Knowing the Past: Game Education Needs Game History

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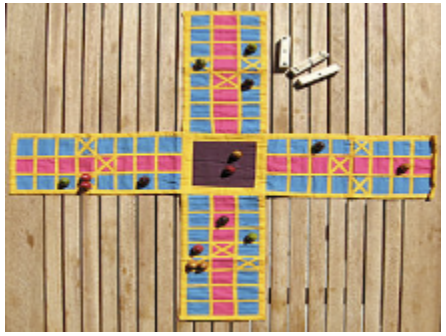
GDC EDUCATION
SUMMIT

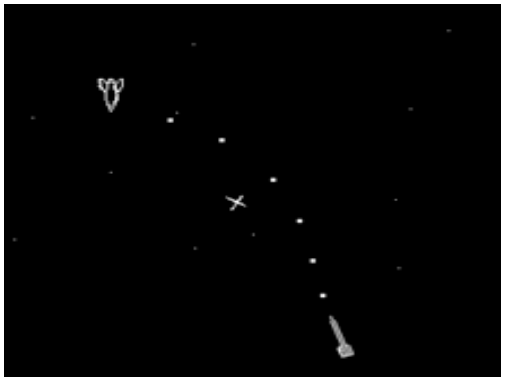
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
MARCH 5-9, 2012
EXPO DATES: MARCH 7-9
2012

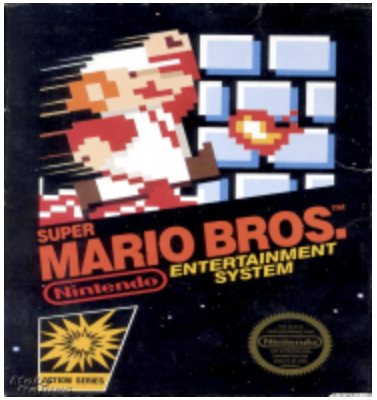
WHICH GAME HISTORY?

Game history does not have to be digital

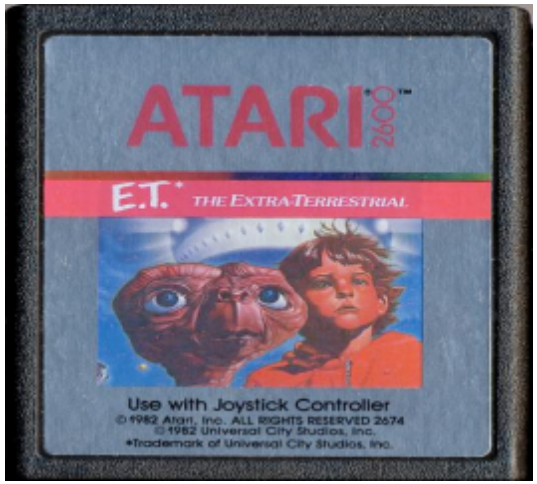


Digital Game History





The Videogame Crash of the 80s



N. Carolina 51 Alabama 44 Texas 26 Iowa St.
William & Mary 20 Vanderbilt 24 N. Texas St. 6 Colorado S

Alamogordo Daily N

Alamogordo, New Mexico, Sunday, September 25, 1983

Tons of Atari games buried

Dump here utilized

By M.K. McQUIDDY
Daily News Staff Writer

The new pit at the Alamogordo city landfill has become the apparent final resting place for a warehouse of Atari games from Texas.

According to a landfill official, eight 18-wheeler truckloads have been crushed and buried in the pit since operations began Thursday, and more are expected on Monday and Tuesday of this week with the total estimated by some to be as high as 24 before they are finished. Others say we could expect at the most two to three more trucks.

"We're covering them with garbage and then with dirt," said Ed Moore, who was on duty at the dump Saturday afternoon. "I've been crushing them as fast as they dropped them off the trucks with my caterpillar. It's kind of sad."

Although an around the clock security guard was supposed to come with the project, he apparently was not on duty Friday night, as numerous reports were received by DPS Saturday of lots of Atari games showing up in the possession of youngsters, or individuals trying to sell Atari games to local stores.

"They said they tried to get rid of some of the games one time before, and a truckload was reported stolen," Moore said. "They figured it was hijacked to Mexico to be copied."

Jack Keating, Browning Ferris Industries manager, said Atari pays him from $200-$500 a truckload to crush and bury the materials. "It helps us to pay for some of the expenses."

Keating said the reason the Alamogordo dump was selected is that here no scavenging is allowed, and the garbage is crushed and covered nightly.

Moore said the truck drivers told him the reason they were dumping the games is that they are changing from series 2600 to 5200 games, due to excessive amount of black-marketeering.

Apparently, another reason for Alamogordo being a top choice was that someone in El Paso wanted to melt down the metals from the components in the game sets and Atari did not want to cooperate. Moore said he was told.

Whatever the reason, by Saturday afternoon, the floor of the new pit at the dump was littered with crushed boxes, remains of game cartridges, game sets, and computers themselves.

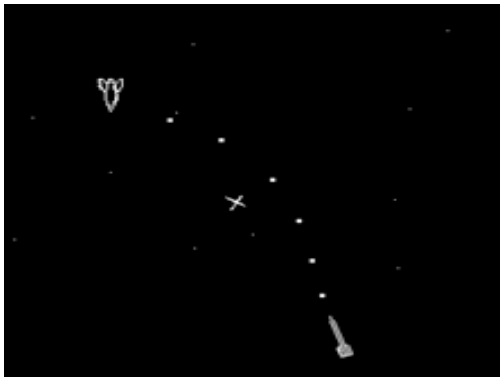
Moore stopped for a minute to pick up the remains of some components, and examined them in his hand.

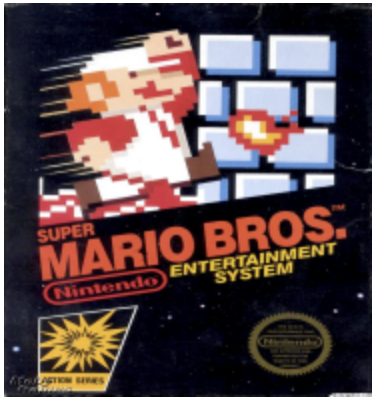
"They have brought in everything," said Moore. "And there it is, all that is left," pointing to the remains.

Keating said the dump is able

WHAT?

North American Videogame History



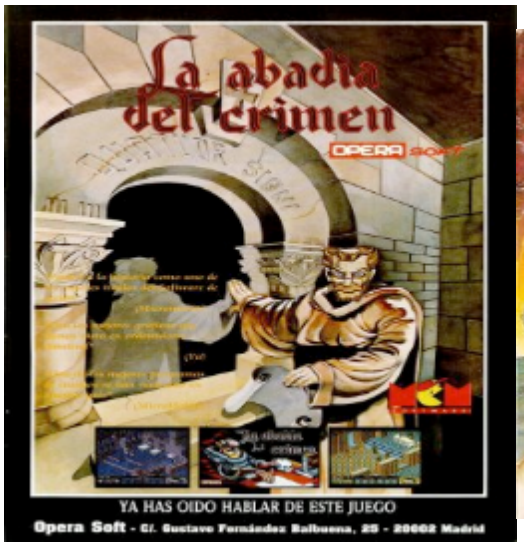


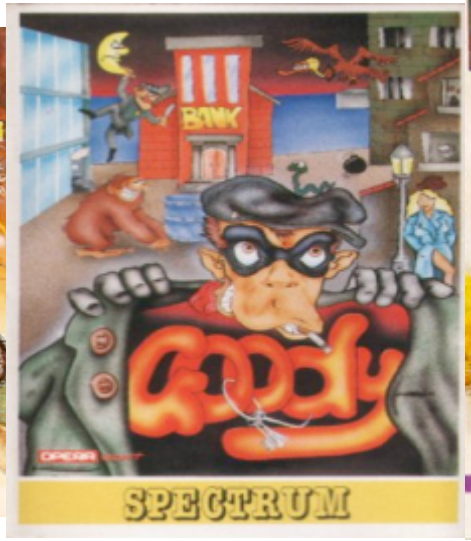
Brief History of European videogames in the 80s

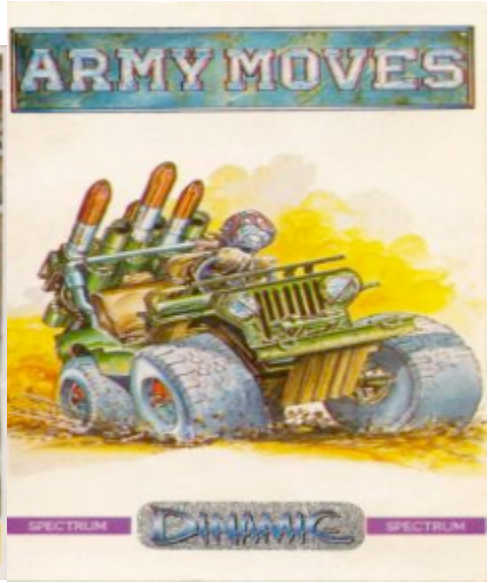
Dominated by home computers

Bedroom developers

The Golden Age of Spanish Videogames







Know History to Understand the Present

Influence on Current Developers

There are different game histories depending on where you come from

ESSENTIAL GAMES

“Essential Games” FTW!

"Essential Games" ~~FTW!~~ WTF?

Intro to Literature ≠

Intro to Film ≠

You cannot cover the *essential games* — give up!

We need a different approach to game history: *essential viewpoints*

Essential Viewpoint: Diachronic

Games influence each other

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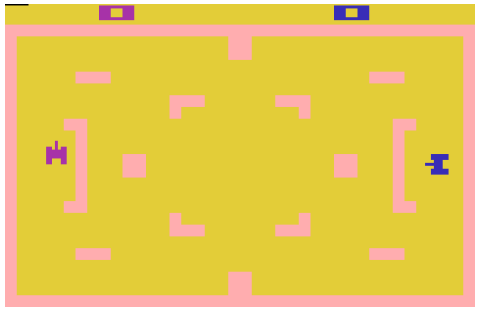
- Look at games *through time,* not as individual masterworks
- Look at games *in culture,* not in isolation

Essential Viewpoint: Synchronic



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NO GAME NATIVES

~~Kids~~ Students know all about games!

- 97% of 12-17 year olds play games!
- Digital Natives!
- So easy to teach!

No. ~~Game Natives~~

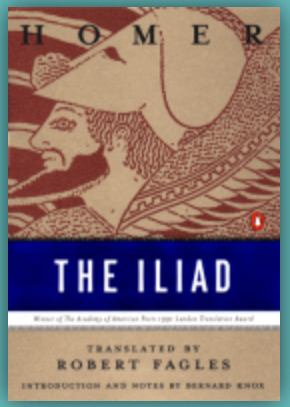
- Majority of students play digital games.

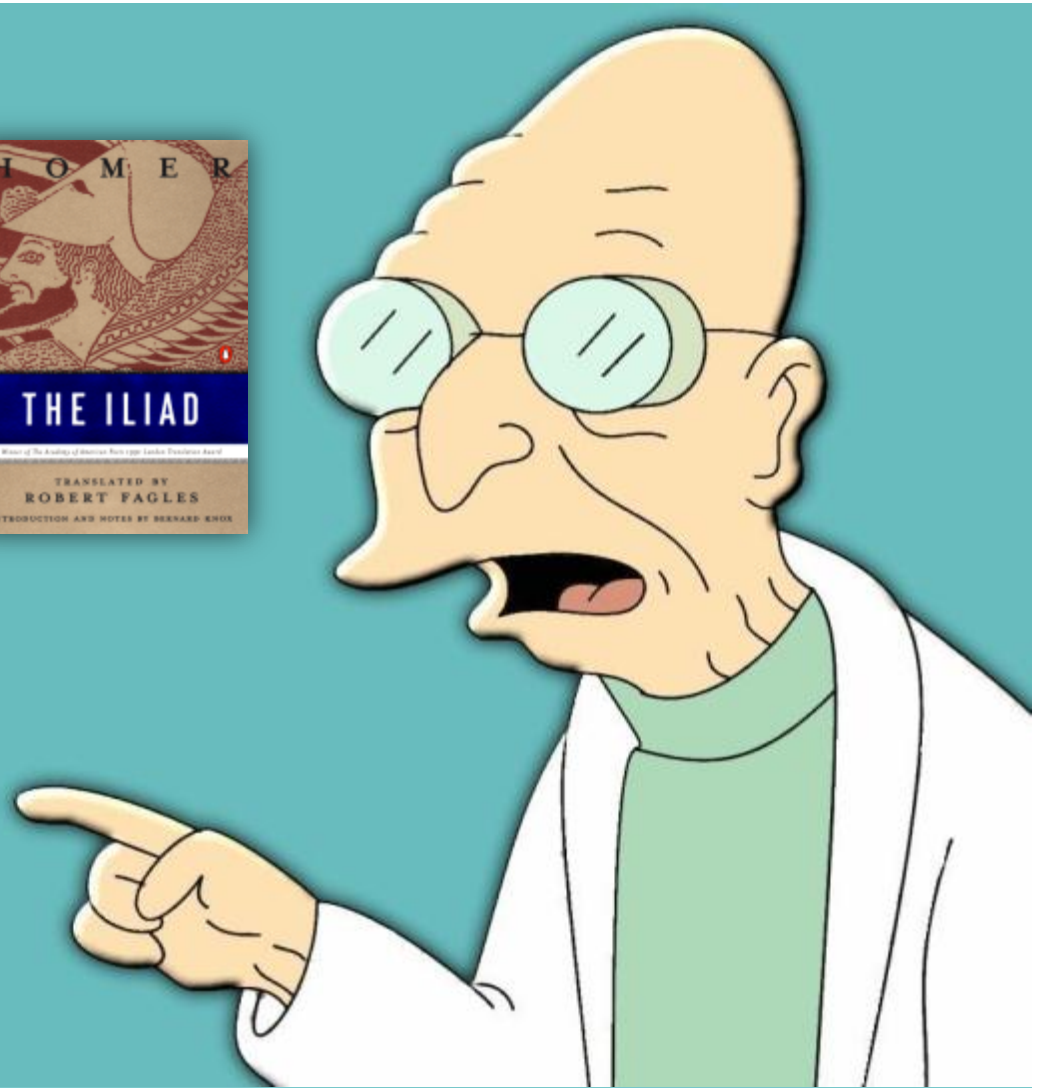
- But: Their game knowledge is local, particular to their time and interests.

The students have never even tried to read *The Iliad*!

And if they did, they found it "boring".

What is the world coming to?!?!

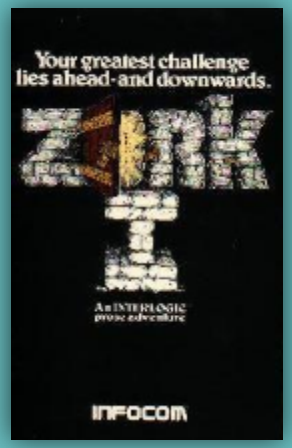


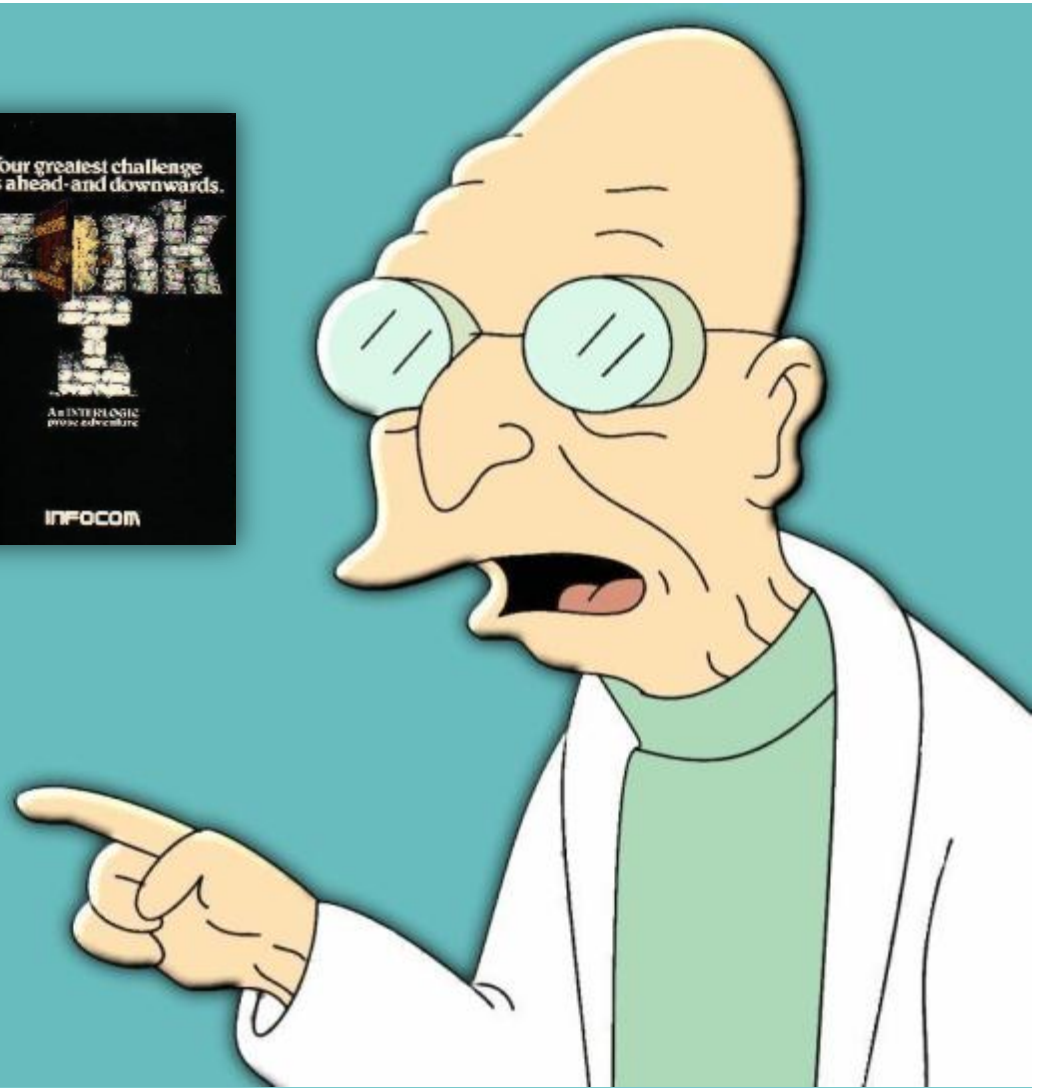


The students have never even tried to play *Zork*!

And if they did, they found it "boring".

What is the world coming to?!?!





Teach.

Game.

History.

GAMES 101

Case study: Games 101 Class

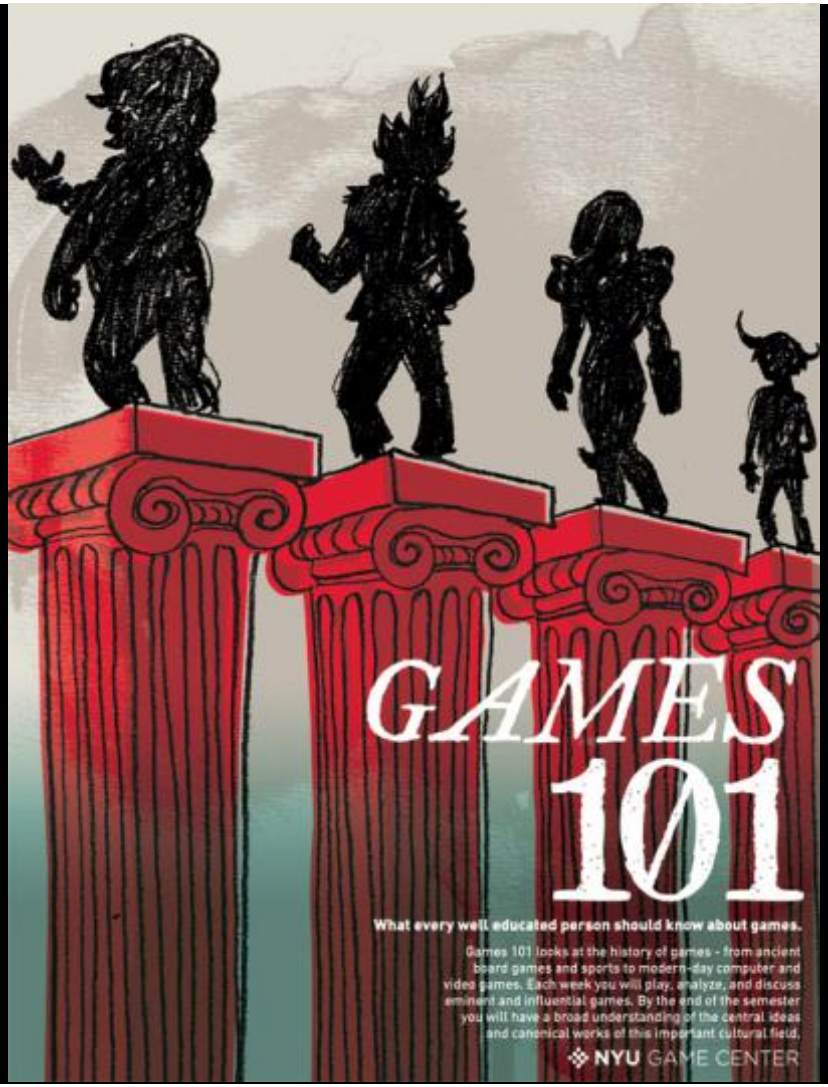
NYU Game Center

- Situated in Tisch School of the Arts, New York University
- Games as a cultural form and game design as creative practice.
- Undergraduate minor with students from across NYU and NYU-Poly.
- 2-year MFA program launching fall 2012.

NYU GAME CENTER

Problems when Teaching

- Historical Game Studies discussions refer to historical games.
- Game Design relies on a palette of solutions in earlier games.
- Studio classes & experimental design challenging with little knowledge of past experiments & roads not taken.


GAMES
101
What every well educated person should know about games.
Games 101 looks at the history of games - from ancient board games and sports to modern-day computer and video games. Each week you will play, analyze, and discuss eminent and influential games. By the end of the semester you will have a broad understanding of the central ideas and canonical works of this important cultural field.
NYU GAME CENTER

The Games 101 course

- 60 students
- Co-taught by game center faculty and adjuncts
- Weekly quiz
  - Years, dates!
- Weekly 500-word report on one of three games
  - Must play game at least three hours. (Ties into grading.)

http://gamecenter.nyu.edu/academics/courses

Selection

Not a *canon*, but canonical themes.

Roots	Chess, Go, Backgammon, Mancala
Sports	Football (Soccer), Tennis, Basketball
Adventure	Adventure (Atari 2600), Zork, The Secret of Monkey Island
Action & Platformers	Space Invaders, Super Mario Bros, Gears of War
Modern Board & Card Games	Scrabble, Poker, Settlers of Catan
Fighting	Street Fighter II, Virtua Fighter 4, Super Smash Bros. Melee
Action-Adventure	Grand Theft Auto IV (any platform), Metal Gear Solid 4, Uncharted 2
RPGs and Midterm	Dungeons and Dragons, Dragon Quest V, World of Warcraft
CCGs & Simulations	Magic: The Gathering, Sim City, NetHack
FPS	Doom, Half-Life, CounterStrike, Halo
Strategy	Advance Wars, Civilization V, Starcraft 2, DOTA
Casual/Social	Bejeweled, Wii Sports, Farmville
Indie/Experimental	Seiklus, Minecraft, Passage

Game Library

- Open to NYU students Mon-Fri 2-8PM.
- 14 systems, 1000 games.
- Coordination between classes and librarians.
- Priority to students taking classes.

Take the quiz!

Who among the following is a key person in the development of this game:

- Yoichi Yamada
- Walter Camp
- James Naismith
- Rinus Michel

Take the quiz!

What year was this game released?

- 1988
- 1994
- 1998
- 2001

http://gamecenter.nyu.edu/2012/02/games-101-practice-exam

Critical Play Reports

Critical Play Report - Week 2
Choose **one** of the following topics for your paper. Keep the paper to 500 words (plus or minus 10 words.)

Topics:

Adventure: Complete levels 1, 2, and 3 of Adventure for the Atari 2600. How does the game structure change from level to level? What aspects of the space, game logic, or placement of elements changed from level to level? How did these changes contribute to the experience of the game for you?

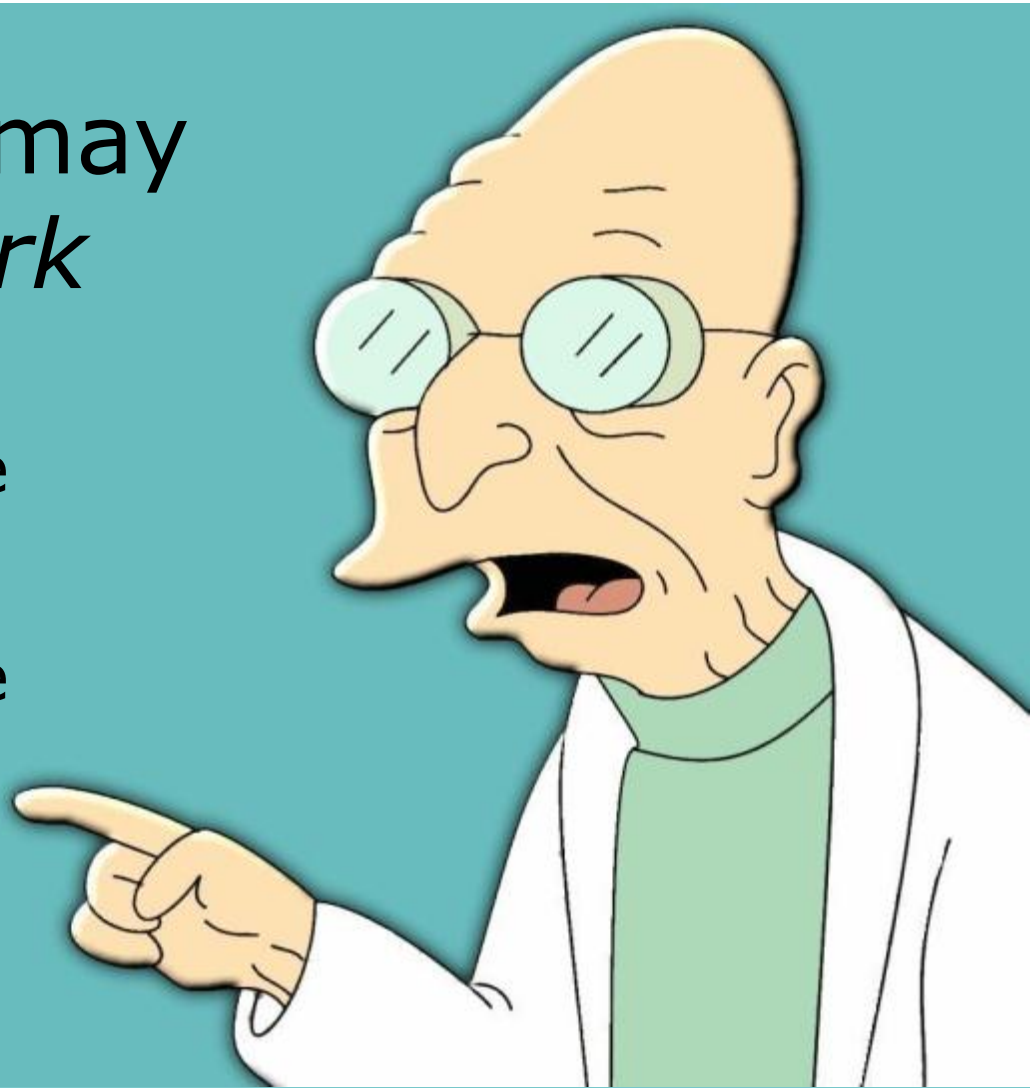
MYST: Analyze a complex puzzle in Myst and focus on one or more of the following questions. How exactly is the puzzle constructed to maximize challenge and player enjoyment? Is the puzzle dynamic in any way, or is it completely predetermined? What kind of problem-solving skills were required to solve the puzzle? How did the puzzle relate to or contribute to the narrative of the game?

Zork: Play Zork for an extended period of time without the assistance of walkthroughs or any kind of online help. Did you feel a sense of engagement and immersion into the game, as related by some of the players in the film we watched during the lecture? Were you immersed in the game narrative, in the game space, or just in the game structure of problem-solving? What aspects of Zork contributed to your engagement and which aspects contributed to your disengagement?

Warning: They may still not like *Zork*

"*Zork* was the first text -based adventure game I have ever played and probably the last text -based adventure game I will ever play. "

-Actual student report



Takeaway

- A student should know 100s of games.
- Dedicated class required.
- We can now refer to *Zork*.
- Significant boon to other classes taught.
- Co-teaching brings faculty on same page.

gamecenter.nyu.edu / www.jesperjuul.net

READINGS VS. OBJECTS

Two intro class models

UC San Diego, COCU 177

Game studies intro

Lecture, plus games as *readings*

http://www.noahwf.com/08spring/gamestudies/

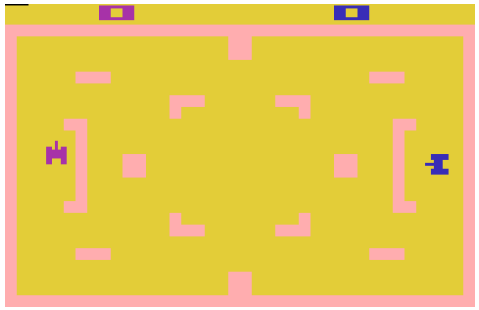
UC Santa Cruz, CMPS 80K

Game design intro (designed by Jim Whitehead)

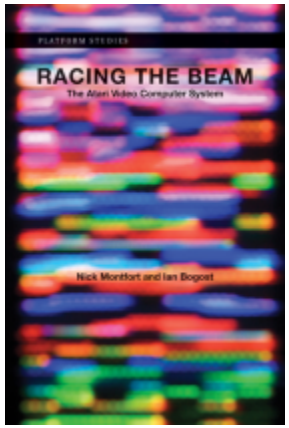
Lecture, plus games as *objects of study*

http://classes.soe.ucsc.edu/cmps080k/Spring11/

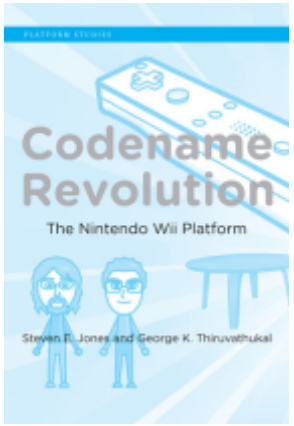
Same synchronic strategy



Readings and lectures/demos blending historical, technical, and cultural view — plus game availability

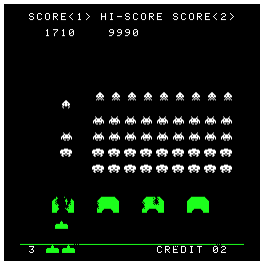


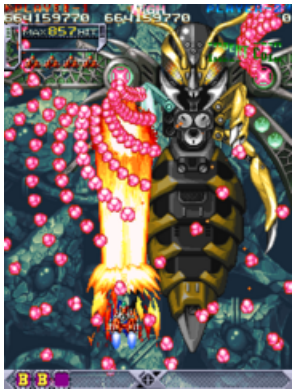
More options: Wii just published & Amiga coming soon

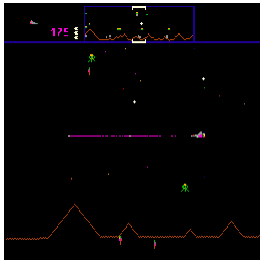


Same diachronic strategy

Gameplay genre evolution in historical context: Juul's matching tiles and Whitehead's shmups







Historical dialogue of 2D platformers

Different ways students see games

Games as readings

Games as objects of study

Games as readings

"Readings" are familiar

New parameters: not "finishing" but time/level, playing with others

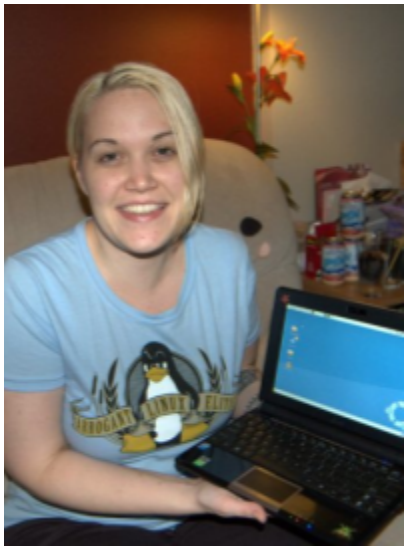
"Readings" need to be *legally* available to all students, with time flexible

Games as objects of study

- Essay analyzing three games
- Across platform generations
- Using mechanics related to student's game project

(Jim Whitehead originated)

Students work like historians, finding the games that they think relate



Students motivated by connection with their design challenge

Games as readings: access

- Using specialty distributors (Clara)
- Worked with campus IT to install games
- Worked with copyright holders for lab
- Worked with dept staff for lending library (integrated with equip checkout)
- Worked with campus bookstore to stock Atari Flashback 2

Games as objects of study: access

Dedicated historical gaming lab, with older consoles always set up

Lending collection of ~700 games and systems, including just-added iPad

The essentials

- Adding game history in a rigorous way
- Using lecture and assignment structure to move beyond the pure pleasure/dislike of retro play
- Giving student access that doesn't discriminate against those with limited economic means or require student availability at fixed times (beyond class)

PLAYING OLD GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

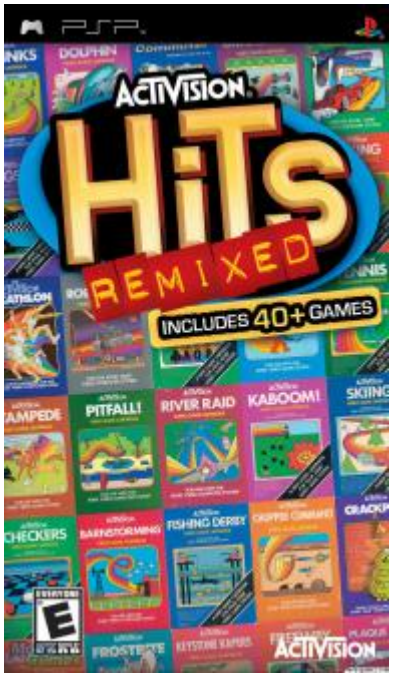
Courses and Activities

- CMS.300 Introduction to Videogame Studies
- CMS.612 Writing for Videogames
- Friday Games at GAMBIT

http://mit.academia.edu/ClaraFernandezVara/Teaching

GAMBIT
SINGAPORE-MIT GAMBIT GAME LAB

Legal Download Sites and Rereleases



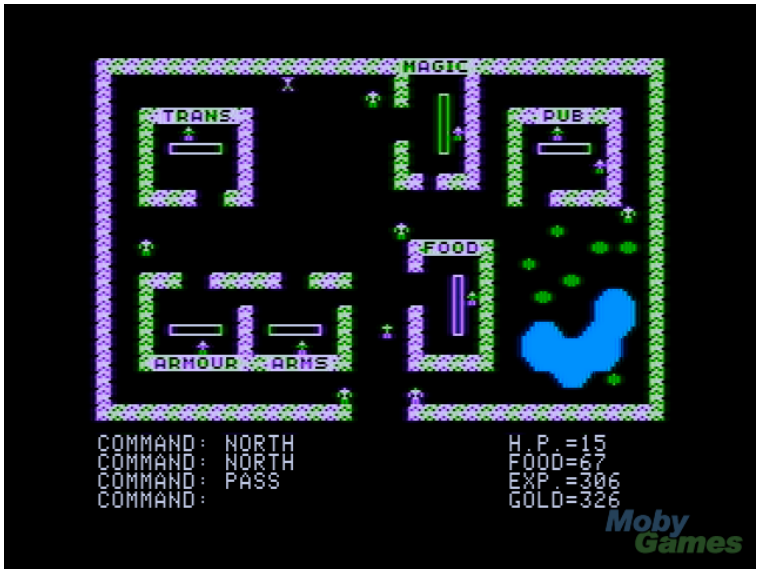
WiiWare™

gog com

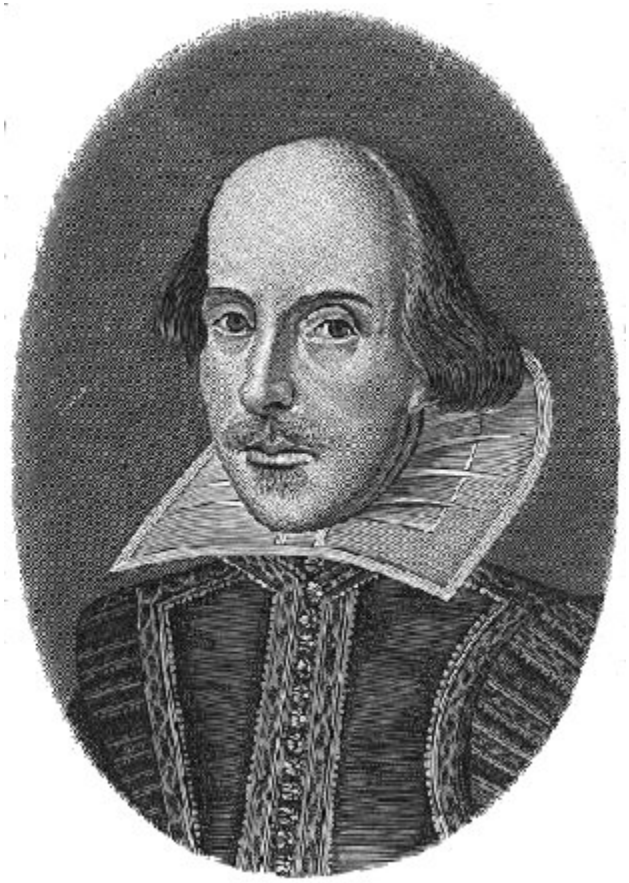
STEAM®

Emulators and Fair Use

Old games can be very hard



How do we overcome that?

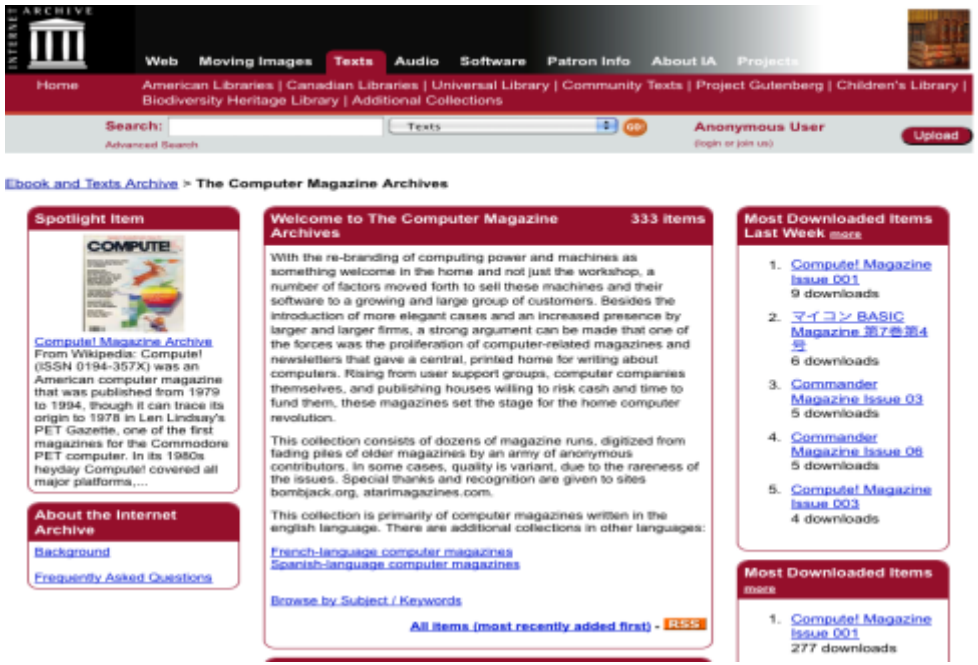


Playing Together Always Helps

Read the Manual!

Manuals Online

Computer Magazines Online



http://www.archive.org/details/computermagazines

Takeaways

- Diversifying examples to give students a sense of history.
- There are many resources to get older games legally.
- Using emulators and ROMs should be covered by fair use: we're educators.
- Old games can be difficult, even for "gamers"
  - Find manuals
  - Communal play helps getting games across.
- Manuals and old magazines are invaluable resources to understand games in context.

Thank you

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