

Genre and the Video Game

Chapter 6 of The Medium of the Video Game, by Mark J. P. Wolf

The idea of categorization by genre, and the notion that there are certain conventions present in each genre, has been used in the study of literature and film and has proven to be a useful way of looking at both. The idea of genre has not been without difficulties, such as the defining of what exactly constitutes a genre, overlaps between genres, and the fact that genres are always in flux as long as new works are being produced. And genre study differs from one medium to the next. Thomas Schatz, in his book *Hollywood Genres*, outlines some of the distinctions between literary genre study and film genre study. He also notes that genre study in the past often focussed on subject matter and neglected the role of the audience. He writes:

Genre study may be more productive if we complement the narrow critical focus of traditional genre analysis with a broader sociocultural perspective. Thus, we may consider a genre film not only as some filmmaker's artistic expression, but further as the cooperation between artists and audience in celebrating their collective values and ideals. In fact, many qualities traditionally viewed as artistic shortcomings—the psychologically static hero, for instance, or the predictability of the plot—assume a significantly different value when examined as components of a genre's ritualistic narrative system.¹

One could easily substitute video game for film in the above quote; video games' heroes are certainly more static than film ones, and plots are often even more predictable. And most of all, the interactive experience of playing a video game is even more of a cooperation between artists and audiences, who go beyond celebrating collective values by applying those values to the activity found in game play itself.

Video game genre study differs markedly from literary or film genre study due to the direct and active participation of the audience, through the surrogate player - character who acts within the game's diegetic world, taking part in the central conflict of the game's narrative. In regard to narrative, Schatz describes the general plot structure of the genre film as:

establishment (via various narrative and iconographic cues) of the generic community with its inherent dramatic conflicts;

animation of those conflicts through the actions and attitudes of the genre's constellation of characters;

intensification of the conflict by means of conventional situations and dramatic confrontations until the conflict reaches crisis proportions;

resolution of the crisis in a fashion which eliminates the physical and/or ideological threat and thereby celebrates the (temporarily) well - ordered community.²

Apart from the fact the video games often do not have happy endings (games usually end with a player - character' s death), Schatz' s four terms describe the action of most video games. If a film genre represents a range of experience for the audience as Schatz argues, video games fit the description even more closely. In some ways, player participation is arguably the central determinant in describing and classifying video games, moreso even than iconography.

Iconography versus Interactivity

In his essay *The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema*, Ed Buscombe lists three areas in which genre elements may appear in film: iconography, structure and theme.³ While iconography and theme may be applicable to narrative - based video games, other games like Tetris and Ataxx are abstract to the point where little or no narrative exists, and some games, like Video Pinball and Scrabble are patterned after relatively nonnarrative activities, and do not contain much in the way of diegetic worlds populated by characters. While the ideas of iconography and theme may be appropriate tools for analyzing Hollywood films as well as many video games, another area, interactivity, is an essential part of every game's structure and a more appropriate way of examining and defining video game genres.

Just as different forms of dance (foxtrot, waltz, ballet, jazz) are defined by how the dancers move rather than how they look, an examination of the variety and range of video games reveals the inadequacy of classification by iconography of even narrative - based games. While some video games can be classified in a manner similar to that of films (we might say that *Outlaw* is a Western, *Space Invaders* science fiction, and *Combat* a war game), classification by iconography ignores the fundamental differences and similarities which are to be found in the player' s experience of the game. *Outlaw* and *Combat*, both early games for the Atari 2600, are very similar in that both simply feature player - characters maneuvering and shooting at each other in a field of obstacles on a single, bounded screen of graphics, with cowboys in one game and

tanks in the other. In a similar vein, Activision's Chopper Command for the Atari 2600 is essentially a version of Defender with helicopters replacing the spaceships. Conversely, an iconographic analysis of Space Invaders, Spaceward Ho!, Defender, and Star Wars, as well as many other games, would consider them all science fiction even though they vary widely in player experience. As narrative games grow more complex and cinematic, iconographic and thematic generic classifications from film will be able to be applied more usefully, but interactivity will always be an important factor in the way the games are experienced.

Genres based on interactivity also avoid some of the problems found in literary and film genres. In *Genre and Critical Methodology*, Andrew Tudor points out that in relying on theme for the determination of genre, one is confronted with the difficulties in isolating a film's (or rather, film author's) intentions.⁴ In a video game, there is almost always a definite objective that the player strives to complete (or find and complete, as in the case of *Myst*), and in doing so very specific interactions are used. Thus the intention, of the player - character at least, is often clear, and can be analyzed as a part of the game. The game's objective is a motivational force for the player, and this, combined with the various forms of interactivity present in the game, are useful places to start in building a set of video game genres. The object of the game can be multiple or divided into steps, placing the game in more than one genre, just as a film's theme and iconography can place a film in multiple genres (the film *Blade Runner*, for example, fits both science fiction and hard-boiled detective genres). The main objective in *Pac - Man* by which a player gains points and advances levels, for example, is the eating of the yellow dots. In order to do so successfully, the player - character must avoid the pursuing ghosts, and also navigate a maze. Thus while *Pac - Man* may be primarily classified (according to the terms below) as a Collecting game, we may also classify it as an Escape or Maze game, albeit secondarily. By beginning with the interaction required by the game's primary objective, we can start to divide the wide variety of video games into a series of interactive genres.

Interactive Genres for Classifying Video Games

The following list of genres based on interactivity can be used in conjunction with the existing taxonomy of iconographically or thematically based genres (like those of film) when attempting to categorize video games. The genres below take into consideration the dominant characteristics of the interactive experience and the games' goals and objectives, and the nature of the game's player - character and

player controls. Also, certain genres listed here (Diagnostic, Demo, Educational, Puzzle, Simulation, and Utility) contain programs which are arguably not games, but since they appear as cartridges or discs in a form similar to game cartridges and discs (and are treated as such by many game collectors), and because they sometimes contain gamelike elements (such as Mario Teaches Typing), they have been included here for the sake of completeness.

In the culture surrounding the video game, certain generic terms such as the Shoot 'Em Up are already established and in use among players, and these terms and distinctions are reflected in the proposed list of terms below. Some of these genres overlap commonly - used genres of moving imagery (such as Adaptation, Adventure, Chase), while others, such as Escape, Maze, or Shoot 'Em Up, are specific to video games and reflect the interactive nature of the medium. These genre terms regard the nature of interactivity in the game itself rather than ask whether the game is single - player, multiple - player, or designed to be playable over a network. Due to the different types of action and objectives that can occur in a single game, games can often be cross - listed in two or more genres. Also, some games, like M*A*S*H or Rebel Assault, feature different sequences or scenarios each of which can be categorized into different genres. Video games used as examples here include arcade video games, home video games, home computer games, and in a few cases, networked games. The format of this list is patterned after the Library of Congress Moving Imagery Genre - Form Guide compiled by Brian Taves (chair), Judi Hoffman, and Karen Lund, whose work was the inspiration and model for this list.

Genres covered in this list: Abstract, Adaptation, Adventure, Artificial Life, Board Games, Capturing, Card Games, Catching, Chase, Collecting, Combat, Demo, Diagnostic, Dodging, Driving, Educational, Escape, Fighting, Flying, Gambling, Interactive Movie, Management Simulation, Maze, Obstacle Course, Pencil - and - Paper Games, Pinball, Platform, Programming Games, Puzzle, Quiz, Racing, Role - Playing, Rhythm and Dance, Shoot 'Em Up, Simulation, Sports, Strategy, Table - Top Games, Target, Text Adventure, Training Simulation, and Utility.

Abstract

Games which have nonrepresentational graphics and often involve an objective which is not oriented or organized as a narrative. Often the objective involves construction or visiting or filling every part of the screen (as in Tetris, Qix, Pipe Dream, or Q*bert), or destruction or emptying of the screen (as in Breakout or Pac - Man). Characters appearing in abstract games may be anthropomorphic in design (such as Q*bert), but usually do not attempt to represent real world animals or people or their behaviors. Abstraction is, of course, a matter of degree, though it is usually possible to

discern whether or not the game was intended to be deliberately representational. For example, despite their simple, blocky graphics, early Atari 2600 games such as Basketball or Street Racer attempt to represent people and race cars, which is reflected not only in their design but in their interaction within the game. Nor should the term be used for games which are adaptations of games existing in different media, such as Checkers or Othello, which are abstract in design and play, but which are nonetheless adaptations and thus representations of games from other media.

Examples: Arkanoid; Amidar (with Collecting); Ataxx; Block Out (with Puzzle); Breakout; Marble Madness; Pac - Man (with Collecting, Escape, and Maze); Pipe Dream; Q*bert; Qix (with Collecting); Super Breakout; Tempest (with Shoot ' Em Up); Tetris (with Puzzle)

Adaptation

Games based on activities adapted from another medium or gaming activity, such as sports, table - top games, board games, card games, or games whose action closely follows a narrative from a work existing in another medium, such as a book, short story, comic book, graphic novel, or play. This involves such questions as how the original work is changed to allow for interactivity and the completion of an objective, or in the case of adapted games, how the original activity changes as a result of being adapted. This term should not be used for games which use the same characters as existing works in another medium but make no attempt to even loosely follow plots or imitate activities found in those works. Home video games and computer games may also be adaptations of arcade video games, in which case they are usually reduced in graphic detail, complexity, or speed when compared with the original. In a few cases, arcade games, such as Computer Space (1971), are adaptations of mainframe computer games. This term should only be applied to Simulation games when they are adapted from games or gaming activities in other media.

Note: See Sports, Table - Top Games, Board Games, Card Games, Pencil - and - Paper Games, and Simulation.

Examples: Adapted from card games: Casino; Eric' s Ultimate Solitaire; Ken Uston Blackjack/Poker. Adapted from cartoons: Spy Vs Spy; The Simpsons. Adapted from comic books: Spiderman, X - Men, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Adapted from film: Tron; Star Wars; Krull; Muppet Treasure Island. Adapted from pencil - and - paper games: Hangman; Tic Tac Toe. Adapted from sports: American Football; Atari Baseball; Hot Shots Tennis. Adapted from table - top games: Pong; Sure Shot Pool; Virtual Pool. Adapted from television game shows: Family Feud;

Jeopardy; Joker' s Wild; Password; The Price is Right; Tic - Tac - Dough; \$25,000 Pyramid; Wheel of Fortune

Adventure

Games which are set in a world usually made up of multiple, connected rooms or screens, involving an objective which is more complex than simply catching, shooting, capturing, or escaping, although completion of the objective may involve several or all of these. Objectives usually must be completed in several steps, for example, finding keys and unlocking doors to other areas to retrieve objects needed elsewhere in the game. Characters are usually able to carry objects, such as weapons, keys, tools, and so on. Settings often evoke a particular historical time period and place, such as the middle ages or Arthurian England, or are thematically related to content - based genres such as Science Fiction, Fantasy, or Espionage. This term should not be used for games in which screens are only encountered in one - way linear fashion, like the levels in Donkey Kong, or for games like Pitfall! which are essentially limited to running, jumping, and avoiding dangers (see Obstacle Course). Nor should the term be used to refer to games like Dragon's Lair, Gadget, or Star Trek: Borg, which do not allow a player to wander and explore its world freely, but strictly limit outcomes and possible narrative paths to a series of video sequences and linear progression through a predetermined narrative (see Interactive Movies).

Note: For adventure games which are primarily text - based, see Text Adventure. For related games similar in theme to adventure games, see also Obstacle Course and Interactive Movies.

Examples: Adventure (for the Atari 2600); E.T. The Extraterrestrial (with Adaptation); Haunted House, Krull (with Adaptation); Myst (with Puzzle); Raiders of the Lost Ark (with Adaptation); Spy Vs Spy (with Adaptation); Superman (with Adaptation); games in the Tomb Raider series; Venture; games from the Daggerfall series; games from the Ultima series

Artificial Life

Games which involve the growth and/or maintenance of digital creatures of some sort, which can die without the proper care by the player. Often growth and the happiness or contentedness of the characters are the goals of the game. (Whether or not all such programs constitute games is debatable.) The term should not be used for games which deal with the allocation of resources or games which are primarily concerned with management (see Management Simulation).

Examples: AquaZone; Babyz; Catz; Creatures; Dogz; The Little Computer People; The Sims (with Management Simulation)

Board Games

Games which are an adaptation of existing board games (see Adaptation) or games which are similar to board games in their design and play even if they did not previously exist as board games, like Fooblitzky and Jones in the Fast Lane. Games of this genre include either classic board games like Chess, Checkers, or Backgammon, or trademarked ones such as Scrabble or Monopoly. This term should not be used for games adapted from games such as pool or table tennis, in which physical skills are involved (see Table - Top Games), nor for games adapted from games which require only paper and a pencil to play, such as Hangman or Tic - Tac - Toe (see Pencil - and - Paper Games), nor for games adapted from games which are primarily card - based and do not use a board (see Card Games). Three games made by Philips/Magnavox, Conquest of the World, Quest for the Rings, and The Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt, required a board game to be used along with the video game itself.

Note: Most Board Games, though not all, can be cross - listed with Adaptation, and many can also be cross - listed with Strategy.

Examples: Backgammon; Battleship; Clue; Conquest of the World; Fooblitzky; The Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt; Jones in the Fast Lane; Monopoly; Othello; Quest for the Rings; Scrabble; Stratego; Video Checkers; Video Chess

Capturing

Games in which the primary objective involves the capturing of objects or characters that move away from and try to evade the player - character. This may involve stopping the object or character (as in Gopher or Keystone Kapers), or closing off their access to an escape route (as in Surround or in the light cycle section of the arcade game Tron). This term should not be used for games in which objects or characters do not move (see Collecting) or do not actively try to avoid the player - character (see Catching), nor should it be used for Strategy games (such as Chess and Checkers) involving the capturing of pieces which are controlled by the player, but which are not player - characters directly representing the player in the game.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Chase as this is implied in Capturing. Many games with more than one player can be cross - listed with Escape, as game play often involves player - characters alternately trying to capture one another and

escape from one another. Capturing objectives also occur briefly in some games; for example, in Pac - man after eating a power pill when the ghosts can be chased and eaten, or the capturing of criminals in Superman.

Examples: Gopher; Hole Hunter; Keystone Kapers; Surround (with Escape); Take the Money and Run; Texas Chainsaw Massacre; the light cycle game in Tron

Card Games

Games which are adaptations of existing card games, or games which are essentially like card games in that they are primarily card - based (such as various solitaire computer games). While most Card Games use the standard four - suit deck, some games use specialized cards (such as 1000 Miles, a shareware game which is an adaptation of Parker Brothers' Milles Bornes racing card game). This term should not be used for Trivia Games which are primarily question - and - answer games.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Adaptation, as that is implied in Card Games. Many card games which involve betting can also be cross - listed with Gambling.

Examples: 1000 Miles (with Racing); Blackjack (with Gambling); Casino (with Gambling); Eric's Ultimate Solitaire; Ken Uston Blackjack/Poker (with Gambling); Montana; Video Poker (with Gambling)

Catching

Games in which the primary objective involves the catching of objects or characters that do not actively try to evade the player - character. If the objects or characters are in motion, it is usually along a predetermined path and independent of the movements of the player - character. In some cases the player - character can affect the motion of the objects or characters (such as in Stampede, where the player - character can nudge the cattle forward), but at no time do the objects or characters try to actively avoid the player - character. This term should not be used for games in which objects or characters do not move (see Collecting) or games in which they actively try to avoid the player - character (see Capturing). Nor should the term be used for games that require timing in order to use moving objects, such as the moving logs in Frogger, or the swinging vines in Pitfall!, nor for Sports games with balls which are thrown, bounced, or caught, as these objects are used and reused but not caught and removed from the game.

Examples: Alpha Beam with Ernie (with Educational); Big Bird's Egg Catch; Circus Atari, Fishing Derby; Lost Luggage; Stampede; Quantum; and games 21 through 27 in Street Racer

Chase

See Catching, Capturing, Driving, Escape, Flying, and Racing

Collecting

Games in which the primary objective involves the collecting of objects that do not move (such as Pac - Man or Mousetrap), or the surrounding of areas (such as Qix or Amidar). Often scoring in these games is determined by the number of objects collected or areas bounded. Collecting here can mean simply running over or hitting objects which then disappear (as the dots in Pac - Man, or the balloons in Prop Cycle). This term should not be used for games in which objects or characters sought by the player - character are in motion (see Catching) or games in which they actively try to avoid the player - character (see Capturing). Nor should the term be used for games that require the use of objects (such as keys, currency, or weaponry) which are only indirectly used in the attainment of the game's objective. Some games involve the collecting of pieces of an object which can be assembled once all the pieces are found, such as the bridge in Superman or the urn in Haunted House, although these games often have objectives that involve more than simply collecting, and so should not be considered as belonging to this genre.

Examples: Amidar (with Abstract); Mousetrap (with Maze and Escape); Pac - man (with Maze and Escape); Spy Vs Spy (with Combat and Maze); Prop Cycle (with Flying); Qix (with Abstract)

Combat

Games which involve two or more players, or one player and a computer - controlled player, shooting some form of projectiles at each other, and in which all players are provided with similar means for a fairly balanced fight. These games usually emphasize maneuverability and sometimes the outwitting of the opponent. This term should not be used for Shoot 'Em Up games in which the two sides are clearly unequal or not evenly balanced, nor for Fighting games which do not involve shooting. Although these games may range in the appearance of their content, for example,

cowboys in Outlaw, tanks or planes in Combat, or paddles in Warlords, the basic play of the game, shoot the opponent while avoiding getting shot, remains essentially the same.

Note: For related games, see Fighting and Shoot 'Em Up.

Examples: Battletech; Battlezone; Combat; Dactyl Nightmare; Outlaw; Spy Vs Spy (with Collecting and Maze); Warlords

Demo

Cartridges, discs, or downloads designed to demonstrate games or a game system. Such cartridges were primarily used in store displays to demonstrate games. While they may not contain complete games themselves, these cartridges have the same appearance as game cartridges and are sometimes collected and traded as game cartridges, and they are often included in listings of cartridges. As discs or downloads, Demos allow a player to try out a game for free without buying the full - sized game.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Utility, as that is implied in Demo.

Examples: ADAM Demo Cartridge, Dealer Demo (Bally Astrocade), Demonstration Cartridge (RCA Studio II), Music Box Demo (Coleco ADAM)

Diagnostic

Cartridges designed to test the functioning of a system. While they are not games themselves, these cartridges have the same appearance as game cartridges and are sometimes collected and traded as game cartridges, and they are often included in listings of cartridges.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Utility, as that is implied in Diagnostic.

Examples: Diagnostic Cartridge (Identification number FDS100144) for the Atari 5200 system; Diagnostic Cartridge (Identification number CB101196) for the Atari 7800 system, Final Test Cartridge (Coleco ADAM), Super Controller Test Cartridge (Coleco ADAM)

Dodging

Games in which the primary objective is to avoid projectiles or other moving objects. Scoring is often determined by the number of objects successfully

dodged, or by the crossing of a field of moving objects that must be dodged (as in Freeway or Frogger). This term should not be used for games in which players avoid getting shot at and are able to shoot (see Combat and Shoot 'Em Up). In many games like Asteroids or Space Invaders avoidance of objects or projectiles is important for the player to remain in the game, but points are not awarded for merely avoiding them, and players usually have the option of shooting at obstacles, which is not the case in Dodging games.

Examples: Dodge 'Em (with Driving), Freeway (with Obstacle Course); Frogger (with Obstacle Course); Journey Escape; and some games in Street Racer (with Driving and Racing)

Driving

Games based primarily on driving skills, such as steering, maneuverability, speed control, and fuel conservation. This term should not be used for games in which racing or the winning of a race is the main objective (see Racing), nor for games which are essentially obstacle courses in which a player's main objective is to hit or avoid touching a series of objects or characters (see Obstacle Course), unless driving skills are essential to play and to the winning of the game. In most cases, Driving games involve vehicles, whereas Obstacle Course games generally do not. Scoring in Driving games is often based on how fast a particular course is completed, rather than whether or not an opponent is beat in a race, and these games are often single - player games.

Examples: Dodge 'Em (with Dodging); Indy 500 (with Racing); Night Driver; Pole Position (with Racing); Red Planet (with Racing); Street Racer (with Dodging and Racing)

Educational

Games which are designed to teach, and in which the main objective involves the learning of a lesson. Rather than being structured as a straightforward set of lessons or exercises, these programs are structured like games, with such elements as scoring, timed performances, or incentives given for correct answers. The degree to which these programs can be considered games varies greatly.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Utility, as this is implied in Educational.

Examples: Alpha Beam with Ernie (with Catching); Basic Math; Mario's Early Years: Fun With Numbers; Mario Teaches Typing; Math Blaster: Episode 1; Math Grand Prix; Morse; Number Games; Playschool Math; Spelling Games; Word Games

Escape

Games whose main objective involves escaping pursuers or getting out of some form of enclosure. Games can be open - ended, with the game ending when a player escapes from an enclosure or enters a place safe from the pursuers, or closed, in which a player escapes pursuers for as long as possible but always succumbs in the end (as in Pac - Man). This term should not be used for games in which the player - character battles the opponent instead of fleeing (see Combat and Shoot 'Em Up), nor for games like Adventure or Haunted House in which the player - character is only occasionally pursued by characters.

Examples: Pac - Man (with Collecting and Maze); Maze Craze (with Maze); Mousetrap (with Collecting and Maze); Ms. Pac - Man (with Collecting and Maze); Surround (with Capturing)

Fighting

Games involving characters who fight usually hand - to - hand, in one - to - one combat situations without the use of firearms or projectiles. In most of these games, the fighters are represented as humans or anthropomorphic characters. This term should not be used for games which involve shooting or vehicles (see Combat and Shoot 'Em Up), or for games which include fighting, like Ice Hockey, but which have other objectives (see Sports).

Note: Many Fighting games can also be cross - listed with Sports. For related games, see also Combat.

Examples: Avengers; Body Slam; Boxing (with Sports); games in the Mortal Kombat series; Soul Edge; games in the Tekken series; Wrestle War

Flying

Games involving flying skills, such as steering, altitude control, takeoff and landing, maneuverability, speed control, and fuel conservation. This term should not be used for games in which shooting an opponent is the main objective (see Combat and Shoot 'Em Up), unless flying skills are essential to game play and to the winning of the game. Flying games can involve airplanes, birds, or spaceships, and

movement can take place in the sky (as in A - 10 Attack and Prop Cycle), through caverns (as in Descent), or in outer space (as in Starmaster and Star Ship).

Note: See also Combat, Shoot 'Em Up, Sports, and Training Simulation.

Examples: A - 10 Attack (with Training Simulation); Descent (with Maze and Shoot 'Em Up); F/A - 18 Hornet 3.0 (with Training Simulation); Flight Unlimited (with Training Simulation); Prop Cycle (with Collecting); Solaris; Starmaster (with Shoot 'Em Up)

Gambling

Games which involve the betting of a stake, which increases or decreases the player's total assets in the following round. These games usually involve multiple rounds of betting, allowing a player's stakes or money to grow or diminish over time. This term should not be used for games in which betting does not occur, or for games in which wins and losses do not carry over into the following round.

Note: See also Card Games and Table - Top Games.

Examples: Blackjack (with Card Games); Casino (with Card Games); Slot Machine; Video Poker (with Card Games); You Don't Know Jack (with Quiz)

Interactive Movie

Games which are made up of branching video clips or other moving images, the branching of which is decided by a player's actions. Players are often called to make decisions at points in the game where the action stalls or loops, or during action sequences that allow player input which can stop or change the course of action while the video clip is running. While the player may be given limited freedom of movement or action, revelation of the story is still largely linear in structure, with little or no variation possible in its overall sequence of events. This term should not be used for games which place a controllable player - character over backgrounds which are video clips, like Rebel Assault, nor should the term be used to refer to games like Myst which allow a player to wander and explore its world freely, but still limit outcomes and possible narrative paths to a series of video sequences and linear progression through a relatively predetermined narrative.

Examples: Dragon's Lair; Space Ace; Gadget; Johnny Mnemonic; Star Trek Borg

Management Simulation

Games in which players must balance the use of limited resources to build or expand some kind of community, institution, or empire, while dealing with internal forces within (such as the crime and pollution in SimCity), or external forces such as those of nature or chance (such as natural disasters and monsters in SimCity, or planets that require various amounts of terraforming as in Spaceward Ho!), and often competition from other players as well. Single - player games are often open - ended, where the community or institution grows and developed over time and continues changing, while multiple - player games usually have the objective of dominating all of the other players, at which point the game ends. In some cases, these games can take on an educational functional as well, for example, games found in museum displays which simulate supply and demand or other economic principles.

Note: See also Educational and Utility.

Examples: Aerobiz; Caesar II; Sid Meier's Civilization; M.U.L.E.; Monopoly; Railroad Tycoon; SimAnt; SimCity; SimFarm; SimTower; Spaceward Ho!

Maze

Games in which the objective requires the successful navigation of a maze. What can be called a maze is, of course, a matter of degree, though it is usually possible to discern whether a configuration of rooms or hallways was intended to deliberately cause difficulties in navigation (consider, for example, the difference in complexity between the mazes found in Berzerk, Pac - Man, and Doom). Mazes may appear in an overhead view (as in Pac - Man), a side view (as in Lode Runner), or first - person perspective (as in Doom) or hidden from view (as in certain games in Maze Craze). In some cases, the player - character can alter the maze, such as opening or closing passageways (as in Mousetrap), or even digging holes or passageways (as in Lode Runner or Dig Dug). Some mazes, such as those found in Lode Runner, focus less on navigation and more on how to gain access to certain portions of the screen in order to achieve certain results or obtain objects. Often the player - character must navigate the maze under the pressure of pursuers, although this is not always the case. Mazes are also often imbedded within other games, such as the Blue Labyrinth in Adventure, or the underground maze of the Selenetic Age in Myst.

Examples: Descent (with Flying and Shoot ' Em Up); Dig Dug; Doom (with Shoot ' Em Up); K. C. Munchkin (with Collecting and Escape); Lode Runner (with Platform); Maze Craze; Mousetrap (with Collecting and Escape); Pac -

man (with Collecting and Escape); Tunnel Runner; Tunnels of Doom (with Adventure); Ms. Pac - Man (with Collecting and Escape); Spy Vs Spy (with Collecting and Combat); Take the Money and Run

Obstacle Course

Games in which the main objective involves the traversing of a difficult path or one beset with obstacles, through which movement is essentially linear, often involving running, jumping, and avoiding dangers. This term should not be used for games which do not require more than simply steering down a clear path (see Driving) or avoiding objects or characters without a linear progression of movement (see Dodging), nor should it be used for games which involve chasing or being chased (see Chase), or shooting at opponents or getting shot at (see Combat and Shoot 'Em Up), nor for games with complex objectives (see Adventure), nor for games involving more than traversing a path of obstacles (see Platform).

Note: While Obstacle Courses are generally linear in design as far as the player - character's advancement through them is concerned, this degree of linearity can vary somewhat; for example, in games allowing a character to backtrack, or choose an alternate route.

Examples: Boot Camp; Clown Downtown; Freeway (with Dodging); Frogger (with Dodging); Pitfall!; Jungle Hunt

Pencil - and - Paper Games

Games which are adaptations of games usually played by means of pencil and paper (see Adaptation). This term should not be used for drawing or doodling programs (see Utility), or for games like those in the Dungeons & Dragons series, whose adaptations are very different from the version of the game played with pencil and paper.

Note: Not necessary to use with Adaptation as this is implied in Pencil - and - Paper Games.

Examples: 3 - D Tic - Tac - Toe; Effacer; Hangman from the 25th Century; Noughts and Crosses; Tic - Tac - Toe; and Hangman which appears as a cartridge in several game systems.

Pinball

Games which simulate the play of a pinball game. Although these games could be considered as Table - Top Games, there is a tradition of video pinball games and a wide variety of them to warrant categorizing them in a genre of their own.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Table - Top Games as that is implied in Pinball.

Examples: Arcade Pinball; Astrocade Pinball; Electronic Pinball; Extreme Pinball; Flipper Game; Galactic Pinball; Kirby's Pinball Land; Midnight Magic; Pachinko!; Pinball; Pinball Challenge; Pinball Dreams; Pinball Fantasies; Pinball Jam; Pinball Quest; Pinball Wizard; Power Rangers Pinball; Pro Pinball; Real Pinball; Sonic Spinball; Spinball; Super Pinball: Behind the Mask; Super Sushi Pinball; Thunderball!; True Pinball; Video Pinball

Platform

Games in which the primary objective requires movement through a series of levels, by way of running, climbing, jumping, and other means of locomotion. Characters and settings are seen in side view as opposed to top view, thus creating a graphical sense of up and down as is implied in Platform. These games often also can involve the avoidance of dropped or falling objects, conflict with (or navigation around) computer - controlled characters, and often some character, object, or reward at the top of the climb which provides narrative motivation. This term should not be used for games which do not involve ascending heights or advancement through a series of levels (see Adventure), nor for games which involve little more than traversing a path of obstacles (see Obstacle Course).

Note: For related games, see also Adventure and Obstacle Course.

Examples: Crazy Climber; Donkey Kong; Donkey Kong Jr.; Lode Runner (with Maze); Spiderman (Atari 2600); Super Mario Bros. (with Collecting); Warioland; Yoshi's Island

Programming Games

Games in which the player write short programs that control agents within a game. These agents then compete and react to situations based on the player's programming. This term should not be used for games which a player must learn to operate a machine, such as in Riven (see Puzzle), nor for games in which the player controls the player - characters directly. Depending on what the programmed agents do, games may be able to be cross - listed with other genres.

Examples: AI Fleet Commander; AI Wars, CoreWar; CRobots; Omega; RARS (Robot Auto Racing Simulator); Robot Battle

Puzzle

Games in which the primary conflict is not so much between the player - character and other characters, but rather the figuring out of a solution, which often involves solving enigmas, navigation, learning how to use different tools, and the manipulating or reconfiguring of objects. Most often there is a visual or sonic element to the puzzles as well, or at least some verbal description of them. This term should not be used for games which only involve the answering of questions (see Quiz). Many Text Adventures also contain Puzzles, and use text to describe their sights and sounds

Examples: 7th Guest; Atari Video Cube; Block Out (with Abstract); Dice Puzzle; Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (with Text Adventure); Jigsaw; Myst (with Adventure); Rubik's Cube (with Adaptation); Sokoban; Suspended Animation (with Text Adventure); Tetris (with Abstract)

Quiz

Games in which the main objective is the successful answering of questions. Scoring is usually based on either how many questions are answered correctly, or on the amount of money players have after betting on their answers. Some of these games are adaptations of board games or quiz shows from television.

Note: Games in which the player can place a bet on their answers should be cross - listed with Gambling.

Examples: \$25,000 Pyramid (with Adaptation); Fax; Jeopardy (with Adaptation); NFL Football Trivia Challenge '94/'95; Name That Tune (with Adaptation); You Don't Know Jack (with Gambling); Sex Trivia; Trivial Pursuit (with Adaptation); Trivia Whiz; Triv - Quiz; Video Trivia; Wizz Quiz

Racing

Games in which the objective involves the winning of a race, or the covering of more ground than an opponent (as in Slot Racers). Often these games involve driving skills and can also be cross - listed with Driving. One - player games can be considered Racing if there are other computer - controlled cars or vehicles competing

on the race track, however if they are not competitive and act only as obstacles, use Driving.

Note: See also Driving. Not necessary to cross - list with Sports as this is implied in Racing. Although most of these games involve driving skills and can be cross - listed with Driving, some of them, like 1000 Miles, do not.

Examples: 1000 Miles (with Card Games); Daytona U.S.A. (with Driving); High Velocity (with Driving); Indy 500 (with Driving); Mario Kart 64 (with Driving); Math Grand Prix (with Educational); Pole Position (with Driving); Red Planet (with Driving); Slot Racers (with Dodging); Street Racer (with Dodging and Driving); Super GT (with Driving)

Rhythm and Dance

Games in which gameplay requires players to keep time with a musical rhythm. These games may employ a variety of controllers beyond the usual video game hardware, including controllers simulating drums (as in DrumMania), turntables (as in Beatmania), guitars (as in Guitar Freaks), or even maracas (as in Samba de Amigo).

Examples: Beatmania; Bust - a - Groove; Dance Dance Revolution; Guitar Freaks; PaRappa the Rapper; Pop ' n' Music; Samba de Amigo; Space Channel 5; Um Jammer Lammy; Vib - Ribbon (with Obstacle Course)

Role - Playing

Games in which players create or take on a character represented by various statistics, which may even include a developed persona. The character's description may include specifics such as species, race, gender, and occupation, and may also include various abilities, such as strength and dexterity, to limited degrees usually represented numerically. The games can be single - player, such as Ultima III: Exodus (1983), or multiple - player games such as those which are networked. This term should not be used for games like Adventure or Raiders of the Lost Ark in which identity is not emphasized or important, nor where characters are not represented statistically.

Note: Many networked games, including MUDs (Multi - User Dimensions), MOOs (MUD, Object - Oriented), and MUSHs (Multi - User Shared Hallucination), fall into this category, although the degree to which they can be considered games may vary depending on the players and system operators, and whether or not objectives are set for the players and competition occurs.

Examples: Anvil of Dawn; Diablo; Dragon Lore 2; Fallout; Mageslayer; Phantasy Star; Sacred Pools; Games from the Ultima series or Dungeons & Dragons series. Networked games include: Interstate '76; Ivory Tower; JediMUD; Northern Lights; OutlawMOO; PernMUSH; RiftMUSH; Rivers of MUD; Sunflower; Unsafe Haven; VikingMUD; Zodiac.

Shoot 'Em Up (or Shooter)

Games involving shooting at, and often destroying, a series of opponents or objects. As opposed to Combat games which feature one - on - one battles with opponents of roughly equal attributes and means, Shoot ' Em Up games usually feature multiple opponents (the ' Em is short for them) attacking at once (as in Space Invaders or Galaga) or multiple objects which can be destroyed (as in Centipede), which are often potentially harmful to the player - character (as in Asteroids). In many cases, the player - character and opponents of the player - character have unequal attributes and means, and do not even resemble one another (as in Yar' s Revenge), and the games usually require quick reflexes. Do not use this term for games like Stellar Track, in which the player - character and opponents fire at each other, but in such a way that quick reflexes are not necessary (see Strategy). There are three types of Shoot ' Em Up games which are common: in one, the player - character moves horizontally back and forth at the bottom of the screen shooting upward while opponents moving around above shoot downward (as in Space Invaders); in the second, the character moves freely about the screen, encountering opponents from all sides (as in Berserk or Robotron: 2084), and the third features a first - person perspective (as in Doom). This term should not be used for fighting games which do not involve shooting (see Fighting), nor for games in which opponents are fairly evenly matched (see Combat), nor for games in which none of the objects the player - character fires upon can harm the player - character (see Target). In a few cases, the player - character is primarily defending rather than attacking, as in Atlantis, Commando Raid, Missile Command, and Missile Defense 3 - D.

Examples: Asteroids; Berzerk; Centipede; Doom; Duckshot; Galaga; Millipede; Missile Command, Robotron: 2084; Space Invaders; Yar's Revenge; Zaxxon

Simulation

See Management Simulation and Training Simulation

Sports

Games which are adaptations of existing sports or variations of them.

Note: No need to cross - list with Adaptation as this is implied in Sports. See also Driving, Fighting, Obstacle Course, Racing, and Table - Top Games.

Examples: American Football; Atari Baseball; Bowling; Boxing (with Fighting); Fishing Derby (with Catching); Hot Shots Tennis; Golf; Human Cannonball (with Target); Ice Hockey; Madden Football 97; Miniature Golf; NHL Hockey 97; Pong (with Table - Top Games); Skeet Shoot (with Target); Track & Field; Summer Games; Video Olympics; RealSports Soccer; RealSports Tennis; RealSports Volleyball; SimGolf; Sky Diver; Tsuppori Sumo Wrestling; World Series Baseball '98

Strategy

Games emphasizing the use of strategy as opposed to fast action or the use of quick reflexes, which are usually not necessary for success in these games.

Note: See also management simulation games like M.U.L.E. and Spaceward Ho!, as well as many Board Games, Card Games, and Combat games.

Examples: Ataxx (with Abstract); Checkers (with Board Games), Chess (with Board Games); Monopoly (with Board Games); M.U.L.E. (with Management Simulation); Othello (with Board Games); Spaceward Ho! (with Management Simulation); Stellar Track

Table - Top Games

Games involving adaptations of existing table - top games requiring physical skill or action (such as pool or pinball). This term should not be used for games involving little or no physical skill or action (see Board Games and Card Games), nor should it be used for games which cannot be played on a table - top of some sort (see Sports). For games which resemble pinball games, see Pinball.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Adaptation, as this is implied in Table - Top Games.

Examples: Battle Ping Pong; Electronic Table Soccer!; Parlour Games; Pocket Billiards!; Pong (with Sports); Sure Shot Pool; Trick Shot; Virtual Pool

Target

Games in which the primary objective involves aiming and shooting at targets which are not moving or in motion. Occasionally the targets may be harming the player - character's property (as in Wabbit). This term should not be used for games in which the player - character can be fired upon by opponents (see Combat, and Shoot ' Em Up), or games do not involve shooting (see Catching and Collecting), nor for games in which the objects or characters actively elude the player - character.

Examples: Air - Sea Battle; Carnival; Human Cannonball; Marksman/Trapshooting; Shooting Gallery; Skeet Shoot (with Sports); Wabbit

Text Adventure

Games which rely primarily on text for the player interface, and often for the description of the game's world and the action which takes place there as well. Some games may use images, but these are usually noninteractive illustrations which are not central to the play of the game. Games range from allowing free movement throughout the game's world (usually by commands such as north, south, east, west, up, and down) with a variety of options for interaction, to more linear, branching narratives. Players often are able to carry objects which are kept track of by an inventory function, and are able to converse with computer - controlled player - characters through a very limited vocabulary. Although some games may incorporate text - based informational screens (as in Stellar Track), rely on text for description (such as the books in the library in Myst), or even use text as a graphic element (such as Rogue), this term should only be used for games in which the world of the game is primarily experienced through text which describes the world of the game and the events occurring in it.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Adventure since that is implied in Text Adventure. Multiple player Text Adventures which are networked are considered to be Role - Playing games (see Role - Playing). Almost all Text Adventures can also be cross - listed with Puzzle.

Examples: The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy; Planetfall; Leather Goddesses of Phobos; Suspended; Zork.

Training Simulation

Games or programs which attempt to simulate a realistic situation, for the purpose of training, and usually the development of some physical skill such as steering (as in driving and flight simulators). This term should not be used for simulations which focus on management (see Management Simulation) or the employment of strategy (see Strategy). These games can range from realistic simulations used by institutions, such as those used to train astronauts, tank drivers, or airline pilots, to simplified gamelike approximations of them used mainly for entertainment, such as Police Trainer or A - 10 Attack.

Note: Not necessary to cross - list with Utility or Simulation, as that is implied in Training Simulation.

Examples: A - 10 Attack; Comanche 3 (with Flying); F/A - 18 Hornet 3.0 (with Flying); Flight Unlimited (with Flying); Police Trainer; military and airline flight simulators; and driving simulations used in driver education.

Utility

Cartridges or programs which have a purpose or functional beyond that of entertainment, although they may be structured in a manner similar to games (such as Mario Teaches Typing) or contain elements of entertainment. While they are often not games themselves, some of these programs have the same appearance as game cartridges and are sometimes collected and traded as game cartridges, and they are usually included in listings of cartridges.

Note: See also Demo, Diagnostic, Educational, and Simulation.

Examples: Basic Programming; Beginning Algebra; Beginning Math; Computer Programmer; Diagnostic Cartridge (Identification number FDS100144) for the Atari 5200 system (with Diagnostic); Home Finance; Infogenius French Language Translator; Mario Teaches Typing; Music Box Demo (with Demo); Number Games; Speed Reading; Spelling Games; Touch Typing, Word Games

NOTES

Thomas Schatz, Hollywood Genres, New York: McGraw - Hill, Inc., ©1981, page 15.

Ibid., page 30.

Ed Buscombe, *The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema*, *Screen*, Volume 11, Number 2, pages 33–45.

Andrew Tudor, *Genre and Critical Methodology*, in *Movies and Methods*, Volume I, edited by Bill Nichols, Berkeley: University of California Press, ©1976, pages 118–126.

Afterword (by Robin Lionheart)

Other writers have criticized the choice of categories Mark defines in this essay:

First some of his categories are questionable. Amongst his genres he lists diagnostics, demos and utilities. While it may be argued that demos are a distinct genre as they are trying to make you buy the full game (an argument I do not buy), I fail to see how diagnostics or utilities can be classified as genres of games of any sort. His rational [sic] seems to be that they come in cartridges or CD - ROM' s like games and some game collectors collect them too, so they are the same as games.

—Review of *The Medium of the Video Game* by Bryan - Mitchell Young

More recently, Mark J.P. Wolf has come up with 42 different genres of games according to the kind of interactivity they offer. However, if we see genre - based categorizations as a means of making sense out of a larger whole, 42 genres ceases to be useful. Or, we have to accept that the diversity of games requires many more genres and subgenres than traditional media products which have benefitted from genre studies. Or, that a game genre equals hybridity, because game genres are complex sums of interaction and rule mechanisms, audiovisual styles, and popular fiction genre conventions.

—Halo and the Anatomy of the FPS, by Aki Järvinen

Mark sent me this response to their criticisms:

Of course, any proposed system of genres will be the subject of debate and criticism. At the same time, coming up with a consistent and comprehensive

list of genres that attempts to define and articulate the boundaries of each is a much more difficult task than criticizing existing lists.

As for Young's complaint regarding the inclusion of diagnostic, demo, and utility, I would agree that these go somewhat beyond games, but then so do some of the entries in the genres education and simulation, and there are some who would argue that *Myst* and *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing* are not games, leading us into varying definitions of games. In trying to be exhaustive, I have been inclusive rather than exclusive, and such genres as diagnostic, demo, and utility can simply be ignored by those who wish to be more exclusive, without upsetting the rest of the list (which should still be valid for them).

As for Järvinen's critique, I agree that 42 genres is a lot, but to have less would mean lumping more of them together, and reducing the specificity (and, I would argue, the usefulness) of the categories. Järvinen is right in saying that video games are diverse, perhaps even more so than other types of media products. And I do believe in hybridity and games being entered in multiple genres, as is evident in the essay above and the list itself. Several genres could easily be subdivided into subgenres, which are themselves even more fluid and ever - changing than genres, and their inclusion would more than double the present length of the list.

Mark's essay may not be the last word on the subject, but it is one of the first. (Chris Crawford's *The Art of Computer Game Design* (1982) includes an earlier taxonomy.) Any taxonomy is bound to become obsolete as new genres are invented (for example, the rhythm and dance genre was a late addition to this essay). Hybrids will continue to defy easy categorization. But to discuss matters like how effective a game is as a member of each of its genres, eventually we should define our terms, as Mark has essayed to.

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