**­­­GAMES 101**

9/12

Class Structure

• Lecture

• Recitation

• Test & Quizzes

• Quiz every recitation about that Monday’s lecture

• Tests (essays & test questions)

• Critical Play Reports\*

• Play subset of games discussed in lecture

• Choose one game to play and write a paper (about 500 words) following prompts in syllabus

• One week to complete (hand it in at the next recitation)

• Dive into one game on your own time

*Notes on Class*

• Memorization

• Encyclopedic knowledge, map of time

• Value people who work on games, remember their names

• Canonization

• List of games changes almost every year

• These will not be all the most important games, a mix, a snapshot

• Legacy

• Literacy

**ROOTS**

Knucklebones

**• Date:**  ca. 5000 BCE

**• Developer:** Unknown

**• Platform:** Dice game

**• Region of Origin:** unknown

Why knucklebones?

• They were actually bones (sheep/cow/etc)

• Sides vary so they can symbolize numbers

• Very *old*: some of the oldest game implements (are probably even earlier than 5000 BCE)

• Age of this game: when does history of play begin?

• We’re not the only species that plays games

• We can play games with other animals and know they understand us

**GAMES** --->

**1.8 million years ago** - Homo ergaster (tool use)

**300,000 years ago** - burial (cultural conception of burial - dead deserve some regard)

**200,000 years ago** - Homo sapiens

**~150,000 years ago** - clothing, jewelry (material culture),speech

---> **HUMAN CULTURE**

Games → primal joys

**The Royal Game of Ur**

**• Date:** ca. 3000 BCE

**• Developer:** Unknown

**• Platform:** board game

**• Region of Origin**: Mesopotamia (Iraq)

• Not entirely sure how it is played, but we have guesses

• Roll dice in order to move pieces around to winning square (race game)

• Had to have level of material civilization and comfort to have something special made to be a game, had to be taught to people, mapping space, we still understand what these terms are

• Played by commoners and elites

• As it progressed, became more aggressive, lent to quicker gameplay (early modding)

• Uses dice! (3 or 4, triangle dice with two white edges)

How Do Dice Work?

• Probability at play

• Playing with 4 dice

• Results: 0 (one way)

• Results: 1 (four ways)

• Results: 2 (six ways)

• Results 3 (four ways)

• Results 4 (one way)

• The relationship between dice, luck and fate

• Very early tools of divination (ways of understanding if the gods favored you)

• There was no division between secular and religion

• You were both unlucky and the gods did not favor you

• They were interwoven much more deeply in their lives than it would be in contemporary people

Games live in the weird place where:

• They’re not important, just for fun

• We’re also deeply immersed, “like heroin”

Senet

**• Date:** ca. 3000 BCE

**• Developer:** unknown

**• Platform:** board game

**• Region of Origin:** Ancient Egypt

• Also a race game

• Board game had way to transport game to others

Why Senet?

• Theme and mechanics: a theme grew out of the mechanics

• Suggested that it started as a game that didn’t have meaning

• Gradually, over 100s of years, it began to develop a theme

• Explicitly about the journey of the soul to the afterlife

• A teaching tool to help people

• Slowly became more of a ritual

TERMS

Mechanics or Game Mechanics

Units of gameplay, re-combinable game actions that are often shared between different games (e.g. Roll dice and move a piece or land on opponent’s piece to capture)

System

The overall game described as a collection of mechanics, the properties of the game as a well-defined set of rules

Theme

The fictional or representational aspects of the game (e.g. a game about dragons, or the journey of the soul)

**Backgammon**

**• Date:** ca. 3000 BCE

**• Developer:** unknown

**• Platform:** board game

**• Region of Origin:** Ancient Persia (modern Iran)

• Still played to this day, popular game throughout the world for all the years it’s been played

• Dice can be spread out across different pieces

• Things younger than Backgammon:

• the use of iron

• Pyramids of giza

Why Backgammon?

• Sense that it is an immortal game

• But it does change: contemporary strategy is using computers to predict probability

• People are still evolving backgammon (doubling)

Mancala

• Date ca. 600 CE

• Developer: unknown

• Platform: Board game

• Region of Origin: East Africa

• Ones that look familiar to us also called Ayo, Oware

• Most popular: Bao (Kenya)

• Complicated, difficult to master, akin to chess and backgammon

• Picking up game pieces: *sewing*

• Become an international game

Why Mancala?

• A family of deep games

*The concept of “depth”*

Depth is the capacity to support **long-term** serious study and play

• To devote your life to mastering it, multiple lives

• Ex/ we’ve been studying chess/mancala/backgammon for centuries

• Quality in games that allows them to survive for thousands of years

Mancala has:

• No randomness

• No hidden information

• Not many choices per move

Game Tree

• Used to show possibilities in games

• Tic-tac-toe example

• Part of what we mean when we say “depth”, even simple games have such vastness in possibilities

**Go**

• Date: 2000 BCE

• Developer: Unknown

• Platform: Board game

• Region of Origin: Ancient China

• Based around controlling territory, cutting off liberties

• Pieces are placed on intersections of squares, not squares themselves

• Pieces share liberties

• Internal liberties, any formation with two internal liberties will never be captured “eyes”

• Became a very important part of the imperial culture of Japan

• Came to United States after WWII

Why Go?

• An “elegant” game

• Concept of elegance:

• Depth and simplicity

• Simple rules lead to complex situations

• Game designer only put in the rules that were absolutely necessary and got an enormous effect from those

• The idea of “emergence”

Checkers / Draughts

• Date: 1500s

• Region of Origin: France

• Emerges from Alquerque (aka Quirkat)L emerged in 1100 CE

• Capturing rule comes after 1545

Why Checkers?

• Checkers is solved

• English Draughts (8x8) is considered “solved”

• We figured it out

• When you can correctly predict the outcome of the game from any position (if both sides play optimally)

• The makers of the program Chinook “solved” Draughts in 2007

• Its a draw

Chess

• Date: 600 CE

• Platform: board game

• Developer: unknown

• Region of Origin: India

• Four divisions of the army

• Spreads from India to the Middle east

• When chess goes to Islamic world, becomes more abstract (pieces are not as symbolic)

• 15th century moves to Europe

Why Chess?

• Chess has “stuff”

• Enters a lot of societies, less abstract because of literacy in these societies

• Has “classes” -pieces do things and have their own powers

• Any kind of rpg element can trace it’s history back to chess

Snakes & Ladders

• Date: ca 1500 CE

• Platform: board game

• Developer: unknown

• Region of Origin: India

• Considered a teaching tools for Hindu religious instruction

• Connection to religious ideas of ethics, teaching virtues and vice

• Contrasting higher and lower forms of life

• Moral instruction - very subdued in contemporary forms

Why Snakes and Ladders?

• Long history of moral instruction

• Meaning & choice