**Working Through Schell’s Lenses**

Our group is working on a two part game about developing a city. The game has been approached by our team in a ‘from the ground up’ manner meaning that we are getting things in place that work minimally in order to play and tweak them over and over again. In this sense, Schell’s lenses have been very effective ways to decipher what basics to consider while approaching this type of design. The first lens that comes to mind is *The Lens of Problem Solving.* Our project remains untitled so I will refer to it as Project X. Project X is intended to be a simple game that will surprise players with its depth. The fun will come in the ways that you choose to spend your resource points because this purchase offers several strategies to conquering the games high score mechanism in new ways. When considering problem solving as a lens of game design, it becomes apparent that this may not be enough challenge for the player. So the challenge for us as designers will be to find a way to make the city building intricate enough that it becomes a worthwhile experience for the player. A large part of that is going to be finding new ways to create a unique set of problems for players to encounter and give them the tools to come up with creative ways to overcome those challenges. I do not know that I would have focused on the players’ individual encounters with solving problems in my initial designs without reading Schell. Project X consists mainly of a ‘match three’ phase where players have an opportunity to link together images of resources in timed scenario and a second phase of spending those resources on appropriate City resources like buildings, or infrastructure. The player tallies a score based on their city’s development and then they have a chance to begin again and top their score. If we get far enough along in the design process we will add an AI element for players to compete against directly that will make attempts to sabotage their improvements and act as a much more competitive factor. This design came along while considering *The Lens of Fun.*

*The Lens of Fun* is such a simple concept that it reminded me of writing techniques that suggest short and simple is a more direct approach to writing. We get so caught up in the idea of ‘creating a game’ that we can sometimes forget what a game is all about - fun. Thinking of making a game fun specifically can add interesting simple ‘crowd pleaser’ aspects to a game that really polish off the overall experience. I remember as a kid when open world games started becoming big one of the nice touches most games implemented was some form of pick up scattered over the game’s world that had an in game relevance. A good example of this would be collecting eagle feathers in Assassin’s Creed II to honor the memory of Ezio’s murdered younger brother who enjoyed finding eagle feathers while playing in the streets of Italy. If all the feathers are found it offered a special reward for the player which coupled with the story’s impact to make this a very worthwhile addition and really adds to the fun experience of the game by making the world that much more immersive. The other lens that goes hand in hand with the Lens of Fun has to be *The Lens of Essential Experience*.

*The Lens of Essential Experience* is a very top down type of design concept. It focuses on asking the designer what experience you want the player to have from the very beginning of your games design and then to focus on how to create that experience with the drafting of your gameplay. In our case I mostly want the player to feel in control of what they’re creating and have the ability to change things as needed. I want to avoid creating a feeling that the game in winnable regardless of what you chose to build, their decisions should have a weight to them so that winning becomes rewarding. To accomplish we are going to test the idea of building an army that you can use to go out and gather resources that can aid in your development and give the player a feeling pf accomplishment that feeds into their sense of strategizing. These types of small changes can really drive major outcomes for your project and new ideas should always be tested if time allows. Stumbling across gameplay features has led to some of the most recognizable games.

*The Lens of Curiosity* could arguably be the most fun to mess around with. Piquing a player’s curiosity can provide a sure fire way to control a player’s actions in a way that does not feel overly controlling to the player. People each play games for different reasons, and so it can be hard to predict how they will react to certain aspects of your game (one of the reasons play testing is so important). Curiosity is a bit safer to predict. Most people enjoy the thrill of discovering just what’s on that other side, or what this flashing pick up will do, or what happens when they succeed or fail in the game. Curiosity can take many forms, but considering this as a designer leads us to alternative presentation ideas where the player’s actions might not fully be explained to them at first. This would force the player to make a few selections early on without knowing exactly why they’re doing so and thus creating a strong sense of curiosity. This can be a fine line at times though as a player’s patience is often a strong consideration to the design process. However, if done correctly curiosity can be a strong agent of entertainment within your game’s world. The player can have feelings about many aspects of the game, you must keep in mind *The Lens of Endogenous Value.* This lens questions what is valuable to the player in your game? Are they motivated by this value, and how can you make it more valuable. These are important concepts when dealing with a reward system in our game because if the resources being spent hold little value and can be obtained easily then it diminishes the player’s motivation to gather resources. Boredom and a sense of pride or challenge in a game are al crucial emotions for a player to experience. We have been trying to keep in mind that we need to create a feeling of pride in the strategy of how resources will be spent. By doing that we can have a higher chance of keeping the player engaged and emotionally invested in their gameplay. This brings us finally to *The Lens of Surprise.*

When discussing a player’s emotional experience to a game it is impossible to leave out *The Lens of Surprise.* How could anyone forget about surprise? But so often it is overlooked as a design element because it is so straightforward. Surprising your player as with as forms of emotion can take many forms, but it is important to consider what purpose this surprise will add to your game. Do you want your player to be startled, or just not sure of what will happen next? Do you want to give them a chance to respond to the surprise or is it a self-contained experience (EX: quick time events versus finding rare gear in a new location)? Surprising a player should also involve any player versus player interactions; Schell asks us if we give the players any ways to surprise each other which is a very nice way to think about multiplayer games. Can the players mess with each other at all? We need to add this element to our Project X, it will be a nice area of focus for me moving forward. One thing that may be more doable in our game is to give the player the ability to surprise *themselves*. I’ve thought of adding a random element to the game where players can spend resources that are costly early on but grants them a mystery box that will be revealed randomly during the rest of the game and add a unique situation to their city’s development. It remains to be seen how effective this will prove to be but Schell has me thinking of ways to directly incorporate surprises into the gameplay. Looking at game design in its truest most fundamental forms can reinforce the most fundamental aspects of games and make the difference in the unique design you want your work to convey as we develop into the field of game design. I am pleased that the foundations of game design have not been lost as I have progressed through this degree, sometimes the early material proves outdated as you move forward in your education but it does not appear to be that way with game design. In the world of programming and design every detail has its place and Jesse Schell provides an immeasurable resource to young developers who are stepping into their creative shoes for the first few times.