Session 18 – FORMAL ASPECTS OF GAMES

Readings

Church, Formal Abstract Design Tools
Hunicke et al, MDA Framework

Concepts/Keywords

- Formal / abstraction / design / tools
- Mechanics v. Manipulation Rules
- Dynamics
- Aesthetics

Goals

- Realize that there's jargon to talk about games, and that there's no consensus
- Understand what game design is as a discipline, areas of study/hobbies

Disciplines have their jargon, which distinguish them from one another → it can also be a barrier for new people. The goal of this course is to learn the basic vocabulary of game studies and a bit of game design

Q: Where do students learn vocabulary to talk about games?
Q: Does vocabulary prevent players from getting into a game?

Who develops vocabulary to talk about games?

- Developers
- Journalists
- fans
- Academics

How is it formalized?

- Write papers
- Articles or presentations
- Academic writing (systematic definability)

These two articles come from industry (mainly) as an early attempt to build vocabulary, formalize it.
CMS.300 – Intro to Video Game Theory

Church: Game design is creation of experience

- Not being constructed as a discipline – contextualized, learning from other domains
- Building a common design vocabulary
  - Q: Why?
    - Creating community
    - Identifying paths and relationships
    - Learning from one another
  - Defining areas
- Many games/technology/audiences → many areas to be addressed
- Technology aspects are easier to describe
- Design evolution happens throughout refinement, often within the same genre → ITERATION

NOTE:
developing a vocabulary is not a matter of creating a dictionary alone (eg. Game Design Patterns/Game Ontology) → it has to be situated

FORMAL ABSTRACT DESIGN TOOLS → method to produce vocabulary throughout analysis

FORMAL – precise definition, can be explained to somebody else
ABSTRACT – focus on ideas, not genre constructs
DESIGN – the discipline
TOOLS – a common vocabulary

What are formal elements of games (vs. other media?)

EXERCISE: list formal elements of:

- Trespasser
- McDonald's game
- La Mulana
- PacMan
- Monopoly (it's in MDA paper)

MDA Framework:
Attempt at identifying main areas of game design
Understanding game design as cybernetics
CMS.300 – Intro to Video Game Theory
(formal aspects of games)

Mechanics:
actions, behaviors and control mechanisms allowed to the player and game content
Machine rules vs. Manipulation rules

Galloway:
Machine Actions (diegetic/non-diegetic) vs. player actions (diegetic/non-diegetic)
MDA's definition is muddied and unclear

Dynamics:
Rules in motion, RUNTIME
Players have to generate strategies
Emergence comes from here
DRAMA (show EVO 2004, Daigo vs. Justin) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS5peqApgUA

Aesthetics:

- “Desirable emotional responses” → “Fun”
- Fuzzy term: Theme, fiction, experience
- 8 types of fun:
  - Sensation
  - fantasy
  - Narrative
  - Challenge
  - Fellowship
  - Discovery
  - Expression
  - Submission

Apply MDA to some games? What is different?