Intro to Game Design

What is it good for?

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

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Today’s Class

• Playing Intervention Games
• **Next project:** Pitching a game concept... solo!
• Documenting and communicating about your games
• If we’ve got time, let’s talk about... what games are good for!
Pitching
Pitching
Pitching: the project

- **Come up with an idea...** for an original videogame. On your own!
- **Must be primarily digital** (some real-world elements OK if you want)
- **Present-day technology platform** (no holodecks, please)
- Your pitch will be graded based on two factors:
  - **Originality and innovation** (just like existing game, but “better?” Too easy!)
  - **Effective communication** – make an impression, paint a picture, sell it
- **On Wednesday...** 30-second elevator pitches at end of class
- **Next Monday...** you will each give a 5-7 minute pitch, with slides
  - Recommendation: don’t do more than five slides
  - Don’t read sentences worth of text off of your slides like I’m doing right now, it’s hard to follow and the audience’s brain desynchronizes
[We read] about a group of scientists who attempted to teach dolphins to play water polo. Although the dolphins were able to learn how to put the ball in the net (and seemed to derive pleasure from doing so), when the trainers tried to get them to stop the other team from "scoring," the dolphins launched an all-out war on the other team's players, using methods that no person steeped in the concepts of sportspeopleship would ever use. After this experience, the trainers gave up their effort, apparently concluding that their task was hopeless, that dolphins couldn't be taught to play the sport. My guess is that they assumed that all the dolphins needed to be taught were the recorded rules of water polo and the creatures would be able to play the game like adult human beings. These scientists evidently did not realize how much of our knowledge of proper game behavior precedes the learning of the statable constraints of a particular sport.

“Play to win, kids... not to maim or kill.”
You must play to win (but not too much)
Patience... Patience.
Classifying Games

5. Social status. (Played by men, or women, or mixed? Regarded as childish, intellectual, disreputable?)
Classifying PEOPLE

Men’s Poker Night

Poker Night with the Boyzzzzzzzzz
Oppositional Definition
5. Social status. (Played by men, or women, or mixed? Regarded as childish, intelectual, disreputable?)
This is all arbitrary...
Monopoly
Assignment: HYPERGENDER HOPSCOTCH

• **Create a new version of hopscotch.** You may change rules, add activities, but keep the basic verbs & objects: Hopping. Shapes on the ground.

• You are encouraged to **label these shapes with words and / or pictures**, constructed with tape, paper, and markers.

• You must **express a gender rhetoric... to the extreme**
  - What is a gender rhetoric? A set of rules, behaviors, exclusions, characteristics, outlook, philosophy of life that someone considers essential to truly and properly being a person of that gender
  - Gender teams will include: MASCULINE  FEMININE  NON-BINARY
  - You can’t make up your own rhetoric; you must use an existing rhetoric from somewhere out in the world. Think: advertising, traditions, stereotypes, expectations, politics, culture. Tumblr.
ALL WORK AND NO PLAY MAKES JACK A DULL BOY

ALL PLAY AND NO WORK MAKES JACK A MERE TOY

Maria Edgeworth, 1825
“Our work is usually explicitly non-utilitarian. A fork designer can always fall back on the success of a fork design being the functional use of the fork.

In game design, we have to create our own criteria for success. This might include aesthetic goals, goals for exploring or conveying ideas, teaching concepts, commercial metrics, and technical innovations, etc.

Of course, all of these kinds of goals are things that non-game designers can take on, too. Fork designers usually have their own aesthetic goals, for example. But in the case of games, the non-functional goals are all that we have.”
Why do we make games?
Bobby Kotick (Activision)

- Games sure are a great way to make money!
- Increase shareholder value
- New features? New technology? If they can be spun to the stock market as making more money
Why do we make games?
• Games for entertainment
• Try to reach as many people as possible
• If something artistic or meaningful on a deeper level (or just pretentious!) happened, it’s not really the goal
Harnessing the attitudes that surface when we play games for positive psychology & motivation
“Reality is broken…”
… but maybe we can fix it by learning from games

More accomplishment
Better social relations
Better feedback & reward
creating
“Super-empowered, hopeful individuals”

Azeroth
(World of Warcraft)

Earth
(World of Reality)
Harnessing the expressive & meaningful power of systems
David Ward: Games to reduce real-world uncertainty and casualties
Ludic Century
Ludic Century

**Games are ancient** and part of being human. **Digital technology** created a resurgence in games; games & computers are a perfect fit.

The 20th century was the century of the **information revolution**. In the 21st century, **information is now at play** and more flexible & user-generated.

20th century culture was dominated by the **moving image**: film, television, animation. The Ludic Century will be **the era of games**: a systemic, participatory, customizable culture.

We live in a **world of systems**. **Games are beautiful. They do not need to be justified.**

It’s not enough to understand systems, we must **creatively play with them**.

We should **think like designers**, not passively accepting systems but improving them.

All of this is what makes up **gaming as a literacy** for the new century. Greater gaming literacy = more people who can **understand & solve complex problems**.

**Everyone will be a game designer** to some degree; to play a game deeply is to think about design.
Eric Zimmerman: Games are beautiful in and of themselves, and need no “reason why”
Why Games – Recap and Wrapup

Games for $$$ / The Bottom Line

Games for Simulation & Prediction

Games for Motivation to Deal with Real Problems

Games for Understanding Complexity

Games for Mass Entertainment

Games for Games’ Sake
Why Games – Recap and Wrapup

A. Games for $$$ / The Bottom Line
B. Games for Motivation to Deal with Real Problems
C. Games for Mass Entertainment
D. Games for Simulation & Prediction
E. Games for Understanding Complexity
F. Games for Games’ Sake
Why Games: Lots of Ideas

Games for Shareholder Value ($$$)
Games for Mass Entertainment
Games for Motivation to Deal with Real Problems
Games for Understanding Complexity
Games for Simulation & Prediction
Games for, above anything else, the potential for beauty
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- What’s on these slides?
Mood Boards
Mood Boards
Mood Boards
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Mood Boards

“The covered wagon, also known as a prairie schooner, is a cultural icon of the American Old West. The white canvas covers of the wagons crossing the prairies reminded some writers of the sails of a ship at sea.”
Elements of a Concept Pitch

- **Platform:** how do people play this game?
- **Audience:** who’s this game for? In what context?
- **Theme:** what is the game simulating, what kind of story is it telling?
- **Genre:** existing gameplay genre as a “starting point” for understanding your game... but how is your game different, distinctive, more interesting?
Design Values: What’s important to you?