

Hello PHIL366-F16,

In class today I introduced distinctions from the Flanagan reading and didn't do a particularly good job of it (Flanagan isn't doing a particularly good job of it either). Here's a second attempt at summarizing the distinctions between intervention, disruption, and subversion.

First, it will help to note that these are notions that exist on a continuum with intervention at one end, subversion at the other and subversion in between. Flanagan says as much on page 12 when she says that "*disruption* lies somewhere in between the concepts of intervention and subversion." Complicating this picture though is the earlier claim that interventions are "specific types of subversions" (p. 11) which seems to contradict the possibility of disruption standing between interventions and subversions because there isn't usually much room to stand between anything and itself. Flanagan clearly has either made a mistake *or* she has a more complicated notion of the relationship between subversion and intervention than she is describing. Just as the moon can overlap the sun during an eclipse but still remain a distinct object, so too might a similar state of affairs be taking place here. Subversion might be both a category for a set of actions *and* a member of the category. In any case, we'll stick with the continuum model for now and set aside possible interpretations that allow for the overlap of subversions and interventions.

So, second, we will allow that disruptions can overlap with interventions and subversions such that an act could count as being both disruptive and an intervention and so too could an act be disruptive and subversive. Consider the following as a rough guide (Note that it will deviate somewhat from Flanagan but it will suit our purposes):

1. **Intervention.** Flanagan says that interventions "~~are specific types of subversions that~~ rely upon direct action and engage with political and social issues". To this definition I'm going to suggest that for our purposes in this class that we think of interventions as attempts to change a state of affairs by *calling direct attention to it* and doing so *largely from outside it*. For example, if you were to have an intervention for a friend who has a problem with drinking that intervention would be outside the normal behaviour of that person. This could just be a comment you make in earnest while walking home with them one night or a whole sit-down with all their family and friends on a Sunday afternoon. From a gaming perspective this could be using a blog post to directly point out injustices in the gaming industry or problems with a particular game.
2. **Disruption.** Flanagan defines a disruption as "a creative act that shifts the way a particular logic or paradigm is functioning" (p. 12). This seems apt. A disruption goes beyond calling attention to something and *actually interrupts the state of affairs*, changing behaviours at least for a short period. Disruptions can be either from within or from without and will often belong to the category of either a subversion or an intervention although there are cases where neither may be the case, such as hacking a game server to shut it down just because it could be done.

3. **Subversion.** Flanagan holds that a subversion is "an action, plan, or activity intended to undermine an institution, event, or object" (p. 10). From this and her definition of interventions, it should be clear why she also thinks that interventions are special types of subversions. We're going to further distinguish subversions from interventions though by placing them *largely inside* whatever is being subverted. In this way the production of a game that challenges the practices of the video game industry would be subversive as would playing a war game by acting as a pacifist. Subversions can also be more subtle than interventions but this is does not seem to be a necessary trait

[This article from The Guardian](#) has some particularly nice examples of subversive games. Of particular note, given our discussions about social justice with the last topic, is [Phone Story](#) which succeeded in making Apple so uncomfortable that it banned it from the App Store (it is still available on Android and there is now an online version), a possible violation of the UN's position that rights to free speech and the like extend to the Internet.

Anyway, I hope this helps clear things up a little.