

Mobile Game Design

The State of the Art

by Martin Grider

Outline

- [Definitions (What is Mobile? What is Game Design?)
- [Interface and Device Considerations (Dos and Don'ts)
- [Game Genres, Popularity vs Traditional Popularity
- [Mobile Design Originality

Definitions: What is Mobile?

— [Mobile == Touchscreen Smartphones

— [(For our purposes.)

— [Personal, always-on, always connected, location aware, intuitive (but “young”) UI, packed with additional input methods. App stores.

Definitions: Game Designer

— [What is a game designer?

— [Wikipedia says: "A game designer is a person who designs gameplay, conceiving and designing the rules and structure of a game."

Definitions: Game Design

— [What is Game Design?

— [Wikipedia says: "Game design, a subset of game development, is the process of designing the content and rules of a game in the pre-production stage and design of gameplay, environment, storyline, and characters during production stage."

What is Game Design?

— [It's an art of ideas.

Definitions: Tony Ventrice's Layers^[1]

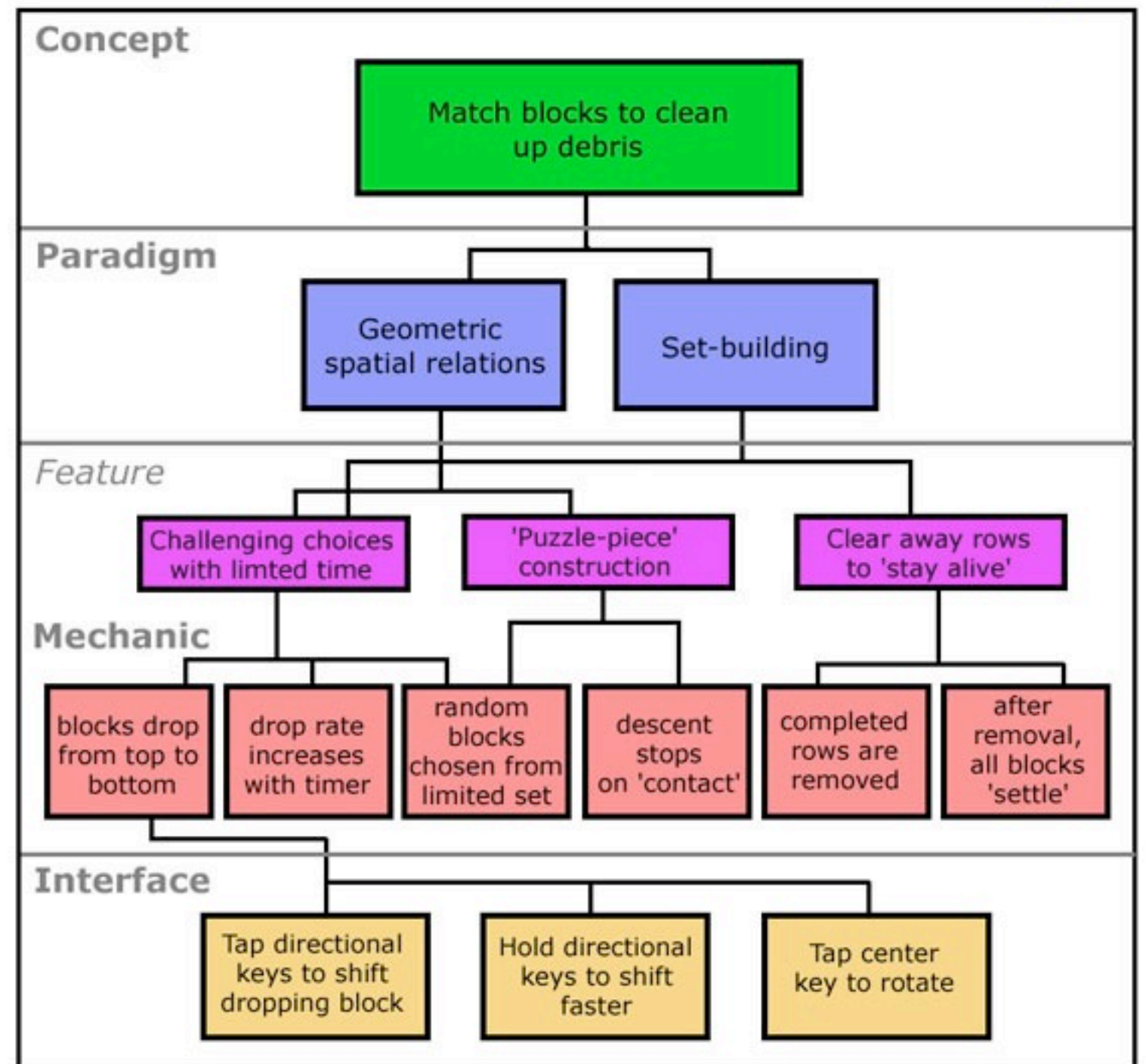
Concept

Paradigm

Mechanics

User Interface

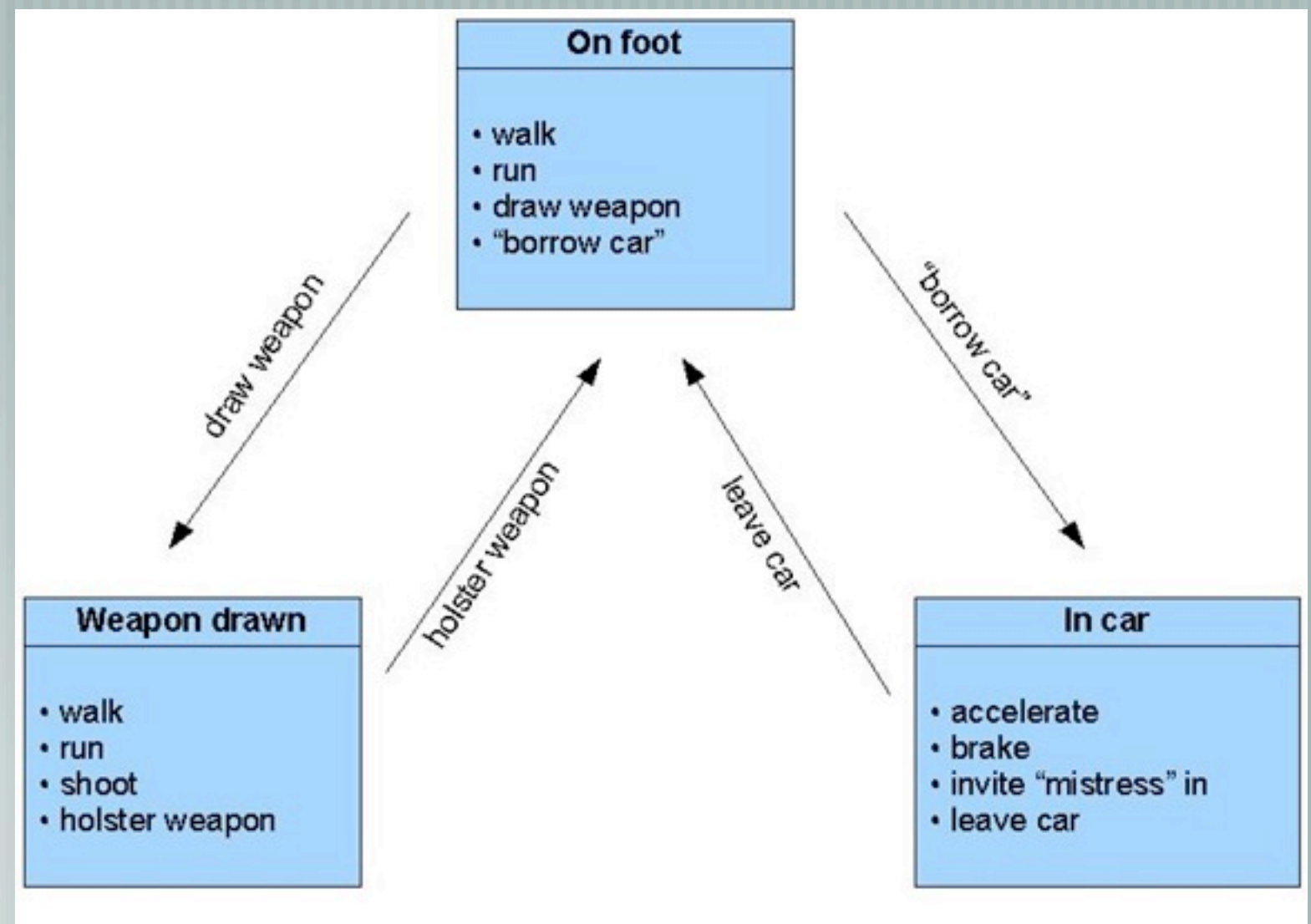
Tetris example



Definitions: Game “Verbs”

“actions that will be performed by the player during the game”

see [2] (Top-Down vs Bottom-Up)



Device Considerations

- [App stores encourage snap judgements. You must “wow” your audience in the first 30 seconds of opening your app, or you will lose them.
- [Design the game you want to play. Imagine yourself playing it on the bus, or while waiting in line for the bank.
- [Consider the screen. Smaller real-estate should mean less HUD, less interface “cruft”.

Device Considerations

- [Touch-based controls win over accelerometer controls the same way mouse+keyboard-based FPS players win over keyboard-based FPS players every time.
- [Always Connected means you have no excuse not to support the metagame. (Game Center on iOS, OpenFeint & ??? on Android)
- [Tutorials are a fail. You still need them, but minimize.

Device Considerations^[3]

The following from Greg Costikyan's "Mobile Design Basics":

- [Handle interruptions gracefully

- [Go easy on sound (and gameplay **MUST NOT** depend on it)

- [Processing power (complicated simulations a problem)

He was talking about J2ME/Symbian, but it still applies.

Game Genres^[4]

— [When It Comes To iPhone Games, What Sells Is Action, Adventure, and Arcade (TechCrunch article citing a “report” by Distimo)

— [“While the biggest category is Puzzles (15 percent), Action and Arcade both come in second with 11 percent each.”

— [“when you look the top grossing games, 22 percent are in the Action category, 12 percent are in Arcade, and 9 percent are Adventure”

Game Genres^[4] (Continued)

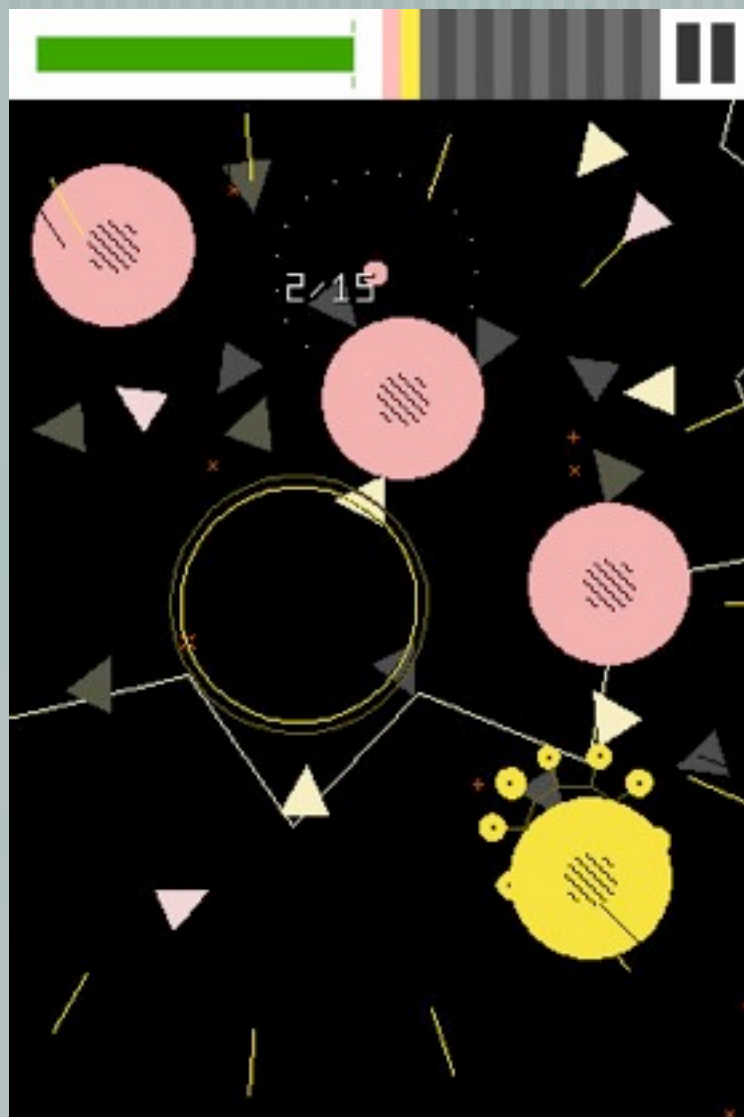
— [“the most expensive games are in the Role Playing category, with an average price of \$7.96. Action and Arcade games are cheaper with average prices of \$1.68 and \$1.39 respectively.”

— [This report was from early 2010. Before Angry Birds hit #1.

— [Note that it is perfectly possible to have a “hit” game in any genre. Board game apps are “niche”, but can sell quite well.

Originality (brainstorm!)

Examples of Games that would not exist without Mobile:



References

[1] The Four Perspectives of Game Design: Insight from the Mobile Fringe

by Tony Ventrice – http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132427/the_four_perspectives_of_game_.php

[2] Game Design Cognition: The Bottom-Up and Top-Down Approaches

by Gilliard Lopes & Rafael Kuhnen – http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/130542/game_design_cognition_the_.php

[3] Mobile Game Design Basics

by Greg Costikyan – http://www.costik.com/presentations/mobile_game_design_basics.ppt

[4] When It Comes To iPhone Games, What Sells Is Action, Adventure, and Arcade

by Erick Schonfeld – <http://techcrunch.com/2010/02/25/iphone-games-what-sells-distimo/>

Thanks!

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