

Matchmaking games and art: What's the best fit?

David Myers

Loyola University New Orleans USA

Introduction

This essay examines preconceptions of art -- popular and theoretical -- to determine which seem particularly amenable to the consideration of game as art and which seem particularly averse to that consideration. This initiative is inspired and guided (particularly in form) by Fodor (1985), a 'state of the art' article on mental representation, where Fodor observed that "ten or fifteen years of philosophical discussion of mental representation has produced a considerable appearance of disorder" (p. 76).

Very much the same could be said about discussion of game aesthetics -- except that the period of disorderly wheel spinning could be (at least) doubled. And the ongoing discussion of game aesthetics also seems similar to Fodor's analysis at the time:

[E]verybody involved concurs, pretty much, on what the options are. They differ in their hunches about which of the options it would be profitable to exercise. The resulting noise is of these intuitions clashing. (Fodor, 1985, p. 76)

Fodor's strategy was to create a flowchart of assumptions about the nature of mental representation, naming names and explicating positions that separated one philosophical assumption from another, based on the idea that a belief in X is simultaneously a denial and rejection of a belief in Y.

I find this approach refreshingly binary in our more contemporary context of inclusiveness. Here I will also attempt to construct an outline of decision points regarding hunches and intuitions about game aesthetics (though comparatively much abridged in comparison to Fodor's).

Also -- as a warning -- I've done something like this before. In *Games are not* (2017), I have classified and collapsed hunches and intuitions about game aesthetics into three paradigmatic models of games as art: the communicative, the constructive, and the expressive. Without giving

away any spoilers, I revisit that classification system from time to time here -- particularly as regards authorial intent and artistic vision.

What's your feeling about art?

Clearly, conventional definitions of art -- ie, what the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* calls "conventionalist" (or "institutional") definitions (Adajian, 2018) -- have come to accept games as art.

One distinctively modern, conventionalist, sort of definition focuses on art's institutional features, emphasizing the way art changes over time, modern works that appear to break radically with all traditional art, the relational properties of artworks that depend on works' relations to art history, art genres, etc. -- more broadly, on the undeniable heterogeneity of the class of artworks. (Adajian, 2018, online)

In 2012, New York's Museum of Modern Art placed fourteen video games in a permanent collection focusing on the artistry of the game's "design elements." Should any be convinced by the decision-making of contemporary collators and critics, then "recent developments in the medium have been widely recognized as clear indications that some video games should be regarded as art works" (Smuts, 2005, online).

The United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the classification of video games as art in 2011, and even the French Minister of Culture, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, supported the recognition of video games as an art form in 2006. (Gilyard, 2017, p. 112)

However, there are objections. And some of these objections are severe. Among the most noteworthy in their cynicism towards games as art are those more formal and discriminating definitions of art, lumped together in the *Stanford Encyclopedia* as "aesthetic" definitions. This category includes essentialist approaches listing one or more necessary and required features of a work of art. These features are then found conspicuously absent in games and game play.

A third sort of definition of art -- "hybrid/disjunctive" definitions -- attempts to reconcile the first two, typically offering a formal set of aesthetic features with fuzzy boundaries. Gaut's (2000) "cluster" definition of art is an example of this sort of definition -- as is Juul's (2003) definition of games. However, this third category, much like the second, would still emphasize the formal properties of works of art, at least insofar as institutional forces would be unable to do much to aesthetically transform objects missing required properties.

So, the first decision point in this analysis concerns whether to position games as art as cultural artefacts or whether to emphasize -- in fact, *require* -- more formal properties of candidate works

of art, insulating these from any vagaries of institutional whimsy. Theorists deciding for the former -- let's label them "culturalists" -- do not eliminate games as art, but establish that possibility as a peripheral concern. A culturalist position corresponds to what I have previously labeled a *constructivist* paradigm of art and artworks, wherein...

...the artwork is malleable enough for multiple and varied manipulations, and... the audience/reader/player has sufficient means to exert those manipulations.... (Myers, 2017, p. 25)

Because conventionalist definitions of art remain largely non-committal (and, frankly, pessimistic) about the existence of formal and universal properties of art, this analysis will focus primarily hereafter on *communicative* (also, "transmission") and *expressive* models of art, wherein the formal properties of the artwork, as constructed and arranged by the creator(s) of that artwork, are more definitive and more critical. (For a review of existing perspectives on games as art contextualized within "comparative cultural studies," see Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche, & Rutten, 2017).

What's your feeling about artists?

A common expectation of the artwork is that the artwork is produced by an artist. We may equally eliminate waterfalls, sunsets, and the canvas splattered by a paintbrush at the end of an elephant's trunk from consideration as works of art -- not because these are not aesthetically pleasing, but because these are neither produced by human hand nor by human *intent*.

This notion of intent is then a difficult one for games as art to negotiate. Indeed, in many instances it may not be clear if the artistry of the game is more rightfully found in game designer or game player, or, perhaps, in some combination of these.

If the game designer is rightfully considered artist, then, as the MOMA would have it, the art of the game may be detached from its play. For, in other, seemingly parallel contexts, the musician, dancer, and actor supplement and therein contribute to the artistry of the composer, choreographer, and playwright.

If the game player is considered artist, on the other hand, then the situation becomes much like that surrounding reader-response and anti-intentionalism camps in contemporary literary theory. Either the intent of the game designer/artist is irrelevant (cf "intentionalist fallacy" (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954)), or the game player's intent must somehow be reconciled with -- including possibly replacing and/or destroying -- any artistic aspiration and intent of the game designer.

Insofar as there has been a widespread pragmatic turn to focus game studies curricula on game programming and design, there may now be an entrenched institutional bias toward conceptualizing the game designer as artist. Clearly, there are many game studies designers, theorists, and educators in positions of influence who favor and promote this assumption (Sharp, 2015; Juul, forthcoming; Schell, 2008).

If we are to consider game designers artists in the traditional sense of manipulating traditional media -- graphics, sounds, and words -- this allows us to bounce immediately into the next decision point: How do these artists use these “languages”?

However, there is a corollary to this designer-as-artist position: that, in order to retain games as games, game designers manipulate non-traditional and *game-specific* elements (e. g., the *rules* of games) to create art. Koster (2012), for instance, has taken a position close to this (labeled a *system aesthetic* by Bateman, 2015), with the caveat that the rules of games offer, in comparison to other languages of art, a “limited emotional palette.”

An alternative assumption at this decision point is that the game player -- rather than the game designer -- is the proper artist of games as art. This position has appeared in discussions of sports and competitive game play where there is no intent to produce a work of art and yet objects of aesthetic value (at least) are produced. There is then further debate as to whether or not these objects of aesthetic value are works of art. A supporting analogy is that nature is to the artist as game is to the player: In each there is a pre-existing context of affordances and experiences from and within which the artist/player selects and arranges to create an object or activity of expressive value: i. e., a work of art.

Given these choices regarding artist identity, which is more amenable to games as art?

Game designer as artist is certainly the most conventional and convenient assumption: an assumption most closely conforming to long-standing models of art and artists. It is also the assumption most likely to face criticism based on those long-standing models.

Well-known objections to game designer as artist are summarized in the popular press “Ebert affair” (Parker, 2018). Prominent among these is the claim that game player *agency* inevitably undermines the authority and vision of the game designer. Correspondingly, in order to transform games into art, player agency must be curtailed, or, preferably, eliminated. This requires reconstituting a core element of games and game play.

The alternative assumption of game player as artist has the advantage of preserving the integrity of games and game play and, further, granting games special status as potentially *unique*

aesthetic forms. The primary objection in this case is that there is a lack of artistic intent on the part of game players. Proponents of this position are then forced to deliver some argument as to 1) why artistic intent is unnecessary to produce a work of art, and/or 2) how game player intentions (e. g., to *win*) can be functionally equivalent to artistic intent.

There are some arguments of this sort available. Advocates include “Dewey-inspired pragmatists” championing sport and games as, at their core, essentially aesthetic experiences (Elcombe, 2012), and those positioning player agency as a unique and *transcendent* quality of game play, capable of subsuming more conventional assumptions of art and artists (Vella, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Nguyen, forthcoming).

Whichever decision is made at this point, that decision predisposes further and necessary assumptions involving the meaning and representational qualities of games. One linked complex of these assumptions serves a *communicative* model of art; another describes a more *expressive* model.

[The] expressive metaphor requires its own distinction conceptualization of artists and artworks -- a conceptualization not entirely unprecedented. Langer’s (1953) notion that art “cannot really be said to refer to something outside itself” (p. 380) is immediately relevant, as is Dewey’s (1934) similar notion of “art as experience. (Myers, 2017, p. 28)

What’s your feeling about meaning?

Correlated with the expectation of artistic intent is the expectation that an artwork is, in some significantly human way, *meaningful* -- and, further, that this meaning is constructed through the artist’s manipulation of “language.” This is obvious as regards literature, drama, and poetry, but can also be applied to more abstract arts such as music and painting: color and sound are “composed” and convey, ultimately, some recognizable and shared aspects of human experience.

The assumption that games produce meaning follows closely alongside the assumption of game designer as artist. The meaning produced is then the meaning given the game by its designer and design: its artistic “vision.” These paired assumptions form the basis for a *communicative* model of art in which an artist communicates to an audience. or, in the case of games, a game designer communicates to players. With this framework in place, there are then variations as to what exactly is (or can be) communicated via a game.

Traditionally, of course, aesthetic communication conveys something of human experience that is not merely pleasurable or informative but *representative* of that experience. But the quality of this representation is affected by the quality of the representational medium -- and therein the quality of a game’s representational “language” becomes an issue.

The most positive analogy in this instance is a straightforward one:

“Language as an expressive apparatus of the human spirit, a partly convention system of symbols is... parallel to the rules or norms of [a game]. (Wimsatt, 1968, p. 79).

But, as earlier mentioned, game rules may inhibit certain categories of expression, emotional or otherwise. Facing this obstacle, the game designer may either forsake game rules as a primary means of communication and substitute more tried and true representations of images, sounds, or prose. Or, the game designer may utilize the so-called “system aesthetic” of the game to its own ends, either in an attempt to communicate directly the system and processes embedded in the game (e. g., through *simulation* of those systems and processes; cf. Bogost’s (2007) “procedural aesthetic”), or to communicate those human experiences most readily accessed through the game system: e. g., tension, expectation, and desire associated with competition and conflict (cf. Perron’s (2018) analysis of the design and communication of horror in video games).

In contrast, a more *expressive* model would deprioritize public language in favor of a more personal -- even private -- aesthetic experience. And, of course, a more *constructive* model would deprioritize artistic vision and intent even more radically in favor of more culturally determined works of art: “authorship is meaningless until mobilized in a specific social-material context” (Parker, 2018, p. 95).

This decision point then most critically concerns, first, whether or not the game platform can be as communicative as other media can be, and, second, what sort of meanings are available within a game *as a game*. While the game designer, as an artist, may manipulate game visuals and game sounds and game narratives to convey some purposive meaning, can that designer equally manipulate *game-specific* elements of games and game play?

In sum and more specifically: To what extent are game rules subject to necessities of form and structure -- necessities dependent on the liminal nature of game play -- that are anathemic to idiosyncratic manipulation and expression?

What’s your feeling about representation?

Correlated with the expectation of meaningfulness is the expectation that an artwork is *representative*. The play of games and sports can be engaging, enthralling, and, upon occasion, aesthetically pleasing. But beauty and aesthetic pleasure alone -- the argument goes -- do not art make.

Best (1986) has clarified this requirement in his distinction of “purposive” and “aesthetic” sports: the difference between sports in which participants attempt to win, and sports in which participants attempt to *perform*. Best claims neither of these qualify as art because performance in sports and games is not equivalent to that in theater or dance: that performance is not *representative*.

This requirement is quite pervasive, even as regards more abstract and non-representational art. For, even if the artwork is non-representational, there are expectations that the artwork remains representative of human experience -- particularly insofar as human sensory apparatus are required to perceive the artwork and/or human cognitive processes are required to appreciate it. The “representativeness” of conceptual art, for instance, is precisely that which makes it art, nothing (necessarily) more or less.

This requirement is so pervasive that Walton’s (1990) influential model of representational art insists that even those artworks labeled as non-representational and abstract -- Malevich’s (1916-17) *Suprematist Painting*, for instance -- must be, in a final accounting, representational. Admittedly, Walton’s position takes quite a broad view of representation in these matters, but this breadth is not the exception but the trend in current game-related theoretical groupings of the artistic, the representational, and the (so very often) fictional: all for one, and one for all.

While previous decision points focus on the author, originator, and *owner* of meaning in games -- designer, player, or other? -- this decision point is concerned with available methods of producing meaning: Regardless of who controls things, how and to what end does the semiotic system of the game function?

Here, the most conventional (and the most culturalist) position is that the semiotic system of the game functions equivalently to the semiotic systems of other aesthetic objects employing more familiar languages. This position makes the most sense in those (many) cases where games -- particularly digital games -- mimic the signs and symbols of other media and/or other semiotic systems, e. g., the semiotic system of *fiction*.

A slightly less conventional position is that the game uses conventional sign and symbol systems in non-traditional ways: i.e., in more interactive and participatory ways, aided by digital media. Game play then seems familiar to conventional message and meaning delivery systems *with a twist*: e. g., game systems employ “mimetic” narratives (Ryan, 2005); or “experiential” narratives (Calleja, 2009); or “self-involving interactive” fictions (Robson & Meskin, 2016); or “generative” music (D’Errico, 2015). The explicit assumption in each of these accounts is that “videogames... entangle gameplay and narrative [and, assumedly, all other existing sign and

symbol systems] to such an extent that one aspect cannot exist without the other” (Folkerts, 2010, p. 107).

It can also be noted that, even among those theorists advocating for the game as a conventional art form “with a twist,” there are strict requirements that, in order for a game to be art, that game must reference some *non-game-world* (fictional worlds and “real” worlds are equally available targets). Or, in other words, in order to be art, the game must be about something *other than itself*.

For a game... to be *narratively designed*, it must involve actions whose purpose is not just winning or losing, but fulfilling a concrete goal. It cannot therefore be about aligning three tokens on a line on a game board, nor about kicking a ball into a net. But it can be about stealing cars or using cars to chase bank robbers. (Ryan, 2006, p. 193)

An even more unconventional -- and rarer -- position is that the game engages a *game-specific* semiotic system involving game rules and procedures and/or the peculiar lusory attitude that makes game play possible. That is, games are not entirely subsumed by fictional catch-alls; the game’s semiotic system is *unique*.

Video games are a new art form...

...This proactive production by players of story elements, a visual-motoric-auditory-decision-making symphony, and a unique real-virtual story produces a new form of performance art coproduced by players and game designers. (Gee, 2005, p.58; 61)

There is then the further opportunity at this decision point for a most disruptive aesthetician to adopt the position that a *game-specific* symbol system functions to produce *game-specific* references -- even, perhaps, *game-specific* artists and art.

Thus, in order to properly understand sport and gameplay as art, new aesthetic categories are necessary that are -- as recommended by Edgar (2013) -- “distinctive to sport.” (Myers, 2017, p. 194)

This decision point seems the most critical of those confronting us so far. And the choices most often made at this point are particularly debilitating to the notion of games as art.

For instance, if the game’s referencing function is deemed a familiar one, then, in comparison to similarly familiar referencing functions elsewhere, the game’s semiotic system seems to perform poorly, as a limited and derivative form of art. The references in games appear unavoidably muddled in authorial intent and authority; and game-based -- particularly *narrative-based* --

“fictional worlds” remain awkwardly defined and controversial in their influence on core elements of game play: e. g., competition and conflict.

Further, only some games appear to qualify for this limited and derivative aesthetic status. For instance (and again), Ryan (2006) limits these qualifying games to those with “concrete goals” within a “fictional world;” Calleja (2009) limits these qualifying games to “scripted narratives” within “virtual environments”; Walton (see below) limits these games to those utilizing “content-oriented” props; and so forth.

Alternatively, if the game’s referencing function is deemed unique -- if the game does *not* represent something other than itself -- then games and gameplay are subject to being classified as frivolous and inconsequential: trivial entertainment with only occasionally aesthetically pleasing flourishes.

A representative example of representational theory

To explicate this predicament revolving around the representativeness of games and game play, consider the well-known digital game of *Civilization*, most specifically *Civilization V* (2010), manifestly a digital *simulation*-game, representing real-world geography, events, and leaders in human history: i. e., the “real-world.”

As a first and generic pass, consider *Civilization V*’s representational status within Walton’s (1990) “make-believe theory.” Walton’s make-believe theory has well-mapped relevance to representational art, and, seemingly, insofar as make-believe theory aspires to be an inclusive theory of human imagination, this theory must assume that games function in reference just as all else functions in reference, i. e., through the evocation of interior “games of make-believe.”¹ Here are Walton’s most pertinent definitions, insofar as he provides them...

Representations... are things possessing the social function of serving as props in games of make-believe, although they also *prompt* imaginings and are sometimes objects of them as well. A prop is something, which, by virtue of conditional *principles of generation*, mandates imaginings. Propositions whose imaginings are mandated are fictional, and the fact that a given proposition is fictional is a *fictional truth*. *Fictional worlds* are associated with collections of fictional truths... [all italics in original] (Walton, 1990, p. 69)

¹ Note that despite Walton’s frequent description of representation and imagination involving “games of make-believe,” there is no reference in Walton’s opus, *Mimesis as make-believe*, to either the lusory or the liminal. Walton describes games and the game play process only intuitively (and naively).

So, representations may go round and round, but come out *fictional*. This is as true of games as it is of paintings. What constitutes the fictional in one instance constitutes the fictional in another.

However, Walton is of the opinion that *games* (some games, at least) do not involve make-believe at all, and, for that reason, do not involve representation at all either -- as this interview with game designer Chris Bateson makes clear:

Kendall: I doubt that chess players ever engage in make-believe. The game would be no different if pieces were called “Piece #1”, Piece #2” etc., rather than “King,” “Queen,” “Bishop,” and so forth.

Chris: But the pieces are clearly at some level representative of Kings, Queens, Bishops and Knights, or at least they once were...

Kendall: Those names do indicate a kind of make-believe players could engage in, and perhaps did in the ancient past. It is likely to be what I call a *prop oriented game*, however, rather than a content oriented one, i.e. a game in which our interest is in the props rather than the fictional world that the props generate. (Bateman, 2010, online)

In such a swoop, Walton eliminates the representative and the fictional from chess and all similar “prop-oriented” games. How then do we reconcile this position with the seemingly contradictory position of Robson & Meskin (2016) and Willis (2019) -- and those many others -- who suppose that games are, in some important and “uncontroversially” way, *fictional*?

The caveat that Walton’s theory allows us is that some games are prop-oriented and some are “content-oriented.” Content-oriented games can qualify as representational, fictional, and, by extension, representational art. However, this does not offer a completely satisfactory solution, for Walton does not provide a clear path to distinguish between prop-oriented and content-oriented games.

Walton defines a content-oriented game as “a game in which our interest is in the props rather than the fictional world that the props generate.” But, in a game -- such as chess -- our interest is not precisely in the props at all, but rather in the *game rules* and *game play systems* that govern the referencing function of “props” *in the game*. This is an interest in a *game-specific* semiotic system governed by a set of rules that seems to take precedence over Walton’s implicit (but otherwise very powerful) rules for “games of make-believe.”

How does Walton’s position affect analysis of *Civilization V*? *Civilization V* is not chess. The “props” in *Civilization V* include digital facsimiles of world leaders: George Washington, Gandhi, Genghis Khan, and such. These game objects -- “props” -- have much more baggage, much more “content,” than the Kings and Queens of chess.

Civilization V also has rules and mechanics which would seem to prompt games of make-believe along Waltonian lines: i. e., a digital facsimile of Gandhi is a leader who inspires populations and prefers peaceful resolutions to conflicts; in-game factories pollute the atmosphere and make the air harder to breathe; token battleship units move further and faster and strike with more force than token archery units; and so forth.

And, indeed, the “props” of *Civilization V* have prompted intricate imaginings about climate change, and colonization, and war, and the exploitation of indigenous populations (Ford, 2016) -- just as have similar props in books and movies and other representational arts.

But then there is actual game play -- and replay. This game play -- and replay -- is not inside a “game of make-believe,” but within a game of *Civilization V*.

Inside a game of *Civilization V*, the content-orientation of its props recedes. Inside a game of *Civilization V*, Gandhi may wield a more brutal and effective offensive force than Genghis Khan. Inside a game of *Civilization V*, factories may be more or less expensive, polluting, and beneficial than are in some “other” world (including the real one). And, inside a game of *Civilization V*, an archer may defeat a battleship.

Through repeated play of *Civilization V*, game play becomes increasingly instrumental and prop-oriented: “where our interest is in the props rather than in the fictional world they generate.” What matters during repeated play of *Civilization V* is not Gandhi’s representational status but Gandhi’s *stats*, not a battleship’s mass and weaponry but its *rules of engagement*.

This distinction between the representativeness of prop-oriented and content-oriented games quickly confronts ALL representational models of game as art, Waltonian or any other. Any model requiring games ultimately represent and therein generate “fictional worlds” -- or “possible worlds,” or “storyworlds,” or any other metaphorical version of a “real-world” -- relegates games and game play to a limited and derivative representational status.

In the case of abstract games like chess and *Tetris*, for instance, necessary content must be manufactured out of essentially content-less props (cf *Pixels* (Columbia Pictures, 2015), set alongside Murray’s (1997) similarly broad imaginings of the game of *Tetris*). Or, even in the case of seemingly heavily content-laden games like *Civilization V*, game props must be conceptually bound to fictional doppelgangers that shadow and inhibit more functional interpretations of these props during repeated game play. Walton’s “principles of generation” become principles of denial of the lusory and liminal nature of the game play experience.

Conclusion: What's the best fit?

Well, clearly, anything can be shoehorned in. But, while the institutional battle over games as art may have already been won in favor of games as art, there has been little substantive progress over the past several decades toward fitting games into more formal and aesthetic definitions of art.

Unruly players and a lack of control over game play undermine the game designer as artist; the “language” of games seems limited and derivative in comparison with other semiotic systems that have been more conventionally used to produce art; and the representational potential of games is most reasonably actualized in only a partial set of games (e. g., “content-oriented” games, again using Walton’s terms).

Based on the decision points and choices mapped in this essay, most current advocates of games as art find it necessary to incorporate some sort of “twist” on existing definitions of art, with a clear divide between approaches applying these twists and embellishments to traditional models, and those more extreme and game-specific treatments that would assign games separate ontological and aesthetic status.

At one point, early in the introduction of game studies as an academic discipline (and considerate of the increasing revenue generated by the digital game industry), there was concern that the study of games might be subsumed within the study of other things (such as text-based narratives).

Games should not achieve aesthetic recognition by giving themselves over to “cinema envy”... but should remain true to their roots. (Jenkins, 2005, online)

Protests against this “colonization” of games and game studies resulted in the formulation and advocacy of what is now known as “ludology.” But these protests proved both prescient and ineffectual.

Assumptions about the representational qualities of games currently reflect necessities of industry (profit), education (information), culture (aesthetics), and community (social relevance). These tend to pressure theory into adopting a *communicative* model of art, rendering games as beneficial and as compatible as possible within and among these various interests (see Parker, 2014). It is then but a small move to characterize the game designer as artist and the game as a vehicle for delivering messages to game players. However, games and game play have steadfastly resisted this sort of assimilation, both in theory and in culture (cf. the so-called “GamerGate” movement).

If forced to choose among those currently available and (at least partially) conventionalist suitors to the notion of games as art, there are fringe positions, positions that do not share critical conventionalist assumptions, that offer some fit of refuge. But this fit is imperfect and, without drastically reconfiguring the game's unique representational functions, likely to remain so. Consider, for example, two potential harbors for games as art drawn from contemporary aesthetics: *relational aesthetics* and the *objet trouvé*.

If games were to assert artistic status as a “found object,” this might remove much of conventionalist anxiety about artistic authority and intent: the artful would be found in the recognition and acknowledgement of art, not in its initial production. Likewise, relational aesthetics might appease these same concerns, while also promoting constructive and participatory game play: art can be found in a reproduction of social context and/or interactive facsimiles *representing* that context. But then, in both of these examples, the meaning of the game and the artwork becomes *the same*. And neither of these two positions can therein account for the critical dilemma of game representations seemingly trapped recursively within game play, pointing more often inward than outward.

Models more disruptive to communicative models -- and the corresponding “meaningfulness” of games -- are then required for a more thorough re-evaluation of games as art. But these models are difficult to promote within communities of scholars who find aesthetic value dependent on social context and cultural relevance. Any truly disruptive model must overcome increasingly entrenched resistance to video game “exceptionalism” (Bateman, 2013) and simultaneously avoid re-interpretations of early play theory and concepts that would erase distinctions -- such as Huizinga's “magic circle” (see Copier, 2005; Malaby, 2007; and more recently, Larsen & Majgaard, 2019) -- between pre-cultural human play and more socially constructed and culturally situated contemporary human activities.

So far, the search for some Cinderella-like shoe for games as art has proven both persistent and unsuccessful. Without refocusing efforts to minimally retain -- and preferably prioritize -- the peculiar lusory and liminal qualities of game play, the prospect of a match between games and art as equal partners seems slim.

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