



# Critical Play Responses

Leanna Barwick, 3174120, Prof Fidelia Lam, VISM-2006-501

# Performative Play. Feb 1, 2023



- Today's group activity "Playful Possibilities" had us devise a rule set/sequence of operations with a prop, that our group enacted a performance around.
- A stack of foamy colorful prehistoric/dinosaur shaped stickers that had been found amongst the reused material piles, outside IT help on the third floor at 100 McCaul OCADU campus.
- As soon as the stickers were pulled out, group members immediately started to play with them and doodling on them with sharpie markers. As we doodled on the stickers we discussed possible performances incorporating the stickers.
- It was suggested that we go around, and each group member offer a rule incorporating the foam, build on the last person's rule, and see where that goes.
- Through this playful approach to performative rules and social engagement, our group started to bring something together that made sense to all of us.



Does It Stick is a performance process that has the player engage another person based on a random colour sticker drawn from a pile, that matches a colour the second person is wearing. In silence the player sticks the sticker on the person and mimes the request to have them use a marker to write on the sticker. If the person engages the player, then the new person gets handed the pile of stickers to continue the game with a new person.

# Performative Play.

## Does it Stick

### Rules of “Does It Stick”

- Pick a foam sticker and put it on someone who wears the same/similar colour of the sticker.
- Silently, offer them a marker and let the person choose what they want to do next
- If they use the marker to draw, offer them a sticker to pass it onto the next person
- Important Rule: All the steps needs to be done silently



# Critical Play. Does It Stick



In *Critical Play* Mary Flanagan suggests that all games are performative and require some negotiation of action, such as thinking, guessing, running, or tossing for it to be play (149). Building on Johan Huizinga's ideas of performance in play, Flanagan says performative games achieve a significant sense of critical play in their attempt to influence society, provide utopian, playful visions or revisions of the world (149).

I see how these ideas play out in our group act *Does It Stick*. The making process, where we negotiated and designed with each other around a collaborative piece; and the public performance and execution of our game, embody the qualities Flanagan and Huizinga point to. We designed rules that were not too rigid, and except for staying in silence (the only "important" rule that we executed playfully), we did not direct the person who we are engaging, aside from playfully encouraging them to keep playing without having to know the rules explicitly spoken out loud.

# Critical Play. Does It Stick



It was interesting to see how the different people we interacted with took the game forward and how we each as the actors had our own delivery, and also collaborated with the group hive brain on elements for audience/participant interaction we could do social experiments with, or that we personally want to try. Participant interest appeared to be held by the physical interaction between people and object activity. The stickers and marker props in combination with silent clowning/miming delivery facilitated this effectively.

The world is tightly wound and defensive when it comes to critique, often taking things quite personally when an underlying belief is questioned for a plethora of reasons. I think this critical realm can be more accessible when applied lightly, with a sense of humour, if the ultimate goal is to be heard. Invitation not domination. Sugar over vinegar. People are often socialized to accept rules and direction. I am living on purpose to my life values when I challenge useless underlying social beliefs that don't serve us, in a way that can stay like a lucky charm on a bracelet, and be brought to life situations beyond the performative act of the moment.

# Queer Play. Mar 15, 2023

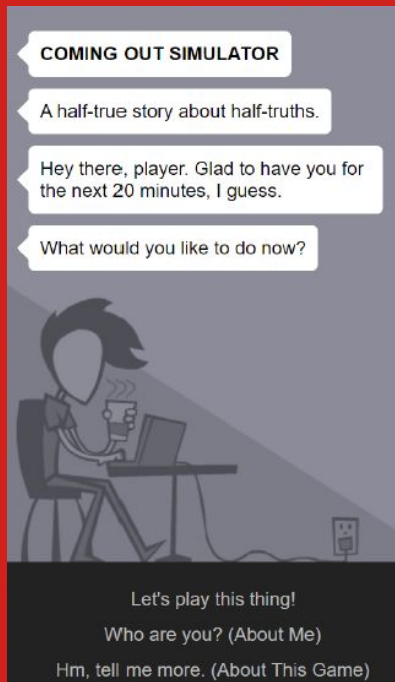
In class we had a “Queer Arcade” featuring a selection of games that explored queer representation. What I found most interesting about this activity was playing it with other classmates. Especially within the intergenerational context that I am playing from, as a mature student with my classmate, the game was more of a conversation facilitator about queer identity and how our own personal experiences were (or were not) reflected in the games we were playing.



Despite the difference in our age, I appreciated how much we had in common in terms of being queer, where we have sought out community, how much that is situated within a bar/club scene, and consuming alcohol.



# Queer Play. Queer Arcade



## COMING OUT SIMULATOR

A half-true story about half-truths.

Hey there, player. Glad to have you for the next 20 minutes, I guess.

What would you like to do now?

Let's play this thing!

Who are you? (About Me)

Hm, tell me more. (About This Game)

Playing the *Coming Out Simulator* also revealed similarities between myself and the student I was gaming with. Neither of us had to experience a family that was stressed out about our queerness nor felt that we had to hide an aspect of ourselves, unlike the character in the game.

The game offered us a lens to consider what other people with less privilege of familial acceptance might experience.

We also both shared annoyance and a sense of injustice with the boyfriend figure of the game narrative, who we both perceived as emotionally manipulating the main character and that we should dump them.

We both had moments when we wanted other options to respond to the situation, and the lack of options we wanted drove us to pick a stance of “committed to staying in a closet” as a narrative direction, if only to explore where in the game play this would lead us.

Source:

*Coming Out Simulator* <https://ncase.itch.io/coming-out-simulator-2014>

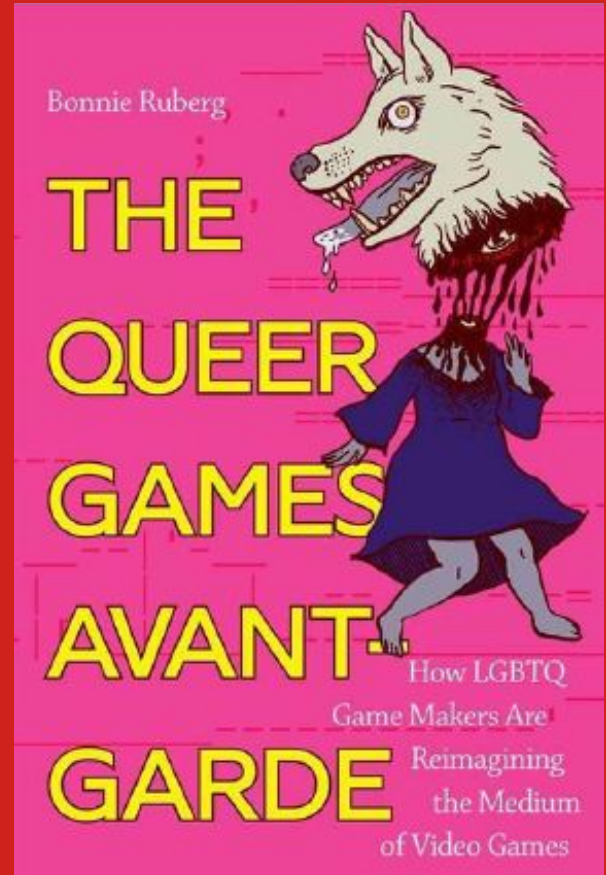


# Queer Play. Queer Arcade

Bo Ruberg, in their intro to *The Queer Games Avant Garde: How LGBTQ Game Makers are Reimagining the Medium of Video Games* (2020), says that “The queer games avant garde explores queerness beyond representation. The queer games avant garde makes identity messy. The queer games avant garde is interested in how games feel. The queer games avant garde questions empathy and looks for its alternatives. The work of the queer games avant garde is political. The queer games avant garde is fundamentally intersectional.”

I felt that the framing of queer games within the context of the classroom and forming a queer arcade was an effective way to engage the avante garde that is inherent in queer games.

The structure allowed for a critical game play that was also silly and not so critical, just bonding over queer experience and the gamer’s camaraderie of just scoring as many points as possible.





# Economies of/in Play. Mar 1, 2023



One of the game we played in class was McDonald's game. In class we asked what the game is trying to communicate or critique. What strikes me is how easily industrial resource management objectifies the life driven links in the chain of fast food production system; and the interconnections between the various parts of the fast food ecosystem, including the power hierarchy, the influence and impacts each link has on the other, and how this relates to the balance of loss and gain for quality of life and quantity of capital.

Source:  
<https://www.molleindustria.org/mcdonalds/>

# Economies of/in Play. McDonald's Game



Source:  
<https://www.molleindustria.org/mcdonalds/>

Game mechanics, aesthetics, sound are designed strategically to convey the McDonald's game's message. This is visualized in the game through the the framing of the multiple sites that are identified in the fast food industrial chain. The earth, where the farming of land to grow feed and animal meat occurs; the industrial processing plant where the cattle are fed with lower quality feed that can be distributed to more animals for cheaper, pumped with antibiotics to treat the infections that come with animals fed with cheap food to accommodate the over populated processing plant and slaughter infected animals that can't be used for human consumption but can be added to animal feed to lower costs and increase profit; the restaurant where the food is packaged and sold to customers for consumption and employees are pressured to work harder through reward and punishment; and the corporate headquarters where strategies are devised to respond to larger world factors that impact capital gain and loss.

# Critical Play.

## molleindustria.org

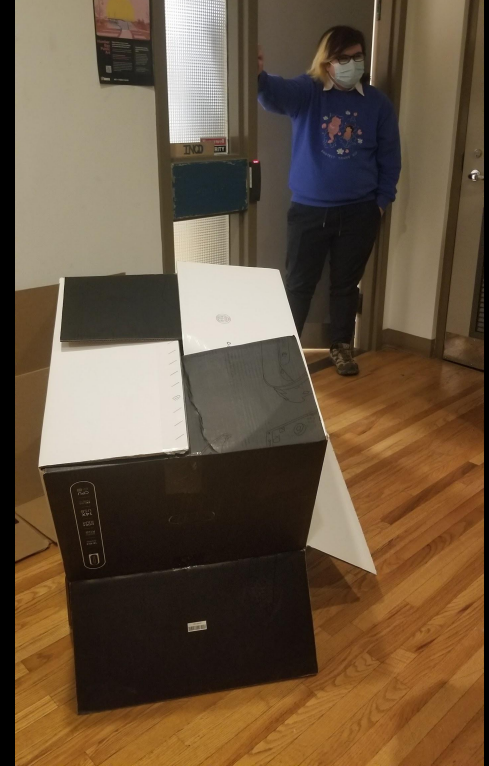


In my Molleindustria project I often deal with issues of alienation and labor. Games like Tamatipico, Tuboflex, Every Day the Same Dream or Unmanned, thematize the struggle of individuals inscribed into bureaucratic and dehumanizing systems.

- I was curious to learn more about the maker of the McDonald's game, and researched a bit more about their take about resource management games as a critique of capitalism and labour, and creating alternative management games that problematize the issue of rationalization.
- Games like the McDonald's game embraces tropes and conventions of the genre: players manage a production process trying to maximize profits, they are presented with an objectified nature ready to be exploited, they invest resources according to numerical trends and feedback, etc.
- Instead of portraying these activities as natural and neutral, these games introduce elements of criticality that subvert players' expectation: the exploitation of the environment has troubling consequences, the attempts to exert control over workers, consumers and indigenous populations cause backlashes and protests and so on.

# Locative Play. Mar 8, 2023

- Today's class group activity was to create an embodied playful act/performance that uses an unexpected or unusual movement/action that considers/critiques a socio political aspect of the site, and highlights/misuses a material feature of the site.
- Our group situated ourselves near the freight elevator at the end of the hallway on the 4th floor in the 205 Richmond Street building of OCAD University.
- At first we gathered as a group and talked out a few ideas of location possibilities and imagined performances. One of our group members has physical mobility challenges and when deciding on a performance location, this was an important consideration and excluded many sites because of the barriers our teammate experienced in their everyday life in a wheelchair. This same student shared earlier during the class lecture about their experience moving through the world with her disability, including depending on support and infrastructures in order to move from different locations. On this day there was a snow storm and weather in addition to environmental fixtures limited us to the building.



# Critical Play. OCADU Boxing Club



Mary Flanagan in *Critical Play* (2013) suggests the current social and technological landscape presents certain peculiar characteristics and challenges to locative media works (190). Flanagan says it's useful to reflect on location and its relationship to play, and that play is not an activity that stays purely in the realm of the physical, but is also a mental construct. During play, participants might experience human values like beauty, goodness, justice, fairness, taboo subjects, or physical actions like in sport (190). Citing Huizinga, Flanagan reminds us that play possesses well-defined qualities of action which is different from 'ordinary life' and it is only possible when players decide it is possible, which involves permission, an agreement between players, and also between spectators or passersby (190).

I can see how these ideas relate to our group process and our act, particularly with including the various physical abilities of our team, and how this relates to the environment and fixed environment we are situated within, and the consideration to be a shared collaborative inclusive fun experience that allows us to process our feels while also engaging the external world outside of our group.



# Locative Play. OCADU Boxing Club

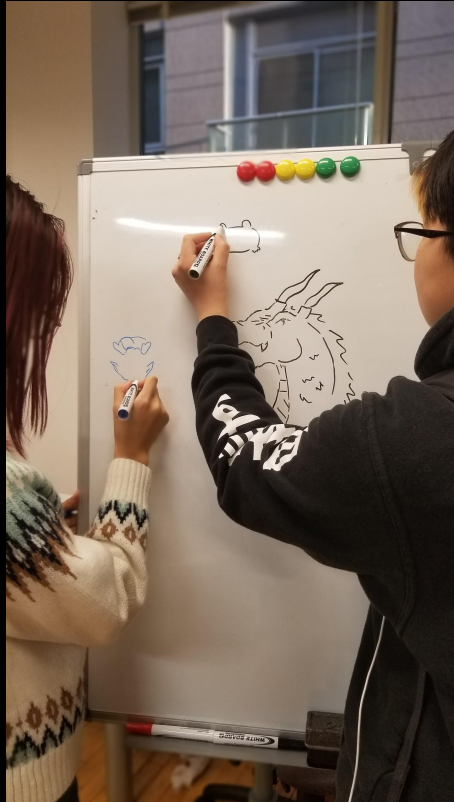


After we decided that we would stay in the building, specifically in the hallway outside the classroom, it was suggested that the group move to the hallway and just get started in the location, before we try to “figure” out what we are going to do for the group activity. Our group flocked together down the hall, chirping many ideas for performances, just generally laughing and feeling light imagining elaborate and hysterical scenarios to perform. Still brainstorming possible scenarios for our playful act, we found a stack of collapsed boxes and started to play with them, i.e. assembling them and getting inside of them.

How much fun the wide social appeal and accessibility that a box provides the playful imagination! Boxes are also my cat Meow-Meow's favorite toy. Playing with boxes and through group conversation, we explored what we were experiencing, paying attention to awkward and joyful feelings. When the time to return to the classroom came, group members were still wondering what we should do for the performance, and some seemed surprised at the suggestion the work was done. But when we talked about the public spectacle and how we engaged it, we all felt that this was true.



# Critical Play. OCADU Boxing Club



Our group's act was performative in our process as well as our spectacle. The ruckus that our hallway chattering caused is atypical in the school hallway. Most doors in the hallway are closed. The assumption is if people are in the rooms off the corridor, then they are working, studying, or lecturing - and noise disturbances are not socially encouraged in these liminal highways that delivering us to the destination world beyond the door.

Like neighborhood children playing on the street, having fun and inviting on-lookers, people started to come out of their home bases (offices beyond the doors), to see what life attraction is happening on the street. Some people seemed to want to play with us, and I suggested they take pictures in case we needed any extra process documentation and they seemed to enjoy this. While doors were opened, I asked if I could go in, and we took the opportunity to enter new spaces that before we did not venture, because the closed doors did not invite, and people were quite happy to let us visit and include the space in our play.