

Definitions of Games and Play

Magic Circle

Foundations of Interactive Game Design
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Upcoming Assignments

- Course web site:
 - <http://www.soe.ucsc.edu/classes/cmcs080k/Winter09/>
- Due next week in section: team selection
 - Find your partner for your game project
 - Pick team name
 - Gather two items of contact info (email, cell phone)
 - Two times during the week when the team can meet for at least one hour
 - Default location for meetings
- Due next week in section: Game Maker Tutorial #2
 - Creating a scrolling shooter
 - Customize tutorial game to modify appearance of one user interface element
- See web site for details

Are these games?

- Consider these activities:
 - ▶ Children playing with dolls
 - ▶ Jumping rope
 - ▶ Using a slot machine in Las Vegas
 - ▶ Russian roulette
 - ▶ Playing Monopoly
 - ▶ Driving



Kaba Kick: Russian roulette “for kids.” Instead of bullets, a pair of feet come out the barrel. If gun doesn’t fire, player earns points.

Source: 209.180.204.251/russian-roulette/index.html



Challenges in creating definitions of games

- What are unique qualities that make a game a game?
- How to differentiate games from play, conflict, and merely rule governed activities?
- Some qualities of games
 - Has rules
 - Has a goal
 - Involves decision making
 - Safe, outside of ordinary life
 - Voluntary
 - Outcome is uncertain
- Ideally, definitions of games should address these

Clark Abt Definition

- In *Serious Games*, Clark C. Abt defines games as follows:

▸ Reduced to its formal essence, a game is an *activity* among two or more independent *decision-makers* seeking to achieve their *objectives* in some *limiting context*. A more conventional definition would say that a game is a context with rules among adversaries trying to win objectives.

- Key elements of definition

- **Activity**

- ❖ Game is a series of actions taking place over time

- **Decision makers**

- ❖ People playing the game are actively making decisions

- **Objectives**

- ❖ There is a goal to the game, a desired outcome

- **Limiting context**

- ❖ Rules exist that structure and limit the activity of the game



Abt Definition Applied

- Reduced to its formal essence, a game is an *activity* among two or more independent *decision-makers* seeking to achieve their *objectives* in some *limiting context*.
- How does this definition apply to the six activities from earlier this lecture?
 - Children playing with dolls
 - Jumping rope
 - Using a slot machine in Las Vegas
 - Russian roulette
 - Playing Monopoly
 - Driving
- Which of these would Abt consider to be a game?

Costikyan Definition

- A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in pursuit of a goal.

- Key elements

- **Art**

- ❖ Games are a form of art, hence creating culture

- **Decision making players**

- ❖ Players actively participating and making choices

- **Resource management**

- ❖ Decisions made depend on resources available, and manipulate resources

- **Game tokens**

- ❖ Representation of the state of the game, affordances for user action

- **Goal**

- ❖ Objective of the game



costik.com

Costikyan Definition Applied

- A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in pursuit of a goal.
- Apply to class list of activities
 - Children playing with dolls
 - Jumping rope
 - Using a slot machine in Las Vegas
 - Russian roulette
 - Playing Monopoly
 - Driving
- Which of these would Costikyan consider to be a game?

Jesper Juul's Classic Game Definition

- From *Half-Real*, Jesper Juul, MIT Press, 2005, p. 36
- **Rules**
 - Games are rule-based
- **Variable, quantifiable outcome**
 - Games have varying endings, with different numbers assignable to specific outcomes
- **Valorization of outcome**
 - The different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values, some positive and some negative
- **Player effort**
 - The player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome
 - ❖ Games are challenging



jesperjuul.net

Juul's Classic Game Definition (2)

- **Player attached to outcome**

- ▶ The player is emotionally attached to the outcome of the game in the sense that a player will be a “winner” and happy in case of a positive outcome, but a loser and “unhappy” in case of a negative outcome.

- **Negotiable consequences**

- ▶ The same game [set of rules] can be played with or without real-world consequences.
- ▶ Examples
 - ❖ Poker: Can play this game without betting real money. Once money is bet, the game has real-world consequences.

Application of Juul's Classic Game Definition

- Juul's Classic Game Definition (overview):
 - Rules
 - Variable, quantifiable outcome
 - Valorization of outcome
 - Player effort
 - Player attached to outcome
 - Negotiable consequences
- Apply to set of six activities
 - Children playing with dolls
 - Jumping rope
 - Using a slot machine in Las Vegas
 - Russian roulette
 - Playing Monopoly
 - Driving

Play

- Let's shift our focus to play.
- Johann Huizinga's 1938 book *Homo Ludens* defines play as:
 - [Play is] a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.
- Does good job capturing essence of play
 - "absorbing the player intensely and utterly"
- Does not well distinguish games and play
 - Children's play is not strongly rule based, but is definitely play
- Do games always create social groupings?

Roger Caillois Definition of Play

- From *Man, Play, and Games*, play is:
- **Free**
 - Playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion
- **Separate**
 - Circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance
- **Uncertain**
 - the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative
- **Unproductive**
 - Creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind, and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game.

Roger Caillois Definition (cont'd)

- **Governed by Rules**

- Under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts

- **Make-believe**

- Accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life

- **Good points**

- Identifies play as being voluntary
- Captures importance of fictional element of play

- **Bad points**

- Easy to think of counter-examples
 - ❖ Professional sports players are not voluntarily playing (have signed a contract)
 - ❖ Some games are purely abstract, with no fictional aspect (Tic-Tac-Toe)
 - ❖ Children's play is not strongly rule based

The Magic Circle

- When children play games and call “time out!” what does this mean?
 - Gameplay **time** stops
 - Players go **out** of the game space
- Michael Apter writes:
 - In the play-state you experience a protective frame which stands between you and the “real” world and its problems, creating an enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come.
- Game Studies researchers call this enchanted zone the *magic circle*
 - Term originally comes from Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*
 - Elegantly captures the notion of the boundaries of a game



Salen and Zimmerman on Magic Circle

- The fact that the magic circle is just that—a circle—is an important feature of this concept. As a closed circle, the space it circumscribes is enclosed and separate from the real world. As a marker of time, the magic circle is like a clock: it simultaneously represents a path with a beginning and end, but one without beginning and end. The magic circle inscribes a space that is repeatable, a space both limited and limitless. In short, a finite space with infinite possibility.

▸ p. 95, *Rules of Play*



Magic Circle (1886)
John William Waterhouse

