Week 11 - Context of Play

Moving from the intervention game to the last set of smaller projects, in which students come up with their own game concepts create pitches and concept documentation. Discussion of the culture surrounding play and games continues!

PROJECT DUE: Intervention Game
PROJECT ASSIGNED: Pitch Presentation

Lecture / Discussion: Week 11

Most of this class is probably spent playing the intervention game – but some time needs to be saved at the end if the pitch presentation is being assigned. If there’s more time or you use labs, the lecture and exercise below can be used.

Some instructors might have an extra week for working on the pitch, so this lecture could happen the week after the intervention games are played. It’s good to start the pitch assignment ASAP so students can begin brainstorming for it – and lab can be used to give them some tips and practice on how to present (see below) since there’s no playtesting or iteration (in the usual sense) for this project.

There are a lot of possible ways to go for this lecture, and it’s a good opportunity for instructors to interject their own take on the subject of games as part of broader culture. A TA special could also work here, depending on timing of the intervention games finishing and the next assignment beginning.

- Discuss the readings – the blurriness at the edge of the magic circle, and what kinds of rules exist, how they exist, etc.
- Sniderman’s categorization of kinds of games, provenance of the game, “social status” (played by men, women, or mixed? regarded as childish, intellectual, disreputable?), “pay-off” etc. What does this taxonomy tell you about Sniderman?
- What games might we put in these different categories – and why? What tells us this? Cultural stereotyping and categories at work?
- Exercise: Hypergender Hopscotch (45 minutes)
- What other cultural notions about games would you consider stereotypes right now? Are these stereotypes growing or fading, or both?
- How has perception of games changed over our lifetime – or longer?
- What do we think games are for, anyway?

Assignment: Pitch Presentation

- Groups of 1 or 2. Advantages of having everyone do solo projects: you really get a sense of each students’ conceptual strengths and weaknesses, individual tastes. A chance to work outside of a group, and pursue your own individualistic idea. Advantages of having people pair up: it’s far shorter to do 8 presentations during the course of a class than 16, if your class has 16 students. Fewer projects means presentations can be slightly longer (also to allow both teammates to speak) and there can be more questions.
- Guidelines:
  - must be for a present-day technology platform – no sci-fi
  - real-world or physical elements are OK, but must have a strong digital component. Pokemon GO would be fine, a VHS game or Reiner Knizia technology-enhanced boardgame wouldn’t.
  - emphasis is on (1) an original and innovative game design (2) good communication
  - if working in pairs, both teammates must do part of the presentation
- Announce time limit for presentations according to number of groups, and let students know that they’ll be carefully timed + cut-off if they run too long, and that questions will be asked. Time limit is probably 5-10 minutes.
- For Lab: be prepared to share the basic idea for your game in an elevator pitch of 30 seconds or less.

Lab: Week 11

TAs can run this lab.

To help introduce the project and give an example of a product pitch (not a game) with do’s and don’t’s, listen to an excerpt of Episode 533, “It’s the product, not the person,” of This American Life: http://www.thisamericanlife.org/play_full.php?play=533

Start at 13:00 and end after Chris’ positive version (not the negative one) around 27:00 and discuss:

- The idea of telling a story, getting a smooth delivery
- The point is not to mirror the problem -> solution -> money structure aspect of this episode; that is not always best for a creative project

Next, elevator pitches:

- Students should have elevator pitches ready to share – no more than 30 seconds to explain their idea. If students haven’t come to class with an idea, this can be done halfway through class.
- Do a go-around, and ask all the students to raise their hands after a pitch if it sounds like a game that would catch their attention if they heard about it, and the pitch makes them want to play it. Tell students that they must limit themselves to raising their hands for three projects (some of them won’t limit themselves, which is fine).
- Ask some of the people who raise their hands what words caught their attention the most. Or ask what genre or kind of game they think it
is (what's it like?) Are these assumptions correct, is that what the pitching student wanted to draw attention to / create the impression of?

Part II

- Go over what makes a good presentation. It’s not flashy Powerpoint transitions (they’re cheesy, almost always, unless you are a master of ironic wit) or reading lists of bullet points off the screen. In general: do NOT read off the screen! People read and listen at different speeds and don’t usually want to hear more than a few words read off something that they can read.
- Mood boards: they can convey a lot about the feel you’re going for, and they can be borrowed from many sources. Google Image Search is your friend. (See lecture slides below for examples)
- Make text legible! Dark green on black, not so good.
- What does an audience want to know about a game that's being pitched?
  - Platform: how do you play this game, what do you play it with or on?
  - Audience: who is the game meant for? Maybe everybody, maybe people who like particular things, etc. In what context do they play? (“At home, for fun” or “on the subway, to pass the time” are common answers but there are many, many others.)
  - Theme: what is the game representing or simulating, or what kind of story is it telling? Or what mood is it evoking?
  - Genre: can you use it as a departure point, something that people are familiar with, before you explain what makes your game unique and distinctive?
- What are the design values for your game? The things that you believe in most strongly, that you want to get across to people listening to you?
- Recommend no more than 5 slides total; focus on WHAT the game is (what's the verb, how do you play, what's the objective in the narrative or gameplay, what's the feeling?) and WHY it's different, innovative, unique, cool, etc.
- Brainstorm a list of what could be covered in such a pitch. Possibilities might include (or you can add):
  - core mechanic / gameplay / verbs
  - narrative setting / characters / story
  - similar existing games and "if you liked..."
  - aesthetics / look and feel
  - number of players
  - platform
  - player experience
  - how it breaks expectations or conventions, if at all
  - some details of gameplay / game design / economy

By the end of the class, students should be practicing their pitches, especially if they’re due the following week. Either way, have students give pitches to each other (or other groups) and provide critique – what's confusing? What's coming across clearly and is it what's intended? What sounds fun or interesting about the game?

Exercise: Hypergender Hopscotch

This is an exercise created by Mary Flanagan about undoing / redoing the gendered notions associated with certain forms of play and games. What is a "girl's game," traditionally speaking? Why are certain games associated with gender?

You’ll need: tape, ideally of multiple colors and not damaging to the floor (painter’s tape is best.) Paper, markers, index cards, and anything else from the prototyping carts that students might want to use.

- The goal: to create a new version of hopscotch. Teams may change rules, add activities, even physical elements – but you must 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 may add other game elements.
- Your game 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
- 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, tropes, social media, memes.
- Gender teams will include: MASCULINE, FEMININE, and NON-BINARY
  - Groups should be picked by a captain: whoever thinks they can best exemplify and perform that gender, at least for one class.
  - The last is included because we seem to have at least one or two non-binary students per class these days, even if they're not actively making themselves known. They appreciate it.
  - The non-binary rhetoric, it should be mentioned, is still in a state of formation and the mainstream culture does not understand it as a rhetoric yet. It's whatever the group thinks it is, based on what's floating out there around the internet and young people's communities.

Readings: Assigned Week 11, Due Week 12

There are no standard readings assigned for next week, when the topic is game economies and balancing games.

However, if you want to go into detailed discussion about what balance means in different kinds of mechanics, how mechanics blend and mix into genres, and the basics of game economics -- faucets, drains, conversion, player fortune, etc -- then I recommend this excerpt:

- excerpts from Ernest Adams, *Advanced Game Design*, Chapters 1 and 4: AdvancedGameDesign.Ch1and4-excerpts.pdf
Quizzes: Week 11
Naomi, Fall 2015: NC-Fall2015.quiz-week11.docx (covers Sniderman and Parlett readings – answer key in white as usual)
Jesse, Summer 2016: Summer Quiz 10.pdf (covers all three readings for this class – Sniderman, Parlett, Dale)

Lecture Slides: Week 11
Covered: pitch assignment, the edge of rules (and expectations, and lusory attitudes towards winning), oppositional sexism and gender stereotypes in play, hypergender hopscotch, the history of social attitudes towards games, contemporary answers to "what are games for?" (The last two sections mentioned above are from longer talks by me on those subjects, but you can feel free to use them if you want.)
Also: for lab, some slides on mood boards, pitch contents, design values.
IntrotoGameDesign.Week11-Culture.pptx
IntrotoGameDesign.Week11-Culture.pdf