

State of the art: Experience Analysis

What you'll learn today

What game analysis is

What are its elements

How to perform it

Literature

What is an experience analysis

The analysis

A game / XR piece analysis should be **a structured and reproducible critique, rather than a review**. A critique breaks down the object of study, using theoretical concepts systematically to structure and support it. (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006; MIT, 2011)

What drive your selection criteria for the critiqued pieces?

- Research question
- Overall relevance for your research
- Don't forget to link the critiques pieces to theoretical aspects such as immersion, presence and embodiment

The analysis

A game / XR piece analysis should be **a structured and reproducible critique, rather than a review**. A critique breaks down the object of study, using theoretical concepts systematically to structure and support it. (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006; MIT, 2011)

Two ways to achieve this:

- Play the game / experience the XR piece
- Gather as much information as possible

Why is such an analysis relevant?



Understanding games / XR pieces as cultural texts

These experiences reflect and shape culture. Like literature or film, they can encode ideologies, norms, and narratives that reveal something about the society in which they were made or are played.

Why is such an analysis relevant?

Examining player experience and meaning-making

The analysis sheds light on how players experience agency, immersion, challenge, or emotional impact.

It considers not just what the game contains but how it feels to play—and how different design elements contribute to that.

Why is such an analysis relevant?

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Exploring the Viewer's Role in Narrative-Based Animated Virtual Reality Experiences: Strategies for Role Activation and Immersive Storytelling

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Abstract

Virtual reality (VR) storytelling offers immersive experiences that engage viewers in unique and interactive ways. This study investigates the viewer's role within animated narrative-based VR and explores strategies and techniques employed to facilitate this engagement. Using thematic analysis, the authors examined 22 animated VR experiences and identified six key themes: viewer interaction, virtual body, viewer's spatial perspective, voice of the narrator, directed viewing and providing options. These themes encompass various strategies used to activate the viewer's role and enhance their immersion in the narrative. The findings reveal that interactive elements, such as viewer interactions and decision-making opportunities, contribute to a heightened sense of agency and immersion. Additionally, the incorporation of a visible and functional virtual body, strategic placement of the viewer and guidance from a narrator potentially shape the viewer's experience and understanding of the narrative. However, it is essential to strike a balance between directed viewing and viewer agency to ensure a satisfying and engaging storytelling encounter. The implications of these findings provide valuable insights for VR creators, highlighting the importance of considering these strategies when designing narrative-based VR experiences. By utilizing these techniques effectively, creators can craft immersive and engaging VR narratives that captivate and involve viewers in dynamic and meaningful ways.

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Dissecting game design and mechanics

Analysis helps researchers and designers understand how formal elements—rules, systems, feedback loops—shape behaviour and create meaning.

It bridges theory and practice, informing better design.

Analysis helps scholars explore how they draw from, influence, or diverge from cinema, literature, theatre, or art.

Why is such an analysis relevant?



Games / XR as sites of social and political discourse

Many games / XR pieces explore or reproduce political issues: war, climate change, gender, or colonialism.

Critical analysis uncovers implicit messages or biases, and can inform socially responsible design.

Why is such an analysis relevant?

Foundation for empirical research

Rigorous analysis generates hypotheses and frameworks for testing with users (e.g. in behavioural studies, user testing, or reception analysis).

It strengthens interdisciplinary links with psychology, sociology, education, and HCI.

Why is such an analysis relevant?

Iterative design and evaluation

In design research or practice-based research, analysis serves as a diagnostic tool—highlighting what works, what doesn't, and why.

It's also used in postmortems and critiques within the industry.

What are the elements of the analysis?

The MDA (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics) framework

The MDA framework formalizes the consumption of games by breaking them into their distinct components and establishing their counterparts

The MDA (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics framework)



The explicit instructions, constraints, and coded parameters built into the game.

The emergent behavior of rules interacting with player input and other systems

The emotional and experiential response the player has—"fun" is just one of many possible outcomes.

The MDA (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics framework)



Mechanics are the various actions, behaviors and control mechanisms afforded to the player within a game context

Dynamics work to create aesthetic experiences

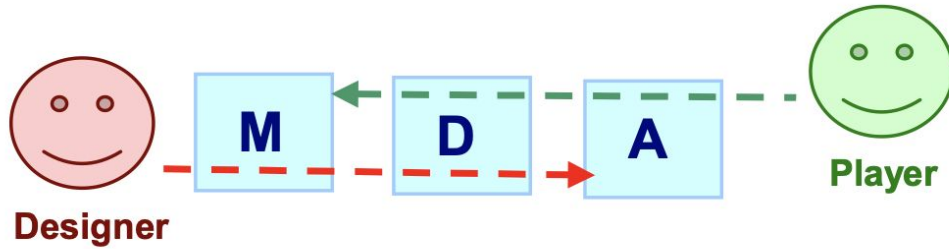
Is the real-time gameplay behaviour and interactions that occur when players engage with the game system.

Describes the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player, when she interacts with the game system.

The MDA (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics framework)



The MDA (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics) framework



The MDA framework

Component	Designer's Perspective	Player's Perspective
Mechanics	The rules and code	What the player can do
Dynamics	System behaviour from mechanics in motion	What happens when the game is played
Aesthetics	Intended emotional responses	Felt experience (fun, tension, curiosity)

(Hunicke, LeBlanc, Zubek, 2004)

Four main elements of analysis



Interface Study

Analyze the player-game interface: menus, HUD, prompts, feedback loops

Investigate how information is communicated and how players interact

- What info is presented
- What is withheld
- What's the hierarchy (are scoreboards always present, how about "health"?)

Helpful for comparing visualization of game states, resource clarity

Four main elements of analysis

Interaction Map

- Trace every type of interaction: player-object, player-NPC, system feedback
- Map out flows like dialogue, mechanics, trading,
- Illuminates behavior loops, agency, and emergent player strategies
- Consider what interactions are offered and what aren't offered

Questions to ask:

- Are interactions limited (is there only one or two responses offered to answer a question)?
- Do interactions change over time (as Sims get to know one another, and like one another, are more choices for interaction are offered)?
- What is the range of interaction?
- Are NPCs present, and what dialogue options are offered to them? Can they be interacted with? How? How variable are their interactions?

Four main elements of analysis

Gameplay Log

- Record detailed play sessions: choices, emergent events, playstyle variations
- Focus on documenting unexpected gameplay, narrative deviations, user behaviours
- Captures “what actually happened” versus design expectations (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006)

Questions to ask

- How does the experience allow players to save their progress? Are there restrictions to the activity? How and why?
- Is “saving” as a mechanism integrated somehow into the game world to provide coherence, or is some more obtrusive method offered?
- Are there situations where avatars can “break the rules” of the game? How and why?
- Are there situations that appear that the producers probably did not intend? What are they and how do they work?
- Does the game make references to other media forms or other games? How do these intertextual references function?
- How are avatars presented? How do they look? Walk? Sound? Move? Are these variables changeable? Are they stereotypical?
- Does the game fit a certain genre? Does it defy its stated genre? How and why?

Four main elements of analysis

Object Inventory

- Catalog all in-game objects: found, bought, stolen, created
- Include UI items, resources, power-ups, NPCs, environment elements
- Supports understanding of design affordances, economy, and world-building

Questions to ask:

- Whether objects are single or multi use
- The interaction options for objects: do they have one use (and what is it)?
- Do objects have multiple uses (and what are they)?
- Do those uses change over time?
- The object's cost
- A general description of the object.

How to perform the analysis?

Where to start

Play the experience at least twice

Read aunty academic papers that refer to it / to similar experiences

Read the reviews

Use the MDA to describe the mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics

Use the four elements to further refine your analysis

Specify tech details: how long you've played it, on what platform

Add overall description of the experience, e.g. a a few lines about what the game/experience is about, the genre, single/multi player, etc.

Bring it all together in tables for ease of read

References

MDA Framework

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Elements of game design

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