Social Play

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GAM 224
Outline

- Admin
  - Rules paper
  - Design project
  - Play paper
- Social Play
Rules paper

- Almost done grading
  - Will be done by Wednesday
Design project

- Draft design due today
- We will perform a peer self-evaluation
  - Looking for everyone to contribute
Play paper

- Due in 9 days
  - 10/24
- No rewrites
- Schemas
  - Experience
  - Pleasure
  - Meaning
  - Narrative
  - Simulation
  - Social Play
- Can choose to do the “Culture” paper instead
Schedule

- **Wednesday**
  - Quiz: Play unit
  - Katamari Damacy case study
- **Sunday (10/21)**
  - Design project presentations due
- **Monday (10/22)**
  - Make presentations in class
  - Final design
- **Wednesday (10/24)**
  - Start Culture unit
  - Play paper due
Halo 3
Social Play

- What is going on here?
- The play is not just on the screen
  - it is in the room
  - between the players
  - between the audience and the players
Social Play

- This is the foundation of most pre-computer games
  - the only way to have an opponent
- Important factor in play experience
  - how else to explain "Thunderstorm"?
  - fundamental to bluffing games
    - Pirate Dice
    - Poker
Social organization

- Internally-derived
  - the game assign social roles to players
  - or game roles with social consequences

- Externally-derived
  - the players bring their own relationships to the game
Play community

- We talk about the community that forms around a game
  - an instance of a game
    - (a game in play)
  - Can be large
    - Players + spectators + referees + hot dog vendors + ....
  - bounded game community

- Different from the community that forms around a game
  - in order to promote it and share experiences
  - unbounded game community
Roles

- Roles are sets of characteristic behaviors
  - enabled or required by the game rules
  - taking a role often requires other players to assume opposing roles

- Example
  - "it" vs the rest in a game of tag
  - offensive vs defensive team in football
Roles cont'd

- Games let players assume many social roles
- Sometimes
  - very different from their normal ones
    - thug
    - cyborg warrior
    - king
- But with distance
  - with low risk
  - "it's only a game"
- Some people (usually non-gamers) find social role experimentation disturbing
  - but this is not different from informal play
Roles in MMORPGs

- **Achievers**
  - want to achieve the highest levels and best gear
  - will explore in order to do so
  - will socialize to learn more

- **Explorers**
  - want to see more of the game
  - know the most about the map
  - know all of the spells and abilities

- **Socializers**
  - want to make friends and engage in group activities
  - will accumulate levels as necessary to keep up with group

- **Killers / Griefers**
  - want to exercise power over others
  - will accumulate levels / gear in order to be able to cause more harm
Designing for roles

- Game design can enhance or inhibit roles
  - Turn off / allow player vs player combat
    - = discourage / encourage the "killer" role
  - Enhance player to player communication
    - = encourage "socializer" role
  - Release constant geographic expansions
    - = keep "explorer" types busy
  - Make some quests unachievable by single individual
    - = require socializing by "achievers"

- Some games do all of these things
  - to try to satisfy all of the audiences
Emergent social phenomena

- Rules have social consequences
- Not always predictable how they will be realized
- May result in unexpected gameplay scenarios
- Some games try to eliminate this
  - Bridge
    - partners are screened from each other to prevent signals
    - other than standard bidding conventions
Assassin (Fall 2005)

- individual vs individual
  - one target per person
  - randomly assigned
  - restrictions on kill locations

- Consequences
  - after an initial burst of kills
    - nothing
    - no movement for weeks
  - numerous rule changes to speed things up
  - ultimately dropped players with no kills
    - left active players

- Explanation
  - "lying low" was very successful
  - social networks too sparse
Assassin (Winter 2006)

- team vs team
  - assimilation rule
  - zombie rule
  - no location restrictions
- Consequences
  - faster paced game
  - students skipping class
- Explanation
  - social networks larger
  - possibilities for teamwork
Emergence

- Couplings occur not just with in-game objects and behaviors
  - But also with external individuals and relationships
- Can be hard to predict
Rules as social contract

- Remember that play exists as a safe space for conflict
- Rules
  - mutually-agreed upon
  - binding
  - repeatable
- Play requires agreement
  - agreement generates a social relationship
  - social relationships require "negotiation" to maintain
Rule negotiation

The game becomes a place where social relationships are expressed

- "House rules"
  - Players agree to follow their own rules
  - may allow violations of standard rules
  - may enforce normally implicit rules

Social tensions in the play community

- may be expressed as conflict over rules

Book's example

- Foursquare
- "Rooie Rules"
Rule negotiation cont'd

- Not available (yet) in single-player games
- But always possible in multi-player games
  - limiting factor: tools for communication
- Example
  - WoW
    - communication with opposite faction very, very limited
    - gameplay reason
      - sense of distance and hostility to opposing side
Rule breaking

- Unsportsmanlike
  - follows the rules but doesn't acknowledge the play community
  - violates the spirit of the game

- Cheater
  - violates the rules in order to win
  - wants unfair advantage but is still playing

- Spoil-sport
  - violates the magic circle
  - denies the game its space
Forbidden play

- Play with social relationships
  - can turn into play that explores taboo areas of behavior

- The game creates distance
  - in which (otherwise) unacceptable acts are contained and removed

- Example
  - "I killed my professor today"
"Spin the Bottle"

- Rules
  - 1 player in the middle, the rest in a circle
  - center player spins a bottle
  - kisses the player pointed to

- What does the kiss mean?
  - execution of an operational rule
    - play relationship
  - satisfaction of a desire for intimacy
    - romantic relationship

- The game generates deliberate ambiguity
"Spin the Bottle" cont'd

- Play with social roles
  - allows "trying on" social possibilities
  - with lower risk
  - without all of the normal consequences
Cybering

- using the socialization mechanics of an on-line game
- to create forbidden romantic / sexual play
  - [Naughty America: The Game](https://www.naughtyamerica.com)
Unbounded community

- How wide does the social network of a game spread?
  - can be very large
  - 5 million World of Warcraft subscribers (1/6)
- Not all on-line together
  - or in the same realm
- But there are other means of connection
  - blogs
  - fan sites
  - guilds
Guilds

- Social organizations
  - Specifically for ORPG players
- Mutual support
- In-game group activities
- Might have tens or hundreds of members
Design questions

- What kinds of social relationships do you want the game to support / discourage?
- What tools do players need to enable these relations?
- Can social networks help market the game and draw in new players?
Monday

- Presentations
  - submit the powerpoint slides by Sunday night