

Abstract

Designing for the Pleasures of Disputation -or- How to make friends by trying to kick them!

by Douglas Wilson
contact@dooogle.net

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In this dissertation I explore what it might mean to design games that aim to nurture a spirit of togetherness. My central claim is that games which are intentionally designed to be confrontational, broken, or otherwise “incomplete” can help inspire a decidedly festive, co-dependent, and performative type of play. Appropriating the political theoretical work of Hannah Arendt, I argue that her concepts of “action” and “plurality” provide useful definitions of performance and togetherness as they relate to gameplay. Drawing primarily on theories of embodied interaction, precedents from the contemporary art world, and various folk game movements, I grapple with the messy relationship between designed systems and sociocultural context. I describe how confronting this relationship head on opens up fruitful design opportunities. Taking seriously Dave Hickey’s concept of “the pleasures of disputation,” I explore how we players and designers might transmute the acrimony of conflict into something joyful.