Oust for AG

My design imperative for Oust was to invent a game which starts with an empty board, is played with two colors, and ends with only one color – something I had never heard of in my quest to design something totally different. Just identifying and framing this criterion was fundamental. From there it was only a matter of solving a problem. It was a hard problem to solve though. I don’t think I could do it again.

Oust is probably my best game overall. Magnificent architecture and superlative, roller coaster gameplay. You can get behind and come back, a few times. You can get beaten down to your last stone against a board filled with enemy stones… and come back and win. Tell me of another game like that. Oust is an exhilarating game to win and a depressing game to lose. You can’t escape the emotional impact of winning or losing at Oust. Don’t even pretend.

One interesting thing about Oust is the enormity of its game tree - very unusual for a finite game. I imagine it exceeds that of Go (with superko). Moves in Go are less restricted, but there’s not a whole lot of capturing. Mainly you just fill up the board in Go and start counting stones to see who won. Oust, by contrast, has a finite cycle of large groups being removed, the vacated areas being repopulated, and more groups being removed. This cycling of groups makes Oust exceedingly difficult for AI programs. Existing Oust programs make seemingly random moves.