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Week 4 Response

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I read this last week and it’s a big and winding reading so this week’s response may be a lot less focused. The Eurogame, according to this chapter, is an accessible game that privileges mechanics over theme and overall gameplay. They primarily use indirect rather than direct conflict, they de-emphasize chance (chance as its involved in decision making), offer more predictability (especially regarding playing times), and are usually high quality. With the first thing, in the discussion of mechanics we clearly see that the Eurogame does have an intense focus on mechanics. However, one could argue that chess is also mechanic focused. The difference seems to be that the Eurogame emphasizes the use of multiple mechanics that can combine in different ways. This, combined with how Eurogames use succinct rule sets (which combine mechanics and constrain their use), it does seem to set up the Eurogame as distinct, especially from the American gaming tradition, which Woods states focus on building a game out of a Simulation. The key distinction here then becomes that Eurogames have generated a new Aesthetic centered around THE GAME and the narratives that come from nesting goals, mechanics, and theme. The way the game “plays” and are less concerned with building themes or modeling referent systems. “Reality” here takes a back seat towards a sort of elegance in how a game plays.

I also thought we got a better idea of what separates play from games in this article. One of these ideas seems to be the use of goals, and to expand on this it’s specifically goals that remain the same across instances of it being played. Another aspect of this is that these goals are also achieved by already existing mechanics, which also remain consistent across play instances. What we see here is that there seems to be some kind of consistency through time that separates a game from pure play, in addition to the other things we have discussed about rule sets.

Another thing that I thought was interesting in the discussion of Eurogames is the that they are designed against direct competition. Instead, the games emphasize generalized competitions, where you have to build towards goals and you can’t necessarily directly affect how other players play the game (or, as we have seen in games we have already played, all of the players may need to “win” in order for any player to win). The wording Woods uses is that goals are symmetrical but incompatible, so that you can have winners without a direct conflict. This does set Eurogames apart very starkly from game like chess, which seem to be very focused on a direct showing of superiority in skill. Why is this important to the Eurogame and to gaming in general? I think one aspect about what makes this compelling is that it helps us get closer to Caillois definition of play when direct conflict is abstracted or removed. What happens is that even another layer of risk is removed (the risk of being seen as inferior to your opponent). I think this competition over conflict also naturally arises because of how the mechanics are structured. In order to have a system that has predictable play times and can obscure the winner until the very end, you need to get rid of direct conflict which would emphasize the skill differences between players and would wildly destabilize the game and the consistency of play.