Today

- Announcement
- Quiz
- Design documents and schedules
- More on “What is a game?”
- If time permits, innovative platformers
- What’s coming up
Announcement
Quiz
Fullerton’s explanation of Csíkszentmihályi’s *flow* includes:

**A:** A balance between challenge and ability

**B:** Reducing unnecessary design elements

**C:** Smooth movement

**D:** Concluding with falling action

**E:** None of the above
Fullerton thinks a key problem with branching stories is ...

A: lack of vocabulary for presenting choices
B: ease of understanding
C: uncontrollable emergence
D: limited scope of choices and outcomes
E: none of the above
Fullerton does not distinguish between characters and avatars

**A:** as predetermined vs player-created

**B:** as emphasizing backstory vs role-play

**C:** as given vs customized

**D:** as focused on past motivations vs future growth

**E:** as having potential for empathy vs achievement
Design documents and schedules
Design documents and schedules

• Due in section next week
• Outline and sketches of innovative game you prototyped (same or revised)
• Detailed work breakdown with tasks assigned to team members
• Any questions?
What is a game?
Defining “game”

A “rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.”

— Jesper Juul
Rules

• Well-defined rules — unambiguous
• Affinity between games and computers
• Game rules and world rules
• Rules as software that require hardware
Variable, Quantifiable Outcome

• Not only in theory, but at this level of player skill
• Beyond discussion — a win, a score
• Making something a game — turning the creativity and grace of dance into a score for competitions
Valorization of Outcome

- Some outcomes are *better*
- Unwinnable games — but high score is better
- Positive outcomes are harder to reach — challenge
Player Effort

• People work — intellectually, physically
• Doesn’t work in pure chance, but people act like it does
• Reinforces attachment to outcome
Player Attached to Outcome

- Wanting to win, and not wanting to lose
- Violating this is playing wrong — spoilsport — usually
- If play among unequals (e.g., against small child) different story — but still a game for all players?
Negotiable Consequences

- There can be consequences, but not built into the game
- Poker can be for things of value, or not
- Not: stock market, traffic, russian roulette
- But their systems could be used for a game, w/o non-negotiable consequences
Game definitions

- Are often presented as “consensus” definitions based on surveys of previous game scholarship
- Can be interesting to think about, intellectually
- Can be a good source of game ideas (we’ll come back to this)
- But: consistently marginalize things that should be central. For example...
This is not a game
The Sims is not a game

- “The #1 best selling game of all time.”
  — Electronic Arts, 2004

- But The Sims doesn’t meet formal definitions. Such games “have emergent quantifiable goals but usually no single overriding outcome.”
  — Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman

- “Open-ended simulation games such as The Sims change the classic game model by removing the goals, or more specifically, by not describing some possible outcomes as better than others.”
  — Jesper Juul
Beyond the margins

- fantasy and vertigo games
- casino poker and blackjack
- *The Sims* and *SimCity*
- *Dungeons & Dragons* and *GURPS*
- *The Old Republic* and *World of Warcraft*
- *Dogz* and *Electroplankton*
- *Cityville* and *Pet Society*
What makes the borders?

• Juul says this definition applies to a 5,000 year history of games

• Many game scholars agree

• But a some (e.g., Pearce) argue these definitions based on a history of boys’ play as “games” and girls’ play as “not games”

• Others argue that even the distinction between “work” and “play” is something only introduced in the modern era
What is this course about?
For this course

- We will consider the idea of computer games something *broader* than the output of the industries, not narrower

- All software that “invites and structures play” — that is *playable*

- We will be much more interested in “how is this played?” than “is this a game?”
What about game design?
Game definitions and game design

• Think about each of the elements of Juul’s game definition in relation to your game
• Are they all clearly and enticingly present?
• If any of them are missing, are they missing for a good reason?
• What would happen if you made one of them missing on purpose?
PainStation
is not a game
The Beast is not a game
Back to where we started
What’s wrong with *Candy Land* as a game?

- Players have no choices (no “the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome”)
- But also, the activity of play is only engaging to the very young — not fun to perform, offering sensory delight, or much else
- And what unfolds over time doesn’t have much weight — no meaningful story, etc
- Don’t lose sight of things not in definition
How can the platformer still be interesting?

Haven’t we been jumping on things for more than three decades?
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time
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Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

- 2003 entry into long-running *Prince of Persia* series, first designed by Jordan Mechner since original (1989)
- The ability to rewind time (and slow, etc) is added to 3D platforming/combat mechanics
- Time manipulation is a resource to be collected, saved, and spent
Braid
Braid

- Engages the long history of 2D platformers (Mario, original PoP, etc) but is a 2008 game largely created by Jonathan Blow
- Strong sales had a big impact on indie scene
- The ability to rewind time is added to platforming mechanics
- The ability to rewind is infinite — but some elements are “out of time” (creating time-oriented platforming puzzles)
PoP:SoT and Braid

- A connection between the mechanics and the fiction
- In PoP, the same events explain the new mechanics and provide the story momentum (and reason to kill NPCs)
- In Braid the mechanics are thematically related to world’s backstory and motives (as made clear in level-entry texts)
Other platformer innovations
Portal
Portal

• A student project (Narbacular Drop) by Kim Swift & 6 others, with an innovative use of something already in game engines

• Core innovative idea brought into Valve, polished & developed into great, short game

• Left 4 Dead a similar story: innovative AI-focused game by small team, brought into Valve and developed
Upcoming

• Three online readings for Friday (linked from syllabus)
• Core concepts and physical prototypes due in section this week
• Design documents and schedules due in section next week
• Computational prototypes due the week after (week 6)