information regarding the mechanics of the game and how they are interlinked. This model is however not concerned with the emotional experience of the game. The focus of our model is almost the opposite to this, in that it does not represent the mechanics themselves, but rather the effects of them; the experience. Because the perspective of the two models are so different they might compliment each other well during an analysis of a game. Another interesting aspect of the model is that it is not static. If the players’ perception of emotions or the games medium change over time, different emotions might be reported and the profile of the game will adapt as a result of this.
**Limitations**

The first limitation of the model arises from subjectivity. Since the system is based on the users’ personal experience it will not objectively measure the game. The model reflects only what the users’ report and is therefore bound to be affected by a range of subjective elements for example: personal taste, experience with games, mood and physical context. Furthermore by creating ratios from the reported emotions, they are averaged out to some extend to represent the general experience. Because of this subjectivity and the average nature of the ratios the model will only show the general tendencies and a user cannot be guaranteed to experience the game in the same way.

Because of the difference in approach this model has limitations were Metacritic and genres had advantages. This model is not concern with the quality of the game like Metacritic, and does not look at game content for categorisation like the genre system. These are limitations of the system, but are also the reason why the system works as a new way of categorising.

**Conclusion**

We have now presented a new model which approaches the classification of games in a different manner. The proposed typology is based on emotions and seeks to map what users experience in games. The model has been analysed and compared to three current systems, Metacritic, genres and the model presented in *A Multi-dimensional Typology of Games* (Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå 2003). The models strengths and limitations have been argued and it seems that the model is bringing something new to the area of game typologies and categorisation, and might work as a good supplement to current systems.

With further research and testing, the emotional classes of the model should be refined to better represent what the players feel. The wording and visual presentation as well as the calculations of the game profiles also requires more work before implementation. However the foundation for the model has been laid out and further development as well as case studies can begin.

**References**


Appendix A

Image 2: Wordle visualisation of Space Invader's profile

Image 3: Pie chart visualisation of Space Invaders and Half-Life 2. Based on ratings from 33 players.
Image 4: Radar diagram visualisation of Space Invaders and Half-Life 2. Based on ratings from 33 players.