Loops and the Metagame

Miguel Sicart

Game Design 2016

- Games between playing and gaming
- what is a game loop, and why it matters
- new words, old concepts
- loops and design
- player care
- metagame, stories, moneys
- designing metagames

what have we learnt
so far?

important things

- player experience
- game mechanics
- challenges
- rules
- contexts of play

x1
x2
x4
$500
Spelunky

- game mechanics?
- challenges?
- rules?
- contexts of play?

for designers

gameplay design is more than just figuring out mechanics, and rules, and the rest. We need to structure this in forms that are more granular

Game Loops

Spelunky

Games between playing and gaming

play: fun

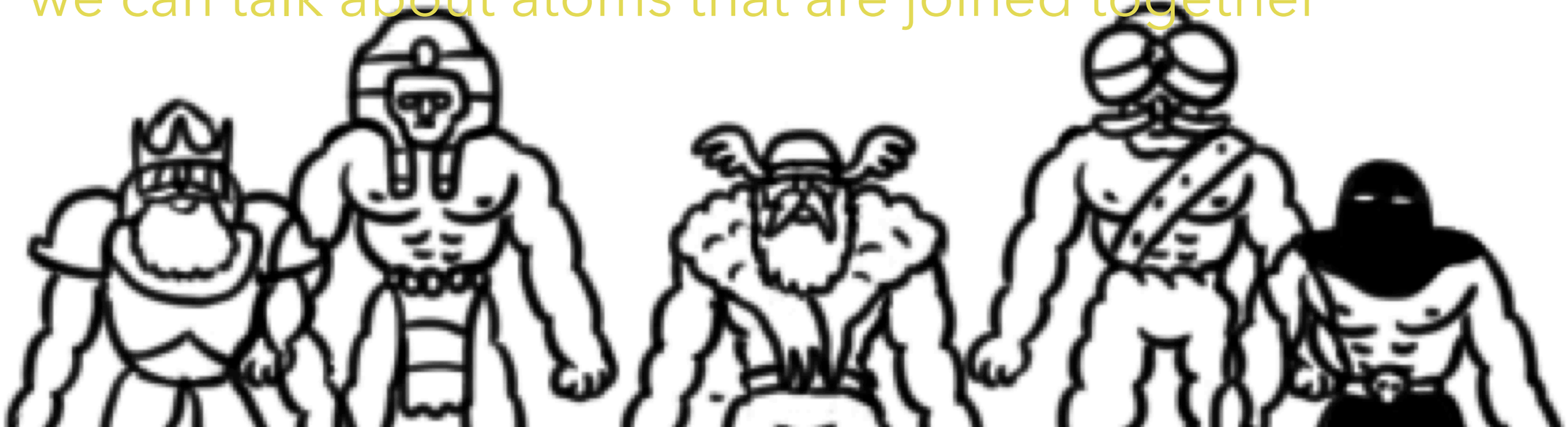
games: structure

there is always a liminal point from playfulness to playing a game

in *Spelunky*: from figuring out the game, to getting better at the game, to the daily challenge and leaderboards.

What is a game loop?

- basic element of play
- action(s) repeated throughout the game
- learnable, develop skills
- we can talk about atoms that are joined together



Core loops

Main actions that have to be performed to progress in the game

Secondary loops

Reinforcing the core loop, providing variety, expanding gameplay

Characteristics of Loops

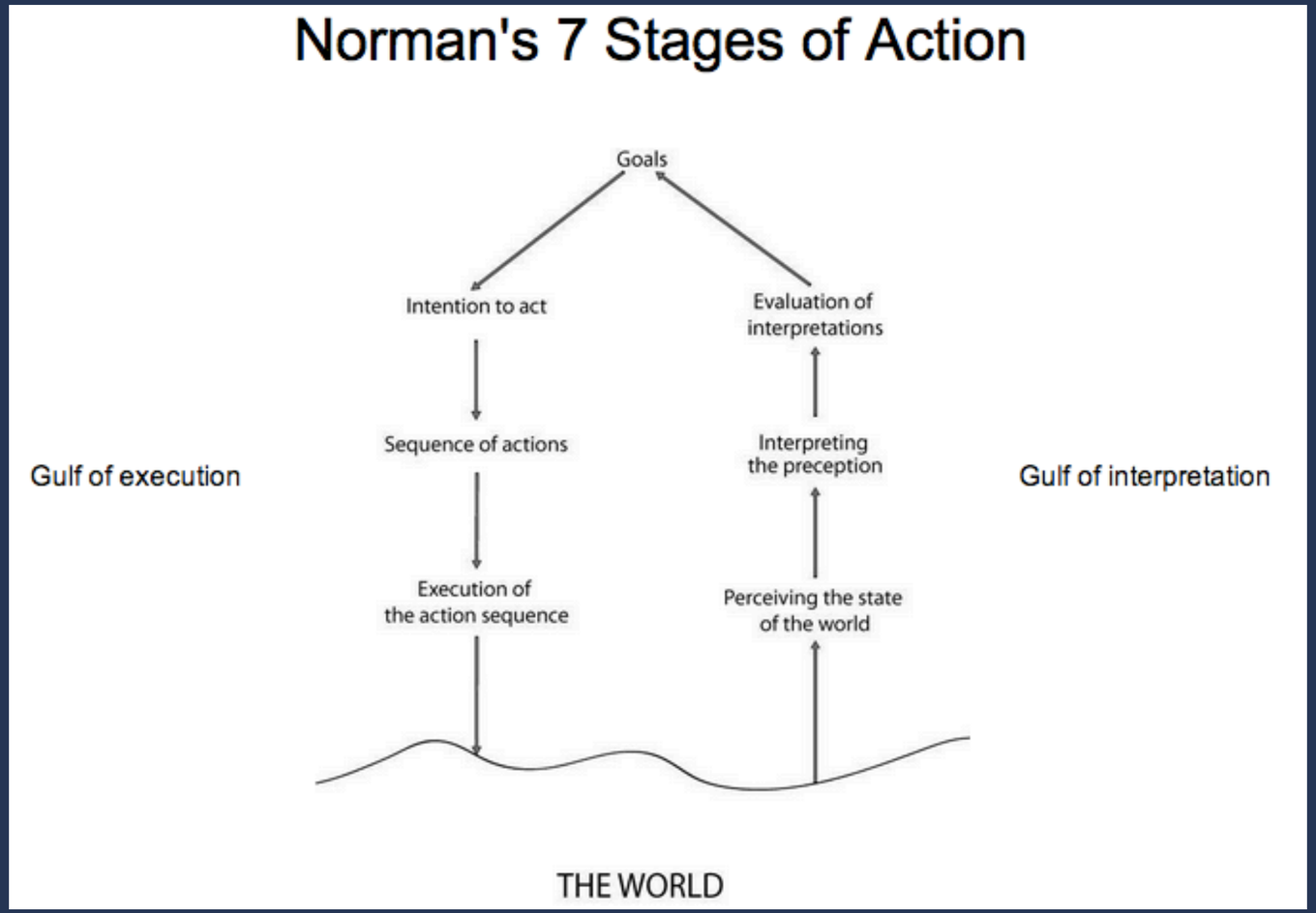
- Clear progression
- Easy to learn
- Replayable
- Deep

Task!

- Identify core loops in games of your choice.
- Draw them!

Wait, haven't we seen this before?

Norman's theory!



Why is this important?

Norman's theory allows us to specify success conditions for the loop design
gulf of evaluation
gulf of execution

For instance:

- loop speed
- closeness (when is the action closed: aggregating values)

Important

Loops always involve the processing from the machine and the feedback
Remember: programmers design, too!

But who cares about loops?

Why do we play games?

Metagame

Old concept

Metagame was used to refer to:

- the rules that allowed the game to be changed
- any actions/knowledge outside of the game (loops) that has an influence on the game

Free to Play

Metagame

- Out-of-the-game information that affects in-game decisions
- Game economy
- Social context of play
- fiction

Metagame as information

- what does the player know that can be used to gain advantage in core loops
- faqs, social communities, experience, ...
- we need to design into the game what the player knows
- *Spelunky*: PGC levels, but also platform games
- As seen on TV: *Lost*

Metagame as economy

- all games have economies (some are part of the game)
- some resource management does not happen in the loops, but outside
- play to win vs pay to win
- *Plants vs. Zombies 2*
- Making game economies porous
- Balance?

Metagame as context

- core loops are played in focused sessions
- social games/f2p want to extend that
- actions associated to the context of playing, not the activity of playing
- *Farmville*
- Design the context of play as part of the game

Metagame as fiction

- we empathize with worlds, characters, stories
- those are part of the metagame:
- they inform core gameplay,
- but they also engage us
- Design the game world to communicate your loops

Game Design

- loops as systems
- metagames as engagement
- design systems,
- but also design the context in which those systems are played

Play, loops, metagames

- design the core loops of engagement
- design their contexts of play

conclusions

- -
- -
- -
- -
- -