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Monopoly. The Game, the City and the Luck.

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The Idea

The questionable case of Charles Darrow

Are games invented? Of course, sometimes a simple idea forms the nucleus from which a game develops. But every game idea has to go through a process of cultural re-modelling, adaptation, testing and improvement before all the pre-requisites essential to its long-term success can be fulfilled, including the devising of logical rules and practicable game sequences and the development of memorable concepts.

From time to time, these phases can span over multiple historical epochs; classical board games are the best examples of this. The war and kings game *Caturanga* first appeared in India in the fifth century A.D., but took a detour through Sri Lanka, Persia and then Arabian culture before settling first in Spain and then the rest of Europe under its Persian name *Chess* – in the much edited and altered, but ultimately stable form we still know today. *Nine Men's Morris* and *Backgammon* – which was previously known as *Puff* in Germany and *trictac* in France – probably date back to even earlier origins.

On closer inspection, board games are almost always themed.

Unsurprisingly, warfare and battle are high in the popularity stakes, as in the example of *Chess*. Strategy games make the player into an army General and, in doing so, fulfil secret desires. The most successful variant besides *Chess* is called *Pachisi*, which also comes from India. Impregnable fortresses complicate the completion of the game, not just by holding up movement, but also by demanding foresight and practical intelligence from the player. Theme, duration, incentive to win, the thrill and plausibility of the game's concept – all of these need to be in perfect harmony to guarantee its popularity and success through the generations. Perfection in a game always equates to perfection in its use, and this is almost impossible to achieve in one single flash of foresighted invention.

On the other hand, not every game can rely on a process of polishing over the centuries to be brought to its definitive denomination.

At first glance, it seems that Monopoly didn't just come into existence, but was made. According to legend, a brainwave in the early 1930s brought its inventor, Charles B. Darrow (1889-1967), success and eternal fame. Role-playing games had already been around for some time by then, but it was only from the 20th century onwards that they began to make their creators rich. One of Charles Darrow's predecessors was Josef Friedrich Schmidt from Amberg, the inventor of *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht*, but it unfortunately took a catastrophe like the First World War to kick-start his invention off on the unique and uninterrupted journey of success it enjoyed from 1908 onwards (Pic. 1). *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht* is based on the Indian forerunners *Pachisi* and *Chaupur*, and Schmidt was sure to have been familiar with the modern English version, *Ludo*. Bearing these existing models in mind, it would have been quite an exaggeration to call his renewed adaptation an invention – to put it mildly, what Schmidt subjected the old game of *Pachisi* to was a significant reduction in its complexity. Fortresses and blockades were dropped without substitution; only the luck of the dice remained to decide between victory and defeat, with the result that any demand for intelligence from the player was dropped too. Even the narrative component became null and void, and it would be a stretch to describe the space the playing figures are moved across as anything other than bleak wasteland.

So how can the impressive success of this minimalist descendant of ancient Indian playing culture be explained, a game which has sold more than 70 million copies to date? The answer clearly lies in the sinking success the German army had been experiencing in battle since 1916. *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht* became a popular present choice at the time, sent by field post from those at home to the fighters on the front line, and especially to soldiers in military hospitals. In that year, an en bloc donation of 3,000 games to be sent to the front line enabled Schmidt to

register as a regular trader and extend his humble courtyard workshop in Munich into a games factory. After all, what message could have been more comforting for demoralised soldiers than the insight, drummed home in daily games of *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht*, that fate alone, not strategic ability or morale, decides over success and defeat? The ingeniously chosen name, surely Schmidt's main inventive accomplishment, wasn't at all compatible with Rah! Rah! Propaganda, and would most certainly have been a major strategic error if used as a message of greeting to victorious armies. Clearly though, it was an appeal to take defeat with good humour – a quietist maxim which was to prove itself to be topical in German history a few more times after that, and one which, beyond war-related occasions, found its way into the bourgeois catalogue of virtues. Both the motto and the game have continued to win loyal fans since then, not only in Germany, but also in France (*T'en fais pas*), Italy (*Non t'arrabbiare*) and the rest of the world.

Unlike Schmidt, whose name was known to insiders at most, Charles B. Darrow managed to establish himself as an idol. An uncrowned king for all the ambitious and predominantly unsuccessful successors who amass at inventor congresses year after year, eager to bombard manufacturers with suggestions of how their new, highly sophisticated yet marketable games just can't fail to delight humankind and conquer the world markets. Ever since Darrow, the unusual activity of being a games inventor has become a dream vocation. There are, in actual fact, a few outstanding ones who hit the jackpot with a game idea that made them hugely successful – sometimes even a whole series of games. Academics and, increasingly, intellectual inventors like Alex Randolph (1922-2004) are classical masters of the profession. Occasionally mathematicians too. And yet, of all people, the great patriarch of this elite was Mr Average, Darrow, a heating engineer and plumber from Germantown, Pennsylvania? The little we know about him hardly strays beyond a banal existence. Any renown he had back then was actually down to his day

job. At the beginning of the 20th century, when Darrow was doing his apprenticeship, the plumber was by no means just a run-of-the-mill handyman; on the contrary, what he did demanded cultural responsibility as well as technological competence, being closely linked with the aims of the town planning reform movement. One could even say that the plumber was a natural leader on the path to modernity. In the opinion of Adolf Loos, the Viennese architect and sharp-tongued champion for a thorough renewal of everyday culture, the plumbing profession had almost elite traits. Loos had lived in America for many years. In an article for the *Neuen Freien Presse* he described the American plumber as a 'pioneer of cleanliness', as 'the first handyman in the State' and a 'billeting officer of culture, of definitive modern culture.'

And yet Darrow's biography has little in common with those of other prominent game inventors we know. Monopoly's success neither inspired him to go on and invent more afterwards – Alex Randolph, for example, had more than a hundred party games patented – nor did he try to take over the sales himself and achieve success as a producer. After the United States Patent and Trademark Office confirmed the copyright for his Monopoly invention on the 31st of December 1935, and as soon as his royalties allowed, he bought himself a farm in Pennsylvania and, from the public's perspective at least, led a thoroughly invisible existence as a pensioner.

And yet the way in which Monopoly came into being was by no means as unassuming as people believed for a long time. There are two stories about this, and in order to get as close as possible to what may have been the truth, both need to be weighed carefully against each other. The first story was written by the venerable Parker Brothers Company from Salem, Massachusetts. Parker Brothers was the most well-known games producer in the USA, producing and selling Monopoly – alongside many other bestsellers – from the very beginning. Founded by the passionate games developer George S. Parker in 1883 when he was just sixteen

years old, the company retained its independence until 1968, a year after Charles Darrow died on his farm. After that, the fine-sounding name Parker existed only on paper. Parker Brothers passed through the hands of various investors before being bought up in 1991 by the toy giant Hasbro, by which time even the brand name had been relinquished.

It was Parker Brothers who made Charles Darrow's name famous; by providing a few, meagre biographical details about him, they gave a man we know hardly anything about an entry in the history books, a man who seemingly did everything he could to avoid being in the limelight. Only a handful of photographs remain to tell us what he looked like, and only one of them became well-known: a bespectacled man in his sixties, smartly attired in a white shirt and patterned tie, is pictured sitting against the backdrop of a panelled wall with an open Monopoly board in front of him, play money piled unevenly on top of it (Pic. 4). Laughing in a friendly manner, he hands a 500 dollar note to a fellow player, of whom we can see only his left hand. The photo is intended to pass for a snapshot, but is far from a spontaneous piece of evidence of everyday life. The scene was obviously arranged carefully for the photographer, as a number of indications suggest. The table is far too small to be able to play properly on, and the board is turned away from Darrow so that the viewer can read the 'Monopoly' inscription. In addition, there are more built-up streets on the board than there are visible deeds of ownership, and one would need to plunder the bank reserves of at least three Monopoly games to accumulate the hoards of money piled abundantly in front of him. We don't know if Darrow ever played Monopoly voluntarily again after his retreat to his private life – but if he did, then this picture is certainly no evidence of it.

The information that has been handed down to us about the 'inventor' of Monopoly is restricted to just a few facts. Born in 1889, the heating and steam engineer moved from Pittsburgh to Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1927 – a formerly independent town which had been incorporated into

the city of Philadelphia as early as 1854, tacking itself on to the centre as a north-western suburb. Practically only the name remains in memory of its foundation in the 17th century by German Quakers and Mennonites. Today, one of its tourist attractions is a shop which sells Christmas tree decorations to the tune of Silent Night all year round, and then there's the fact that the first Bible in America was once printed here – perhaps as a nod to Johannes Gutenberg. But its modest, somewhat melancholic fame is actually thanks to the *Battle of Germantown*, which swayed back and forth on Main Street in 1793 before the native troops, led by George Washington, suffered a humiliating defeat to the English.

By the 1920s, Germantown Avenue, as Main Street was called by then, had become the typical main traffic and shopping thoroughfare of an American mid-sized town, buzzing with advertisements, passers-by and Model T Fords (Pic. 5). Darrow worked here as the employee of a plumbing firm, before he, along with millions of other Americans, lost his job after the 24th of October 1929, Wall Street's Black Thursday. After numerous warning signs, the stock market collapsed dramatically that day, resulting in debt on an unimaginable scale. It was another three years before the economic crisis that followed reached rock bottom, going down in history under the calamitous name of The Great Depression.

And yet it seemed that the crisis didn't have such serious consequences in Philadelphia as it did in other cities across America. In January 1932, Hampton Moore, the Republican mayor of the city, declared: 'I toured around in South Philadelphia. I went down the side streets and saw very little poverty. I counted automobiles from an observation point. Rich and poor, white and coloured, foreigners and natives – they were all driving past me. There is no hunger in Philadelphia.' He sent proud reports to Washington about how masterfully his city was overcoming the crisis. But that was just glossing over the reality. In actual fact, a third of the population were out of work in South Philadelphia's traditionally black community, and the total number of unemployed in the city reached

281,000. Moore was a dyed-in-the-wool free market liberal. Purely and simply, what mattered to him most was keeping state intervention away from his city at all costs. But even private charity organisations were having a hard time of it in Philadelphia. In 1930, a committee for unemployment aid had collected almost four million dollars and built emergency accommodation for 10,000 homeless people, but by the autumn of 1931 they had to give up. The Community Chest Campaign, an organisation created by the city, fared similarly not long after. Despite receiving ten million dollars from well-off residents, they weren't able to achieve any lasting success either.

It soon became clear that private aid was not able to overcome the difficulties. After Franklin D. Roosevelt (Pic. 6) won the presidential election in early 1933 and introduced the first phase of the New Deal with public employment and investment programmes, Mayor Moore appeared incredibly reluctant to raise the total sum for funding available from Washington for his city. According to his *ceterum censeo*, the government were exceeding their powers with the economic support. What he feared most was the strengthening of democratic competition against his Grand Old Party, which had held power in Philadelphia since time immemorial; after all, here they traditionally had the support of the workers and the black population too (that is, at least those who were permitted to vote). He continued to back reductions in local expenditure and redundancies amongst civil servants long after Washington had changed course. At his wit's end, Edward Jones, leader of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for Pennsylvania, appointed 12,000 civil servants in the suburbs of Philadelphia, instead of in the city proper, where Moore had the final word.

The mayor's calculations admittedly worked out in the end, but not in the way he had intended. Ahead of the local elections in autumn 1935 his sharpest opponent, the Democrat leader S. Davis Wilson, unexpectedly changed sides to the Republican Party, throwing Moore out of the running

as candidate. With a close lead, he became mayor ahead of his Democrat competitor, but died in office just four years later. Although his reputation was somewhat disputable on a personal level – he went to court twice for sexual misdemeanours and gambling, although admittedly without being charged – he nonetheless managed secure state benefits for Philadelphia in a short period of time. Road and bridge building flourished after his election, public housing construction picked up speed, and before long 47,000 workers were employed at the expense of the WPA.

These eventful circumstances were the driving force behind the birth of Monopoly. Like many housewives, Esther Darrow tried to contribute to the household costs with her needlework. Charles Darrow gave some thought to his manual skills, which were by no means limited to heating repairs, and got himself a fret saw in to make toys commissioned by friends and acquaintances. But despite this, the crisis still gave the couple more leisure time than he would have liked. They were both positive people and enjoyed life. It was clear that they had to tighten their belts, but what was there to say they couldn't spend their plentiful free time with old and new friends? Since 1932, Charles and Olive Todd had been amongst these. Charles Todd, who had resorted to becoming a construction worker on hotel renovations, knew Esther Darrow from school; after he moved to Germantown with his wife, the four of them started to spend time together. The only thing was, what could they do? Four cheerful people wanted to keep their spirits up, but in these hard times, it had to be something cost-free. They quickly found a solution. All four of them loved board games. And their favourite quickly became the *Atlantic City Game*, introduced to them by Charles Todd, who had picked it up from other friends not long before.

Atlantic City – in the 1930s, the coastal town in New Jersey wasn't yet the noisy, colourful and over-crowded 'Las Vegas of the North' it became after casino gambling was legalised there in 1978. Back then, the name was still synonymous with reputable beach fun, with tranquillity and a hint of

exclusivity. After the end of the civil war, the former fishing village gradually developed into a resort for city dwellers. The summer crowd consisted predominantly of visitors from the city of Philadelphia, which was only 60 miles away. In around 1870, two of the obstacles which still stood in the way of its career as an elegant seaside resort were successfully removed: the plague of mosquitoes and the rough route between the accommodation and the beach. The solution for both was provided by the construction of the first boardwalk, an artificial beach promenade constructed on stilts, which easily crossed both the uneven dunes and the waterholes interspersed between them. Its planked surface created an even pedestrian footpath, on which the holidaymakers could finally promenade in elegant attire (Pic. 7).

Those who were affluent enough didn't just go for a stroll, but had themselves pushed along the boardwalk by black *boys* whilst seated in small wheelchairs, (Pic. 8). White tulle gowns, wide-rimmed hats and coquettishly twiddled parasols brought the picture to life. Countless hotels and guest houses lined both the promenade and the streets and squares in the numerous new housing developments – from the luxury hostels, like the famous 'United States', to the simple boarding house, which made the pleasures of the summer vacation achievable for even the less-privileged. Particularly in the decades between 1870 and the turn of the century, Atlantic City developed into an – almost – class-less holiday destination, especially once the connection to several large railway lines significantly shortened the link to New York. While the permanent population totalled around 5,000, Atlantic City grew to include 65,000 residents over the summer months. It also became increasingly attractive for weekend visitors, especially after an inventive investor built the first amusement pier with dance floors, stages, restaurants and bars in 1882. The turn of the century brought electronic lighting on the beach and, a little later, the first movie-theatres.

Atlantic City had succeeded in stepping into the modern age, but it was America's social traumas in the early 20th century which, after just a few decades of ongoing prosperity, led to the collapse of the harmless and tranquil beach paradise: first the Prohibition – introduced nationally in 1919 – and then, from 1929, the Great Depression. The alcohol ban led to illegal distilleries and drinking holes in Atlantic City just as it did elsewhere, prompting a wave of organised crime and corruption scandals. This was more than enough to scare off the traditional public, but the economic crisis alone had already made holiday destinations of any kind an unrealisable dream – a problem which persisted even after Roosevelt brought the Prohibition to a much-desired end in 1933 in the interest of tax income, a move which should actually have benefited tourism. The dream of holidays, the nostalgic memory of care-free beach holidays funded by a well-stocked rainy day fund, all of this could be re-awakened during the two couples' evening games in Germantown.

However, the *Atlantic City Game* wasn't available to buy in the shops. Charles Todd had fashioned his one-off copy himself on a dark blue oilcloth (Table 1.), based on the hand-made one he had encountered by chance a while before. Around an empty central space, each of the four sides were methodically divided into nine playing squares, collated into groups by coloured corners and rather roughly annotated: street names from Atlantic City like Oriental Avenue, Vermont Avenue or Med (for Mediterranean) Avenue were alternated with train stations, and fields for *Chance* and *Community Chest* were distributed in between. Anyone who still believes in the pure inventive genius of Charles Darrow is about to have all their illusions shattered. In 1932, three years before the impressive patent certificate was issued, the entire Monopoly game was already pre-modelled, inclusive of street names, chance and community fields (which direct the player to the infamous pile of cards in the centre of the board) and even the start and prison corners; only the name was missing. But if Charles Todd was the true inventor, why didn't he become

suspicious when Darrow borrowed his game, allegedly in order to copy it for his own use? And why – even if that can be put down to naivety – did he not fight for his rights even when Parker Brothers brought Monopoly to the market and, together with his friend Darrow, made their fortunes with it?

Monopoly historians like Philip E. Orbanes provided the answer to this question a long time ago. Not just Charles Todd, but countless others before him had already played the popular game of property investment, unexpected tax demands and forced prison sentences. It was given the illusion of being based on a real city by the street names of Atlantic City. Strictly speaking though, the beach resort had very little to do with the game itself; Todd just happened to become friends with a circle of people who came from Atlantic City and who had the nostalgic idea of naming the playing squares after their shared home town. It seems that Todd didn't know Atlantic City particularly well, with the result that he misspelt Marven Gardens, a pretty street on the outskirts of the beach resort, as Marvin Gardens – a mistake which, as we will see, would turn out to be of considerable significance in the history of Monopoly.

The game which can be quite reasonably referred to as the original Monopoly originated considerably earlier than the 1930s, at around the turn of the 20th century to be more precise. It was called *The Landlord's Game*, and its creator was the stenographer Elizabeth ('Lizzie') Magie Phillips from Chicago, Illinois, who later settled in Washington. In the 19th century, stenography was a demanding profession which attracted many gifted and intelligent people who, due to either insufficient funds or other reasons, weren't able to study. Many starry-eyed idealists earned their living as stenographers, such as Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), inventor and passionate propagator of the garden city movement. On the 5th of January 1904, Elizabeth Magie had her game patented – as the very first board game, for that matter – and after the expiration of the twenty year term of copyright, she obtained a new patent for the revised version on

the 23rd of September 1924. Lizzie Magie's game never reached notable production numbers, but numerous hand-made copies and editions circulated all around the East Coast of America right through until the 1930s. In her first patent application, Lizzie Magie included a sketch of the game (Pic. 9). The quadratic board game is reminiscent of the layout of a fortress: Between the protruding, rampart-like corner squares are four rows which are then divided into nine narrow squares. They represent property – both private and public, including railway lines and a goldmine – but occasionally also obliged players to make tax payments or donate to charity. The central section is divided into four larger squares by a cross. In her patent applications of 1904 and 1924, Magie stated that the concept of the game was *educational in nature*.

Eight property cards were distributed amongst the players; the remainder were initially piled up in the centre of the board and could be bought later. It gets a little more complicated when you take into consideration that there were a lot more property cards than playing squares. So the full extent of the property acquired during the game was only partially represented on the board itself. In addition, the players were given different coloured playing pieces and little flags with the inscriptions *Improvement* or *No Trespassing*, which could be pinned onto property as well as title deeds. From a common starting point, the players' pieces advanced around the board according to the numbers rolled on the dice. There was no goal as such, instead you had to complete the circuit from scratch again and again. This was very unusual for games of that era, and later became one of the reasons why Parker Brothers turned Monopoly down at first. Whoever landed on a property due to a lucky throw of the dice was able to buy it, sell it or claim it for development (with the attached costs), unless it already belonged to a fellow player – in which case they would have to pay rent.

Landing on a property that wasn't supposed to be entered meant being forced to go to prison (the *poorhouse*). In addition, one of the corner

squares had the inscription *No trespassing – go to jail*. Due to lack of money or other reasons a player could also auction off property they owned to the highest bidder amongst the other players. The bank occupied one of the central squares, and a total of 6,600 dollars were in play. The winner was the first to acquire a fortune of 3,000 dollars.

So where is the concealed pedagogical impulse in this very complex game, which was a predecessor to the concept and logic of Monopoly in many ways? There have been many references to the fact that Lizzie Magie felt a strong connection with the economic theories of Henry George (Pic. 10). Her father was a former colleague and student of the once extremely successful – one might even say popular – autodidact and economic theorist. George came from Philadelphia, and his career showed many surprising parallels with those of other early Socialists like Karl Marx, William Morris and Joseph Proudhon. George began his studies but never graduated, and went on to live and work in San Francisco as a freelance journalist. For a short period of time he even became editor of *The Standard*, a paper of the labour movement, before moving to New York with his family in 1881 in order to run for mayor. His bid was unsuccessful but still gained very respectable results – he won around a third of the votes.

George had already been condemning the social injustices in New York for some time by then, especially the provocative proximity of excessive wealth and bitter poverty which he chastised as being the disgrace and failure of American politics. It was this preoccupation with social inequality which inspired his unconventional economic and tax theory, and which led him to write *Progress and Poverty*, a work which was circulated worldwide at the time. First published in 1879, it was translated into fourteen languages and reached a total print run of four million copies, making Henry George one of the most successful social theorists and utopian socialists of the 19th century.

His theories – instantly named *Georgisms* in America – do not conform to a consistent theory system like the one created by Karl Marx in *Capital* in 1867. George himself somewhat proudly admitted that he didn't even know the leading economic and social theorists of his time when he started work on his book and, in the process, declared war on the scandalous economic inequality in the USA. That may or may not have been true, but the crucial point is he took advantage of the unassailable status of the prophet. He claimed to have found the remedy for all modern day symptoms of poverty. According to George, he merely followed 'the course of his own thoughts' until, in 1869, completely out of the blue, he was granted with the 'enlightenment' of how the catastrophic state of affairs could be overcome. George, whose father had published the writings of the Episcopal Church, subscribed to two unshaken age-old American belief systems – the freedom of the individual on the one hand, and divine justice on the other. With almost sectarian insistence, he saw it as his true calling to help both of these beliefs come into their own; and the simplicity, almost phenomenal one-dimensionality of the conclusions he drew from his observations made his theories seem highly reminiscent of religious doctrines of salvation and revelation.

According to Henry George, the root of the ills was solely down to the unjust distribution of the land, which was ultimately God's gift to all humanity. Not re-distributing, but re-taxing this land was the only fail-proof way to lead humankind to salvation. With his single tax theory he was demanding nothing less than an exclusive property tax, which was to be set solely according to the dimensions of the property, not its yield, and which would therefore make all existing taxes on capital, work and productive wealth instantly superfluous.

His criticism of urban life was radical, and yet a few of his observations still ring true today: "There are some plots of land where the owner makes more profit from every single foot of the street front than an average craftsman could earn; there are plots where the sale price is

higher than if it were plastered with gold. On the main roads there are skyscrapers of granite and marble, iron and glass, finished in the most lavish style and equipped with every comfort. And yet they are not worth as much as the ground they stand on – the same land that had no value whatsoever when the first settler came. [...] The most valuable ground in the world, the ground that brings the highest yield, distinguishes itself not by its productive activity, but by its utility value as a direct result of the growth of the population.” The economics of the modern metropolis is more aptly captured here than in many other works of contemporary urban criticism. Was there any more precise way to describe the decoupling of property ownership from its natural profit potential and, by association, the fundamental difference between countryside and urban land yield?

There can be no doubt that Henry George was an astute diagnostician. And yet it seems naive to expect that a single step like this – the exclusive taxation of private property combined with the abolition of all other taxes – could provide a solution to all the difficulties and, in the process, restore validity to the just intentions of the world’s creator. On the one hand, as George continued to stress, the single tax would relieve the predominantly un-propertied population of crippling tax payments, as well as prevent disastrous land speculation by the wealthy. Not to mention that the supply on the property market would abruptly increase and land prices would fall given that increases in value caused by speculation could be reliably prevented. The only question which remained – one which is still posed today amongst George’s followers – is where to find potential investors in this questionable paradise, one which levies tax solely on property and leads to inevitable losses, if not financial ruin, for the property owner or shareholder.

And yet Henry George was not alone in his unwavering belief in the single tax. His predecessors included the Physiocrats – the progressive school of economic theorists which had already found its footing in France and

Switzerland around the time of the French Revolution. François Quesnay (1694-1774), Victor Riqueti (Marquis de Mirabeau, 1715-1789) and their fellow physiocrats had already passionately campaigned for a single tax to be borne exclusively by property owners. Even back then, the simplicity of the theory was enticing and found followers even in established circles – although this was on the eve of industrialisation, when hardly anyone knew about the undreamt-of profit potential of modern productive economy. In 1776, the University of Basel appointed the well-known German physiocrat Johann August Schlettwein as professor; and a year later, the pugnacious royal critic was even made Dean of the Economics Department in Gießen by the Landgrave of Hessen. Compared with these forerunners, Henry George's most significant modernising achievement was surely the advancement from the 18th century's still entirely agrarian-influenced approach to an economy of contemporary metropolises. On the other hand, those who continued to champion a practical implementation of his theories in the years that followed were mainly artists and intellectuals with esoteric tendencies, who were trying their hand in founding well-meaning initiatives – barely noticed by the public, but with notable persistence nonetheless. There is a foundation in Arlesheim in Switzerland – a centre of anthroposophic theory – which still treasures Henry George's work today. And the Arden settlement in the state of Delaware (Pic. 11), founded in 1900 by the idealist architect Will Price, became famous for the fact that they were able to enforce the single tax despite state and federal tax legislation. The current settlement, now with only five hundred inhabitants, still does so today, remaining true to Henry George's theories.

It was this very artist colony in Arden which Lizzie Magie, game inventor and daughter of a died-in-the-wool Georgist, frequently chose as a holiday destination from 1905 onwards. *The Landlord's Game* was popular there, and played a great deal. But why? It was rashly concluded from the game's good fortune and the inventor's background that *The Landlord's*

Game was intended as propaganda for the single tax. But there are many indications to the contrary, not just the absence of any clear reference to George and the single tax in Magie's patent application, but also the analysis of the game itself. The somewhat confusing rules transplant the player into an economical system which doesn't function according to Henry George's land and tax maxims in the slightest, and even partially contradicts them – for example, tax is payable on luxury items and cash, but not – as you might expect – on land ownership! Instead, the rules and course of play follow a pattern of free-market liberalism. According to the game's principle of chance, in which the dice decides how far you advance, the properties can be bought or sold to the highest bidder at your discretion, without tax being payable. Anyone is free to acquire franchise rights to public facilities such as water and electricity companies. That wouldn't necessarily have been ruled out according to Henry George's theories, but the single tax always focused economic trading on a justified goal: overcoming land speculation.

But there was one aspect of Elizabeth Magie's game which was seamlessly congruent with Georgist economic theory – and indeed its reductive one-sidedness – and that was its complete disregard of the productive sector and service industry. Any search for factories, shops, lawyers' offices or doctor's surgeries in the cosmos of *The Landlord's Game* was entirely fruitless. And it was perfectly clear that the game had created a world for itself – not just the portrayal of a particular section of it. At any rate, the start square, which one had to pass again and again when circling the board, showed a double-framed locket with a kind of world map within it, functioning as the emblem of the game. All players were regularly paid a two dollar wage for labour on Mother Earth, 'Labour upon Mother Earth produces wages' as the inscription declared in the style of a heraldic motto.

Whether Lizzie Magie herself was as ardent a follower of Henry George as her father was, we don't know with any certainty, because too little was

known about her as a person. But one thing is certain, that Magie was a Quaker: one of deep conviction and missionary impulse. And this profession to the *Society of Friends* – as this religious community, built around emancipatory values, called itself after its foundation in 1650 by the Englishman George Fox – left tangible traces in Magie's design of her game and its world. Many Quakers had fled relatively early from England to the American colonies, where they were able to develop their beliefs with considerable success and even later play a part – to some extent – in shaping the USA's political and state ideology. There can be no doubt that Magie wanted to enforce Quaker convictions in her game.

It makes sense, then, that there are no physical references to religion in the world she created – there are no churches, no Sunday schools, nor any other schools which, as rule, tended to serve religious upbringing in 19th century America. This staunch rejection of institutionalised religion, including the priesthood and church buildings, was one of the foundations of the Quaker belief. The fact that theatres and concert halls are also missing in her game can be easily explained by the Quakers' rejection of worldly pleasures – for a long time, they dressed only in grey and renounced conventional courtesies. On the other hand, the belief in the equality of all creatures and the duty of those who were able to provide welfare support was taken incredibly seriously. So it's hardly surprising that every player of *The Landlord's Game* is forced to make tax payments to alleviate oppressive social need – if you landed on one of the fields in question, you had to fork out the not inconsiderable sum of five dollars to help the homeless or towards the donation of clothes.

Ultimately, as the history of the *Society of Friends* shows, the Quakers' position on questions of property ownership and public taxes has never been in perfect harmony with the prevailing political norms. True to Quakerism's consistently pacifist outlook – 'love your enemies!' – tax payments were always refused when they were intended to finance wars, and plans to construct church buildings from public funds also made

devout Quakers rebel by refusing to comply with the liability to pay tax. The fundamental rejection of slavery, practised by numerous Quakers to the point where some conspired to protect fugitives and even took part in illegal emancipation acts, led to trials relatively early on, as well as the development of alternative concepts of land management. This applied especially to the large estates in Pennsylvania, which was founded in 1681 by William Penn as a free state for Quakers and other persecuted faith communities; a year later, Penn acquired what would later become the federal state of Delaware for the same purpose. In around 1850, the Quakers' liberal commitment to demanding equality for all reached a temporary high point in the activities of Lucretia Mott (pic 12), who lived in Philadelphia. As an intrepid activist of abolitionism – the movement to abolish slavery – and a figurehead of the first Women's Congress of the Americas, in 1848 she helped realise the Seneca Falls Convention for Woman's Rights, resulting in a key document of the political women's movement which has had lasting impact right through to the present day.

Like all, or perhaps, like all *good* games, Lizzie Magie's *Landlord's Game*, the archetype of economic games for that matter, was by no means the literal realisation of a pre-packaged ideology. In no way pre-occupied with promoting Georgism, and in spite of the pedagogical fervour that moved her, Magie's primary aim was to create a game that was entertaining. The traditions of Georgism and Quakerism were admittedly to thank for some of the societal assumptions, political thought patterns and humanitarian convictions in the game, but the result, even today, seems everything but pre-cut. *The Landlord's Game* was certainly original, and had a comical character which, although not affecting its appeal, stood in the way of its successful marketing from the very beginning.

Picture captions:

2. *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht* – a motto for hard times. The game had its breakthrough moment in the First World War

3. Under hand and seal: Charles Darrow's 1935 patent for Monopoly

4. Charles Darrow plays 'his' Monopoly – for the camera!

5. Pennsylvania Avenue in Germantown, the birth place of Monopoly.

Photo from 1921

6. Not in the slightest bit depressed by the Great Depression: Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), 32nd President of the USA.

7. Elegance was a must in Atlantic City. Today, the one-time sea resort has become the 'Las Vegas of the North'.

8. A relaxed ride? The prototype of the dreaded 'Boardwalk' card.

9. Earlier rights? Lizzie Magie's 1904 patent for *The Landlord's Game*

10. Well-meaning, but hardly a match for the despicable world: Henry George (1839-1897) founded the single tax as the cure for all crises.

11. An idyll, thanks to the single tax: an artist's house in Arden, Delaware, the only 'Georgist' community in the world.

12. Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) steadfast Quaker, helped the oppressed and cited the women's movement in the USA as being the best time of her life.