# Assassin's Creed
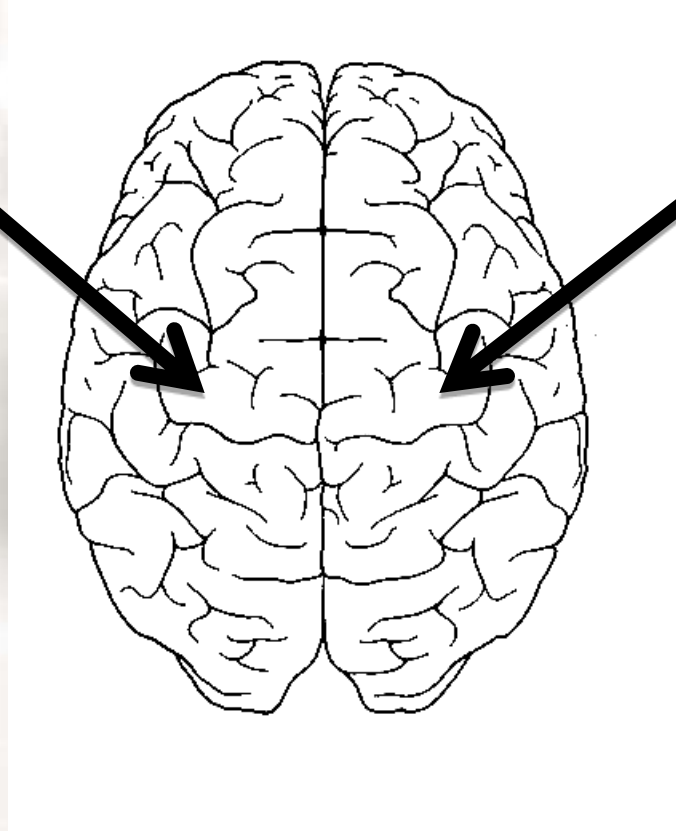# Design Philosophy

Patrick Plourde - CEDEC 2010

# The Brain

Left Side:
Logic

Right Side:
Creativity

Logic: Programmers

Creativity: Artists, Writers

Game Designers

Can we merge both aspect of game creation in order to achieve the results we want?

1. Creativity First approach

2. Rigourous Production Processes

# Assassin's Creed Franchise History
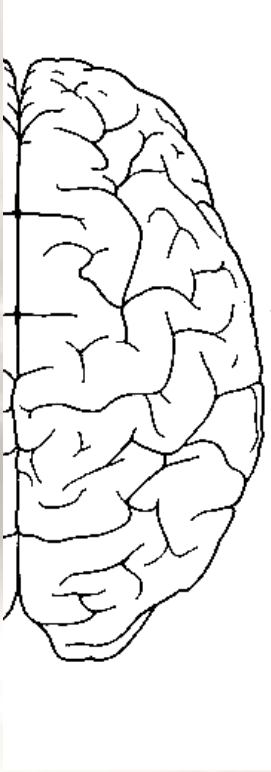


November 2007

November 2009

November 2010

Playable at TGS in 2 weeks!

**Part 1 - The Right Side:**

Creativity

# Games are Art

## START WITH AN EMOTION!

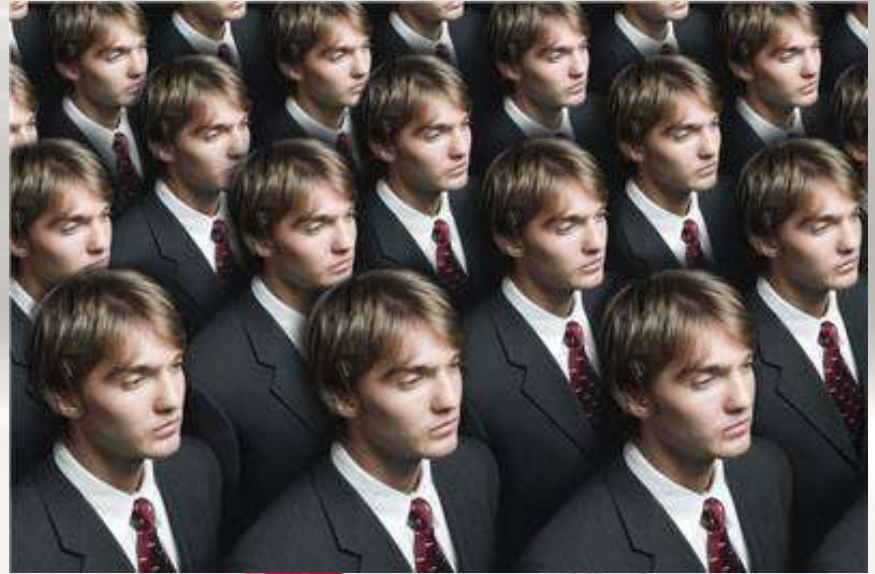Otherwise :

- Soulless feature checklist

# Games are Art

## START WITH AN EMOTION!

Otherwise :

- Soulless feature checklist
- Clones of other games

# Do, Don't Tell!

What define the Videogame medium compared
    is INTERACTIVITY:

- In Videogames, something is only TRUE
  if it is EXPERIENCED

- You need to convey the emotion through
  GAMEPLAY!

Assassin's Creed Emotional Pillars:
1. Freedom
2. Being a Master Assassin

## FREEDOM

- Sandbox Design: Open environment Free Roaming



© 2008 Pam Penick

# Emotional Pillars:

## FREEDOM

- Sandbox Design:
  Open environment
  Free Roaming
- The Game's AI
  is not the aggressor

FREEDOM

- Sandbox
  Open env
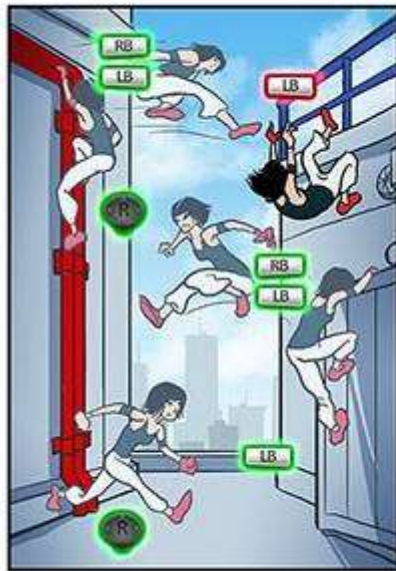  Free Roa
- The Gam
  is not the

# Emotional Pillars:

## MASTER ASSASSIN

- Not Skilled based.

# Emotional Pillars:
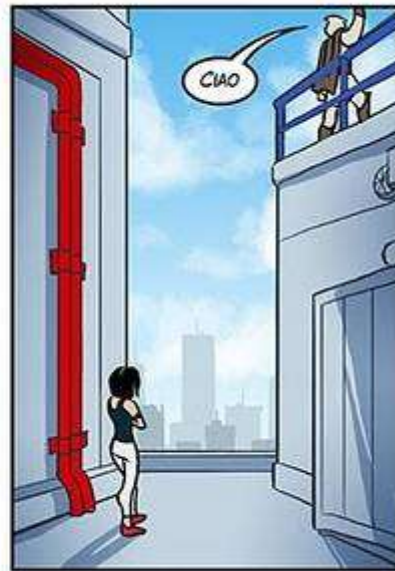
## MASTER ASSASSIN

- Not Skilled based.
- Player character is more agile and stronger then any AI character.

# Gameplay Pillars:

Your Game EXPERIENCE will only works if your CORE GAMEPLAY provides the EMOTIONS you are aiming for.

The more ingrained in your core gameplay your new features are, the more powerful the emotion will be felt

# What is a Gameplay Pillar?:

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# What is a Gameplay Pillar?:



Fight

# What is a Gameplay Pillar?:



Fight

Navigation

# What is a Gameplay Pillar?:



Fight

Navigation

Social Stealth

FIGHT: Based on Timing



Support feeling of Mastery

## NAVIGATION: Focused on Fluidity

## NAVIGATION: Focused on Fluidity



## Support both Freedom and Mastery

## SOCIAL STEALTH:
Social Behaviour
makes you invisible



## Support feeling of Freedom

## AC2: LEARNING

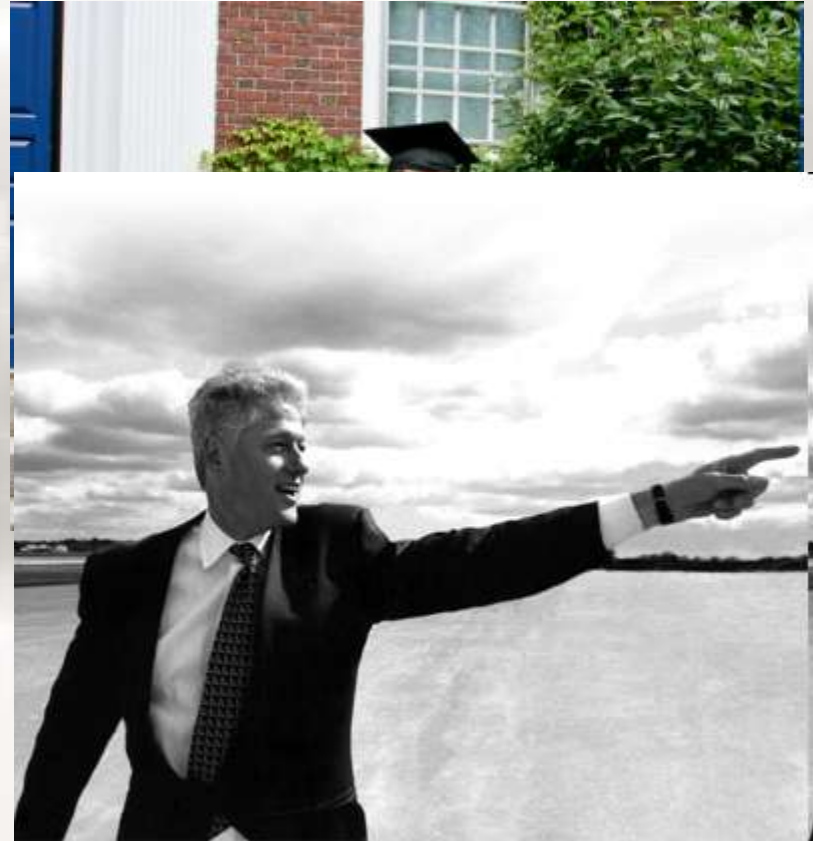- Up to **80%** of the game, players continually learned NEW SKILLS.

# Add a Unique Emotion per Title

## AC2: LEARNING

- Up to **80%** of the game, players continually learned **NEW SKILLS.**

## ACB: LEADERSHIP

- SHARE his knowledge with apprentices –

The **ASSASSIN'S GUILD.**

# AC Brotherhood: Assassin's Guild

1. Recruit

2. Train

3. Use!

# Assassin's Guild and Gameplay Pillars

Assassins improve Gameplay Pillars:
- Help in **FIGHT**
- Enable to kill while remaining **STEALTH**

# Assassin's Guild: Key Learning

- By making sure we **anchored** this feature in our **Gameplay pillars**, we secured <u>early</u> on that the feature is **NOT A GIMMICK**

# Creativity Recap

To Create powerful and Attractive games:

1. Set a unique and fresh EMOTIONAL Tone for your game

2. Convey this Emotion through GAMEPLAY

3. Make sure the Gameplay linked with the emotion you want reinforce your GAMEPLAY PILLARS for a MEANINGFUL IMPACT.

Part 2 - The Left Side:

Production
Process

# Additional Details about AC

Assassin's Creed productions are known for:

- **High Quality**

but also:

- Highly effective **Production methods**
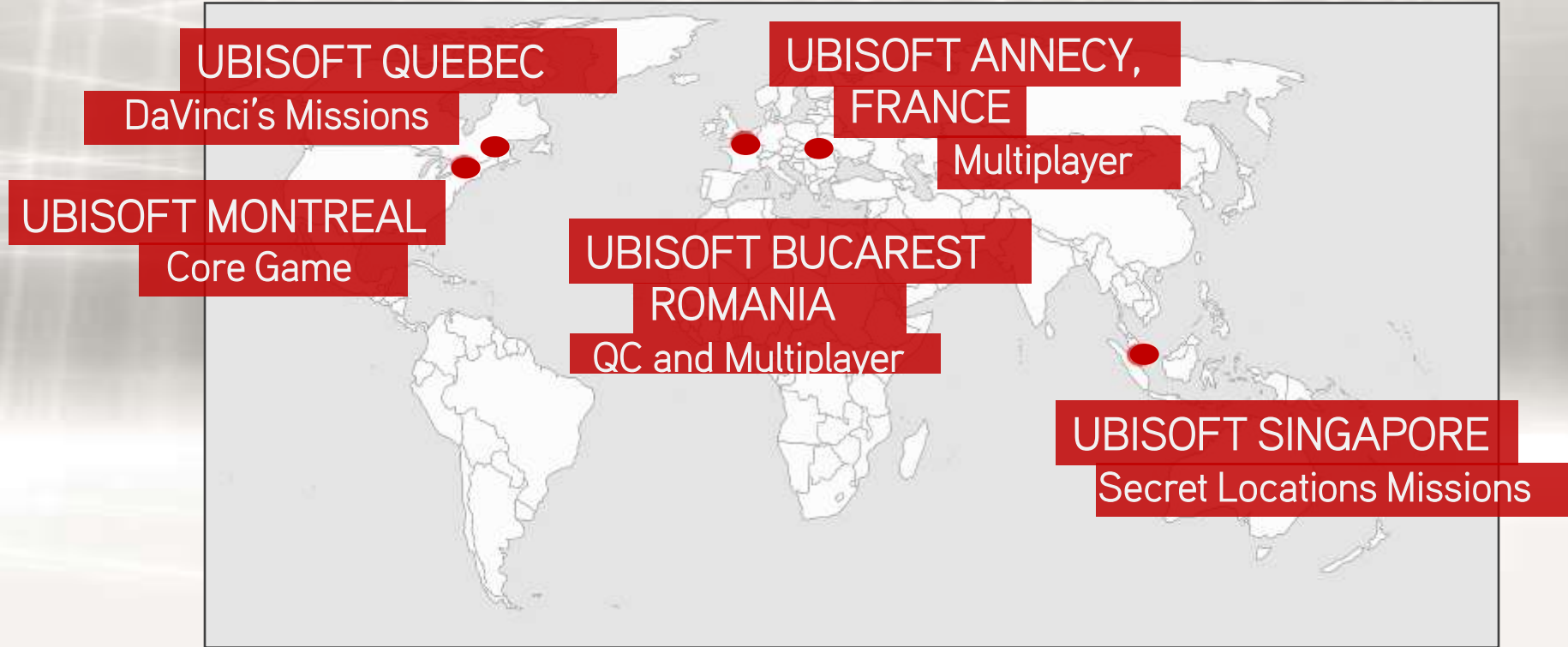- One of the **Biggest Development team** in the industry!

# Enourmous Team

## 450+ developers

# Worldwide production

## 5 Studios across the world



UBISOFT QUEBEC
DaVinci's Missions

UBISOFT ANNECY, FRANCE
Multiplayer

UBISOFT MONTREAL
Core Game

UBISOFT BUCAREST ROMANIA
QC and Multiplayer

UBISOFT SINGAPORE
Secret Locations Missions

# Large Scope…

We are also producing A LOT of Features:

AC2: 210 Features

AC Brotherhood:

- Keep 150 features from AC2

- Add 100 *new* ones

## ... within tight Deadlines

AC2: 22 months

AC Brotherhood: 10 months

To maximise the strength of such a big team in the time we have, we can't rely on chance.

These are the Production process we focus around:

1. Rigorous Documentation Process
2. Playtests

ASSASSIN'S CREED

DOCUMENTATION
PROCESS

# Why Game Documents are great:

1.  Force you to think
2.  Keep tracks of what you have in mind
3.  Limit questions - people can focus on their work

# Need to be relevant to production:

# Assassin's Creed Documents:

## Loot

| | Description |
|---|---|
| **Gameplay Loop** | Looting can be done on: |
| |    Dead bodies |
| **On Spawn/Despawn** |    Lootable Objects (ex: Stationary Boats, Treasure chests, box) |
| **Controls** |       Big Treasure chest |
| |       Small Treasure chest |
| **AI reactions** |       Covered boats / gondolas (player can't drive them) |
| **Level Design implications** | |
| | Looting a body or an object takes [5] seconds. |
| **Sound/Music design** | The player can receive money and [keys] while looting. |
| | There's no need to loot a body twice to get both. |
| **Camera** | |

# Brackets: Best practice!

[X]

Identify Variables we need in Data

Remove needless debates!

# Production Structure

- 5 Production Cells for the MontrealTeam
- 1 Game Designer per Team – sitting with the team.

Feature Sign Off:

- Each Document **approved by Directors** during Approval meetings
- Once Approved **we can't do major change** without **restarting the process**. (2.0 document)

# Documentation Process Results

## For AC2:

- 200+ Documents produced in 6 months
- Rework was kept to a minimum (only one feature received a 2.0 revision)
- Updated until the end – Used by the Q/A team for testing the game, until submission!
- AC2 document were usable day 1 for ACB

ASSASSIN'S CREED

VALIDATION THROUGH PLAYTESTS

AC2 and AC:B production cycle = **ZERO** time to polish

Walkthrough for the main path only = **20-25 hours**

Playtests became is our MAIN TOOL to identify problematic areas in the walkthrough

# Data Tracked

**Quantitative** – Data Tracking + Usability Reports

    Provide **concrete information**

    Orient the discussion on data instead of opinions.

**Qualitative** – Appreciation Reports

    **Give context** to the data you collected

    Most Important (for me)

        **Having both provide perspective**

# Adapt to your Production Cycle

2 major stages in Production:

**Pre-Alpha** – Validate your Features.

**Post-Alpha** – Smooth out the experience.

# Test Case: Navigation

## Problematic:

Buildings went from 1-2 story high in AC1 to 3-4 in Venice.

Climbing felt slow and the players don't use the Free Running as much as we'd like.

Are Layout changes between AC1 and AC2 a big mistake?

Player 12 rated this mission BORING
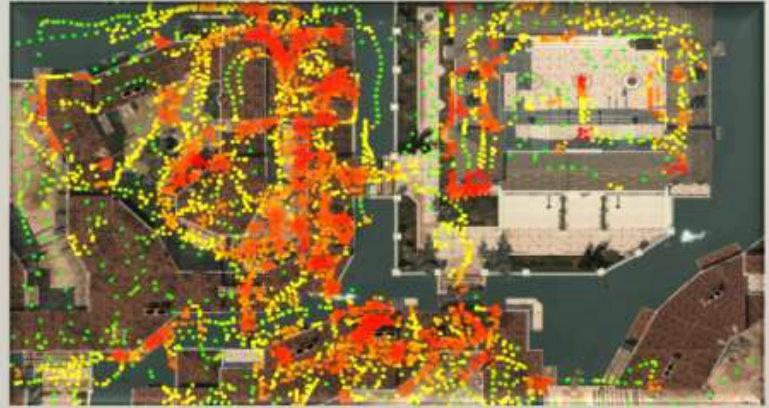
Player 13 rated this mission FUN

Playtests proved that more Navigation = More Fun

No Use of Rooftops...

...except if the Mission requires it...

...except if the Mission requires it...

| | P9 | P10 | P11 | P12 | P13 | P14 | P15 | P16 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M10 - Fun | 5 | Nil | 4 | Nil | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

... and that Mission was rated the most fun

# We noted that it affected mostly 'Casual' Players

|  | Casual | | | | Hardcore | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | **P9** | **P10** | **P11** | **P12** | **P13** | **P14** | **P15** | **P16** |
| Overall Fun | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Difficulty | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| **Navigation** | | | | | | | | |
| Ability to navigate his environment? | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

# Test Case: Navigation

## Don't change the layout!
Hardcore Players didn't appear to have problems
Our first city (Florence) had lower buildings, so once the Players reached Venice, they would be acclimated with the Free Running

## Work on the Strong Climb
The Character climbs twice as fast – enable to regain the fluidity of the first title.
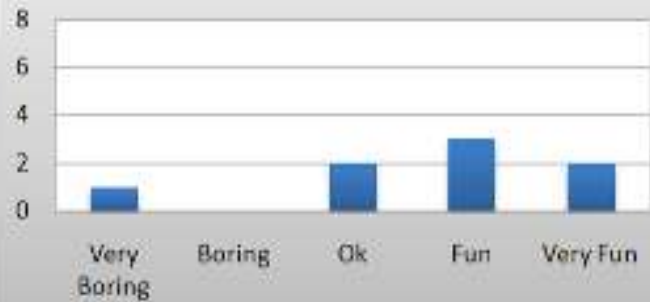
May 18th

June 22nd
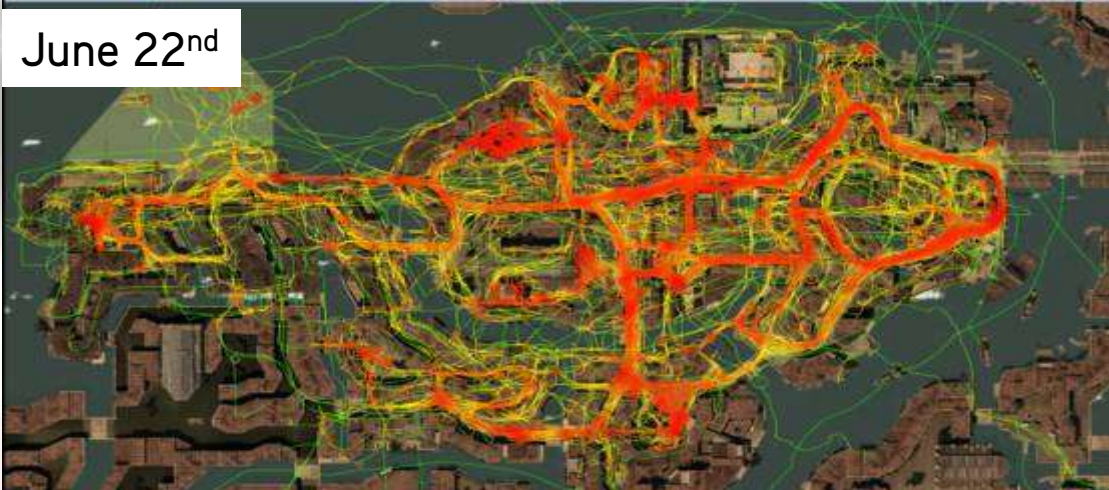
## Results

Usage is in line with our expectations.

The players learn intuitively to use the Free Running and Climb and maximize the Navigation.
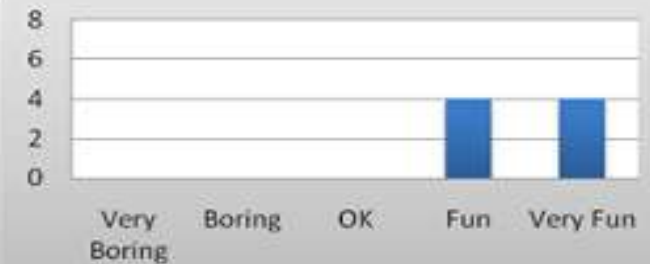
Playtest 1

Fun

Playtest 4

Fun

# Stage 2 – POST ALPHA

Lesser focus on Data Tracking

- No changes in the layouts possible
- We had to branch out to Post Launch Data Tracking one month before going in submission
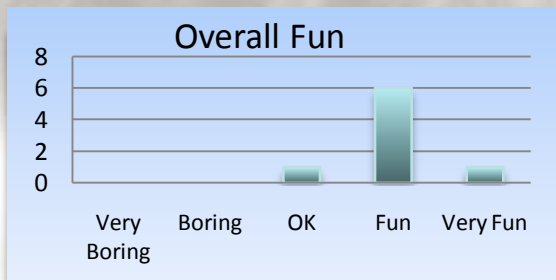- Couldn't afford the time to analyse the data

# Playtest RESULTS

## Playtest 5

41 Issues Flagged:

31 Minor

7 Major

3 Critical



Fun: 4/5

## Playtest 10

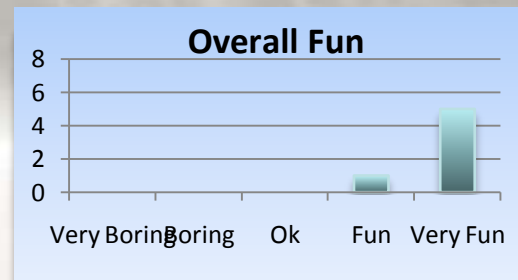30 Issues Flagged:

13 Minor

14 Major
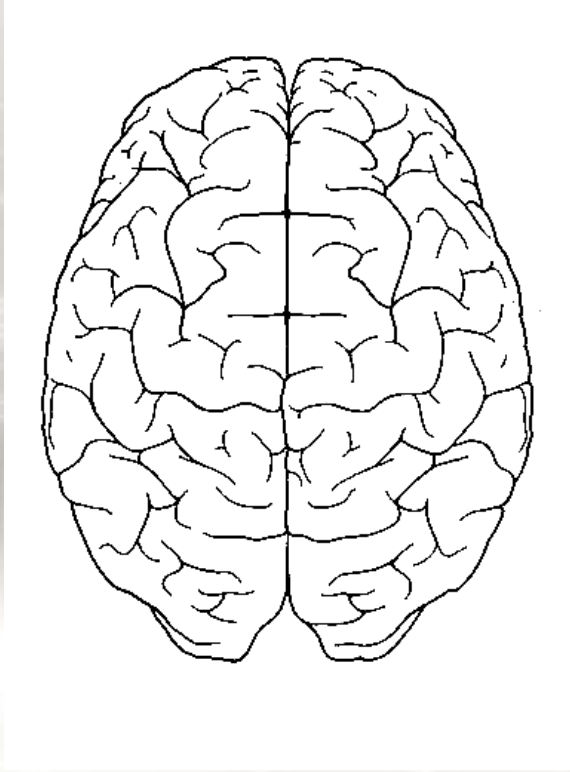
3 Critical



Fun: 4.5/5

## Playtest 15

2 Issues Flagged:

1 Minor

1 Critical
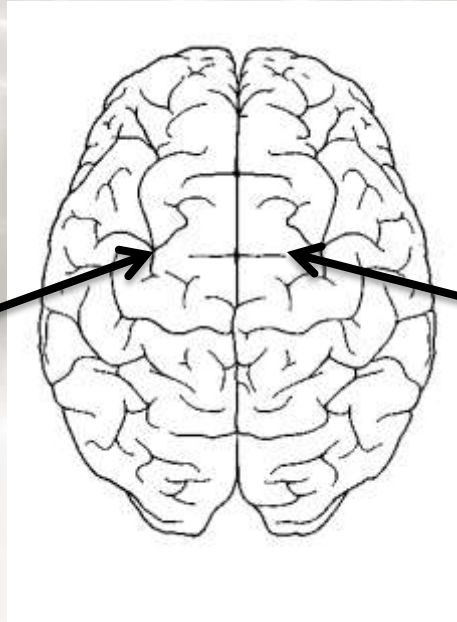


Fun: 4.8/5

Assassin's Creed Design Philosophy:

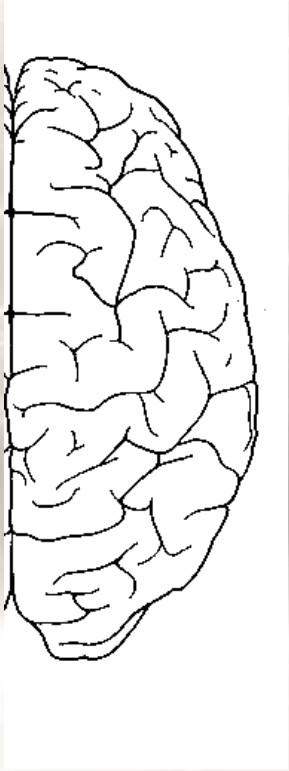## Conclusion

# Recap: Creativity

- A Game Designer must use both its **creative skills as** well has a **Pragmatic approach**
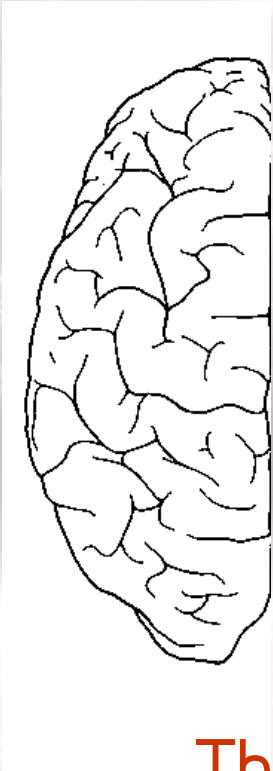


Left Side:
Logic

Right Side:
Creative

# Recap: Creativity



1. Start with a powerful EMOTIONAL ANCHOR

2. Convey that **emotions through GAMEPLAY**.

3. New Gameplay ingredients must IMPROVE your Gameplay PILLARS

This guarantees depth.

# Recap: PROCESS

- Provide Strong **DOCUMENTATION** to your dev team
- Use the **PLAYTEST** to verify if you are achieving your goals throughout production.

This guarantees the best possible execution.

This is Assassin's Creed's
Design Philosophy.

THANKS!

Patrick.Plourde@ubisoft.com