Reaction Papers
GAM 224, Prof. Robin Burke
Winter 2008
Due: More or less weekly, starting 1/22
Grade value: 15%

What is it:
Each student will write six one-page 2-3 paragraph papers, describing their interaction with and impressions of a particular game title drawn from the game syllabus.

Due dates:
1/22, 2/5, 2/14, 2/21, 2/28, 3/11

What to do:
1. Choose a game to play. You can do the games in any order. It does not matter if you have played the game before, but do not rely on your memory.
2. Play the game for at least an hour.
3. Write a one-page reaction paper describing your interaction and your impressions of the game.
4. Turn in the paper via Course On-Line by midnight.

The reaction paper should only briefly describe the premise and scenario of the game. It should
- Log your time spent playing the game.
- Describe your experience of playing the game:
  o Level of difficulty
  o Attractive / interesting or annoying / distracting aspects
Focus on one or two aspects of the game in two or three paragraphs. See example on following page. You will only get full credit for your reaction paper if you relate your main points to the game analysis schemas from the book. If you used any aids, such as FAQ files or walkthroughs, these should be noted.

Rubric (10 points)
Writing
(1 pt) Is poorly written and proofread with many errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
(2 pt) Is well written and proofread with few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
(3 pt) Is very well written and proofread with few to no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
Description
(1 pt) Summarizes game premise without describing particular instance of use.
(2 pt) Describe the interaction with the game.
(3 pt) Describes the interaction with the game clearly.
Analysis
(1 pt) Does not make any analytic claims or does so without adequate support.
(2 pt) Briefly makes and supports one or two points regarding the gameplay experience.
(3-4 pt) Briefly makes and supports one or two points regarding the gameplay experience and relates them to specific schemas described in Rules of Play.

Games:

a) Wii Sports or Super Mario Galaxy
b) Half-Life or Half-Life 2
c) Katamari Damacy or We Love Katamari
d) Facade (available on-line at http://www.interactivestory.net/download/, 167 MB)
e) Guitar Hero (I, II or III), Rock Band
f) Assassin’s Creed, Bioshock, or Gears of War.

1 Not available in the CTI Game Lab.
Example Reaction Paper:

I played Astro Boy: Omega Factor on the GameBoy Advance SP for about two hours over two days. It is an action-oriented side-scrolling type game with some adventure aspects, set in an animated world in which robots and people are struggling for power. The game begins with a brief tutorial episode that covers the use of the controls. There wasn't sufficient practice given on some of the more difficult techniques, like "dashing": it was possible to make it through the tutorial without actually using these. Also, as I discovered later in a FAQ file², combinations of attacks are also important. These were not covered in the tutorial.

Despite being a GameBoy game with limited display to work with, I found the visuals very appealing, in a Sunday-morning cartoon kind of way. ( Appropriately so, since the game is based on a manga series.) Astro Boy is supposed to be a robot, but he looks like a boy and can display a variety of emotions. There are a number of other characters, both attackers and helpful characters, all done in a colorful anime style. The backgrounds are two-dimensional, but use multiple layers to give the impression of depth.

The cut-scenes in which Astro Boy converses with various characters are not overlong and make good use of comic-book conventions. The scenes are clues to a set of secret identities. Solving the mystery is the narrative component of the game. Because the scenes were short and well-crafted, I found that they enhanced the gameplay and motivated the action sequences. However the cut-scenes cannot be skipped, which makes it annoying to do a level again and diminishes the replay value of the game.

I played on the easy level of difficulty, so I progressed through the game pretty quickly. The primary reward system has to do with powering up each of Astro Boy's special moves. When another game character is added to Astro Boy's "Omega Factor", a power-up token is available. It can be added to any of the moves, however. So, the player can choose how and when to enhance Astro Boy's abilities. This is a kind of positive feedback loop - the more progress you make in the game, the easier the opponents are to defeat. This is important because you must revisit some levels several times. I chose to enhance the laser gun most often because it is the most powerful weapon, but later I wished I had spent more on the machine gun because of its "stun" effect.

² http://db.gamefaqs.com/portable/gbadvance/file/astro_boy_gba.txt