

# Games as systems of pleasure, goals, and rewards

Foundations of Interactive Game Design  
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UC SANTA CRUZ



# Today's Assignment

- **Game Ontology Assignment**
  - ▶ **Due Today**
  - ▶ May turn this assignment in by midnight tonight

# Upcoming Assignments

- **Next week:**

- ▶ **No class Monday**

- ❖ President's Day Holiday

- ▶ **Partially Operational Game Prototype**

- ❖ Due Wednesday, February 21
- ❖ Need to have started your game
- ❖ Need to have at least some things working already
- ❖ Will have evening help sessions on Tuesday, Feb 20
- ❖ Submit game on CDROM or USB drive
  - Come to help sessions for assistance with this
  - Clearly mark with Team Name, Individual Names, and Game Name

- ▶ **Progress Report**

- ❖ Also due Wednesday, February 21
- ❖ An update on where things stand in your schedule
- ❖ Is your project completing tasks on schedule, or falling behind?

- ▶ **Details on course web site**

# Game Maker/RPG Maker Help Sessions

- Help sessions next week
- **Tuesday: Game Maker**
  - ▶ 12-1:10pm, E&MS B214
    - ❖ Ken Hullett
  - ▶ 6-9pm, E2 215
    - ❖ David Olsen, Tim Davis, Jeff Brizzolara
    - ❖ After hours, knock on windows for entry
- **Tuesday: RPG Maker**
  - ▶ 6-9pm, E2 280
    - ❖ Nate Emond, Nic Kent
- **Thursday: Game Maker**
  - ▶ 4-5:10pm, E&MS B214
    - ❖ Jacob Telleen

# Games as the Play of Pleasure

- The space of possibility created by a game is more than the mathematically defined potential inherent in its formal rules
- A game must be **pleasurable** for the player
- As a game designer, you are the sculptor of a space of possible pleasure
  - ▶ You must intentionally create a pleasurable experience

# Constraints and Pleasure

- Several ways in which rules contribute to pleasure
  - ▶ Recall that rules create limitations and affordances
- **Submitting to rules**
  - ▶ Players submit to the rules, and subordinate their behaviors to the restrictions of the rules
  - ▶ In so doing, they experience the pleasure of play
  - ▶ By being rule bound, the play activity is *more fun*
- **Free play**
  - ▶ Rules create affordances for action
  - ▶ Players derive pleasure from being part of the system of a game
  - ▶ The ability to perform certain actions within the framework of the rules is part of the pleasure of playing a game
  - ▶ “Free play is dependent on, yet also resists, the rigid structures that give rise to it.” (*Rules of Play*, p. 331)

# Constraints and Pleasure (2)

- **Lusory Attitude**

- ▶ Rules create artificial restrictions
  - ❖ In a foot race, waiting for the starting gun, and running around the track, not across it
- ▶ Rules simultaneously restrain and enable pleasure
- ▶ “The willingness of players to step into these artificial systems in order to experience the resulting pleasure is at the heart of the lusory attitude.” (*Rules of Play*, p. 331)

- **Stylized Behavior**

- ▶ Rules of a game cause players to act and behave in stylized ways
- ▶ Interactions between a pitcher and catcher in baseball
- ▶ Movements of players playing DDR or Guitar Hero
- ▶ Acceptability of trash talk during player vs player computer game play

# Autotelic Play

- Games are constructed to be self-contained worlds
  - ▶ The limits of meaning of the game are constrained to the game world
  - ▶ The value of playing the game is *intrinsic* to the game
  - ▶ Playing the game is its own reward, not done with expectation of external (or *extrinsic*) reward
- The term *autotelic* captures this notion of games
  - ▶ **Auto:** self
  - ▶ **Telos:** goal
  - ▶ Literally, a self-goal: the game itself provides its own goal
- Not entirely true
  - ▶ Many instances of games that have extrinsic goals
  - ▶ Betting on cards, professional sports
  - ▶ Even when there are extrinsic reasons for play, there are always intrinsic motivations

# Why is autotelic nature of games important?

- The pleasure and value of a game largely comes from its intrinsic appeal
- Implications
  - ▶ Players play games because they derive pleasure from doing so
  - ▶ Game play is a voluntary activity
  - ▶ People may perform jobs that aren't fun for sufficient money
  - ▶ People rarely play games that are not pleasurable
    - ❖ Why bother? There are so many other pleasurable things one could do.
- “People play games because they want to; game designers must create experiences that both feed and satisfy this sense of desire.” *(Rules of Play, p. 333)*

# The Double Seduction

- To **start** gameplay, players must cross over into the magic circle
  - ▶ Players must want to play the game
  - ▶ **First seduction**
    - ❖ Designer must entice players to cross over the threshold and into the magic circle
    - ❖ Requires the **design of desire**
    - ❖ No well understood ways to accomplish this. Marketing helps.
- To **continue** gameplay players must desire to stay in the magic circle
  - ▶ Keep playing until the goals have been met
  - ▶ **Second seduction**
    - ❖ Designer must create a continually pleasurable experience to keep players engaged
    - ❖ Requires the **design of pleasure**
    - ❖ What do we even mean by this? Stay tuned...

# Conditioning

- B.F. Skinner:
  - ▶ People behave the way they do as a result of a process of **conditioning**
  - ▶ They do certain things because those have been **rewarded** in the past
  - ▶ They avoid others due to **punishments**, or negative experiences
- People like to receive rewards

# Rewards and Game Design

“It’s surprising how many developers forget that it’s the victories and the treasures—not the obstacles—that make people interested in playing in the first place. If you stop giving out the carrots that will keep players excited, or even worse, if you start punishing them for their curiosity, you’re only going to drive away the very people who want to enjoy your game.”

Neal and Jana Halford (in *Rules of Play*, p. 345)

# Rewards and Game Design

- Game designers need to explicitly think about reward structures in their games
  - ▶ Types of rewards in computer games:
    - ❖ Giving bonus points, extra lives, powerups, access to a hidden location, playing an animation
    - ❖ Other examples of rewards?
  - ▶ Types of punishments
    - ❖ Loss of life, being forced to redo a level, force feedback jolt
    - ❖ Other examples of punishments?

# Types of Rewards

- **Rewards of Glory**

- ▶ Things given to the player that have no impact on gameplay itself
- ▶ Winning game by getting to the end, completing a particularly difficult side quest

- **Rewards of Sustenance**

- ▶ Given to player to maintain avatar's status quo
- ▶ Health packs that cure injuries, health potions, etc.

- **Rewards of Access**

- ▶ Give players access to new locations or resources
  - ❖ Generally used only once
- ▶ Keys, picklocks, access codes, etc.

- **Rewards of Facility**

- ▶ Allow player to do things previously not possible
- ▶ Powerups, new abilities (double jump), etc.

# Goals

- Games need both long-term and intermediate goals
  - ▶ The long-term goal provides the overarching goal of the game
  - ▶ Legend of Zelda: collecting all pieces of the triforce crystal
- However, it can often take hours to achieve this goal
  - ▶ Need short-term, more immediately accomplishable goals
  - ▶ Player can achieve these quickly, then move on to the next goal
    - ❖ Clearing a wave of enemies in a Shmup, getting to the end of a level in a Platformer, solving a puzzle in a text-based Interactive Fiction
  - ▶ Successfully completing a goal provides pleasure to the player
    - ❖ Pleasure of accomplishment
  - ▶ Failure to accomplish intermediate goal can lead to frustration