

Video game critics by the fault of the medium being so new tend to put too much focus on the cinematic qualities of a game: the emotional story telling, the imagery, the dialogue, but miss out on the fact that these things are only valuable if they make the struggle (game loop) more beautiful / enjoyable. In the same way that living in a nice city might improve our lives but work would still make it feel downright miserable. Graphics will only improve the game if it compliments the challenges, objectives and mechanics.

This is why I would like for more game designers to take the struggle/labor approach to their games. What I love about games is that if we look at them through this framework it provides us with an intrinsic value for labor (the struggle) that differs from our current reality. As we are at all times trained to seek an outcome, a bad gamer will only care about winning and completely ignore the beauty of the game which is the labor that produces said value. When we focus on labor, we are effectively flipping the pyramid of power around focusing on what we've been downplaying for years. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't care about a reward but rather that we can only truly appreciate the end if we have understood the labor that it actually took to get to it.

This is different from the traditional view that Game designers have which is that play is freedom and that games should allow you to experience it how you want to explore them; like a sandbox. **Alternative** to that view, is the one that I would like to continue and that is that games provide us with alternate agencies. C Thi Nguyen, in his analytical philosophy book, *Games: Agency As Art*, suggests that instead of game designers providing us a sandbox to play with, they design who we are in the world and decide which objectives we should care about. By accepting the conditions we are offered (Playing the game) we are effectively allowing our existence to not be stuck as an object in the world but allowing to transcend our made up character. This is because we are purposely accepting being in a different reality, with different objectives then what we might usually have in reality.

C Thi Nguyen describes two types of conflicting game styles that arise from this framework, achievement playing vs striving play. Achievement players will put the ends above the means. This is the type of game style you want to avoid as these are sore losers or people that would continue to play the game without enjoying it just to get a reward. The other play style is striving play which means that you care about the struggle itself. This is where the aesthetics of the game will really unravel. By having the medium be the doing and being able to interact with the media, the player in itself creates the beauty with the guide of the game designer. Take for example a game from From Software (Elden Ring / Dark Souls series). The failure and the struggle is what gives the player this experience and emotional turmoil that couldn't be achieved through another medium.

This is why I resonate so much with C Thi Nguyen quote: **"I'm not worried about games making serial killers I'm worried about them making wall street bankers"** as our current reality becomes continuously similar to a game and we are fooled into believing that everything is quantifiable and measurable. We must not fall into the trap.

Reality is very much not quantifiable and only appears to do so as a power tactic.

Next time someone is trying to hard to dominate at a game, just laugh to yourself that they lost the point.