Intro to Game Design
Games and Stories

Fall 2015
Mondays & Wednesdays 9:30 AM-12:15 PM

Instructor: Naomi Clark
nmc5@nyu.edu / naomi@halfrobot.com

Teaching Assistant: Angela Lee
al4317@nyu.edu
First things first: Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics

**Mechanics**
- Rules: processes, actions, end conditions, procedures, code

**Dynamics**
- What happens during play: strategies, politics, turnarounds, dramatic arc, tension, resolution
- Content: characters, setting, authored story

**Aesthetics**
- The experience of the player: emotions, reactions, interpretation
- Dealing: exhilaration, payback, loss
- Bluffing: reading, forcing out
- Betting: dealing, drawing
- Reading: bluffing, forcing out
- Forcing Out: betting, drawing
- Exhilaration: dealing, betting, drawing
- Payback: bluffing, reading, forcing out
- Loss: dealing, betting, drawing
Why do we make games with stories?
A1. Videogame technology & interactivity lets us craft especially vivid, compelling stories where the player has a central, decisive role.
A1. Videogames are awesome venues for stories!
A2. As the aesthetic form of systems, games let us express stories about situations via rules, simulation and choice.
A2. Games do stories in a unique and special way.
A3. Every time a game is played, a new story is created about what happened.
A3. Games produce stories—no matter what we do.
Plot and Narrative in Games

A1 -> Embedded Narrative

A3 -> Emergent Narrative
Narrative in Games

A1 -> Embedded Narrative

A3 -> Emergent Narrative
Narrative in Games

A1 -> Embedded Narrative
A2 -> Procedural Representation
A3 -> Emergent Narrative

Give him a break. He's new in the country.
Narrative in Games

**Embedded Narrative**

**Emergent Narrative**

**Procedural Representation**

*Oftentimes works in tandem with*

*Helps generate through rules*

---

**Narrative** ➔ **A2 -> Procedural Representation** ➔ **A3 ->**
The Complexity of Procedural Representation in Play

The point of play or simulations? Stands for a thing but is in some ways the opposite of the thing: playful not serious, safe not dangerous.
Ways of Embedding Narrative

A1 -> Embedded Narrative
Ways of Embedding Narrative

A1 -> Embedded Narrative
Embedded Narrative: String of Pearls

Several levels

Longer story scene

Story

Play

Play

Several levels
Embedded Narrative: Player Choices

May or may not change the outcome/course of a game...

...but a distinctive form of embedded narrative no matter what
Environmental Storytelling
Embedded Narrative: “On-Demand” Storytelling aka “Lore”

Plants vs. Corpses

In all the strange struggles that have raged across Ferelden, one of the most peculiar is the battle of Faipur’s Cap. A powerful demon, bent on gaining power in the mortal world, raised an army of corpses to assault the home of Helianthus, a reclusive apostate who was said to possess both fabulous wealth and great knowledge. While the demon saw the perfect host in this bejeweled bookbinder, Helianthus was not without defenses of her own.

As the corpses shuffled toward her house, Helianthus called to the demon, declaring that though she was but a simple apostate, the demon would see her power an entire infantry. Then, calling upon her magic, she summoned spirits into the plants in her vegetable patch, creating countless tiny sylvans. The resulting garden warfare saw corpses armored with buckets and doors as makeshift helmets and shields battling...
Mixing it up with Procedurality: Life in the Garden

INSTRUCTIONS

Shuffle the pages. Without looking,
Select five pages and place them
Between the covers of the book.
Then read the story.

- from Life in the Garden
Mixing it up with Procedurality: Life in the Garden
Life in the Garden: Why it works

- **Ambiguity**: space for players to fill in the blanks of what’s happening
- **Themes recur**: helps create connections between pages
- **No backstory needed**: a very familiar setting and characters
- **Small cast**: makes recurrence easier, less “guy who just shows up once, what happened to him?”
- **A moment in time**: no page causes a permanent “state change” to the world that would throw off other pages
- **Modular**: each page is written like a generic Lego block that can connect to any other – no “special connections”
Shaping Narrative: Story as Gameplay
Ordered deck gets harder as game progresses

Rules spread disease tokens every turn; cascade chain-reaction possible

Players have specialized roles
Shaping Narrative: Leaning on well-known fiction
Potential Pitfalls: Relying heavily on player creativity

Amazing with the right players!  Awful with players who can’t step up.
Shaping Narrative: Physical Feel + Social Dynamics = Drama!

- 3 “Click” + 5 “Bang” cards in hand, play one each turn (8 turns total)
- 8 variable-value loot dealt out
- On count of three, everyone points a gun at someone
Shaping Narrative: Physical Feel + Social Dynamics = Drama!

- You can now drop out to avoid Wounds
- Remaining players reveal cards; anyone targeted by a “Bang” takes a wound, drops out
- Remaining players divide loot