Week 10 - Games as Intervention

Starting the unit on Games as Culture, and assigning the brief Intervention Game assignment. Not all instructors do this unit!

PROJECT DUE: Thematic Game
PROJECT ASSIGNED: Intervention Game

Lecture / Discussion: Week 10

- Most of class is probably used on playing the thematic games, unless you got that out of the way in a previous week!
- If there's no time during lecture class, the intervention game can be assigned at the beginning of lab. Some discussion is necessary, however, to get across the idea of this assignment, so an instructor should be present.
- Introducing the next unit: Games as Culture
  - What is a game as an intervention? Discuss ideas from Mary Flanagan's book, if assigned
  - Show some projects that highlight the idea of games as culture. Some suggestions:
    - Games from Bernie DeKoven's New Games Movement
    - Play it by Trust / White Chess, Yoko Ono
    - Universal Square, Uri Tsaig [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uo5LegqCkI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uo5LegqCkI)
      - Show a few minutes at start, and then halfway through (exactly on white line)
    - Situationists and the Derive
      - The hi-line park – rethinking space. The architect said that for each project, he and his partners carefully establish a problem that the work itself must push through, creating what Mr. Renfro calls the building’s “gentle aggression,” allowing the project both to oppose and complement its surroundings.
- However, as Jesse points out, childhood mortality has also dropped a lot (although still much lower for more wealthy families): [https://d262ilb51htx0.cloudfront.net/max/600/1*8t7Snm-u2LV2xy_GE3QbrA.png](https://d262ilb51htx0.cloudfront.net/max/600/1*8t7Snm-u2LV2xy_GE3QbrA.png)

Assignment: Intervention Game

Larger groups are OK for this project – 3 or 4 groups total, especially since there may be some walking between project locations!

Each group:

1. Picks an existing social / physical context (elevator, crosswalk, store) – must be less than 5 minutes travel from the classroom
2. Observe the context and see what people are doing
3. Design a site-specific game that either:
   a. Exaggerates a social behavior people are already doing
   b. Makes them do the opposite kind of behavior they are doing
   c. Causes people to reflect on what they're doing in that space

For example, if you notice people are isolated in a public space, you might design a game that either increases their isolation or brings them together in some way.

This method of framing the assignment can make for a fairly game-like experience – you’re altering the behavior of participants somehow. It's also possible to expand this assignment by adding a third possibility:

- The requirements for this assignment are very broad, however; students don't need to create a game that has win/loss conditions, well-defined goals, boundaries or rules about behavior, etc. Mitu has shown public artworks to students to encourage them to think about interaction further outside of the box. Some examples:
  - Musical stairs in Milan: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KH8h5yZBi4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KH8h5yZBi4)
  - Lots of games from Come Out and Play festivals

Some important guidelines for “Big Games” in general, if students want to make games with rules:

- Engaging players’ bodies is great – but using up their endurance (requiring players to run around a lot, and continuously, over an extended period) may fall flat
- When actively participating in a new game that involves more action than thinking, procedures of play have to be simple. A useful rule of them: players can remember 1-3 simple things to do (do X, then when Y happens, do Z instead) and if they need to figure out anything more complex, they will have to consult instructions or a reference card. The more frenetic and physically active the game, the less players can retain and follow – so “Keep it Simple” is the best practice.
- Long instructions as in a tabletop board game are no good, especially for games played “on the go” – any kind of reference should be on a card, no larger than 4”x5” or so.
- Alternately, the game can have staff that tell players what to do next – but procedures for what those staff members do (what “rules” they
follow, essentially) also have to be planned out or the game can feel arbitrary.

- Guiding players via digital devices is also possible, but requires technical setup which is hard to do in a week! However, most players can be assumed to have cellphones, and you can consider sending out game info via Twitter, or updating a simple website / tumblr / etc that players have access to (with an easy-to-remember address!) Any setup should have few or no possible "technical failure points" assuming all players have reception.
- When physical effort is involved, players may be more frustrated if it turns out "they did something wrong" or "guessed wrong" and lose or don't get a reward. If this is possible given the structure of your game, consider making the rules, goals and solutions, if any, clear to understand and unambiguous. Keep in mind that the more active and frenetic the game, the more likely it is that players will misunderstand or forget something! (Of course, maybe your game is about this kind of misfire?)
- Ritual or ceremony can be useful and enhance the experience a lot -- especially for beginning and ending the game, judging it, announcing winners or score, framing it at start/finish as a narrative, etc.

**USUALLY DUE AFTER 1 WEEK** (Assigned Week 10, Due Week 11)

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**Lab: Week 10**

If the intervention project is assigned, this lab is quite critical for students to get together and work on their games around the Metrotech neighborhood; because these games are hard to playtest (they may require significant numbers of players) it can be good to coordinate playtesting. One method that might work:

- Assign the project at the end of the previous lecture (even if it's mostly used for playing thematic games) and say that teams should come to lab with some concepts that they've either thought about individually or discussed in their group.
- At start of lab, give each team an hour to come up with an idea, including length of game and number of players.
- At the end of the hour, pair up games based on shortest + longest and 2nd-shortest+2nd-longest. Number of players may also be a consideration, but larger games will need to be played by some of their own group as well.
- Depending on time needed to play, the teams now have another 30-60 minutes to prepare their game for play – thinking through how to explain it simply and quickly, what procedures are necessary to run the game if any, etc.

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**Readings: Assigned Week 10, Due Week 11**

The next week's lecture class is mostly devoted to playing intervention games and possibly to assigning the next project (digital pitch). These readings are for the "cultural context of play" topic, which can be an interesting discussion if there's time; this topic is free-floating (doesn't have to be part of a particular unit or project) but goes well with the idea of intervention, or at the end of the semester. The first two readings are about the boundaries of trying to define or make rules. The third is about the emotional impact that interactive media can have, and the responsibility that comes with the ability to produce impact, in a discussion of *Life is Strange* and how one player felt the tragedy of the game, echoing traumatically in her own experiences, was "gamified" into a scoring system.

- "Unwritten Rules" by Stephen Sniderman: Sniderman.UnwrittenRules.pdf
- "Hoyle on Troubled Waters" by David Parlett: Parlett.HoyleOnTroubledWaters.pdf

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**Quizzes: Week 10**

Naomi, Fall 2015: NC-Fall2015.quiz-week10.docx (covers Flanagan readings, and is multiple choice – answers in key at very bottom, in white text)

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**Lecture Slides: Week 10**

No lecture slides have been made yet for this week! If you have some, please contribute.