

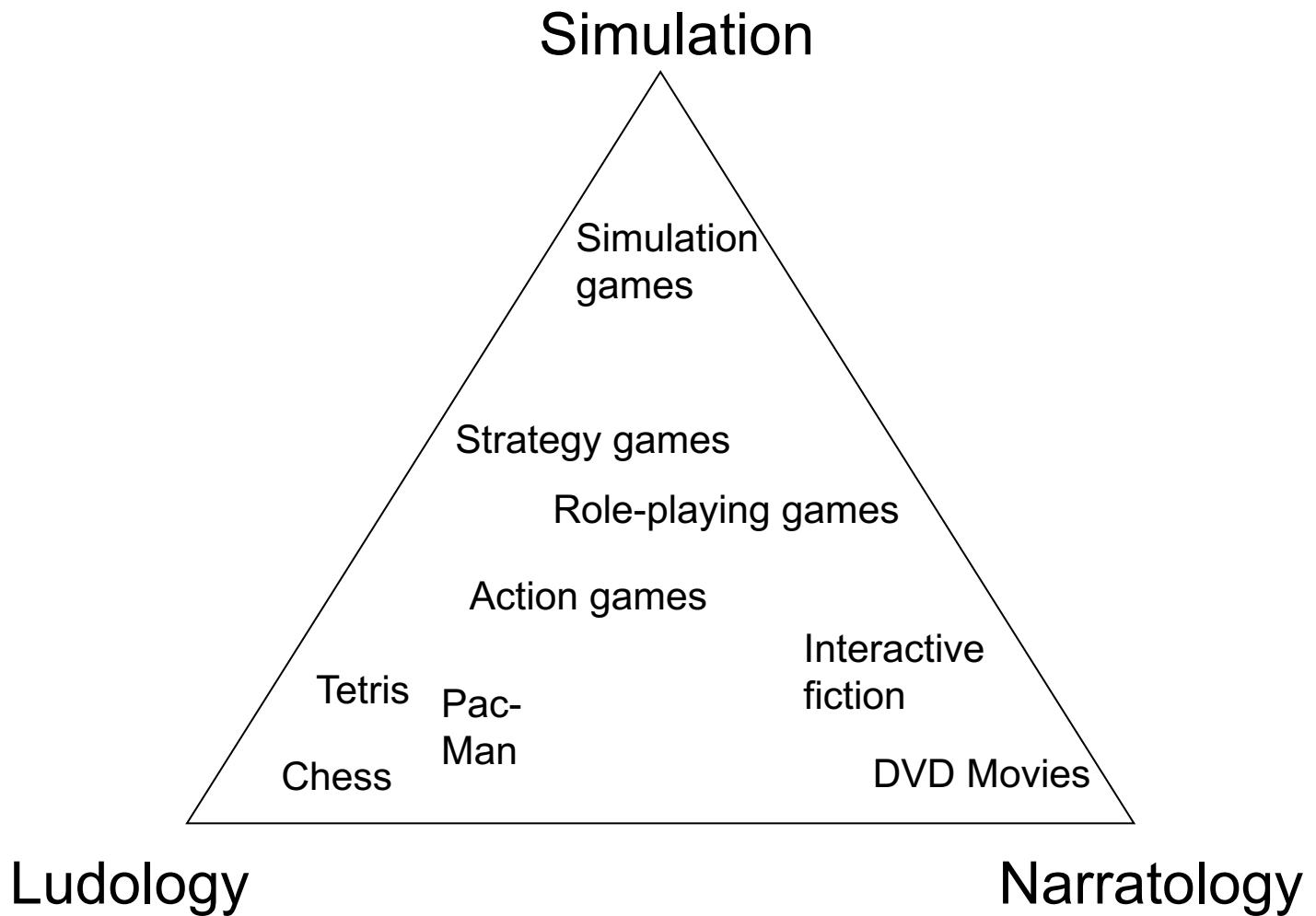
# G54GAM Games

Categorising Games  
Genres, Meaningful Play

# Core Mechanics

- What the player *does* within the system, as allowed by the rules
- A game's core mechanic contains the experiential building blocks of player activity
- Repeated over-and-over again
  - Create patterns of behaviour
  - Manifest as experience for players
  - The mechanism within / by which players make choices and have a **meaningful** experience
    - “Free movement within a more rigid structure”

# Craig Lindley (2003)



# Varying the core mechanic

- A common practice with early arcade games
  - Pacman, Breakout
    - Repetitive core mechanic, easy to complete, then you do it again, and again...
  - Slight variations of core mechanic provide a “new” game
    - Add time limits, multiple levels, invert the mouse, change the behaviour of game elements
    - Same interactivity, different experience
    - Some successful, some not
- Arguably few *pure* core mechanics, many variations on a theme

# Classifying games

- Position within a spectrum
  - Simulation, narrative focus, ludological focus
- A range of variables
  - Players, goals, rules, challenges, mode, setting
- An description of the core mechanic
- A taxonomy of games
  - Group by “genre” or similarities in one or more dimensions, common elements
  - An inexact science, open to debate
    - Adams and Rollings

# Action games

- Real-time games in which the player must react quickly
- Require quick reflexes and timing to overcome obstacles
- Emphasis often on combat
  - Reaction tests, hand-eye coordination tests
  - Skill is a primary factor of play
- Sub genres
  - *Shooters*
    - First-person shooters
    - Scrolling shooters
  - *Platformers*
  - Fighting
- Rules fundamentally describe the game mechanics
  - Lives, energy, score, time limits, collectibles, waves, bosses

# Breakout (1976)



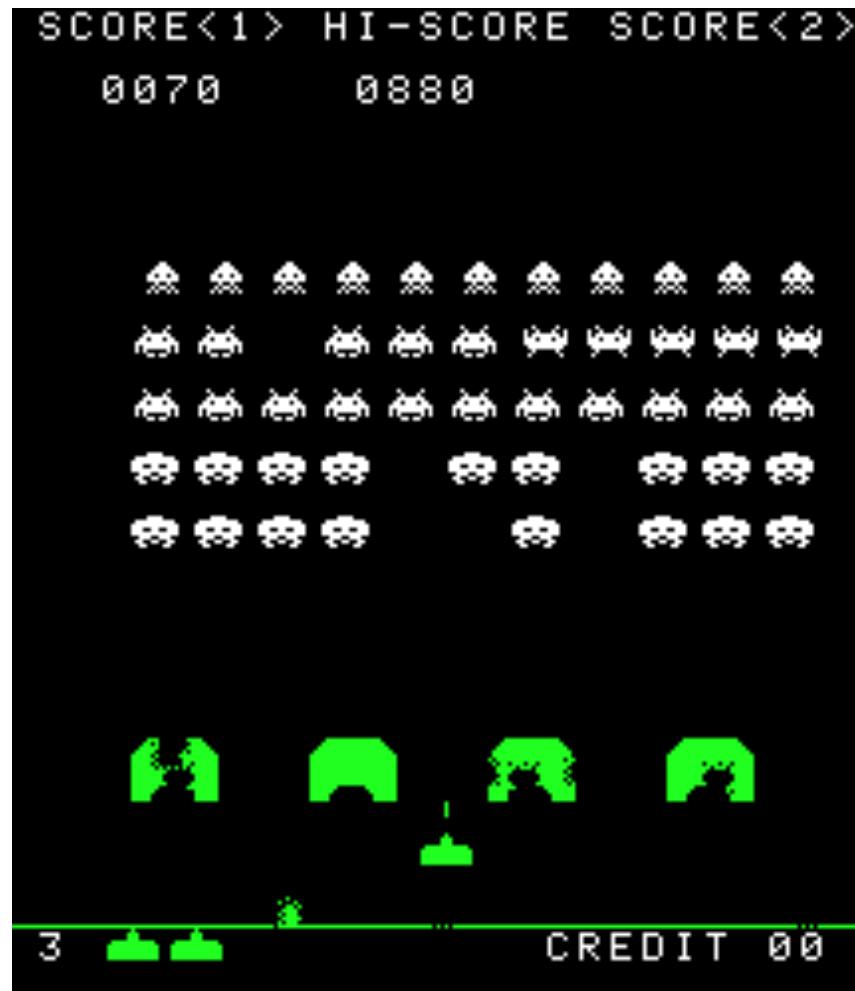
# Wolfenstein (1992)



# Counter Strike – Global Offensive (2012)



# Space Invaders (1978)



# R-Type (1987)



# Super Mario Bros (1985)



# Street Fighter (1987)



# Tekken 7 (2016)



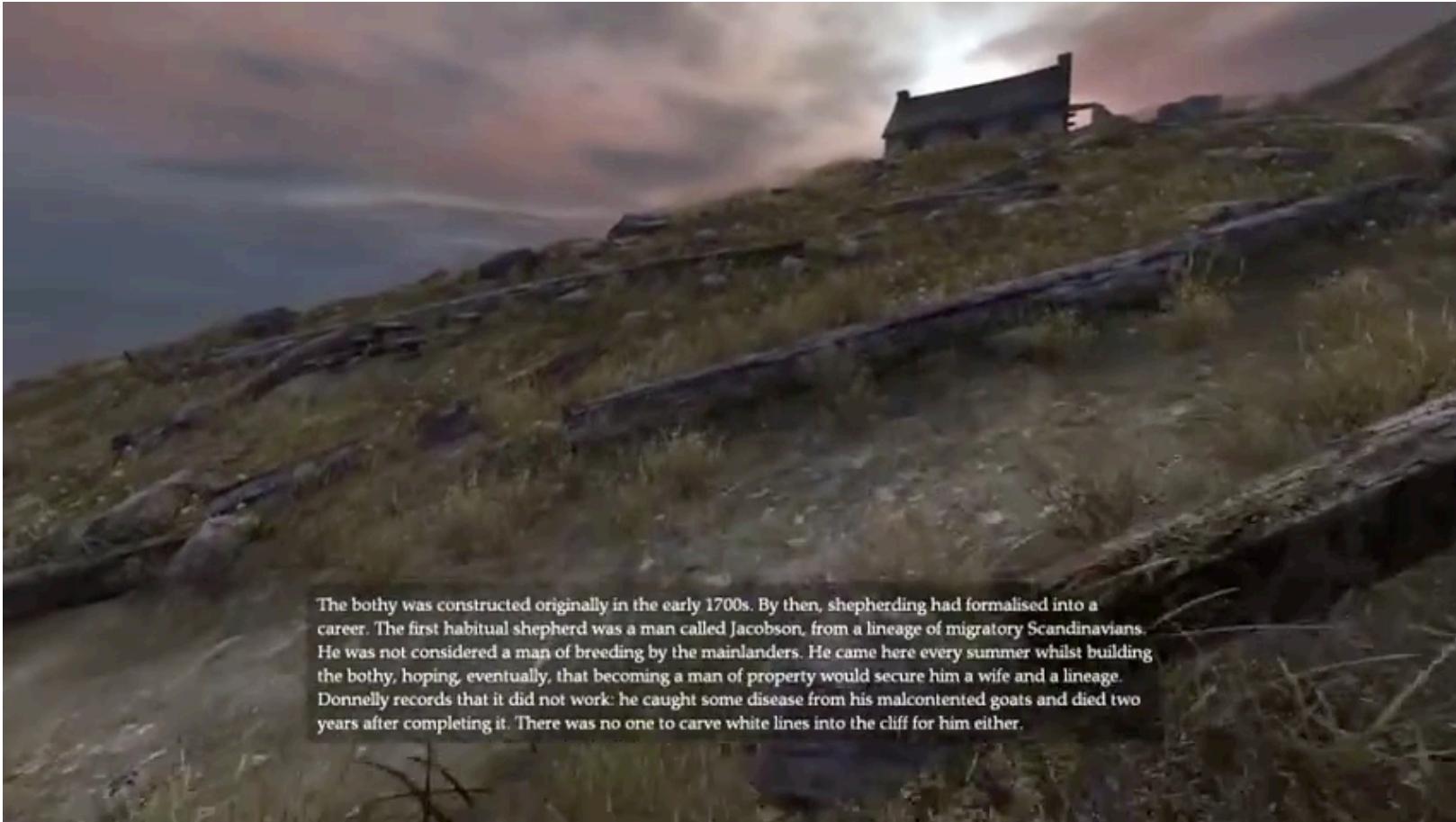
# Adventure

- Solve puzzles by exploring and interacting with people or the environment
  - Setting is not incidental
    - C.f. Breakout
  - Manipulation of objects, dialogue
- Text-based “interactive fiction” or graphical
  - The player is usually represented by someone inside a *narrative*
  - A more sophisticated *emotional tone*
  - Highly structured narrative
- 1st, 2nd or 3rd person
- Often non-confrontational
  - Often said to appeal to those who do not normally play video games
  - Few *failure states* / catastrophic deaths

# Myst (1993)



# Dear Esther (2008)



The bothy was constructed originally in the early 1700s. By then, shepherding had formalised into a career. The first habitual shepherd was a man called Jacobson, from a lineage of migratory Scandinavians. He was not considered a man of breeding by the mainlanders. He came here every summer whilst building the bothy, hoping, eventually, that becoming a man of property would secure him a wife and a lineage. Donnelly records that it did not work: he caught some disease from his malcontented goats and died two years after completing it. There was no one to carve white lines into the cliff for him either.

# Action-adventure

- Combine elements of action and adventure genres (!)
- Long-term obstacles and challenges as found in adventure games
  - Exploration
  - Item collection and use
  - Puzzle solving
- Many immediate challenges as found in action games
  - Combat
  - Reactions and hand-eye coordination

# Tomb Raider (1996)



# Resident Evil (1996)



# Strategy

- Many similarities with board games
  - Warhammer 40K
  - Discrete, turn-based interaction
    - A consistent and balanced rule-set
- Require careful thinking and planning to achieve victory
  - Management of a limited set of resources, not necessarily combat
  - Deciding which units to build and where and when to deploy them
  - Often a “godlike” *view* of the game world
    - Indirectly control semi-autonomous units
- Theme, simulation are as important as rules
  - Conquest, trade, explore
- Real time (RTS)
- Turn based (TBS)

# Worms (1995)



# Age of Empires 3 (2005)



# Role Playing Games (RPGs)

- Inspired by traditional role-playing games
  - Dungeons and Dragons
- Choose to play one of a number of different characters
  - Elf, dwarf, wizard, thief...
  - High player agency in determining character
  - Focus on gradually increasing abilities of the character by completing quests
    - Experience
    - Skills, equipment, special abilities
  - Highly narrative driven
    - *Character development*
    - Theme gives player agency
- Turn-based or real-time combat

# Angband (1990)

You have no more Scrolls of Summon Monster (o).

Dwarf

Soldier

Warrior

LEVEL 8

NXT 95

AU 567

I ~(( ))]]

STR: 18/30

INT: 12

WIS: 11

DEX: 14

CON: 16

CHR: 9

Cur AC 21

HP 56/ 108



200' (L4)

# World of Warcraft (2004)



# Fallout 3 (2008)



# Fallout (1997)

Our existence: a subterranean fallout shelter modified to house 1000 people indefinitely after a nuclear holocaust. It's been nearly 80 years, and we still don't have any idea what's out there. Sure we've sent out volunteer scouts, but none of them returned....

Now our water recycler has failed. Rationing has begun, but someone needs to leave the vault to get a replacement microchip for the water recycler and look for other survivors.

We drew straws. You drew the short one...

# Simulation

- The emulation of real world operating conditions to varying degrees of accuracy
  - Not necessarily a strong ludological component (differentiation from RTS)
    - Competitive contexts
    - Economic challenges
    - Indirect control
- Construction and management simulation
  - City-building games
- Life simulation
  - Social simulation
- Vehicle simulation
  - More realistic
  - Less fun?

# SimCity 2000 (1993)



# Microsoft Flight Simulator (2006)



# Farming Simulator 2013 (2012)



# Others...

- Music/party
  - Karaoke or rhythm based
    - Guitar Hero
- Traditional board games
  - Chess, Mahjong
- Puzzle
  - Logical, abstract, mazes
- Sports
- Serious, Educational, Christian, Adult, Advertising, Casual

# Question

- What was the *worst* game that you played recently?
- Why was it *objectively bad*?

# Homo Ludens / Huizinga

- In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play **means** something
  - The goal of successful game design is the creation of meaningful play.

# Laurel (1993)

- [They] identified action as the key ingredient and conceived Spacewar! as a game that could provide a good balance between thinking and doing for its players. They regarded the computer as a machine naturally suited for representing things that you could see, control, and play with. Its interesting potential lay not in its ability to perform calculations but in its capacity to represent action in which humans could participate.



# Meaningful Play

- A descriptive definition
  - Describes what happens in every game
- **Meaningful play** in a game emerges from the relationship between player action and system outcome; it is the process by which a player takes action within the designed system of a game and the system responds to the action. The **meaning** of an action in a game resides in the relationship between action and outcome.
  - Every game lets players take actions, and assigns outcomes to those actions

# Meaningful Play

- An evaluative definition:
  - Can be used to evaluate the validity of a design
- **Meaningful play** occurs when the relationships between actions and outcomes in a game are both **discernable** and **integrated** into the larger context of the game. Creating meaningful play is the goal of successful game design.
  - Critically evaluate the relationships between actions and outcomes, and decide whether they are meaningful enough within the designed system of the game

# Reading

- Homework
  - Play QWOP <http://www.foddy.net/Athletics.html>
- **Rollings and Adams chapters 9, 10, 11, 15 “The Genres”**
- Computers As Theatre. Brenda Laurel (1993).