

Gameplay Design Assignment 1 - What is a game?

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1 My definition of a game

My definition of a game is as follows:

A game is an art form expressed as an interactive crafted experience, with a set of rules and potential use of agents, in which players engage and make decisions using resources to achieve either a predetermined or self-established goal.

1.1 Explanation and reasoning behind my definition

That that I've established my definition of a game, let's dissect it's parts in order to understand the concepts involved in it. Firstly I start by saying that a game is an art form expressed as an interactive crafted experience, I call it an art form as it's supposed to evoke feelings in the player, this also means that there needs to be some sort of input between the player (the user playing the game) and the game system (game system being a "player-organized or designer-created collection of game mechanics" [1]) itself, a two-way flow of information is needed, in addition it is a crafted experience as it needs to have been developed by one or more entities. Next I say that it has a set of rules, this is based on the game definition of Johan Huizinga "according to fixed rules" [2, page 30] and was included because, without a proper set of rules defined, a game could not be conducted in a organized manner, making it complete chaos.

Furthermore I mention the potential use of agents, the word "potential" is used, as agents (a character/entity or object provided by a game, that has some sort of behaviour and it's not controlled by the player and that may be AI driven, this definition of an agent is derived from unity's definition [3] and my understanding of the term), might or might not be employed depending on the intended design of the game. I also refer to players engaging and making decisions using resources, this is partly based on Greg Costikyan's definition, when they mention that players "make decisions in order to manage resources" [2, page 34] and it's included due to me considering that resources in a game are a vital component of a game as they can be used in a myriad of way (to incentives decision making, to create a game economy, to support the player, etc.).

Finally, I mention that, in a game, it exists either a predetermined goal (so a goal that was intended on by the game designer/creator) or a self-established

goal (so a goal that a player creates for themselves) in order to give the player a purpose, as without a goal there wouldn't be a game.

1.2 Comparison of my definition to others

1.2.1 Bernard Suits definition [2, page 33]

Bernard Suits has a similar definition of what a game is to mine, both definitions define playing a game as engaging into an activity (or experience in my case), to achieve a "specific state of affairs" [2, page 33], or in my case, goals. Bernard Suits also mentions the use of rules similar to my definition. There are, however, a couple of differences between our definitions, I define game as a crafted experience, meaning it is designed/created by someone (on the other side Bernard Suits calls it simply an "activity", not necessarily defining it as a crafted thing), Bernard Suits also defines playing as a "voluntary effort" and in my definition I do not mention it being as being a voluntary activity as I believe you're still playing a game even if involuntarily (for example the games in the movie franchise "Saw").

1.2.2 Clark C. Abt definition [2, page 29]

Clark C. Abt shares similar ideas as to what a game is compared to my definition, as in, to them a game is an activity (and activity here is similar yet slightly different to my definition, as I defined it as a crafted experience) between decision makers to achieve their objective (a goal, or perhaps in this case it's more correct to compare "their objectives" to me specifying self-established goals on my definition, as it alludes to something the decision-makers set for themselves) in a limiting context (rules). A clear difference is the absence of mentioning agents in a game in Clark C. Abt's definition.

1.2.3 Johan Huizinga definition [2, page 30]

Johan Huizinga has a definition that has some differences and similarities to mine. Similarities being that we both talk about playing as being something engaging, in Johan Huizinga's case describing it as "absorbing the player" and both our definitions include the use of rules. Differences between the way we define games are that Johan Huizinga talks about games as "consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious"" [2, page 30] which is something not mentioned in my definition as I believe games can be part of someone's

ordinary life and it can also be a very serious thing (for example esports). Another difference is that Johan Huizinga describes games as "an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it." [2, page 30], this sentiment is not shared in my definition as I see games as something which one can derive profit from (whether it's from in-game transactions or live-streaming a game, etc.).

1.2.4 Greg Costikyan definition [2, page 34]

Greg Costikyan's definition shares a lot of resemblances with mine, both call games a form of art, both include players that make decisions and manage (use) resources to pursuit (achieve) a goal. Perhaps the only major difference is that Greg Costikyan does not include the possible use of game agents.

1.2.5 John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern definition [2, page 36]

John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern have a very rational approach to defining a game, they utilize "agents" as players (a difference from my definition, as I make a clear distinction between the two), and talk about how their "goal" is to maximize their expected utility index by choosing a particular courses of action (decisions), maximizing their expected utility however is different from how I define a "goal", let's take a goal a player sets from themselves (a self-established one), they might not do it to maximize their utility but rather to do something that they find fun or entertaining. One a final note, the way they define a game, at least to my interpretation, due to how logical it is, makes it so that it isn't an art form, it's more of a rational set of decisions made to produce the best possible outcome, instead of being something made to invoke certain feelings.

1.2.6 Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman definition [2, page 38]

Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman also define a game as something that players engage within a set of rules, in an artificial conflict (similar to my "crafted experience" or even the "self-established" goals, so basically something created by someone). They also mention the result of a game being a "quantifiable outcome" [2, page 38] which goes against my idea of a game being an art form that invokes emotions, the result of a game, to me,

can simply be an emotion caused on a player, and this I don't believe to be quantifiable.

2 What classifies as being a game according to my definition?

2.1 High jump

According to Wikipedia "High jump is a track and field event in which competitors must jump unaided over a horizontal bar placed at measured heights without dislodging it" [4], so with that in mind, I would argue that it is a game according to my definition. It's interactive (players jump, and can even touch the bar), it's crafted (this game was devised by someone), it has a set of rules (players must jump over the bar without touching it), agents might be involved (for example the coach), decisions are made using resources (this decisions can included things like: when to jump, how to bend your body in the most optimal way, and resources can be, for example, the energy spent to do the activity), there's also a predetermined goal (to jump over the bar) and it can invoke all sorts of emotions in players (if they make the jump they might express excitement for example).

2.2 Sudoku

According to Wikipedia "Sudoku is a logic-based, combinatorial number-placement puzzle." [5], so taking that into account I believe sudoku is a game according to my definition, it's interactive (players have to write down the numbers on the tiles), it's crafted (it was created by someone), it has a set of rules, players need to make decisions using resources (they need to place numbers in the appropriate tiles depending on certain rules and other number placements), there's a predetermined goal (filling all tiles with the correct numbers) and finally it can invoke certain feelings in players.

2.3 Gambling

Gambling has many forms, but they all fall in to playing according my definition. Card-based (more skill-based gambling) games have rules, agents (the dealer for example), a goal (to win the game), decisions need to be made, they

invoke feelings in players, they're interactive and crafted (someone created the games). Same goes for more luck-based gambling like slots or lottery, there's some sort of input (spinning the wheel on a slot or writing down the numbers on a lottery ticket), there's rules, decisions are made (in a lottery ticket, players decide what numbers to choose, or in a slot they decide what mode to play or when to stop), they try to achieve a goal (to win as much money as possible) and it can also invoke certain feelings (they might be disappointed if they lose).

2.4 Programs playing chess

If two programs are playing chess I believe that they are playing a game (according to my definition), the key factors here are determining if the programs can be considered players or not, and they can, one could say that according to what I defined they would be "agents" and not players, however I define agents as entities provided by the game itself, in this case the programs are not provided by the game but by the people who created them. The other key factor is that a game is an art form but the programs cannot feel, but the game itself (in this case chess) is the thing created to invoke feelings, so even though feelings are not present in the programs it was still intended by the game to provoke them, so if the players do feel something or not, is a topic that falls outside the definition of a game (it's the game's responsibility to try to invoke feelings, but it's not mandatory that the players actually have to feel, the game can try to do it but fail). With that established, they are playing a game as they are players, who are engaged in a crafted activity (someone created chess), that has rules and they make decisions to achieve a goal (winning the game).

2.5 Street fighting vs. professional fighting

A curious case of what is and isn't a game according to my definition is fighting, fighting professionally is a game, there's rules, players (the fighters), an agent (the referee), a goal (to win the match), it invokes feelings in the players, it's a crafted activity (someone created the game) and there's decision making (when to attack, defend, etc.). On the other hand street fighting is not a game, as it has no rules, no agents and it's not a crafted experience.

2.6 Watching a movie

Watching a movie can be considered a borderline game, as it's almost a game. It invokes feelings, it's engaging, it's crafted and it has rules (you can only watch it in a cinema or at home if purchased, also it has a set time), however there isn't a goal (finishing the movie could be considered one but the movie will finish regardless therefore it's not really a goal) and there's not players or decisions they can make.

3 What a game designer should focus on

Taking into account my definition of a game, game designers should focus on creating experiences that invoke their intended ways of feeling in a player, while using set rules and resources to create interesting and motivating goals for them. So their main focus should be to design something that clearly passes the message they're trying to convey.

References

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