CMS.608 / CMS.864 Game Design
Spring 2008

April 24: Social Play

Game Design
CMS.608/CMS.864

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Today

- Social play!

- Exercise!

The Magic Circle

- Salen & Zimmerman, "This is Not a Game: Play in Cultural Environments" (2003)
- The classical notion of a game implies that there is a clear and unambiguous border between the game and the world outside the game, manifest most clearly in Huizinga's concept of the "magic circle." The magic circle of a game is a delineation in time and space of the game's existence: the sports match, for example, takes place only within the borders of the playfield, for a duration that lasts between the starting whistle and the final second of play.
- While this model of a game does describe many experiences of play, there are many examples of games that purposefully blur the border between the world of the game and "real life." From live-action role-playing games to games like Majestic or Assassin, there is a wide variety of games that intentionally blend in with their surrounding cultural environment.

Criticisms of the idea of the magic circle

- Thomas Malaby, "Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games" (2006)
- […] games thinkers have relied on an exceptionalist approach to games, seeing them as a form of play necessarily set apart from the everyday, and therefore requiring a distinct treatment. In short, this inherited and largely unexamined theory of games assumes there is a rupture (in experience, in form) between games and other aspects of social life. But while understandable, this is precisely the wrong approach.
- […] we must work from an approach that: (1) sees them as never fully separable from other aspects of experience
- […] This approach is both consistent with a range of existing social theory and avoids many of the limitations that have characterized much games scholarship to date, in particular its tendency toward unsustainable formalism and exceptionalism.

Sorry!/Parcheesi a shallow abstract game. Why is it social?

Images courtesy flickr users DrBaloney and robotpolisher

The meanings players add to a game

Socially embeddable games

- Game as **puzzle piece** that fits into a context
- Games latch on to existing social structures
- Gift-giving, helpfulness
- In-game helpfulness
  - As out-of-game condescension
- In-game antagonism as unfriendliness
  - Or as out-of-game friendliness

Animal Crossing: Social embedding out-of-game

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. Please see any screenshot of Animal Crossing, such as http://img.gamespot.com/gamespot/images/2002/gamecube/animalcrossing/animal_screen002.jpg

A story of game meaning

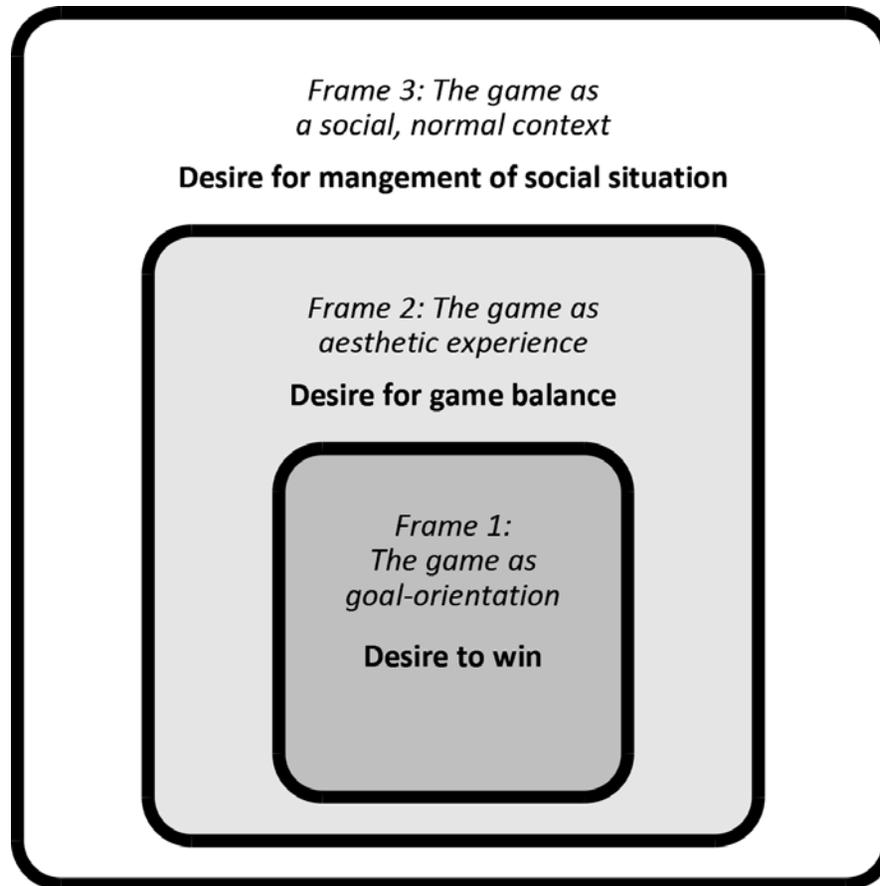# *Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*

Social embedding in-game

Images removed due to copyright restrictions. Please see screenshots from Ilia's kidnapping and Link's transformation into a wolf, such as:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXNfxBRx1Gk

Games and players: Social meaning attaches to goals

1. Players play for personal **goals**
2. They are aware of **goals of other players**
3. **Helping / thwarting** goals. Knowing that they know that you know etc…

- **Shared understanding of goals lets players be nice and not-so-nice to other players.**
- **Goals allow in-game actions to be attached to social setting.**

Three frames for game-playing

Frame 3: The game as
a social, normal context

Desire for mangement of social situation

Frame 2: The game as
aesthetic experience

Desire for game balance

Frame 1:
The game as
goal-orientation

Desire to win

Three frames in Sorry/Parcheesi

You have the opportunity to capture. Now what?

1. You want to win - **capture!**
2. Other player is far behind – **don't capture**.
3. Ongoing competition with other player – **capture!**

Frame 3: The game as
a social, normal context

Desire for mangement of social situation

Frame 2: The game as
aesthetic experience

Desire for game balance

Frame 1:
The game as
goal-orientation

Desire to win

Goals are good for telling stories

- *Tellability* (Ryan)

- Bad story: Plan that succeeded.

- Good story: Plan that failed.

- Tellability adds social value.

Exercise (pick one or two)

Take existing non-digital game.

1. That only allows hostility (blocking other player's goals) and add the possibility of helpfulness
2. Make game involve social taboos
3. Find way to bring more social content into the game
4. Find way to bring more social content out of the game
5. Enhance social dynamics like in "Rooie rules"

- Playtest
- Present 16:25

Social play?

- How do you get the most out of it?