

Dialogue in video games

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Dialogue is hardwired into the very matrix of video games, not only because they are an interactive medium, but because they are an *active* one: they react to input by players and can offer their own input. From the beginning, rule structures in video games were communicated through language. The more emphasis a game puts on narrative, the more this turned into a dialogue with the player. Video games are usually at least implicitly cast as second-person narratives, hinting at or enacting a dialogue between the narrator/game master and the player. The player's avatar also communicates within the game. This chapter looks systematically at the relationship between ludic and dialogic structures and at the various forms that dialogue has taken in video games.

Introduction

Since video games often present their gameworlds in the form of fictional story-worlds, it is only logical that they also include dialogue, and indeed, dialogue in one form or another has been a constant feature since the earliest history of video games' development. Just like the presentation of a fictional world, dialogue is in no way necessary for video games to function, and communication of any kind is scarce, if not non-existent in such early examples as *Pong* (1972) or *Space Invaders* (1978). However, these represent only one strand of video games' development (that tends towards quick, intuitive and reflexive action), while another strand is represented by examples such as *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976). This latter game emphasised games' ability to reference something, to be "about" something (in this case a colossal cave, modelled on the Mammoth Cave system in Kentucky), and it used verbal communication as its main way of interaction with the user. In this early example, originally written by a single programmer in his spare-time, such communication is of course still rather simple. But since then, dialogues in video games have been professionally produced, both regarding the scriptwriting and the voice acting, and it has become an important feature for reviewers judging the aesthetic value of a new game.