Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

week ten, lecture two
Today

- Announcements / reminders
- TA evaluations
- Quiz
- More on games and fiction, which will be one focus of the final
- If time permits: What is play?
Go to the Sammys!

- The best UCSC games from **80K, 20, 179, and 172**
- June 15th, 7-10pm, at the Rio Theater at 1205 Soquel Ave
- Was great last year, but so full dean couldn’t get in
Please evaluate the class online

Check your email for reminder and/or log onto eCommons and click “Evaluation System”
TA Evaluations

- This will take 15 minutes after forms are distributed
- Please put “CMPS 80K,” TA’s name, and “Spring 2012” at top

Mon 4:00 PM - 5:45 PM: Aaron Reed
Mon 6:00 PM - 7:45 PM: Aaron Reed
Tue 6:00 PM - 7:45 PM: Julia Kelly
Tue 8:00 PM - 9:45 PM: Julia Kelly
Wed 6:00 PM - 7:45 PM: Eric Kaltman
Thu 1:00 PM - 2:45 PM: Eric Kaltman
Fri 3:30 PM - 5:15 PM: Julia Kelly
Quiz
Which is not one of the aspects of Csikszentmihalyi’s *flow*?

A: Positive conditioning
B: Clear goals
C: Ability to concentrate
D: Chance of completing
E: Immediate feedback
The motivational game design patterns of ‘Ville games

A: prove that these are a new type of game

B: build on a set of ideas first found in Parking Wars

C: help describe the game themes

D: are also found in games ranging from Animal Crossing to Metroid Prime

E: demonstrate that they are evil
Games and fiction
Games are complex systems.

Play creates many emergent possibilities.
Stories are linear arrangements. One arrangement is carefully selected.
Stories are inherently linear.... Indeed, this is a strength; the author chose precisely those characters, those events, those decisions, and that outcome, because it made for the strongest story....

Games are inherently non-linear. They depend on decision making.... To the degree that you make a game more like a story — more linear, fewer real options — you make it less like a game.

— Greg Costikian, 2000
There is some evidence for this
Great-looking graphics: aka movies

Not enough movies for dynamic gameplay or story
We have better cinematic models
Tells an “action movie” story

With gameplay challenges: running, jumping, climbing, shooting, using cover
Games can do what movies can do
Setting up character tensions
You don’t think they’re a couple, do you? They’re not a couple.

Making tensions clearer
Setting some tensions aside
Games can do what movies can’t do
Can’t run, jump, or climb; only pistol
Hard-won victory made meaningless.
What happened here?

• You start out with character ambivalence toward Jeff the cameraman, that is put aside to try to save him

• Difficult task that may require multiple tries. Finally player succeeds, which matches fictional success

• Player and character are both angered as a life and player's success are taken away
Does bad things in a separate world

Does bad things in a world impelled by my gameplay
But traditionally cinematic games are just one approach.
The narration dynamically reflects play
We can also move beyond linear stories
... and a deeper connection between game and fiction doesn’t require a big team
Shade, Andrew Plotkin, 2000
http://eblong.com/zarf/zweb/shade/
Shade

- The game system provides a space, objects, and a mystery
- The player and the character both explore the space, use the objects, and uncover the mystery
- Unlike a traditional fiction, the audience not only experiences intellectual curiosity about the fictional world, but must experiment with the world actively — curiosity in action
- The player understands the world at the same time the character’s fiction climaxes
Or you could control the world at a different level
Storytelling with *The Sims*
Alice and Kev by Robin Burkinshaw
Alice and Kev
Alice and Kev

- A story about poverty,
- with the choices of the player implicating the audience in a way *The Bicycle Thief* couldn’t,
- told through a simulation game.
- It works because both game and story are about resources.
- *The Sims* is an amazing — if somewhat abstract — metastory.
Or the boundary between worlds could be questioned
“The Beast”

Circles: “Evan Chan was murdered”
Squares: “Jeanine was the key”
I was born in Shanghai in 2066. Both of my parents were professors at the University of Shanghai. My father was an astrophysicist, and my mother a professor of quantum mechanics. After my father’s death in a plane crash, my mother accepted a position at Harvard.

At first I hated Cambridge. I did the lonely, moody adolescent bit and took to writing poetry and acting sullen. Then one day, friends of my Mom took us sailing off of Marblehead. I fell in love that day. I then had two passions: sailing and haiku.
“The Beast”

This is not a game
“The Beast”

- Elan Lee (puzzles), Sean Stewart (writing), and Jordan Weisman (concept)
- First ARG; denied its own existence; spread through internet text, movies (and phone, fax, USPS, bathroom walls, live events)
- Required massive player collaboration (Cloudmakers had 7,500 members)

Nearly 150 characters, nearly 4,000 documents, four languages, nightmare database, Enigma code, etc.
“The Beast”

- Launched the “alternate reality game” genre
- Fictions uncovered/performed as a group
- Taking roles in fictions that blur boundaries
- Game system provides a framework and goal for social interaction in fictional/real world
- Pushing back on plans of game/story authors (even if not visible to players)
- A powerful genre, though mostly used as a marketing tool (Jeff Hull’s work an exception)
Or a simulated world might not be a goal
A man sleeps, his head rested in the crook of a couch arm. He has closed his eyes, feels a small thump of his heart as they pull through. There is a snip of scissors in the air.

Three fingers across his scalp, parting his hair at the roots, untwisting the skin. His mother, kissing his hair. Soft fingertips across his forehead, smoothing down his ever-so-soothing.

She is alive then, as she is now. At times he'd thought he saw her drive through the reflecting pool, her profile at the window. But it was only a passing car. She didn't turn to speak. As he fit his gaze, let go to say don't live it alone, open mouthed.

Light over the sill as a manhole, bed next to him, light next to him. Time turns away, sleep held back by sleep. Is a man in this place, my time, or my place?

Spanned against her, her, him, it, me. His, her, his hands, her, him, my. A woman, inside, outside, protective. Their, her, his, their, his, her. A woman, inside, outside, protective.

She thinks of cheese and parsley. Spreading the paper, turning on the radio. Afternoon will appear in the bed, afternoon will appear in the bed, afternoon will appear in the bed.
A collaboration with Josh Carroll, Robert Coover, Shawn Greenlee, Andrew McClain, and Ben “Sascha” Shine

Played in the Cave at Brown University

Texts of memory as a virtual experience

The language of memory as game material, in relation to the body, made almost tangible

Words peel loose, hit back with the hand...
Or you could make choices for characters that branch the plot
Story choices
Problems with story choices

- #1: Combinatorial explosion
How to solve combinatorial explosion problem?

• kill the player off after most choices
How to solve combinatorial explosion problem?

- have a story that ends very quickly
How to solve combinatorial explosion problem?

- fold choices back into the “right” plot thread, making them irrelevant.
- beads on a string
- dialogue trees
How to solve combinatorial explosion problem?

- only offer choices very late in the story.
How do RPGs handle it?
Choices in RPGs

Presentation by
Alexander Schneider
More on games and fiction on Friday
Play
What is play?

• *Play* is clearly fundamental to games — so what is it?

• Fullerton: has many faces: learning, socializing, problem solving, seeing anew...

• For Salen and Zimmerman: “Play is free movement within a more rigid structure.” From the “play” of a steering wheel to the “play” of language to the “play” of a game
S&Z on Play

• Three categories of play, broad to narrow:

• Being playful — from games through slang, wacky hairstyles, etc

• Ludic activity — include games and also all other “play” (tossing a ball, animal play, etc)

• Game play — play within rules, toward a goal, with a quantifiable outcome
Transformative play

• While S&Z see play as free movement within a more rigid system, play is also more — which they call “transformative”

• Play can change the structure — slang becomes part of the language, new strategies motivate new game rules, etc

• Play can use the structure to other ends: machinima, game art, etc

• And play changes players...
Theorists of play

• Roger Caillois a very influential theorist of games/play (not differentiated in French)

• Many discuss ideas from: *Man, Play, and Games*, Roger Caillois, 1958

• In some ways a response to: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga, 1938
Huizinga vs Caillois

[Play is] a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules... [and promotes social groups]

• Free (not obligatory)
• Separate (in limits of space & time)
• Uncertain (outcome unknown, player innovation)
• Unproductive (creates nothing)
• Governed by rules
• Make-believe (not real life)
Caillois’s “fundamental categories” of play

- **Agôn**: Competitive play (most game play)
- **Alea**: Chance-based play (gambling)
- **Mimicry**: Role-playing and make believe (from theatre games to tabletop RPGs)
- **Ilinx**: Vertigo and physical sensation play (from “ring around the rosie” to skiing)
- **Padia & Ludus**: Improvisation and joy vs. gratuitous difficulty
# Caillois’s play matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agôn (competition)</th>
<th>Unregulated athletics</th>
<th>Boxing, Chess, Starcraft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alea (chance)</td>
<td>Counting-out rhymes</td>
<td>Betting, lotteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimicry (simulation)</td>
<td>Masks, disguises</td>
<td>Theatre, ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilinx (vertigo)</td>
<td>Horseback, waltzing</td>
<td>Skiing, tightrope walking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Play in games

• From the rules perspective, we mostly look at games as *agôn*, with some *alea* thrown in.

• When we start looking at players, things like *mimicry* (e.g., in MMOs) come in.

• More generally, the Wii has brought more focus on *ilinx* into mainstream game design.
Games and pleasure

• Gameplay is *autotelic* (its own reward)

• Gameplay is intrinsically motivating (that’s why people try to harness it...)

• But this is only when it’s well designed — need to establish in the first few minutes

• We might think of Caillois’s categories of play as a matrix of play’s pleasures