

Definitions of Games

In-class writing assignment 9/12/06

For this week you read a series of definitions of games from theorists and designers Jesper Juul, Greg Costikyan, Mark Wolf, and Roger Caillois. You also watched and talked about a slew of “historical” games in lab from a variety of genres from text-adventure to Super NES to a contemporary “casual” MMO.

For class today, I’d like you to ruminate a bit more on how you define what counts as a videogame. Reflecting on Juul’s argument that today’s videogames are based on and evolved from “classic” game models to Wolf’s glossary-like “classification” of game genres, can it be said that there is such thing as a definition of videogames? Juul claims, for example, that it is possible to talk about what a game is and what it’s not. Can we also say what a videogame is and what it’s not?

In small groups of no more than four, I would like you to work on this question together. You may begin any way you like, but I suggest you start with Juul’s helpful list of game definitions and go from there. Your goal with this exercise is to, as a group, write a 50-word definition of the term “videogame.” And yes, when I say 50 words, I mean 50 words. Feel free to tweak and revise your language as required. The 51st word will meet a terrible fate!

This assignment will be collected at the end of class and will be graded. Definitions will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Effectiveness of group work (as observed in class)
- Use of assigned readings and support materials
- Well-roundedness of definition

Please make sure all the names of your group are on the assignment when you turn it in.

You may use any resources available to you in class, including the readings for class, the interweb, phonecalls to friends, your TA, visiting other groups for help and advice, and even dictionary.com if you need it.

There are several options for this, so keep in mind that you might want to define the term “videogame” by its form, its rules or system of play, its principles, its medium or interface, its consequences,

There will be a prize for the group that comes up with the best definition. TA and I will judge them and will distribute a prize to that group on Thursday.

Have fun!