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Limbo is a platform game that appeals to me in a lot of ways. I am a big fan of horror and dark, creepy themes, and *Limbo* gives me all of that with a non-advanced game play. While the gameplay is relatively simple, there are moments in *Limbo* that are incredibly intense and shocking. Particularly whenever the player is forced to engage in combat-based puzzles. It was one of these moments that *Limbo* caught my attention and made me feel real emotions. Albeit they were negative ones. Oddly enough, that fact did not affect my enjoyment of the game; rather, it enhanced it and made me more determined to carry on and achieve the main objective – escape the forest.

Figure 1 below is the exact moment in the game the stakes raised for me. I had just defeated my first spider and was feeling triumphant. In *A Study of Puzzles*, Lindley says, “[the instinct for play] may be pleasure in triumphing over obstacles, the joy in success, victory,” (433). This was the case for me, but it led me to my quick and sudden demise. I was distracted by that feeling because the next thing I know is the boy is slowing down and to a complete stop. At the exact same time, I noticed very distinct and familiar spider legs slowly moving towards me. The boy is picked up by, wrapped in spider webs, and left to his own defenses. This moment was so jarring because of the fact I had just successfully moved past a spider. I honestly was expecting to encounter another one heads on, so the fact that it changed up on me and introduced a new obstacle was what made it so effective. As Freud says in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment [for adults],” (35). Enjoyment is an interesting word, because I wouldn’t necessarily, I enjoyed what I was watching, but enjoyed the emotions the action brought on.



Figure 1

In discussing these emotions, I look closely on Freud’s concept of shock, fear, and anxiety being un-synonymous. “Fright, fear, and anxiety are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger,” (12, Freud).

Their distinction is proven accurate to me because I experienced each emotion separately in response to the same action. When I was forced

to a stop and the spider first appeared I felt shocked because I was not expecting it at all. Subsequently, I felt fear towards the spider itself. That fear shifts and molds with anxiety whenever the spider picked me up instead of killing me instantly as it did in the previous chapter of the game. The main difference in the three emotions has to do with the spider's different and perceived actions directly.

These emotions are escalated by the game's immersive qualities. According to Ariel Rogers in the article *Artificial Reality*, "To be immersed, a body must not only come into contact with a larger environment but be surrounded by it," (Rogers, 139). Of course, this article is discussing VR, where the player would genuinely feel surrounded by the game setting as if they are stepping into it and crossing the threshold of the screen. But, LIMBO does contain devices that make Roger's definition stand true. The eerie sounds of the forest, the immediate setting, and the far away unended background are what makes the platform game immersive. I would find myself forging on and experiencing the environment as if I were actually in it. It felt like there are moments of mental exhaustion in the place of the physical i.e., the boy must jump over a hole lined with deadly spikes while wrapped up in the spider silk. His arms are restrained so the jumping feels stunted and like it is taking more effort than the usual upward press of the keyboard keys. The added pressure and restraint made my heartrate pick up and I was on the edge of my seat suddenly. Overall, the described moment in LIMBO genuinely scared me and caused some movement within. It changed the way I viewed the game, and it made me excited to continue forward and learn what other obstacles I would potentially encounter. It was a very successful and creepy end point in the game if you did die.

Sources

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. James Strachey (New York and London: Norton, 1990 (1920)).

Lindley, Ernest. "A Study of Puzzles with Special Reference to the Psychology of Mental Adaptation" in *The American Journal of Psychology*. July 1897. Volume 8 number 4.

Rogers, Ariel. "Taking the Plunge" in *Screen Ideologies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).