CSCI 5670-001 Midterm Exam October 16, 2014  
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Question 1: Choose one of the three games. Identify one way that it succeeds in providing meaningful play using the concepts from this unit.

*Ladies and Gentlemen* creates humor in an otherwise very sexist view of the Victorian era. Gentlemen go to work at the stock market to make money. Ladies choose dresses, shoes, and/or servants to buy. Each Lady is paired with a Gentleman, and together they have to buy items with the end goal of having the Lady be the prettiest one at the ball.

The semiotics of this game work together to make choices on either side discernable. Making money and spending money are common actions that most people do in the world. It is easy to understand that Men need to make money so that Women can buy items. These actions are integrated to the larger goal of this game, which is to buy the most expensive/fancy items to be the prettiest Lady at the ball.

Without this representation, the game at its core would be: Team 1 has to get their counter as high as possible so that a linked player on Team 2 can subtract a chosen number without going below zero. The two players that have subtracted the highest value in total, wins!

Although both games are identical, nearly all meaning is lost in the second version of this game as there is much less context for which the player to relate. Hence, the semiotics of this game have not only made the game easier to understand and play, but made it easier to share and enjoy with friends.

Question 2: Choose one of the three games. Identify one way that it fails to provide meaningful play using the concepts from this unit.

*Quidditch* is by far the least relatable or understandable game in the list, and I believe this is done by design. This sport was designed for fictional players in the fictional series of Harry Potter. Hence, real, somewhat normal people without magical powers like myself (Muggle) will struggle with jumping right into the game.

Meaningful play will be absent for most Muggles as the vocabulary is made up of completely made up or words have a completely different definition. Aren’t snitches betrayers or squealers? In this game a snitch is a golden ball that almost guarantees victory and ends the game. Words like quaffles and bludgers are made up, and rules explain how all these ball are enchanted. Even after understanding what all these balls do, there are jinxes, spells, and all sorts of other made up hocus pocus. Why don’t I just “enchant” the ball to always goes through my hoop and win all the time?

Although I’m mostly speaking of the semiotics, this spills over to the anatomy of choice. If the semiotics aren’t clear, are the player’s choices clear? The player is never really prompted to choose. The player may try to do something illegal in the game, and his/her team may get severely penalized. But the trouble with fiction or magic, anything goes. Who is to say something is illegal? And who will enforce it? These unanswered questions lead to undiscernible actions, and will take away from meaningful play.

Question 3: Choose one schema from RULES. Explain how it can be applied to Quidditch.

*Quidditch* sets up direct conflict with Team vs Team. There are multiple players with different yet mirrored roles. Each team is battling to earn the most points in the match, and in turn earn the most points for the season. There is one clear winner and one clear loser. Even in the event of a tie, a winner is decided by a shootout (much like soccer).

The conflict takes place during simultaneous play. There are various other forms of obstacles and conflicts occurring at the same time. Bludgers cause indirect conflict trying to knock the player off their brooms, but not necessarily trying to stop the player from winning.

However, for this artificial conflict to occur, every player has to play cooperatively. Every player has to follow the rules of their role, stay on their broomsticks, and play within the field without any outside help.

Question 4: Choose a different schema from RULES. Explain how it can be applied to Dixit.

In the game of *Dixit*, a storyteller is attempting to get players to guess his/her card out of a quantity which equals the number of players. Looking at the Game as an Information Theory System, before the storyteller talks there is a lot of information. The story teller starts transmitting signals via voice and/or gestures, reducing the information. The goal of the story teller is to transmit enough signal so that players can guess the correct card as they will both benefit from a correct guess. However, the interesting part about the game, is that the story teller must make sure to include enough noise where at least (and at best) one player does not guess the story teller’s card correctly. Otherwise, the story teller gains no points that round. Furthermore, if the player does not transmit enough signal and leaves too much information out there, perhaps no player will guess the card and the story teller will also get zero points in this instance.

Question 5: Choose a different schema from RULES. Explain how it can be applied to Ladies and Gentlemen.

Before beginning the game, no player knows which lady is going to have which items to be the prettiest lady at the ball. This macro uncertainty is made of many different decisions and events that take place throughout the game. Without knowing exactly how everyone thinks, makes decisions, and play, it will be nearly impossible to ever know.

The boutique/bank cardboard cutout setup in the middle of the table not only splits the Gentlemen from the Ladies, but it also starts to create a system of uncertainty. The gentlemen cannot see what items are in the window of the boutique store, and the ladies do not know the amount of money contracts hold in the banks. In addition, the gameplay happens simultaneously which means the ladies and gentlemen have a great deal of micro uncertainty as they make their decisions on their selections.

As the game progresses, some players may be bound to some of the fallacies of probability. Perhaps if a Lady and Gentlemen are on a streak, they may start to feel more confident and only go for the high priced items, being victim of the Monte Carlo syndrome. Maybe certain events, items, stocks will trigger a superstition, and the player gets over-confident or over-cautious. Players tend to get lost in all sorts of other aspects of the game, and probability and risk may be over simplified or incorrectly measured.

Question 6: Choose a schema from PLAY and one of the three games. Explain how that schema can be applied to that game.

*Quidditch* takes place outside in an open fictional space of wizards and flying brooms. From what I observe, the game does not contain a “story” that the players follow, but it is an observable sport with conflicts, motivations, and goals for all the players.

Through one match alone, players of the game can go from winning by a large margin to losing by someone simply catching the snitch. But from each match, players gain information. Maybe player X is weak flying his broom at low altitudes, or player Y is strong at batting bludgers coming from his right side. Each part of the game, being a match, a series, or the world cup, creates a narrative when the players interact with the game. Even through observing a match through a fictional book, there is a story to be told, and development to be made.

Question 7: Choose a different schema from PLAY and a different game. Explain how that schema can be applied to that game.

*Dixit* has an interesting play of experience component. There is one story teller that has to use gestures and voice to communicate a card. The remaining players have to vote on which one they think storyteller is communicating. The core mechanic of this game is explaining and understanding. The repetition of the core mechanic is part of the bigger game of scoring and winning.

The experience of the game occurs via sights and sounds. A storyteller player acts out a card that he/she will feel that most but not all players will understand clearly. The game creates an output of a choice with a randomly shuffled card from each player, including the storytellers. The player must then decide which card is the storyteller’s card from what the player understood.

Question 8: Choose a schema from CULTURE and one of the three games. Explain how that schema can be applied to that game.

*Ladies and Gentlemen* has an interesting cultural rhetoric as there are gender stereotypes ingrained and stand out as the first thing players observe when entering this magic circle. However, the game is far from serious, and it treats everything as a joke. Even the goal is to be the prettiest lady at the ball.

Looking beyond the frivolity, there are other rhetoric of play that occur. Even making the best decisions with the information you have, players cannot control their own lives. They are governed by fate, where in this game, it is determined by a deck of cards representing items and contracts. Whether it was pure fate or a mixture of good decisions and fate, the couple that wins are glorified with the title of “prettiest lady at the ball”.