What is a Game?

GDD 450

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See also references at end of slides (if any)

By Now

- You are Seniors

- You know the answer to this right?

- Any suggestions?
  - What is a Game?
    - Write some of your thoughts down

A Definition

- A Game is
  - a **play activity** with **rules** that involves **conflict**

- Problem?
  - It says nothing about how to design a game

Formal Elements

- Perhaps easier to discuss a game in terms of its *component parts*
  - rules
  - resources
  - actions
  - story
  - …

- These may also be called "*formal elements*" of a game

Distinguishing Between Games

- Consider the game
  - Three to Fifteen

- Heard of it?

- It was described in the introduction to this class

3 to 15

- 2 player game

- Goal:
  - Collect a set of three numbers that add to 15

Rules

- Setup
  - Write the numbers 1 through 9 at the top of a sheet of paper
  - Below that draw a line to divide the paper into 2 halves
    - one half for each player

  - Choose a player to go first

- Play Progression
  - on your turn
    - choose a number that has not yet been used
    - cross it off the list of numbers at the top
    - write it on your 'half' of the paper (to show it is yours)

- Resolution
  - if either player acquires a set of three numbers that add to 15 then that player wins
  - if all the numbers are used and neither player has such a set of three then the game is a draw
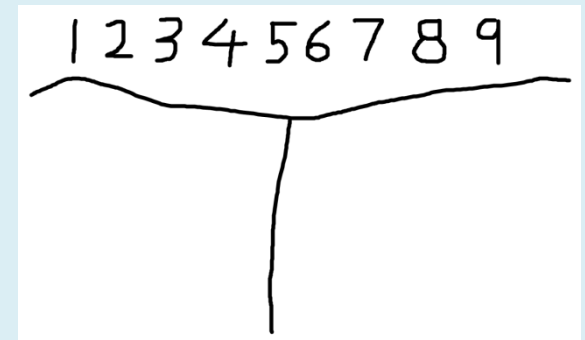
Consider

- Introduce this table to the game

- And what does the game become?

6	7	2
1	5	9
8	3	4

Same or Different?

- Same game?

- Different games?

6	7	2
1	5	9
8	3	4

- Answer?
  - depends on what the question really means.

Common Vocabulary

- To talk about something
  - Helps if all the people talking
    - agree to what certain words mean

- Allows us to talk about games and analyze games in a critical fashion
  - examine and discuss the parts of a game
    - how they fit together
    - both good and bad

Common Game Presentation

- Compare the "new" game idea to what already exists
  - Grand Theft meets WOW

- May be a good description
  - Unless the audience is not familiar with one or more of the existing games

Define New Words: More Jargon?

- Could define new words

- But already have words

- **Let's try to find a way to use them clearly**
  - *recognize what they might mean*
    - *and work with that*

- Examples may also help

Definition 1

- A game has "ends and means"
  - an objective,
  - an outcome,
  - and a set of rules to get there
    - » David Parlett

Definition 2

- ## A game is
  - ### an activity involving
    - player decisions,
    - seeking objectives
    - within a "limiting context"
      - » Clark C. Abt

Definition 3

- A game has six properties
  - it is "free"
    - playing is optional and not obligatory
  - separate
    - fixed in space and time, in advance
  - has an uncertain outcome
  - is unproductive
    - generates neither goods nor wealth
  - is governed by rules
  - is "make believe"
    - not real life, but a shared separate reality
      - Roger Callois

Definition 4

- A game is a
  - voluntary effort to overcome unnecessary obstacles
    - » Bernard Suits

  - *NOTE: this definition implies*
    - *voluntary*
    - *with goals*
    - *and rules*
    - *"unnecessary"*
      - » *implying inefficiency caused by rules on purpose*

Definition 5

- Games have 4 properties
  - Closed formal system
    - formal meaning defined
  - Involve interaction
  - Involve conflict
  - Offer safety
    - as compared to what they might fully represent
      » Chris Crawford

Definition 6

- Games are a form of art
  - which the participants (players)
    - make decisions
    - to manage resources
    - using game tokens
    - in the pursuit of a goal
      - » Greg Costikyan

Definition 7

- Games are a system in which
  - players engage in
    - an artificial conflict
    - defined by rules
    - that results in a quantifiable outcome
      - i.e. there is winning and losing
        - book: *Rules of Play* by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman
        - which also lists all the above definitions

Common **Elements**?

- Games (implicitly) have **players**
- Games are an **activity**
- Games have **rules**
- Games have **conflict**
- Games have **goals**
- Games involve **decision making**
- Games are **artificial, safe, outside ordinary life**
- Games involve **no material gain** on the part of the players
- Games are **voluntary**
- Games have an **uncertain outcome**
- Games are a **representation** or **simulation** of something real but are themselves **make believe**
- Games are **inefficient**
- Games have **systems**
- Games are a form of **art**

Which is Right?

- None and All

Slippery Area

- **Puzzles**
  - crosswords, Sudoko, Rubik's Cube
    - Salen and Zimmermann = subset of games
    - Costikyan = not games, but may be contained in a game

Slippery Area

- **RPGs**
  - Dungeons & Dragons
  - Often not considered games
    - No final outcome or resolution
    - No winning or losing

Slippery Area

- **Choose-Your-Own-Adventure BOOKS**
  - Generally not considered games
    - Reading a book, not playing a game
    - But add a tear-out character sheet, some stats, skill checks in the book
      - have now an adventure module

Slippery Area

- **Stories**
  - Stories are linear
  - Games much more dynamic

  - BUT
    - most games have a story or narrative

  - Must be related somehow

End Summary

- Think about what you mean by "game"

- Know those you speak to might not agree

- May be best to find a different word
  - or perhaps an element
  - to speak about in discussion

- Use words to make things clear
  - Not vague
  - Avoid misunderstanding

Questions?

- Beyond D2L
  - Examples and information can be found online at:
    - http://docdingle.com/teaching/gdd450/

    - *Continue to more stuff as needed*

References

- Some material in these slides was derived/based on material from:
    - Ian Schreiber, Game Design Concepts
    - https://gamedesignconcepts.wordpress.com/
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