



PLAY DAY #1

Hi all, we've arrived at our first opportunity to do a bit of playing and then talk about it. We'll do several of these during the semester, each with different goals and subject matter, so no worries if you're a little unsure on this first one. (and kudos to anyone who's been playing games all during this semester anyway, this just gives you a little extra reason to reflect and think about it!)

Play Day #1 assignment:

1. Select an early-ish era video game to play.

- What do I mean by "early-ish" era game? Something released somewhere between super early (stuff from the 1970s and early 1980s) up until about 1993 or so. Basically, you're probably dealing with a lot of games released on Nintendo Entertainment Systems, various Atari systems, Nintendo Game Boy, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, Neo Geo, etc. A lot of these will be 8 bit and 16bit games. I'd prefer you steer clear of games from later in the 1990s, stuff that is designed for consoles such as Sony Playstation, Nintendo 64, Sega Saturn, etc.
- Don't obsess about the date too much, but do try to steer clear of games that are too recent here.
- How to get your hands on such a thing? You might already have access, depending on what you've already got at home (for example there are *lots* of "virtual consoles" with subscription services, such as Super NES and NES games that are available through Nintendo Switch online). Sometimes there are some ports of older games via apps for phones and there are also some ways you can play older games via computer interfaces (quality varies for those).
- But if you don't already have an obvious game to try, **feel free to be creative here**. If you don't have already have access to such a game yourself via some sort of device or console, **feel free to use a friend's or borrow something from someone across the hall or a neighbor (in safe covid ways...); feel free to partner up with someone else in this class; see if someone you know has a device they can lend for 30 minutes.**
- Basically: **DON'T** spend money to do this.
- If you're having **ANY** problems figuring out what to play, just let me know and I'll happily help you out.

Note: while we want an experience-ish with some earlier game styles, we know that this is all pretty approximate and fluid—as one writer puts it, “classic console gaming is hard to preserve. Cartridges are their own unique media that you can't read without some specialized hardware, and they account for the majority of console games made before 1996.” Ports and emulations vary in quality. I’m less interested in you experiencing some exact replica of an early game than just digging in and playing for a few minutes.

2. Play the game for around 30 minutes. Don’t worry about playing longer than that, though, unless you really want to.
3. As you’re playing the game, listen carefully to sounds and music. What do you hear? What do you notice? You will likely want to take some notes.

What are some things you might want to think about while taking notes ?

You might also think of some things that come up during our reading for Tuesday.

- What game **genre** is this?

A game genre usually has a set of established conventions behind it, such as First Person Shooters, adventure games, real-time strategy games or Role-Playing Games. Establishing the game within a genre can help determine, for instance, why it is like other games of the same type, or what is innovative about it.

- **Technological context**

What platform(s) was the game developed for? It is important to note which version of the game you are playing. The technology will determine, for instance, the length of the game or whether there is an ending (think of arcade games in the early 80s, where games typically did not end).

- **Socio-historical context**

When was the game made? It's different to analyze a game from the 70s, when videogames were almost exclusively played in arcades, than a recent game. Where was it released?

- **Description of Gameplay:** what do you do in the game?

Focus on the core mechanics: what are the most recurring actions in the game? You can think of this in terms of verbs: what are the main verbs of the game? For example, in *Super Mario Bros.* the verbs would be run, jump, pick up, slide down, stomp. In *Tetris*, the verbs would be rotate, drop, clear.

- **Aesthetics: general gameplay experience**

This section is a tricky one, since your experience will likely be different from other people's. Your skills or game knowledge affect the way you play the game, and that is fine!

- **Audiovisuals: visual design, sound design, music**

What is the audiovisual style of the game? Does it evoke / imitate the style of other media (e.g. painting, photography, cinema, classical music)? What is the color scheme? How do these audiovisual elements contribute to the fiction of the game? How do they contribute to the mood of the game?

- **Physiology:**

Notice anything about how your body feels when playing?

4. Please write for me—informally, shouldn’t be a research paper, just a reflection on your 30 minutes of play—**about 1-2 pages (double-spaced, 12 point)** of what you heard and how it functioned in the game. This is *not* a review of the game—it’s an informal essay on your own experience and analysis of what you heard.

- 5) Upload your written page to Moodle by next Thursday morning, September 23, 8:00am (needs to be up before class).