Foundations of Interactive Game Design (80K)

Lecture 7
Today

- Quiz
- Design documents and schedules
- Game demo
- More on “What is a game?”
- If time permits, innovative platformers
- What’s coming up
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?
Demo: Painted
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
Well-defined rules. Implementable on a computer, affinity between games and computers - systems. For folk games they “drift toward becoming unambiguous,” but can also differ across communities. We’ve talked before about “game rules” and “world rules” (Juul on game state in sports fields, bodies, etc). Rules as software that need hardware to be played.
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

Not only different possible outcomes in theory, but also at this level of player skill. Solved games (tic tac toe), game handicapping (golf, chess). And the outcome must be beyond discussion — a win, a score. Ice skating moves unquantified grace toward quantifiable score.
The game presents some outcomes as better than others. Unwinnable games like Tetris and Space Invaders still have scores, with higher ones better. Positive outcomes are generally harder to reach, which is core of game challenge.
Player Effort

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

Doesn’t work in games of pure chance, but players still act like it does (wishing, doing “lucky” things, etc). This investment of effort tends to reinforce the attachment to outcome (next).
Wanting to win, and not wanting to lose — otherwise playing wrong. A spoilsport among equals, but something else when unequal (e.g., playing against small children).
There can be consequences, but they’re not built into the game. So poker can be played for things of value, or not. Gladiatorial combat to the death cannot. Football, boxing, others with almost inevitable long-term consequences aren’t tied to rules (the winner can still get brain damage). Things played for real consequences (stock market, elections) can be used as game rules.
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?
Here is an example of physical interaction. With PainStation people voluntarily play computer games that result in physical pain, which is a curious thing. I might say more, except that the physical pain means they’re no longer playing a game.
Here is an example of ambiguous, fictionalized interaction. The Beast is often called the first example of an “alternate reality game” -- a game that deliberately obscures the boundaries between the game and the rest of the world. But this means it is not a game. Look, the game itself even says so.
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
Upcoming

• Fullerton for Tuesday: Chapter 4 (Dramatic Elements)
• Game design document and schedule due next week