

Games I: Design and Architecture

Week 02 (9/4)

- Personal Gaming Chronology
- Theory of Fun
- Appreciating the Obvious in Game Design
- The Role of the Game Designer
- Teams

Personal Gaming Chronology

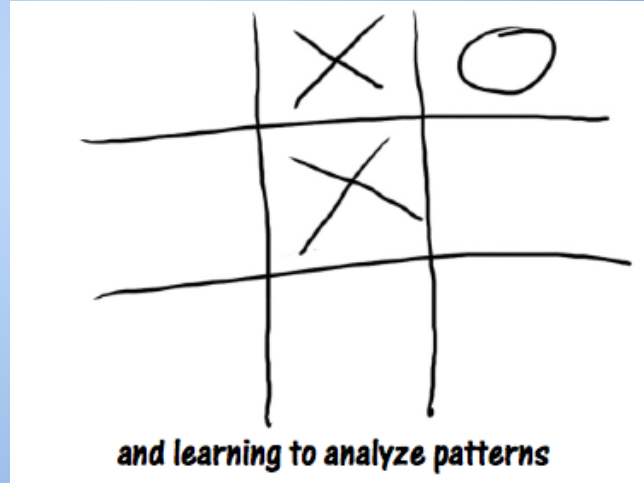
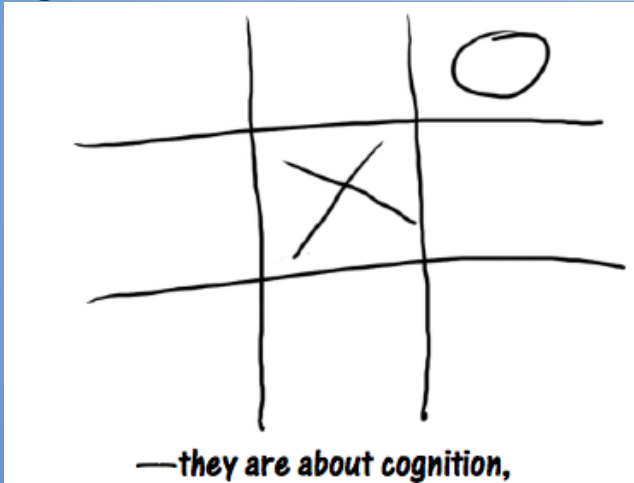
- Pick one of the games on your list:
 - What stood out to you about that game?
 - What did you learn from that game?
 - Why was that game good (or bad?)

Theory of Fun

- What is fun?
- When do games become art?
- What are some examples of games that could be considered *sophisticated* art forms?

Theory of Fun

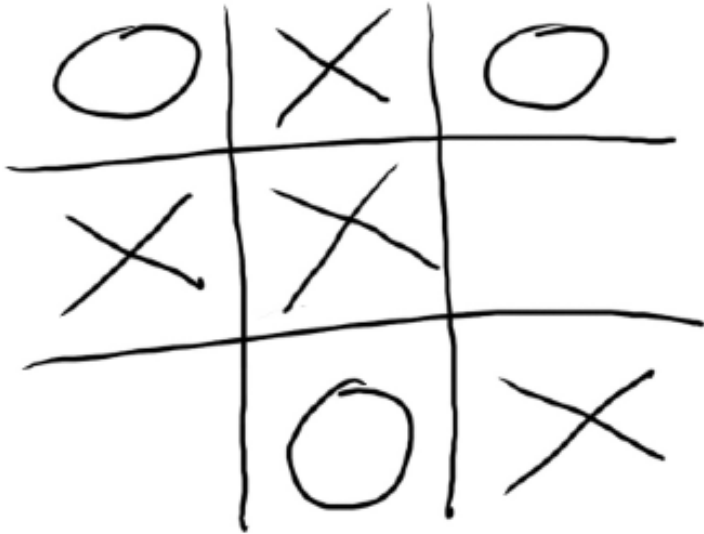
- Games are puzzles



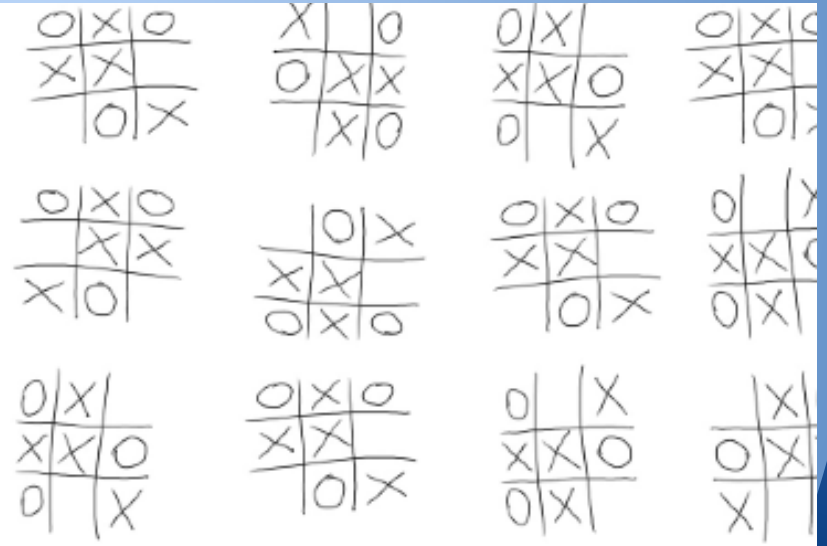
- Is this necessarily true?

Theory of Fun

- You only play until you master the pattern



once you've mastered it



The game becomes **boring**.

Theory of Fun

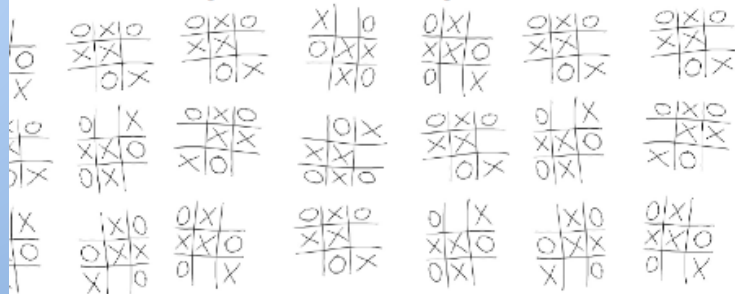
cheat! MULE grind.
macro HACK
exploit SMILE
BOTTOM FEED

Players seeking to advance in a game will **always** try to optimize what they are doing.

If they are clever and see an optimal path—an **Alexandrine solution to a Gordian problem**—they'll do that instead of the "intended gameplay."



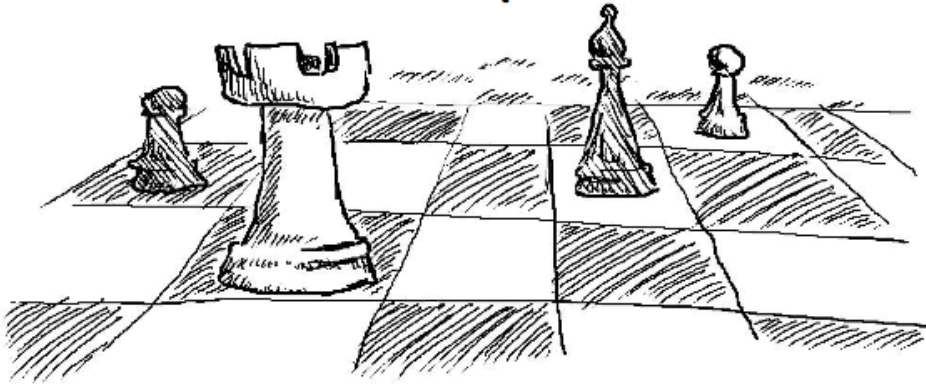
They will try to make the gameplay as predictable as possible.



Which then means it becomes boring, and not fun.

Theory of Fun - Possibility Space

Most long-lasting games in the past have been competitive, because they lead to an endless supply of similar yet subtly varied puzzles.



We talk so much about **emergent gameplay**, non-linear storytelling, or about **player-entered content**. They're all ways of increasing the possibility space, making **self-refreshing** puzzles.

(INSERT CARTOON HERE.)

Games as Art

We also often discuss the desire for games to be **art**—for them to be puzzles with more than one right answer, puzzles that lend themselves to **interpretation**.

To be, or not to be— that is the question.

That may be the best definition of when something



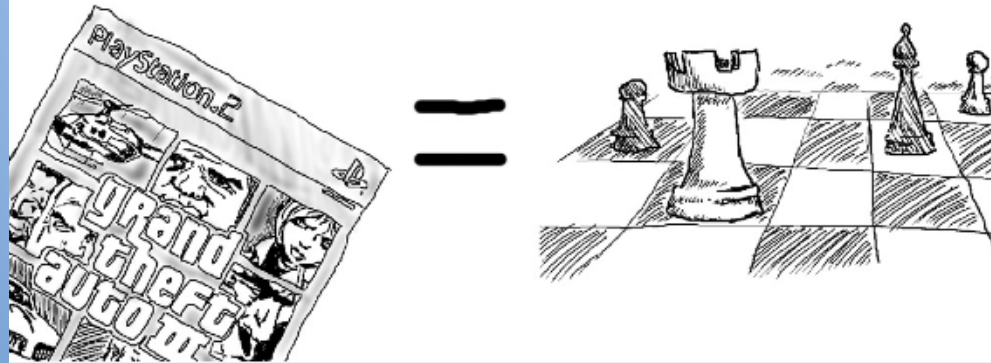
ceases to be craft and when it turns into art



—the point at which it becomes subject to interpretation.

Games as Art

The point at which our game puzzles approach the complexity of those puzzles is the point at which our art form becomes **mature**.



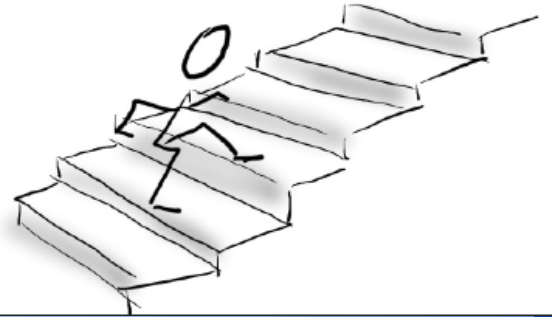
But what do players really want?

Because both entail posing questions—
tough ones even, ethical ones, even. And

**games will never be
mature as long as the
designers create them
with complete answers
to their own puzzles in
mind.**



Even then, there will a class of player
who prefers the comfort of **only tackling
puzzles they know how to solve.**



Theory of Fun

- What are some games that have self-refreshing puzzles?
- What are some games that you enjoy even though you aren't challenged by their puzzles?

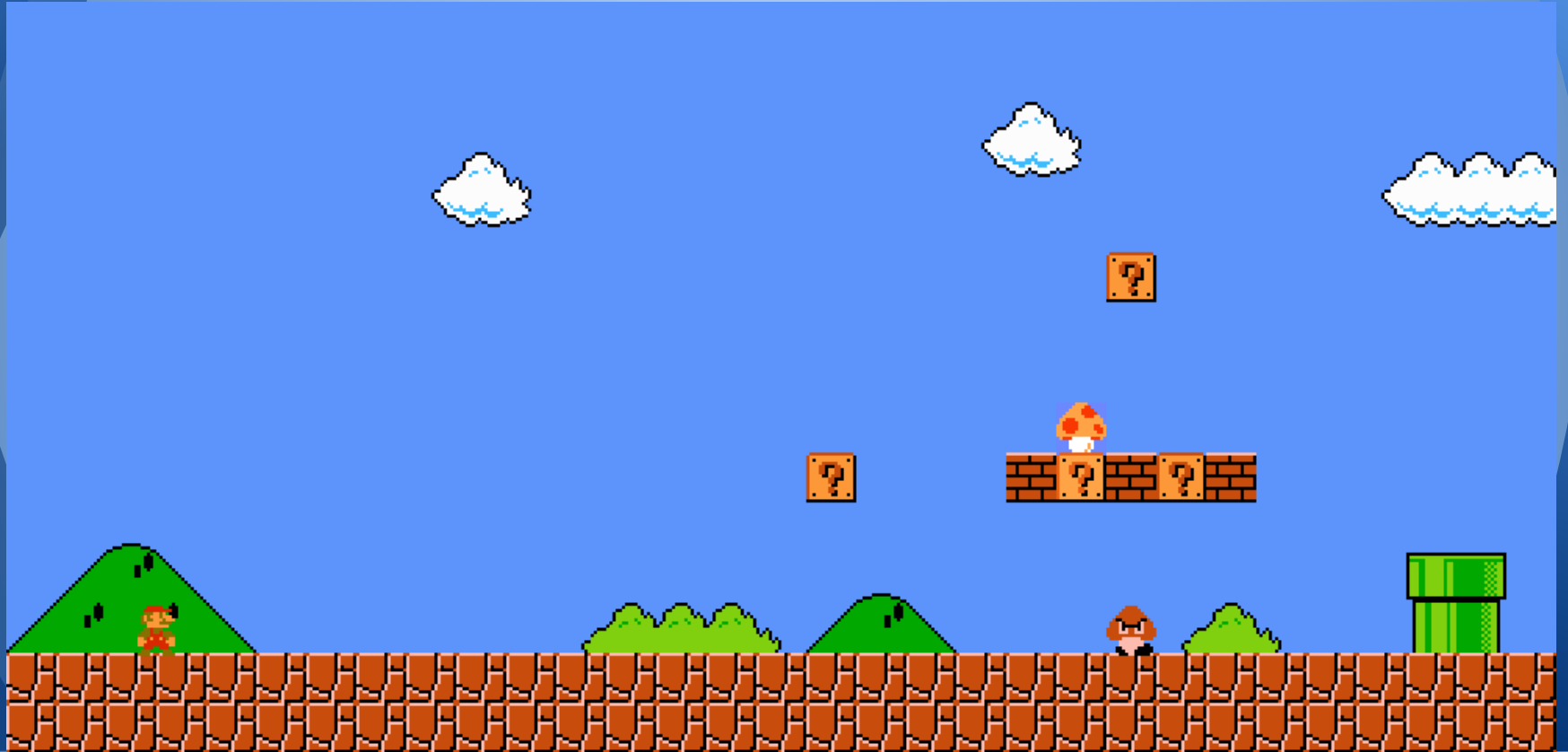
Games as Art - Theories

- Subject to interpretation
- What else qualifies?
 - Emotionally moving?
 - Aesthetically pleasing?
 - Intellectually stimulating?
 - Flow?

Theory of Fun

- What else is fun (or enjoyable, or satisfying, or engaging) in a game besides puzzles?
 - Competition?
 - Creativity/Self-expression?
- Does a game need to be fun to be considered successful?

Appreciating the Obvious



Why do we stomp on the turtle?

“We do it because the game telegraphs this path right in front of us with a line of tap-dancing mushrooms behind that hard-shelled bastard, waiting to be knocked over. It’s a concept so plain to see that we engage with it almost mechanically.”

Appreciating the Obvious

“Since games are an interactive, dynamic medium, they reveal their mechanics with as much clarity as possible.”

Appreciating the Obvious

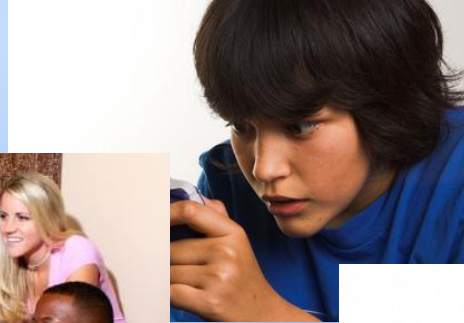
“...not to explain something in the simplest way possible, but to give us information in such a way that we are forced to interact with it. We know our enemies for their threatening armor and imposing stature. We see a world’s boundaries in the oceans or mountains that border the map, insisting on impassible terrain. Games forcibly point such things out to us because it’s a medium that requires confrontation.”

Tutorials in Games

- How do you feel about them?
- What forms should they take?
- What are some examples of good/bad tutorials?
- Journey

The Role of the Game Designer

- An advocate for the player
 - See the world through the player's eyes



Playtesting

- Observe the playtesters' experience and write notes
 - What objects are they focused on?
 - When do they get frustrated or bored?
- Playtesting is often done too late in the development process - it is something that should be done throughout, not just at the end

Building a Potential Experience

- Game design is “about building a potential experience”
- “Like being a host at a party - you aren’t dictating how everything will go, but you can setup your guests with **the tools to have a good time**”
- Super Smash Bros is About Accidents

Communication

- **Selling your game**
 - to teammates, management, investors, etc.
 - good language skills, clear vision, well-conceived presentation
- **Listening** (to teammates, playtesters)
 - keeps them involved, owning their responsibilities
- **Compromising** - adapting to overcome challenges
 - (i.e. something technically infeasible/impractical)

Teamwork

- Interacting with different types of people and personalities
 - Programmers
 - Artists
 - Executives and managers



Becoming a Better Player

- Be mindful of your own experience
- Critical analysis
- How do game systems work and create meaning?
- Miyamoto on hiking and discovering a lake

Creativity

- Ideas tend to just hit you when they will
- The important thing is what you do with it after (playcentric process)

Inspiration

- Look at the world in terms of challenges, structures, and play
 - Goals, rules
- Look at underlying systems
 - How things function
- Rules, mechanics
- Opportunities for challenge or play

A Playcentric Design Process

- Player is involved from conception through completion
- Looking through player's eyes, mindful player's experience
- Testing every step of the way



Prototyping and Playtesting

- Player experience goals
 - Have a deep understanding
- Core mechanic
 - The central activity of the game
- Hard to change once you get into development
 - (this is why you nail it down first)

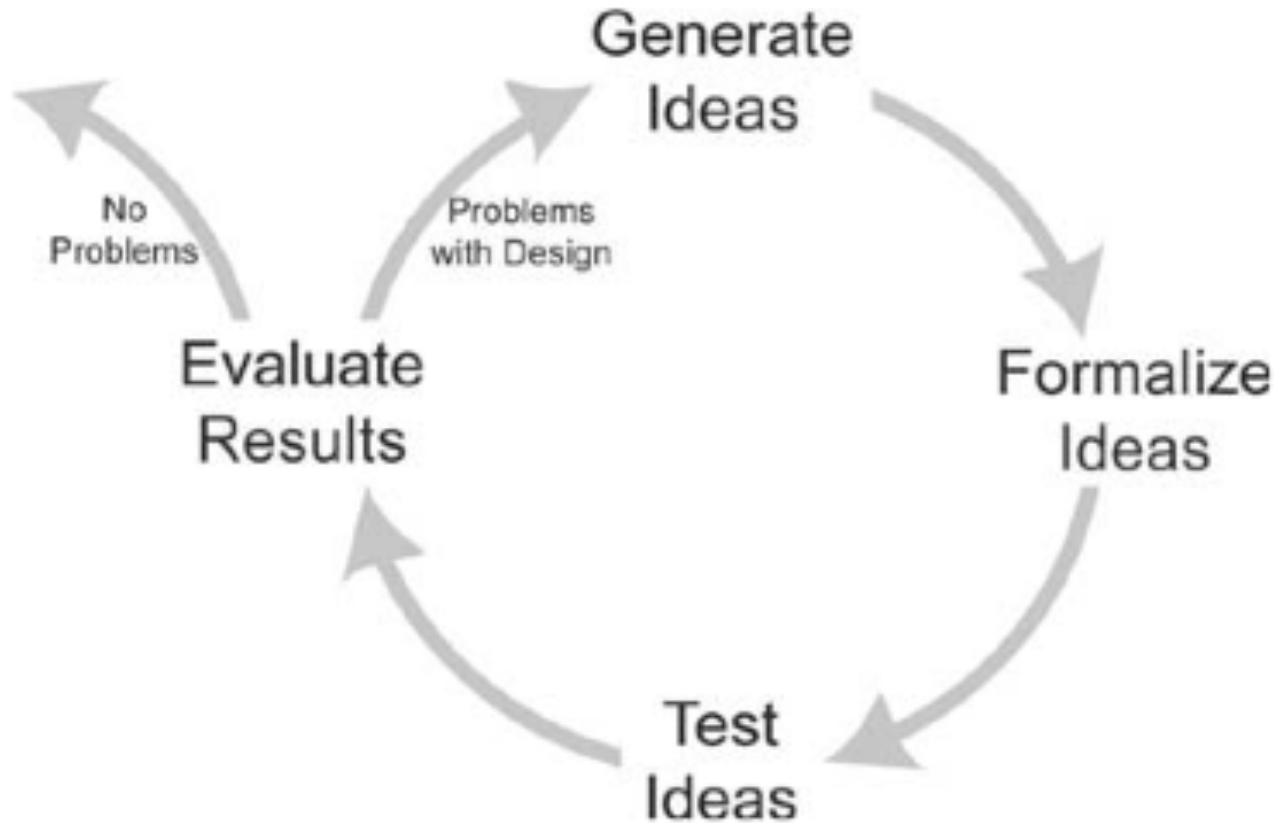
Setting Player Experience Goals

- Descriptions of situations in which you hope the players will find themselves
 - High level - not focused on implementation yet
- What will be interesting and engaging?
- What is the player thinking?
- What choices are you offering?

Prototyping and Playtesting

- Immediately after brainstorming ideas, construct a playable version of the idea
- The goal is to play and perfect this simplistic model before even involving programming, art, etc.

Iteration

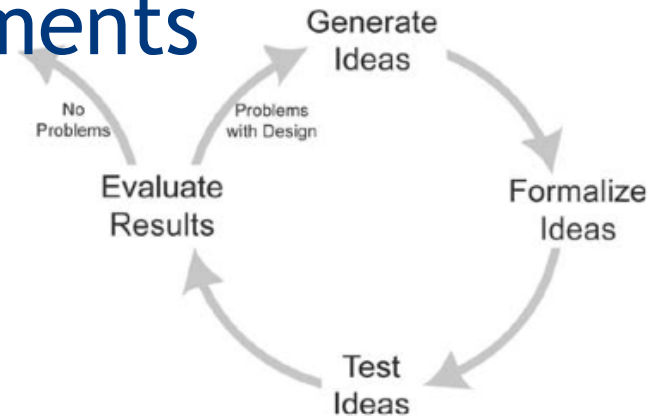


Iteration

- Player experience goals are set
- An idea or system is conceived
- The idea or system is **formalized** (written down or prototyped)
- The idea or system is **tested** against player experience goals

Iteration

- Results are evaluated and prioritized
- If results negative / idea flawed
 - go back to first step
- If results point to improvements
 - modify and test again
- If results are positive
 - move on



The Development Process

- Step 1 - Brainstorming
- Step 2 - Physical Prototype
- Step 3 - Presentation
- Step 4 - Software Prototype
- Step 5 - Design Documentation
- Step 6 - Production
- Step 7 - Quality Assurance

Step 1 - Brainstorming

- Player experience goals
- Game concepts/mechanics to achieve goals
 - Narrow down the list to top 3
 - Write a short 1-pg description of each idea (concept document)
- Test concepts with potential players
 - Rough visual mockups to communicate ideas

For Week 03 (9/11/14)

- With your team:
 - Develop an idea and an informal proposal
- Individually:
 - Read:
 - Game Design Workshop Ch. 6 - Conceptualization
 - Reading Lessons From Giants
 - Kevin Maxon - Game Design is the Meta-Medium
 - Start a Game Journal

For Week 3: Concept Proposal

- What are the player experience goals?
 - What do you want the player(s) to do, feel?
 - What kind of situations will players find themselves in?
 - What will be interesting and engaging?
 - What is the player thinking?
 - What choices are you offering?
- What is the core mechanic?
- Be prepared to speak to these points
- Rough concept images may be useful

For Week 3: Game Journal

- Discuss a meaningful moment of gameplay
 - Why did it stand out to you?
 - What did you think/feel/do?
 - What choices did you make? Why?
 - How did you feel about those choices?
 - What are the underlying mechanics that made it work?
 - What are the dramatic aspects?