

G54GAM Games

Categorising Games

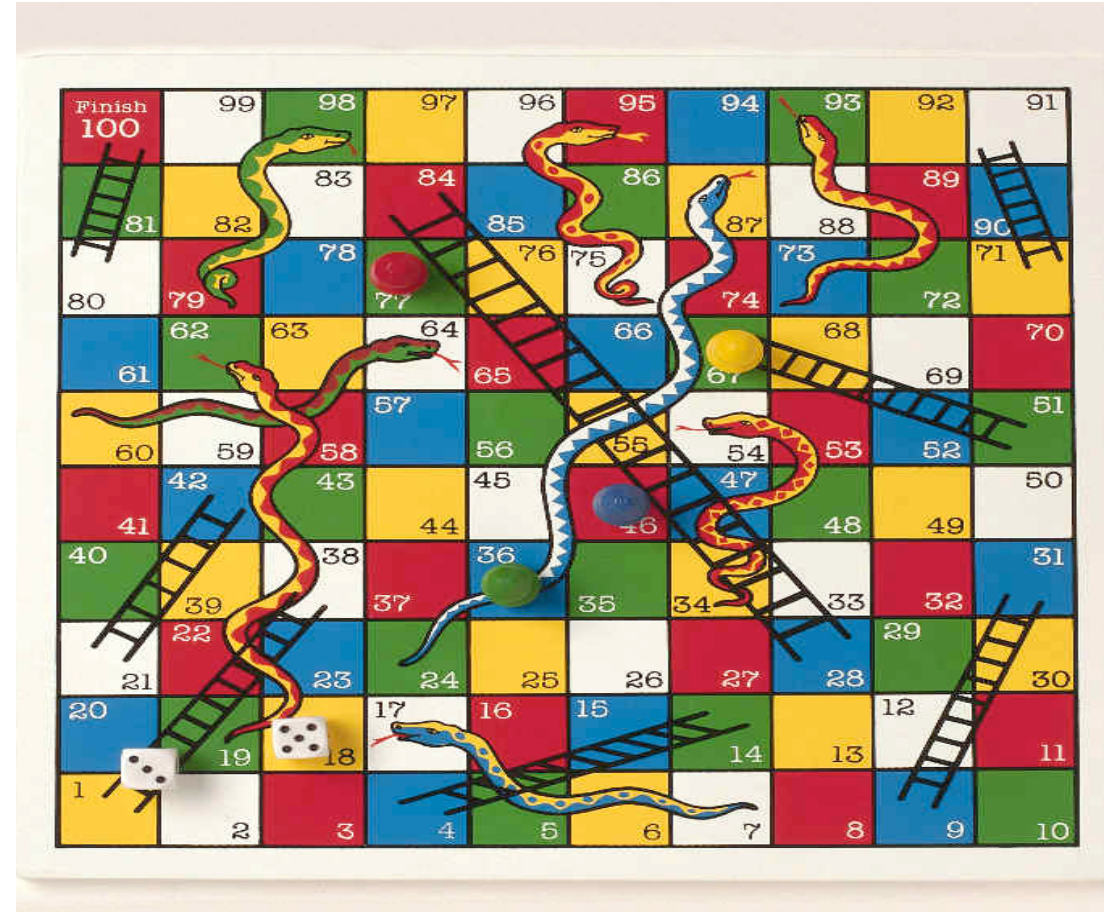
The Nature of Games and Play

What is a game?

- What is a **game**?
- What does it mean to **play**?
- How can we **describe and classify the differences** between games?
- ...identify important things, then learn how to best put those things into a game

What is a game?

- **Rules**
- Players take turns...
 - Roll the dice
 - Move that many spaces
- When you land on a space...
 - Ladders take you up
 - Snakes take you down
- First to the finish wins



What is a game?



What is play?

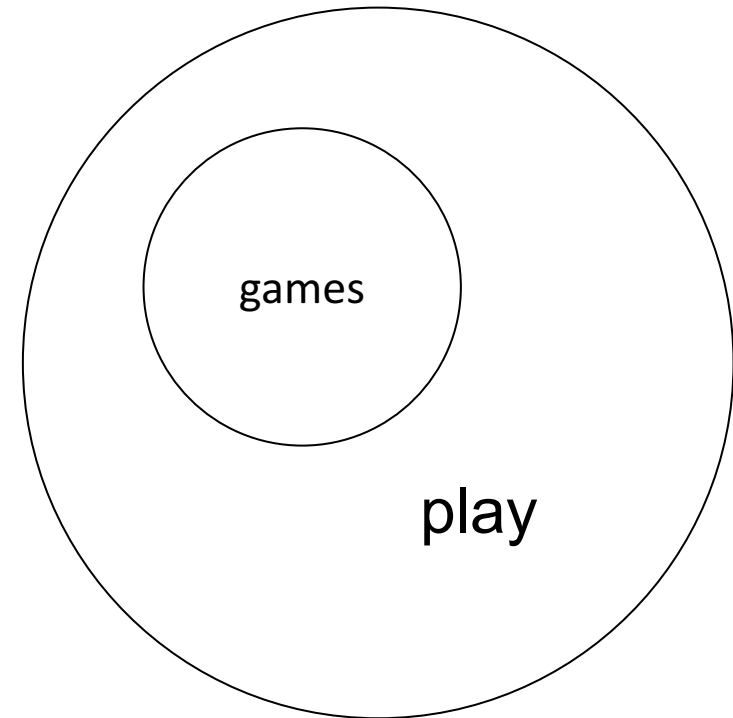
- Huizinga (Homo Ludens 1938)
 - A free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious” ... absorbing the player intensely and utterly ... connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it
- Roger Caillois (Man, Play, and Games 1961)
 - Free: in which playing is not obligatory
 - 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;
 - 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.

What is a game?

- Chris Crawford (The Art of Computer Game Design 1997)
 - Representation: A game is a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality;
 - Interaction: the intricate webwork of cause and effect by which all things are tied together;
 - Conflict: Conflict arises naturally from the interaction in a game. The player is actively pursuing some goal. Obstacles prevent him from easily achieving this goal. Conflict is an intrinsic element of all games;
 - Safety: Conflict implies danger; danger means risk of harm; harm is undesirable. A game is an artifice for providing the psychological experiences of conflict and danger while excluding their physical realizations. In short, a game is a safe way to experience reality.
- Greg Costikyan (I Have No Words and I Must Design 1994)
 - A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal.

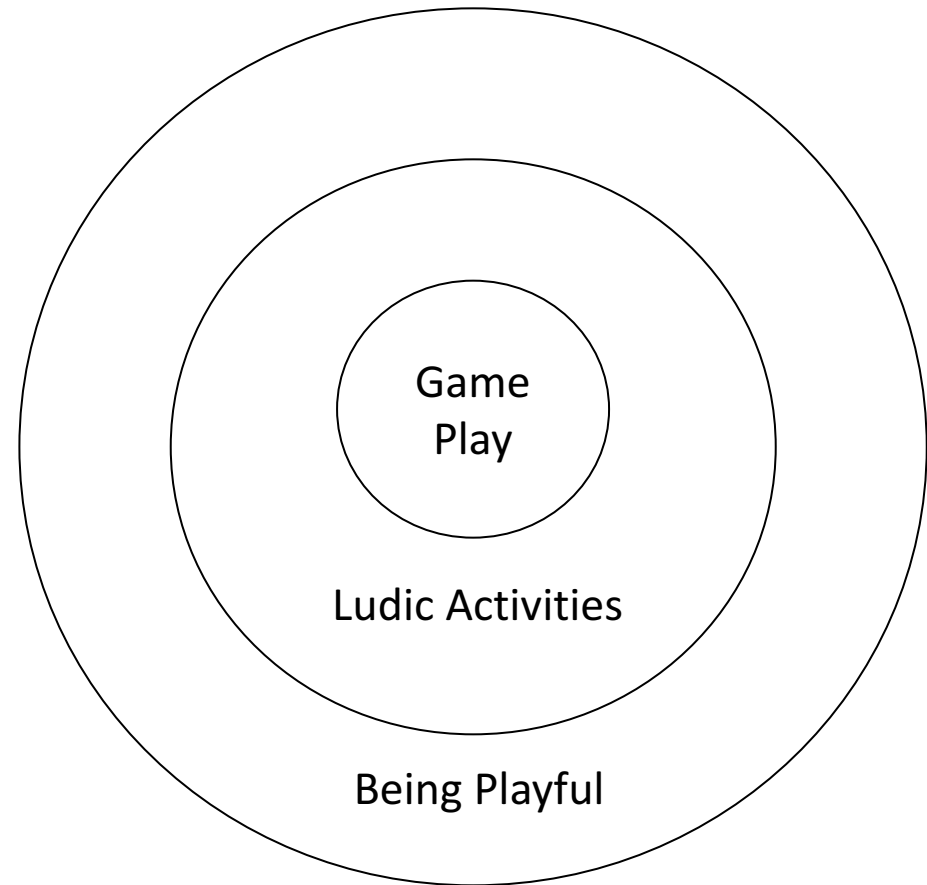
Games are a *subset* of play

- A typological / descriptive approach
- Examples of Play
 - A cat with some string
 - Playing on a swing
 - A community of role-players
 - A chess match
- Only some of these would be thought of as a game
 - Forms of play that are **formalised** are often considered to be games
 - Most forms of play are looser and less organised than games



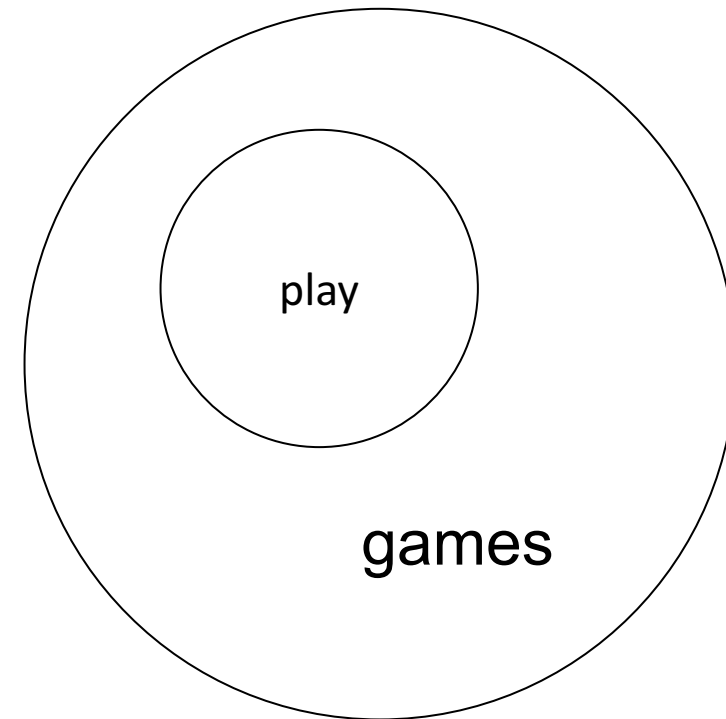
Games are a *subset* of play

- Game Play
 - Formalised interaction that occurs when players follow rules of a game and experience the system through play
- Ludic Activities
 - Non-game behaviours that we think of as “playing”
 - Bouncing a ball, a cat with a string
 - Caillous
 - Competitive play, chance based play, mimicry, perception and the pursuit of vertigo
- Being Playful
 - A playful state of mind
 - The spirit of play injected into some other action
 - Using slang, telling a joke
 - How you can inject the proper spirit of playfulness into an otherwise ordinary behavior?



Play is a *component* of games

- A conceptual approach
 - “Certainly everyone knows what play is not even if everyone can’t agree on just what play is”
 - (J. Barnard Gilmore)
- Situate games and play within the field of design
- Play is a component of games
 - Games contain play
 - The experience of play is one of many ways of looking at and understanding games
- Play represents one aspect of games
- **Play is free movement within a more rigid structure**
 - Can you have a game without play?
 - Work / gamification
 - Depression (McGonigal)



Huizinga - Formalising play

- The Magic Circle of Play
 - A voluntary, contractual structure that is limited in time and space
- Defined before the game, or changed as part of the social gaming process
 - “We are going to play a game”
 - “I would like to join your game”
- Games are played...
 - In certain **spaces**
 - At certain **times**
 - By certain **players**

Huizinga - Formalising play

- All play moves and has its being within a play-ground ***marked off beforehand*** either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.
- The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc, are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, **within which special *rules* obtain.**
- All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, **dedicated to the performance of an act apart.**

Rules

- Huizinga -> formalised rules -> describe a game
- Rules
 - Limit player action
 - Are explicit and unambiguous
 - Are shared by all players
 - Are fixed
 - Are binding
 - Are repeatable
- Rules make up the inner, formal structure of games
 - All games have rules
 - Rules are a defining quality of games but are not the **experience** of play

Tic-tac-toe



Tic-tac-toe

- Play occurs on a 3 x 3 grid of 9 empty squares
- Two players take turns marking empty squares, the first player marking Xs and the second player marking Os
- If one player places three of the same marks in a row, that player wins
- If the spaces are all filled and there is no winner, the game ends in a draw
- The rules describe the formal system of the game but not the experience, the history or the culture of the game

Defining a game

- A game = a systematized form of play
- Adams
 - A **game** is a form of **interactive entertainment** where **players** must overcome **challenges**, by taking actions that are *governed* by **rules**, in order to meet a **victory condition**
- Salen & Zimmerman
 - A **game** is a **system** in which **players** engage in **artificial conflict**, *defined* by **rules**, that results in a **quantifiable outcome**

Defining a game

- System
 - A set of parts that interrelate to form a complex whole
- Players
 - One or more participants actively play the game
 - Players interact with the system in order to experience the play of the game
- Artificial
 - Games maintain a boundary from “real life” although they occur in the real

Defining a game

- Conflict
 - All games embody a contest of powers
 - Against others, against “the system”, “the rules”
- Rules
 - Provide the structure out of which play emerges, by delimiting what the player can and cannot do
- Quantifiable outcome
 - At the conclusion a player has either won or lost or received a numerical score
 - Distinguishes games from less formal play activities

Resultant design decisions

- Players
 - How many players are there?
 - Who or what is the player in the world?
 - Specifies a notion of **identity**
- Goals
 - What is the player trying to achieve?
 - Defined by the game or by the player?
 - Specifies the player **focus**

Resultant design decisions

- Rules
 - How does the player affect the world?
 - How does the player learn the rules?
 - Specifies the **boundaries** of the game
- Challenges
 - What obstacles must the player overcome?
 - Is there more than one way to overcome them?
 - Specifies the fundamental **gameplay**

More design decisions

- Have we captured the *essence* of a game?
 - Seems very dry
 - Actions *governed by rules*, not *defined by rules*
- Game modes
 - How are the challenges put together?
 - What is the interactional **context**?
- Setting
 - What is the nature of the **game world**?
 - What is the player's **perspective**
 - First person, side-scrolling, 3D, overview...
- Story
 - What **narrative** will the player experience?
 - How is it connected to the gameplay?
 - What explains the player's agency?

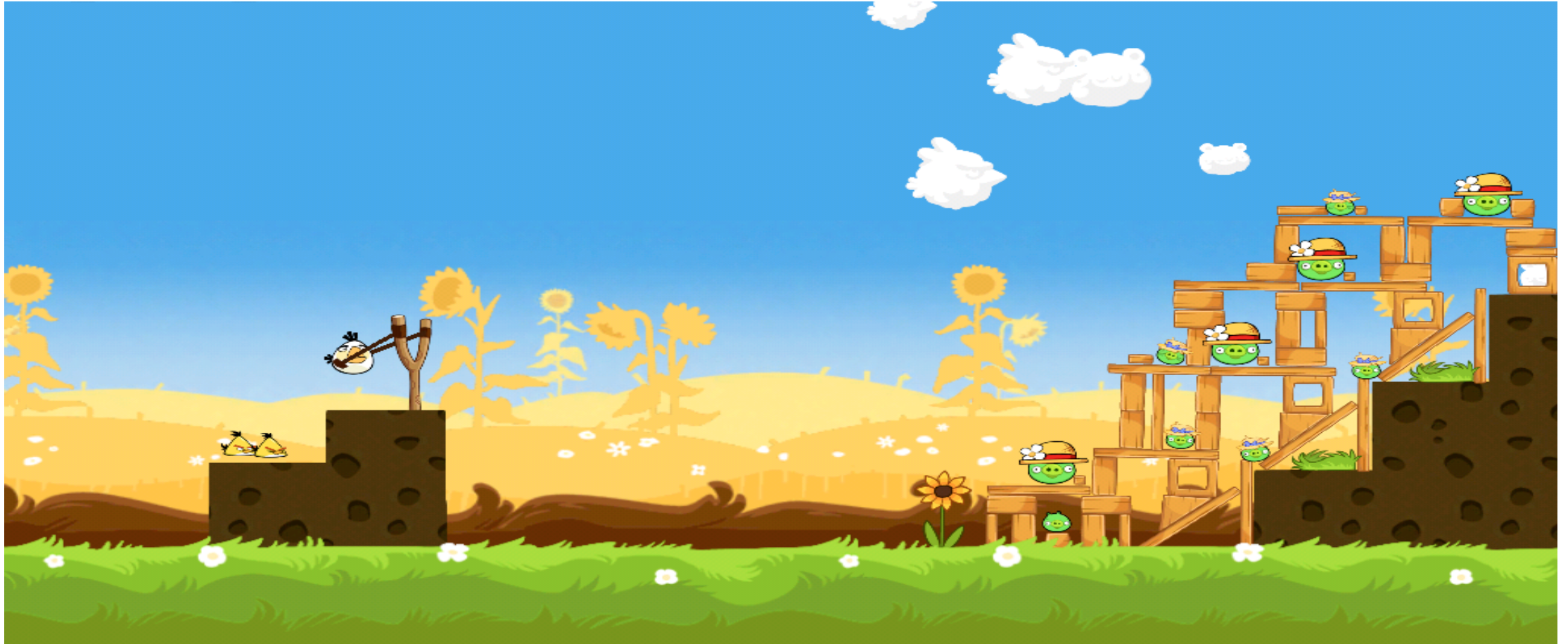
Competing design philosophies - Ludology

- Focus on gameplay, rules
 - What the player can, cannot do
 - The behavioural consequences of actions
- Learning a gameplay gestalt
 - What the player *does* within the system, as allowed by the rules
 - Playing the game = performing the gestalt
 - A pattern of repetitive perceptual, cognitive and motor operations
 - **Not** a game design pattern
 - **Not** designed into the system of a game
 - **Emergent** from the rules and the design
- Pros
 - Focus on player agency
 - Tight, well defined gameplay
- Cons
 - Lack of player motivation
 - Hard to distinguish the game from others
- *Action games: shoot while being hit, strafe to hiding spot, take health, repeat*

Competing design philosophies – Simulation, Narratology

- Simulation
 - A representation of the function, operation or features of one process or system through another
 - Pros
 - No goal oriented activities / end-state
 - Repetitive action used to drive a simulation
 - Cons
 - Continue playing after all enemies are defeated
- Narratology
 - Games are a story medium
 - Focus on storytelling
 - Pros
 - Traditional narrative structure
 - Emotionally compelling, strong artistic vision
 - Cons
 - Author voice over player voice
 - Poorly defined mechanics

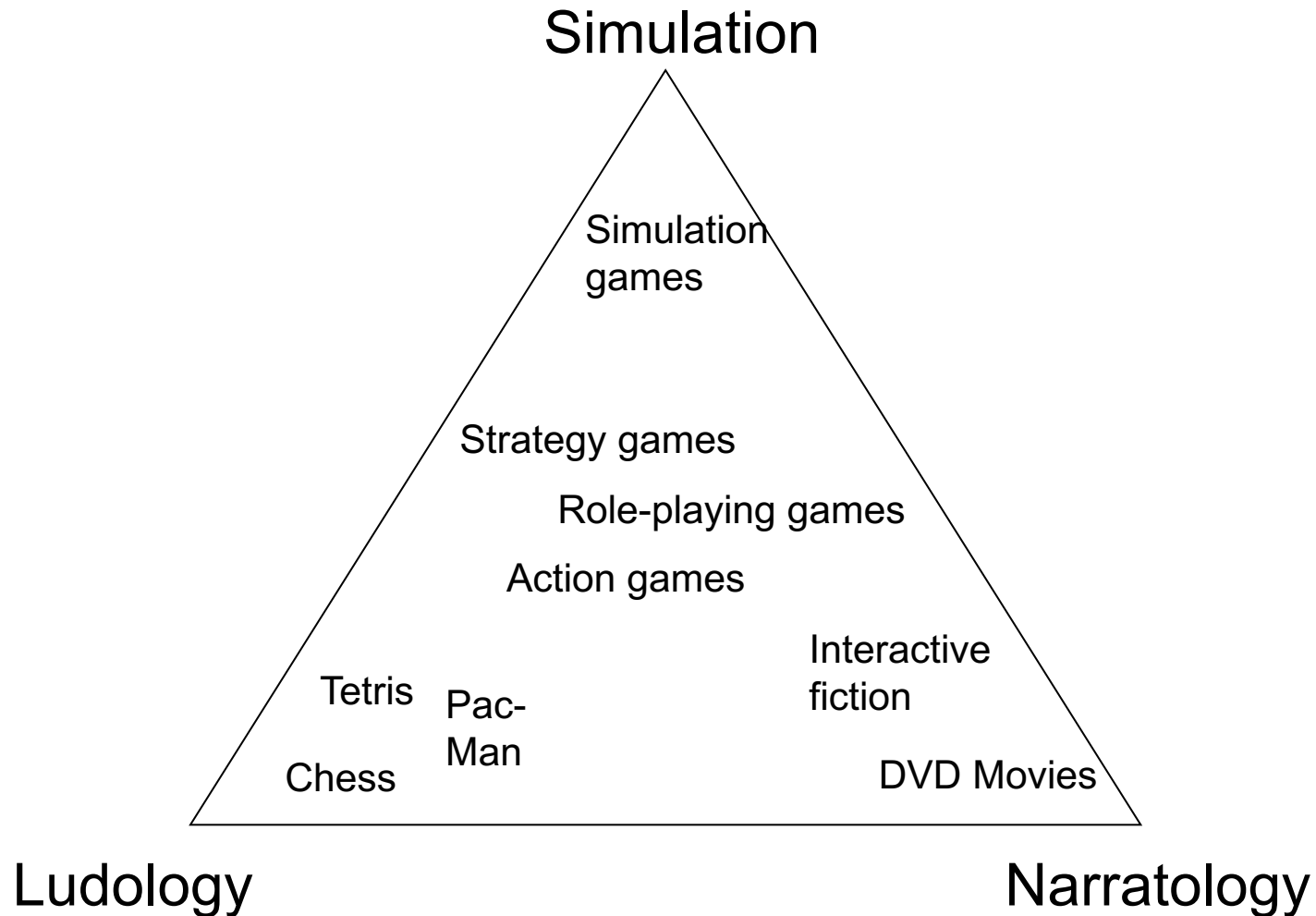
Angry Birds (2009)



Crush the Castle (2009)



Craig Lindley (2003)



Core Mechanics = Gameplay gestalt

- Identify the **core mechanic** of a game
 - The essential play activity players perform again and again in a game, and why
 - Used to describe the **experience** of a game when placed in context
 - “It’s what you do in a game”
- A single action
 - A driving game / race = running
 - Trivial pursuit = answering questions
 - Donkey Kong = using a joystick and jump button to maneuver a character on the screen
- A compound activity
 - Quake (FPS) = a set of interrelated actions such as moving, aiming, firing, managing resources such as health, ammo, armour
 - Starcraft (RTS) = resource management, wargame strategy, rapid mouse and keyboard command skills

Core Mechanics

- 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

Homework

- Play a game.
- Where does it fit into Lindley's framework?
- Can you identify the players, goals, rules, challenges, mode and setting?
- What is the core mechanic?
- How would you explain the difference to another game? In what *genre* would you put it?

Reading

- http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131205/game_taxonomies_a_high_level_.php
- Salen & Zimmerman chapters 7, 22
- <http://www.costik.com/nowords2002.pdf>
- https://www.digitpress.com/library/books/book_art_of_computer_game_design.pdf