

Theory

Mobile and Ubiquitous Games

ICS 163

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Content adapted from:

Pervasive Games: Theory and Design

Experiences on the Boundary between Life and Play



Ubiquitous games as culture

- Pervasive Games
 - Intersection of
 - city culture
 - mobile technology
 - network communication
 - reality fiction
 - performing arts
 - single player
 - multi-player
 - artistically and/or politically motivated



Ubiquitous games as culture

- Game Theory
- Johan Huizinga
 - “Homo Ludens” (1938) : Argued that play is primary formative element of human culture (more)
 - forefather of games studies based on philosophical and anthropological work
- **play** happens outside ordinary life
- play is a ritual **activity**
- **rules** of play are separate from everyday life



Ubiquitous games as culture

[play is describes as a] ...free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary life as being "not serious" but at the same time absorbing the players intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

[Huizinga, 1938]



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Does this definition work? [Huizinga, 1938]



Magic Circle

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- the magic circle is the boundary that separates
 - ordinary from the **ludic**
 - “real” from playful
- Huizinga’s magic circle is physical, temporal



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Magic Circle

- Within the magic circle:
 - action is artificial
 - different rules apply
 - lying, backstabbing, limited violence is ok
 - **metacommunication** frames this difference
- When you say “this is play” you mean something like “These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would usually denote”



Magic Circle



- Salen and Zimmerman extended the magic circle metaphorically
 - “a special place in time and space created by a game”
- Goffman further conceptualized the magic circle as:
 - “a conceptual membrane that forms a game boundary”



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Magic Circle

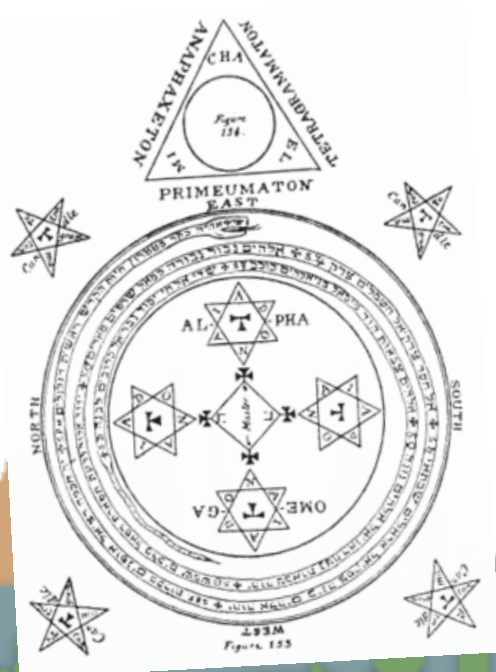
- Membrane vs Circle
- When you play Monopoly, real world wealth does not influence the game
- When you play poker, Does real world wealth influence the game?





Some thoughts on the magic circle

- The idea indexes to pagan and neo-pagan ritual magic and early American Christianity
- The physical circle marked out by practitioners functions to
 - contain energy, spirits, magic
 - form a sacred space
 - provide magical protection
- Be sensitive about the discussion of the topic



[more: [magic circle on wikipedia](#)]

Magic Circle

I was standing by my window
On a cold and cloudy day
When I saw the hearse come rolling
For to carry my mother away.

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by Lord, by and by
There's a better home awaiting
In the sky Lord, in the sky.

Well, I went back home, home was lonely
For my mother she was gone
And all my family there was cryin'
For our home felt sad and alone.

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by Lord, by and by
There's a better home awaiting
In the sky Lord, in the sky.

Undertaker, undertaker, undertaker
Won't you please drive slow
For that lady you are haulin'
Lord, I hate to see her go.

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by Lord, by and by
There's a better home awaiting
In the sky Lord, in the sky.



What is a game then?

- Salen and Zimmerman
 - “a game is system in which players engage in an an **artificial conflict** defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome”
- Jesper Juul (2003)
 - “A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.”
- Compare



Purpose of a game

- Fun?
 - Entertainment
 - Excitement
 - Enjoyment
- Learning?
- Artistic Expression?
 - Critical Commentary
- Societal Exploration



Types of play

- Caillois (1958)
 - Play exists on a spectrum

παιδιή

paidia (Greek)

informal

“messing around”

make-believe

mimicry

riding a roller coaster

ludus
(Latin)

formal

defined rules

chess

basketball



Types of play

- Salen and Zimmerman, Juul focus their definitions on rules
 - ludus
 - ludologists define games as “rule systems”
- Huizinga play is “free activity”
 - more paidiac
- What are Pervasive games?



Types of play

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- What are Pervasive games?
 - primarily ludic systems but within them lots of paidiac elements are supported



Magic Circle as Contract

- The magic circle only holds if everyone agrees
 - implicit agreement
- Magic Circle is not impervious from the outside world
 - You can't actually kill someone in a game and be ok
 - You can play a sport and be liable for external punishment
- Magic Circle membrane is broken by
 - Markets
 - Politics
 - Law

Magic Circle

- What crosses the membrane, what doesn't these games?
 - Mixed Martial Arts (MMA)
 - Paint ball
 - Scrabble
 - Twister
- What other games are built around specific things crossing the membrane?



Magic Circle is limited

- Watching TV while playing WOW
- hardcore gaming destroys the magic circle (Pargman/Jacobsson)
- games build communities that spill into the ordinary

Metacommunication and Game Frames (Fine and Goffman)

- Consider a role-playing game
- Primary framework
 - external matters from game (e.g., ordering pizza)
- Secondary framework
 - communication about the game (e.g., clarify a rule)
- Tertiary framework
 - diegetic communication (e.g., negotiating for a character)
- frameshifts aren't explicit
 - gestures, speech, mannerisms index the

metacommunication



Pervasive games break the magic circle

- “Killer” does not “proceed within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in orderly manner”
- It intentionally blurs

A pervasive game is a game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporarily, or socially.

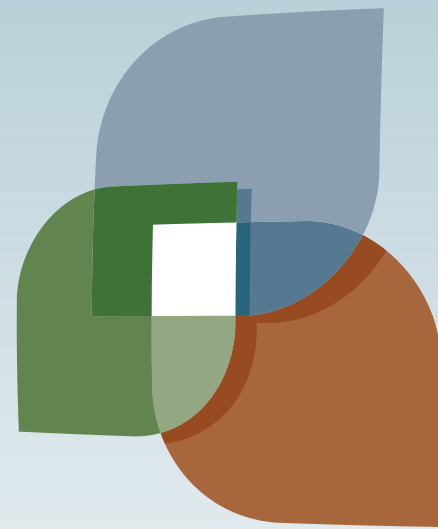


Case Study: Cruel 2 B Kind

- Game designed by
 - Jane McGonigal
 - Ian Bogost
- Post 9/11 version of Killer
 - Game Play
 - Video Demo



- <http://www.cruelgame.com/>



L U C I

