

Nietzsche contra Caillois: Beyond Play and Games

Dan Dixon

Introduction

Roger Caillois' *Man, Play and Games* (2001) is a seminal book in Game Studies; his taxonomy of play and games has framed much of the debate while the field has been active. However this book was published half a century ago and does not provide much help in understanding computer games. Many academics have raised the point that computer games are significantly different from traditional gaming or real world play activity and introduce many new problems for the definitions, however most of Game Studies is still influenced by Caillois' classifications.

According to Caillois play and games fall on a continuum between what he terms *ludus*, rule bound games and *paidia*, anarchic playing. Computer games can be seen as heavily rule bound in that the limits of a participant's actions are controlled by a codified simulation. But am I playing a game when I sight-see in *GTA4*, dance with friends in *World of Warcraft*, or chase someone through *SecondLife*? Am I engaged in free *paidia* or rule-bound *ludus* when I'm rushing through a *Call of Duty 4* multiplayer map, carelessly hurling abuse and fragging other players?

In this paper I argue that because Caillois' approach is essentialist, it is of little use and that giving the aesthetic experience pre-eminence is more useful for understanding the terms play and games. Based on this I propose two related points. Firstly that there is no continuum between the experiences of gaming and playing; these are two separate aesthetic qualities both present during the playing of games. Secondly, I propose that these aesthetic experiences map onto Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian principles, as set out in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1993). Following this separation, particular attention is paid to the terms *playing* and *gaming* as specific aesthetic terms and neither of which are privileged experiences of digital or non-digital games.

The scope of this paper is intentionally limited to digital games (treating video and computer games as a synonym). Although the concepts might be applied more broadly, I have focussed on applying them specifically to computer games and not opening the discussion more generally into play theory. The examples used will therefore be from computer games, except where another

example might be used for contrast or clarification.

Caillois' Legacy

Man, Play and Games (2001) is a book written by Caillois to extend and add robustness to Huizinga's (1933) argument for the pre-eminence of play. Although he was in broad agreement with Huizinga, he didn't believe that he had been analytical enough and had treated playing as one generalised experience. To resolve this Caillois presented a more detailed approach to describing the activities of playing and games.

Caillois sets forth a taxonomy that is often presented on two axes. The first axis is a continuum between what Caillois calls *paidia* and *ludus*, or free-play and games. The second axis is a classification of four types: *agon* or competition; *alea* or chance; *mimesis* or role-play; *ilinx* or sensation. According to Caillois, all types of play and game activity fall somewhere on the continuum between *paidia* and *ludus* and can be placed into at least one of the four types above.

There are a number of criticisms that can be applied this taxonomy. Firstly, it is by its nature, essentialist, it generally describes the properties of these forms of playing from an external point of view. Caillois does make claims as to the experience of play in some of these, but that is not the primary rationale for his classification. Certainly the category of *ilinx* would seem to be based on a phenomenological understanding of the play, and predicated on a more aesthetic phenomena. The second issue is that most examples of *ludus* and *paidia* fit into a number of categories at once, and some can happily fit into all. This necessarily reduced the validity and usefulness of this as a taxonomic system, when only some things fit nicely, and many don't.

Thirdly, the taxonomy is driven by Caillois' project to illustrate western progress. He wants to illustrate progress through a society's leisure activities. As he clearly states, less developed societies tend to take part in activities at the *paidia* end of his continuum, as well as in the *mimesis* and *ilinx* categories, More developed societies play games that tend to be of the *agon* and *alea* type. He is basically saying that *agon* and *alea* types of games are necessarily highly social and help a society to develop. To this end he uses very self-serving examples, ancient Greece, Rome and China, to show that societies that develop *agon* and *alea* games will advance, or advance faster, and counter-examples from Eskimo and African cultures to show the opposite is true of primitive societies.¹

1. It is worth noting that the term *Dionysian* appears in the English translations of *Man, Play and Games*, but this term is the translators choice, not Caillois' original term. He originally used the term *sociétés a tohu-bohu*, tohu-bohu literally meaning hurly-burly, or pandemonium; a reference to 'primitive' societies. The translators choice of *Dionysian* is probably from the 20th century anthropological use of the term to refer to 'primitive' societies. Initially used by Ruth Benedict and more popularly by Margaret Mead.

Despite these problems, the taxonomy still has much traction in the Game Studies discipline. The *paidia to ludus* continuum especially seems to be widely and uncritically accepted, and the four categories can be quoted off the cuff by nearly all academics in this field. Is it unassailable because of its age, or because of its simplicity?

Although the above does sound overly critical, Caillois has made an immense contribution to the field and although this taxonomy has flaws it is still a very easy to understand and useful as a starting point. He was primarily working anthropologically, looking at large scale manifestations of games, not the individual experience of playing them.

The Aesthetic Experience

For it is only as an aesthetic phenomena that existence and the world are externally justified. (Nietzsche, 1993, p32)

The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music is Nietzsche's first step in establishing his concept of Life as Art. However claiming all life to be some form of aesthetic experience is a luxury we will leave for Nietzsche. To keep the concept of an aesthetic experience relevant and useful it needs to be specific, or the discussion devolves into one where any and every experience is an aesthetic experience and the term aesthetic becomes meaningless and useless. The following, slightly modified, working definition of an aesthetic experience is based on a definition provided by C.I. Lewis, and is presented as a placeholder.²

An experience is aesthetic just in the case (1) it is valued intrinsically, that is not exclusively as a means to some end; (2) its intrinsic or final value is preponderant in relation to whatever instrumental value it may also have; (3) it is an absorbed and active contemplation of the object; and its (4) content is not a matter of a possessive attitude. (Livingston, 2004)

In this we are not differentiating what elements of the game are inducing this experience, these will be a combination of all elements of the digital artefact that is a computer game; the narrative, the visuals, audio, rule systems, control systems, etc. Ultimately it is the role of the designers and creators of the game to create an aesthetic experience by combining these game elements.

It should be noted how much the individual propositions of this definition closely parallel the propositions that make up common definitions of games (both digital and non-digital); that they are autotelic, absorbing, and sharable experiences.

2. This definition is presented here as a rough and ready working definition. This, as any other definition, has issues, is not stable, and can be debated thoroughly. However this gives a working definition and a flavour for the type aesthetic experience the paper is aiming for.

Although games may be considered art via historical, institutional, representational and expressive theories (Smuts, 2005) it is not the place of this paper to argue that. The primary concern of this paper is the aesthetic experience of computer games, and the player of a digital game has this type of experience whether the digital games are: an art form, individually as an art work or simply as a designed experience.

The Apollonian and Dionysian

The Birth of Tragedy was a work intended to revolutionise classical philology and has had a lasting impact on philosophy and aesthetics as well as penetrating many other fields. Although the concepts of *Apollonian* art were present before Nietzsche (Del Caro, 1989), he set up the contrasting *Dionysian* urge and created this famous dialectic that has echoed across the last century.

The most important thing about these two notions is that they are not simple, equal, binary opposites, they are "intertwined dialectically in a unity of opposites" (Nagel, 2002). The Apollonian emerges from the Dionysian, which is primary and fundamental (Ackermann, 1993). It has to emerge to make the wild, chaotic nature of life manageable and understandable. Otherwise we are lost in unmediated madness.

The Dionysian is characterised by the physical and attained through intoxication; it is understood through symbolic intuition and most importantly through dance, the intuitive bodily response to music. Improvised music comes as close to the Dionysian as we can get (Ackermann, 1993). On the other hand the world of Apollo is the world of dreams, it is cognitive and rational, understandable, available to us via the visual and literary arts. The Apollonian gives us Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis* that rescues us, or shields us from, the titanic, barbaric and maddeningly ecstatic revels of Dionysus.

Although often, and mistakenly understood to be diametrically opposed, they do have commonalities, and are intrinsically inter-linked. Both, are aesthetic principles, they present worlds of illusion, the Apollonian is the world of dreams and narrative and the Dionysian is the world of intoxication and sensuality. The Dionysian recognises that everything is transient and temporal and that fixed truths can only be hinted at via the Apollonian. Greek Tragedy, as interpreted by Nietzsche, is a particularly fecund way to make the terrible Dionysian reality bearable through Apollonian representation. For him the sublime is the taming of horror through art and comedy is the artistic release from the absurd.

Play and Games

Play is less the opposite of seriousness than the vital ground of spirit as nature, a form of restraint and freedom at one and the same time. (Gadamer, 1986)

Starting with Huizinga (1971) play theorists have tried, with great difficulty, to define play and games. Huizinga devoted a whole chapter of *Homo Ludens* to tracking the concepts across various languages. Sutton-Smith rightly titles his seminal work *The Ambiguity of Play* (2001) and provides an exhaustive list of various play forms that includes much more than a narrow definition of play, he includes: playful behaviours, social playfulness, vicarious play, performance, festivals, contests and risk taking. Both note the difficulty in a definition and resort, as many others do, to Wittgenstein's use of games as example of his theory of family resemblance.

There is a historical nature to the term play. Nagel (2002) notes the "precarious ontological status" of the term and tracks its progress, and denigration, through various philosophers between the classic and the modern period. In ancient Greece we have a play that is presented in opposition to seriousness and has a deep ethical element. In the modern world play tends to be described as the opposite of work and is understood in terms of leisurely play and play for its own sake. Across these two epochs though, play does appear to always be cast as the Other the opposing force to legitimised activity. Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle write of play as an activity that can only be engaged in by children (*paidia*), is mere play (*paidia tinas*) and *mimesis* according to Plato is three steps removed from the truth.

However, establishing play as being the opposite of either seriousness or work has always had its problems. Play itself can be serious undertaking for the player, a game can be treated seriously and one may play at being serious. The boundaries between work and play are always being crossed, is the professional gamer playing? Is someone enjoying their job playfully, working? Gadamer quite rightly takes issue with the common antonyms for play and says that the opposite of play is really being earnest (1987).

Within the wider Games Studies discipline the terms play and games tend to be understood via the definitions that Caillois gave, *paidia* and *ludus*. The terms really hinge on Caillois' definition of *ludus*, as highly structured, rule bound games, and *paidia* as the dialectic opposite is spontaneous, rule free play. *Paidia*, or play in its raw form, becomes the Other, just as Dionysian play became the Other to Apollonian seriousness and rationality.

However these definitions are purely based on an attempt at objective essentialism. The question is always, "Is this activity controlled by mutually agreed rules?" It doesn't capture the mental state of the player, and their aesthetic reaction to the play activity they are pursuing.

Caillois is part way there, an improvement on his essentialist position is to make

phenomenological reinterpretation and reconstruct the two ends of his continuum as intentional activities. So rather than *paidia* and *ludus*, there should instead be *playing* and *gaming*, as verbs and as the experiences of play and games. As two intentional states these are not exclusive, and are by their nature aesthetic experiences. When we are playing, in the traditional sense of the word, we are both *playing* and *gaming*.

In *Masking the Abject* Nagel (2002) describes Nietzsche as being the first play theorist to identify play as being the Other of philosophical discourse. Nietzsche identified the irrational, frenzied Dionysian as being playful and as the foil to rational, cognitive Apollonian philosophy.

The Dionysian aesthetic is sensual, bodily, chaotic and a fundamental feature of what it is to be embodied. This is primal animal play where we are subsumed by communal, festive experience.

However games are different, they are rational, rule-bound systems. The experience of the activity of playing a game is more like the Apollonian aesthetic; it is the pleasure of figuring things out, understanding a story, solving a problem, seeing beauty in the system.

This reformulation of *playing* and *gaming* is not going as far as to claim a transcendent experience by putting games in the same position as Greek Tragedy and claiming as Nietzsche did that they give access to the raw Dionysian elements of reality. Nor is the interpretation gained from *The Birth of Tragedy* intended to be a slavish replication of these two principles. These two aesthetic experiences discussed are intrinsically joined in games but do also appear together and separately in other forms of everyday life. This gives us the context and the further theory to develop them beyond Nietzsche and modify them in this specific context. The next two sections will explore these two aesthetic experiences with respect to computer games and also legitimise each by showing that they are not a privileged game experience, but instead part of everyday aesthetic experiences.

Playing

Mature manhood: that means to have found again the seriousness one had as a child at play. (Nietzsche, 1996).

The basic urge to play certainly occurs in the higher mammals and many other animals as well. This urge, desire or biological necessity has been recognised by many theorists to be something primitive, not dependent on our rational facilities (Huizinga, 1971; Gadamer, 1987; Bateson, 2000; Sutton-Smith, 2001). However, as animal behaviourists point out (Bateson, 2000), all forms of play do appear to be controlled by some form of rules of engagement. Wherever there is so called free-play there is always at the very least the seeds of rules.

When Gadamer addresses play as part of his theories on art (1987) he describes it as a form of primal motion. From this basic movement structures and rules always emerge. He is more interested in the underlying principle of motion in play, stressing that meaning of the word. For

him it is a free impulse, a non-purposive activity, “A phenomenon of excess, of living self-representation.” (p23) The most important aspects are the repetition of movement, its rhythm and its metaphorical relationship to art.

Huizinga devotes an entire chapter of *Homo Ludens* (1971) to the meanings of play in various languages and cultures around the world. Etymologically many equivalents of the English word ‘play’ are associated with movement, especially repetitive movement or dance, for example the German *spiel* (it is pursued), Norwegian *spil*, Danish *lege*, Swedish *lek* and the Sanskrit root *las*.

Movement is an important aspect of the Dionysian aesthetic. The primary transmission of this is the body's response to music; the embodied physical rhythm of dance. We lose our identity in dance, lose our individuality, we are intoxicated by its affect. To date there has not been any other claimant to this position in the mediation of the Dionysian aesthetic. However many forms of digital games appear to have this same effect. Most obviously Rhythm Action³ games can create the same aesthetic reaction as music, but any game where rhythm and physical reaction plays a part is a similar experience and displays a similar aesthetic, whether the rhythm is communicated audibly or visually. The waves and patterns of Shoot 'Em Ups and Scrolling Shooters⁴ all the way back to *Space Invaders* have the same effect as music, Platform Games⁵ like *Super Mario Bros.* have pathways and patterns which are dance-like in their performance. In a complex, contemporary game, a First Person Shooter⁶ such as *Quake 3*, this becomes an orgiastic ballet of action and reaction. A multiplayer, online, Shooter like *Quake 3* becomes an onscreen symphony, the player responding to the visual music in a dance of play, their individuality lost in the Dionysian, almost one with the machine and the other players, completely absorbed in the aesthetic experience of *playing*.

However *playing*, at its most basic, is non-sensical, it is the raw, ecstatic and intoxicating Dionysian urge. The Apolline aesthetic emerges to make rational sense of it. There are strategies and tactics in these games, for example when I'm playing *Quake 3* I decide which weapons to use, manage my ammunition, decide who exactly to shoot, and this activity provides a thrill which is distinctly different from the pleasure of *playing*. The Apollonian *gaming* experience is certainly also present at all times in computer games, and it emerges at all times from non-digital play.

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3. A Rhythm Action game that is generally musically themed and revolves around dancing or playing instruments. Players must press buttons to match a sequence, whilst keeping time with the music.
 4. Shoot Em Up is a genre of game, commonly arcade style, where the player controls a lone avatar, usually a spacecraft, and must survive as hordes of enemies continuously attack. The Scrolling Shooter is a sub-genre of the Shoot Em Up where the screen continuously moves, usually either horizontally or vertically.
 5. A Platform Game is one where jumping is the primary mechanic. The avatar must be moved by jumping from suspended platform to platform, and either over or onto enemies.
 6. A First Person Shooter is a common 3D action game where the player shares the viewpoint with the avatar. At its simplest the game play consists of shooting enemies whilst avoiding being shot by them.

Gaming

To be beautiful, everything must first be intelligible.

These words from *The Birth of Tragedy* paraphrasing Socrates (1993, p62) are a good summary of the Apollonian aesthetic. Beauty and understanding go hand in hand. Although Nietzsche is very cutting about Plato and Aristotle's denigration of the Dionysian playfulness of earlier Greek art and philosophy, he does recognise that there is a high level of art in the Apolline forms. These forms were described as the plastic arts and lyric poetry, basically the visual arts of painting and sculpture, and literary art forms.

The phenomenological reformulation of *ludus*, the experience of playing rule-bound games, leads to the aesthetic experience of *gaming*. This is the experience of feeling out rules, it is the fun in understanding systems and the enjoyment of information and knowledge, as well as the pleasure of mathematical beauty. To quote Russell (1919),

Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty — a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show.

The Apollonian is also the aesthetic experience of narrative, story and character. This Nietzschean structure points to the fact that narrative is more closely related to rules, systems and simulation than to the basic Dionysian experience of *playing*.

Complex narrative, let alone narrative at all is a new-comer in games, largely pioneered by computer games. Earlier in the 20th century there were Dadaist story games like *The Exquisite Corpse*, and Role-Playing Games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons* which have been around from the 1970s, but these are largely based on emergent narrative co-created with the players. Putting aside role-play, narrative as a part of a *gaming* experience appears to be something that has emerged lately out of play, it is a new phenomena brought about by computer games.

Apollonian aesthetics are prevalent in contemporary computer games, and nowhere more so than in the genre of Role-Playing Games (RPG)⁷. These games have complex rule systems that, unlike more action oriented titles, deliberately expose themselves to the player, allowing the player to control the characters, and through them the world. Traditionally these games were not real time, they were turn-based, allowing the player complete control over the action and flow of the game.⁸

7. Computer based Role Playing Games are ones that share a heritage with pen and paper RPGs. The players control one or more characters in the game, participating in quests, puzzles and combat to progress the game and uncover and maybe control the narrative. In the process the characters develop and the player has mechanical control over how this unfolds.

8. Turn based RPGs are often referred to as Tactical RPGs.

Thus the game cannot lead the player, the Apolline structuring and ordering disrupts the Dionysian rhythm and interplay. Games such as the *Ultima* series, *Baldur's Gate* or *Pokemon* are all good examples of this type of game. A common feature of these games is that players spend much of their time tweaking their characters, possibly a disproportionate amount of time compared to what might be considered the main game. This activity would still be considered part of the game as the player is having an Apolline aesthetic experience whilst modifying and improving their characters.

Real Time RPGs⁹, and Massively Multi-player Online RPGs (MMORPG)¹⁰ are different. Although they do have the same deep Apollonian rules, their combat occurs in real time. The recharge systems and ability durations of most MMORPGs work in a similar manner and do engage the player, or players, in a complicated rhythmic Dionysian dance. Raids in *World of Warcraft* are a good example, where players are joined together in strategic lock-step with one another; refreshing powers, applying buffs and co-ordinating attacks. A good group builds up a distinct rhythm, players' fingers on their keyboards tapping out a tactical tempo. Character development is geared around managing the timing of spells as well as just gaining more powerful abilities.

There is a thrill in gaining knowledge, a particularly special aesthetic in uncovering a story or mastering a rule system. Lines from de Certeau have a particular resonance for the Apollonian aesthetic mode. Games immediately spring to mind when he talks of "the tactical and joyful dexterity involved in mastering a technique" or "the pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining place" (1988). In fact he likens the execution of his tactics to a game. He also talks of the art of practice in everyday situations, how people do get a special tactical enjoyment from normal activities achieved under difficult strategic situations. The hurly-burly of normal life is punctuated by little battles, schemes and techniques that we, as players of the everyday, use to win in situations when the strategic space is arrayed against us.

Through de Certeau's strategy and tactics we see the link between the Apollonian *gaming* mode and aesthetic activities in everyday life. The aesthetic enjoyment that comes from *gaming* is something occurs in everyday life and does not have to come solely from digital or non-digital games. The enjoyment we feel in *gaming* a game feels the same as the enjoyment we get in engaging in the everyday player versus environment game around us. Other activities can feel just like games and the aesthetics of these activities do feel similar to the *gaming* experience.

As a final point, in the USA the term gaming definitely has a particular meaning, it has become a euphemism for gambling. The term gaming has also recently developed another special meaning,

9. Real time RPGs have forgone the artifice of turns. Conflict situations play out in lived time, but many games have some form of recourse to pausing or slowing time.

10. A Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game is one where a large number of players simultaneously play an RPG, in real time, in a persistent world.

that of *gaming the system*. Meaning using the rules, policies or procedures of a system against itself, or outside of its intended purpose. These usages of the term are fully correct in that both, especially the second, involve an aesthetic reaction to participating in some form of *gaming*. Though in both cases this may be unethical, perverse or uncontrollable.

Synthesis

‘The Birth of Tragedy’ [...] it smells offensively Hegelian (Nietzsche, 1992, p48)

This may not seem to have progressed far from Caillois' definitions, but a number of changes have occurred. Firstly, there is no concern with providing a definition of play and games. Secondly, the focus is now an individual's aesthetic experience of playing an instance of a game, not the totalising force of games in society. Thirdly, *gaming* and *playing* should be treated as separately understandable, but twinned, experiences. Lastly, these experiences can be re-interpreted through the tragic aesthetics of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

Understood from Nietzsche's aesthetic principles, *gaming* is an inherently individuating experience, even if the rules are primarily social. The *playing* aesthetic is the one that is communal, shared and shareable. This at first seems to be the opposite of what Caillois intended, rules were meant to be a way for societies to negotiate and find interpersonal common ground. If we are to take games as being fundamental to culture and society as Huizinga and Caillois do, then taken at the macro, as well as the micro, level then both the negotiated, systematised Apollonian aesthetic as well as the empathetic, intuitive Dionysian aspect are both equally important for civilisation to function. Maybe as Caillois describes the *gaming* aspect is important at a high level, and maybe the *playing* aspect is important at an interpersonal level.

The constant question is, does this approach provide us with any new insights? As discussed above it is similar to Caillois' continuum. It also matches nicely with the terms twitch and strategic, referring to two types of gameplay, both being part of common computer gaming vernacular. Both of these terms appear to be in common parlance and their usage does vary to some extent, but basically twitch gameplay is about reaction time and strategy is concerned with decision making or resource balancing. It would seem that these are emergent terms to cover the same aesthetic experience. However applying Nietzsche, Gadamer and de Certeau gives us a richer and more nuanced understanding of these aesthetic responses. The words themselves are also adjectives, not verbs, therefore not capturing the active participation and response to an experience.

This helps provide an alternative to Csikszentmihalyi's flow states, which tend to be vigorously assumed in the aesthetic experience of gameplay (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Not all experiences of a game where the player is fully absorbed are necessarily flow states, and his later work does point to flow states being less common than at first assumed. Neither is it correct to say that all gameplay results in flow. A flow state is relatively binary, and it would be wrong to assume that

gameplay has no positive aesthetic value unless the player is in the flow state. Both *playing* and *gaming* could go from a small level of enjoyment through to the intense level of experience that are considered flow.

As a final point I am not claiming that there is any perfect synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus in computer games. Nor do I wish to claim the level of transcendental access to existential aesthetic experiences that Nietzsche claims for Greek Tragedy. There is an integration and inseparability of these two principles in games, but that does not mean that they are equal in all games nor should they be.

Conclusion

So tremendous is the power of the Apolline epic that it enchants the most terrible events before us with delightful illusion. (Nietzsche, 1993, p61)

As digital games emerged they bifurcated and followed two separate aesthetic paths with relative distinctiveness. Arcade games followed the Dionysian path (with the ever-present shadow of Apollo), these were played in shared environments, and many game innovations increased their sociality. Computer games (PC-based games) followed the Apollonian route, with many strategy games, RPGs and other turn based games appearing, played alone at home. Console gaming, gaming in the living room and the Internet appear to have now brought these two closer together again, in that many games have a richer, and deeper, blending of the two aesthetics.

There is a constant call to Game Designers to come up with games that are art, or ones that have what players would consider a high level of aesthetic value. Many push the narrative aspect of contemporary computer games as being the device whereby we can create truly emotional, and lasting, experiences and thereby raise games to a form of art. They are missing a large part of the equation. According to Nietzsche the narrative element hides or obscures the raw, underlying horror of existence, but the Dionysian artistic types of music and movement can provide us with unfettered access to emotion and a heightened aesthetic experience. Computer games in general, the arcade heritage especially, are already doing this and have achieved a high level of sophistication and aesthetic value. Can they use their power of movement and action to provide a richer and deeper level of artistic expression?¹¹

The Wii kicked off a boom in the field of gestural technologies and haptic interfaces for games and game systems.¹² The rationale for these interfaces is usually based on a rhetoric of better

11. The next question is should they? We don't send children to addiction clinics for art habituation. Computer games have reached a level of sophistication where they do appeal to a dark core at the heart of gamers. How many who consider themselves gamers wouldn't play games constantly, give the chance? But would they live in an art gallery?

12. The Wii manages to compete with the PS3 and XBox 360, two other game systems that have far better, Apollonian graphics engines.

affordances and more intuitive controls, and as most often appears to just be sheer novelty. The rhythm, movement and action of Dionysian *playing* could be the vehicle for deeper emotional engagement in games, take for example the explosion of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. Future game design could, and should, take more inspiration from the non-representational arts. At this point it cannot be said what form that might take, maybe the state of digital games is as advanced as this will get, maybe the seemingly trivial nature of the interaction is as much a revelation of the human condition as it is of the medium.

Games will never be the same art form as Greek Tragedy, or any other art form. This paper is not attempting to present computer games as a successor to the place of Tragic theatre. They are a very different artistic medium, different modes of production and have a very different audience. However the twin principles of Dionysus and Apollo can be used as tools to understand the aesthetic experience of gameplay and to break down the artificial duality between the traditional conceptualisation of the phenomena of games and play by presenting an altered reading of the concepts of both playing and gaming.

Games

BALDUR'S GATE, Interplay, PC, 1998
CALL OF DUTY 4, Activision, PS3, 2007
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, TSR, PnP RPG, 1974
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV, Rockstar Games, PS3, 2008
GUITAR HERO, Activision, PS2, 2005
POKEMON, Nintendo, Gameboy, 1999
QUAKE 3, Activision, PC, 1999
ROCK BAND, Electronic Arts, PS3, 2007
SECONDLIFE, Linden Lab, PC, 2003
SPACE INVADERS, Midway, Arcade, 1978
SUPER MARIO BROS., Nintendo, NES, 1985
ULTIMA SERIES, Origin / Electronic Arts, PC, 1980 - 1999
WORLD OF WARCRAFT, Blizzard Entertainment, PC, 2004

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