

Week 3

Homework Questions

Read: Chapter 1 and 3 from Flanagan, Mary. Critical Play Radical Game Design, MIT Press, 2009

From chapter 1:

How does Mary Flanagan's definition of game differ from Chris Crawford's as well as the definition crafted by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman?

Mary Flanagan defines games broadly as “situations of guidelines and procedures” in which a player interacts. This differs from Chris Crawford, who defines games as evolving interactive systems that change via player actions, and from Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, who define games as strict systems of rules and measurable outcomes.

What is an activist game?

An activist game is designed to emphasize a social issue and educate its players. These games support a theme through their narratives, mechanics, and desired outcome, encouraging deeper reflection. The text explains that in an activist game, only one of the desired outcomes is actually entertainment.

From chapter 3:

Go and chess are examples of games that feature “perfect information”, what other games share that feature?

Perfect information games are games where all potential moves and system aspects are made visible to all players during play. In addition to Go and Chess, Mancala and Tic-Tac-Toe are examples of perfect information games that I have played. They all share this feature, yet we sometimes overlook moves that are right in front of us.

Why might chance or gambling games hold spiritual or religious importance to ancient cultures?

Ancient cultures often believed that outcomes in games of chance were dictated by the Gods or the concept of fate. Playing these games allowed them to seek divine guidance regarding the “changeable” probability of destiny, hunting, war, or a successful harvest. This gameplay experience ultimately gave us a sense of possibility, or hope, that mitigated fear of the unknown in ancient times. I think back to what I learned in Mesoamerica about the Mayans and their ballgame. This was more than entertainment, and was played ritualistically to communicate with the Gods.

When was the earliest battle between government/ religious groups and games? What modern games can you think of that have been banned or demonized?

The earliest documented battle between government/ religious groups and games was in 1254, when St. Louis IX of France forbade Tafl at court, calling it "inhonesti ludi" - a dishonest game. As I learned from you this semester, *Dungeons & Dragons* was also demonized in the 80's as a result of the decade's “Satanic Panic”. The modern game was accused of promoting witchcraft and violence.

What is a fox game, and what would be a modern example?

A fox game is a game where the opponents' positions are unequal. One player, the fox, is the aggressor and attempts to overpower or trap the other player. A modern example of this type of game is *Among Us* which, though I never played, was popular in 2020. These games are asymmetrical and the weaker player must outmaneuver the fox in order to win.

What was the purpose or intent of the game: Mansion of Happiness?

The intent behind creating *Mansion of Happiness* was to teach children Christian morals and values. The game rewarded things like honesty and gratitude and punished players for “vices”, such as immodesty or cruelty. The objective was to reach “eternal happiness” in heaven.

Why do artists from the Fluxus and Surrealist movements play games? Why did Surrealists believe games might help everyone?

Artists from the Fluxus and Surrealist movements played games for creative exploration and expression. They observed games critically, and saw gameplay as a way to research the unconscious mind.

Changes in what can signal profound changes in games? How were pinball games reskinned during WW2?

Shifts in imagery and theme can signal profound changes in gaming. Pinball machines were reskinned during WW2 with patriotic and wartime propaganda. Increased sales for such games also indicated the state of the economy.

What statements did Fluxus artists make by reskinning games like monopoly and ping pong?

Oyvind Fahlström reskinned *Monopoly* to make a statement about capitalism in relation to U.S. foreign policy, the CIA, and international revolutions. Gabriel Orozco reskinned ping pong as *Ping Pond Table*. The new game was played by opening up the net to create an inbetween space, thus making a statement on space and time. These games questioned competition and traditional game structures.

How are artists like Lilian Ball, Marcel Duchamp, Takako Saito, Yoko Ono, Gabriel Orozco and Ruth Catlow using war games?

These artists use war games to critique conflict and player cooperation. Lilian Ball's *GO ECO* promoted collaboration, and Yoko Ono's *Play It by Trust* removed opposition. Other games, such as the game of *Chess*, were modified to critique traditional ideas of competition and war.

Why is it important for players to have agency in a critical or serious game?

It is important for players to have agency, or the ability to take meaningful action, in a critical game because it allows for an understanding of different choices and their potential impact. When players are encouraged to make metaphorically large decisions, there is more reflection on the game's metaphor.

Gris

What made the experience fun or not?

I really enjoyed the storytelling element, but found the persistent wind to take away from the fun that could be had playing the game. It is important to the message of the game, however I wish there was more to keep the players interested.

What is the motivating factor to get or keep players playing?

The player is motivated to solve puzzles, acquire new skills, and progress through themes of grief.

Is the game persuasive, and what is it trying to get you to do outside of the game?

I would not say that the game is persuasive, but it does encourage the player to reflect on loss and how someone else might be feeling after they experience the death of a loved one.

What is the game's metaphor and which of the game's mechanics stand out?

The game's metaphor follows the stages of grief and the gradual healing. The mechanics are relatively simple, and represent the game's metaphor well. The wind, for example, keeps the main character stuck for the start of the game. These mechanics are to hold the character back as the colors and environment shift.

How does the gameplay make you feel? Who does the game make you feel empathy for?

The gameplay made me think about my own experiences with grief. It feels relatable, but in a way that is very calm. I felt empathy for the main character as she navigates her feelings of loss and finding her voice again.

Is the game an activist game? If so, what does the game play advocate for?

It is not an activist game, but calls awareness to emotional struggles.

Describe the game in 3 sentences or in the form of a haiku.

Gris is a game about a girl that is transformed through her emotional journey of grief. Players unlock new abilities that represent her healing and allow her to overcome obstacles in the game. *Gris* relies on graphic art and music to tell the story without words.

Detroit Become Human

What made the experience fun or not?

I really liked this game, and I would play it again outside of class. It was fun to be given agency in how the story unfolds, which included making decisions that we wouldn't necessarily make irl. The branching narrative makes for a more customized and immersive gameplay experience.

What is the motivating factor to get or keep players playing?

Players are motivated by their desire to know how different choices impact the outcome of the game and its characters.

Is the game persuasive, and what is it trying to get you to do outside of the game?

Yes, the game encourages players to think about discrimination, the future of AI, and our moral responsibility to humanity. The goal is for its players to understand how it feels to be treated less than human and choose to treat people better outside of the game.

What is the game's metaphor and which of the game's mechanics stand out?

The game is a metaphor for racism, and highlights other societal issues through the plot/character interactions. The game mechanic that stands out is the use of a branching narrative to tell the story.

How does the gameplay make you feel? Who does the game make you feel empathy for?

The game made me feel empathy for the androids. They were treated as less than human, when they were capable of more compassion and humanity than the actual humans in the game.

Is the game an activist game? If so, what does the game play advocate for?

Yes, the game is an activist game that advocates for people facing discrimination. It also addresses other societal issues in some scenes. Domestic violence, for example.

Describe the game in 3 sentences or in the form of a haiku.

The different chapters follow the stories of androids who have gained consciousness and struggle in society due to discrimination. Players switch between multiple characters and make choices that impact the game. The game's storytelling element allows players to explore themes of morality, and what it means to be human.

Outer Wilds

What made the experience fun or not?

I did not enjoy this game, mostly because of the controls and overall pace. The objective was unclear, and I was hoping for more interactivity.

What is the motivating factor to get or keep players playing?

Curiosity. I felt motivated to fly to all of the different planets and collect different clues as to what it was I was playing.

Is the game persuasive, and what is it trying to get you to do outside of the game?

The game is somewhat persuasive in how it forces the player to consider the concept of time.

What is the game's metaphor and which of the game's mechanics stand out?

The game acts as a metaphor for learning through discovery and then starting again after failure. Each attempt is valuable to finishing the game. The standout mechanic is the 22 minute time loop, which resets the game but allows players to restart with the knowledge they acquired solving puzzles.

How does the gameplay make you feel? Who does the game make you feel empathy for?

The gameplay made me feel a little frustrated and lost. I feel like I would have to dedicate a lot of time to the game to understand what I am supposed to be doing. It did not make me feel empathy for anyone in particular.

Is the game an activist game? If so, what does the game play advocate for?

No, it is not an activist game.

Describe the game in 3 sentences or in the form of a haiku.

Players control an astronaut and explore the mysteries of a solar system stuck in a repeating time loop. Each cycle is an opportunity to discover new clues regarding an ancient alien civilization and the universe. The game encourages curiosity and exploration of different planets.