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Sustainable Play

Toward a New Games Movement for the Digital Age

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This article suggests a revisit of the New Games movement, formed by Stewart Brand and others in the early 1970s in the United States as a response to the Vietnam War, against a backdrop of dramatic social and economic change fueled by a looming energy crisis, civil rights, feminism, and unhealthy widespread drug abuse. Like-minded contemporaries R. Buckminster Fuller (World Game), Robert Smithson (Spiral Jetty), and Christo and Jean-Claude (Valley Curtain) responded in kind to these environmental and sociopolitical quandaries with their "earthworks." As digital game designers and theorists embark on developing new methods to address the creative crisis in mainstream game production, against a similar backdrop of global climate change, a controversial war, political upheaval, and complex gender issues, the authors propose a reexamination of the New Games movement and its methods as a means of constructing shared contexts for meaningful play in virtual and real-world spaces.

Keywords: *games; digital cultures; game studies; New Games; play; ludology; activist games; games for change; alternate reality games (ARGs)*

The study of digital cultures often fails to reach beyond the narrow history and influence of the digital itself. This article, authored by Ludica,[1] a women's game collective devoted to exploring alternatives to the current anthrocentric, male-dominated, and technocentric culture of digital games, proposes an examination of the historic New Games Movement and some related activities of the 1970s that used games as a way to challenge the status quo and explore alternative ways of being in the world.

Authors' Note: We work collectively as Ludica. This article was originally published in Digital Arts and Culture conference proceedings, Copenhagen, December, 2005; this version was edited for *Games and Culture*.

The New Games Movement, created in response to the Vietnam War and the civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, has much to offer both the creation and analysis of digital games. As described by Bernie DeKoven (personal communication with Ludica, July 12, 2005), a former codirector of the New Games Foundation,

> A game is a social contract, allowing participants to suspend the culturally defined significances and consequences of their behavior. A game has a set of rules, roles, and goals that are distinct from those of the culture that supports it. It is an esthetic system with qualities of elegance, symmetry, and clarity. A game is a form of mutual entertainment whose effectiveness can be determined by the degree of engagement manifest by the players.

Although the cultural context is different, our contemporary era shares with theirs a sense of political malaise and frustration with the forces of the military industrial complex and vast media conglomerates. This article provides the reader with an introduction to the original New Games movement, describes a case study of introducing New Games into a game design curriculum, outlines some examples of how New Games sensibilities are beginning to emerge organically in contemporary digital game culture, and concludes with a proposal for a creation of a "new new games movement" that integrates some of the key principles of New Games with contemporary digital forms.[2]

The New Games Movement: History and Context

Stewart Brand, author of the *Whole Earth Catalog* and *The Clock of the Long Now*, theorized,

> You can't change a game by winning it, goes the formula, or losing it or refereeing it or spectating it. You change a game by leaving it, going somewhere else and starting a new game. If it works, it will in time alter or replace the old game. (Fluegelman, 1976, p. 137)

A prolific activist and counterculture provocateur, Brand explored uncharted territories to progressively empower people via multiple frameworks that would give them voice toward real change. The *Whole Earth Catalog,* awarded the 1972 National Book Award, provided a toolkit of practical instructions people could readily implement to construct environmentally conscious and socially sustainable lifestyles. Drawing on the widespread success of his book, combined with protest of the Vietnam War, Brand explored how people interact with each other through the games they play and devised a new "set of meta-strategies to learn" through the development of New Games (Fluegelman, 1976, p. 7).

> I felt that American combat was being pushed as far away as the planet would allow, becoming abstract and remote. It suggested to me that there was something wrong with our conflict forms here . . . I invented it because all the peaceniks I was dealing with

> seemed very much out of touch with their bodies in an unhealthy way. Consequently, they were starting to project heaviness on a personal level that was just as bad as the heaviness we were projecting in Vietnam. What I wanted was a game which would involve fairly intense physical interaction between players. (Fluegelman, 1976, pp. 7-8)

The first multiplayer game Brand and his cohorts set in motion was ironically called Slaughter, in which 40 players competed with each other on a large wrestling mat over four moving balls and two moving baskets. Anyone could be arbitrarily eliminated from the game by being jarred over the mat by the other players. The experience was described as "intense, energetic, with much body contact and almost no injury. To the players' surprise, it was also fun" (Fluegelman, 1976, p. 9).

The next game played was a battle for control over Mother Earth. Similar to a rubber pushball used in military training exercises, hundreds of people collectively inflated a canvas-covered ball measuring 6 feet in diameter that was hand-painted to resemble the Earth, with its vast continents, deep oceans, and atmospheric swirls. The rules were simple:

> There are two kinds of people in the world: those who want to push the Earth over the row of flags at that end of the field, and those who want to push it over the fence at the other end. Go to it. (Fluegelman, 1976, p. 9)

Players mobilized the reimagined Earth from all sides, and whenever a team neared a goal, it was noted that players from the winning team would defect to help the other side. In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia,* Bernard Suits (1978) muses, "If players in games were found to be both cooperative and antagonistic with respect to the same end, this might well warrant our calling the joint possession of such aims paradoxical" (p. 76). The first Earthball game was played for an hour, without a score, thwarting zero-sum game mechanics into a state of Suits's utopian paradox, where the goal was not to win but simply to play.

Games were previously used as a means of personal expression during times of war, political uncertainty, and sociocultural isolation. Surrealist, Fluxus, and Dada artists invented their own games to address similar issues later explored by Brand. In *The Shock of the New,* venerable art critic Robert Hughes (1980) noted that Dada

> stood for a wholly eclectic freedom to experiment; it enshrined play as the highest human activity, and its main tool was chance: 'Repelled by the slaughterhouses of the world war, we turned to art,' wrote [Jean] Arp, the most gifted of the Zurich Dadas. (p. 61)

In 1971, R. Buckminster Fuller designed The World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization Planning Tool using a large-scale "Dymaxion Map" illustrating world resources for players to propose solutions to global problems by matching human needs with available resources.[3] Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (in 1970) and Christo and Jean-Claude's Valley Curtain (in 1970-1972) are also worth noting as examples

of environmental works that were designed to mod the Earth, with considerable support anchored from their respective communities.

Brand continued to propagate his vision in the digital domain with the December 1972 launching of Spacewar, sponsored by *Rolling Stone* magazine, photographed by Annie Liebovitz. Distinctive from both Spacewar! (developed at MIT in 1962) and Space Wars (the 1977 arcade game), Brand rhapsodized his game in an article he wrote as

> the youthful fervor and firm dis-Establishmentarianism of the freaks who design computer science; an astonishingly enlightened research program from the very top of the Defense Department; an unexpected market-Banking movement by the manufacturers of small calculating machines, and an irrepressible midnight phenomenon known as Spacewar. (Brand, 1972)

In 1985, he established a virtual community known as The WELL, an acronym for Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, which can be considered an idealistic modeling of Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village, designed as a third space for people to make connections with each other through their ideas.

The semiotic nature of the Earthball recently re-emerged in 2004 with Squidball, codeveloped by Sally Rosenthal at the New York University Media Research Lab. Squidball is a massively multiplayer, motion-capture-based game composed of 12 helium-filled weather balloons measuring 4 feet in diameter that were covered in reflective jackets as part of the input device that drove the game play. By way of cooperation, thousands of players attending the SIGGRAPH computer graphics conference collectively and simultaneously eliminated projected targets on a 40-foot video screen by tossing, pushing, and bouncing the weather balloons all over the enclosed playing field. Rosenthal produced similar games in the 1990s with Loren and Rachel Carpenter.

Other key figures from the New Games movement include Pat Farrington and Bernie DeKoven, who added a humanistic element to Brand's work, making the games all inclusive, based on trust. In a Ludica interview, DeKoven explained,

> Most of the games were designed to encourage participation by people of widely differing abilities. All of our games required some degree of physical participation, even if it meant just sitting in a circle. Very few of our games involved keeping score.

"New Games," he continued,

> were really less about games than they were about a way of playing. One of the best examples I can think of is how we played Tug of War. Here is a highly strenuous, clearly competitive game. But because it was clear that playing was more important than winning, when people noticed that their side was "winning" they tended to (without prompting from any of the New Games "referees") abandon their side and join the

other. Farrington believed that games could encourage players to celebrate their abilities, rather than compete with them.

DeKoven is currently advocating Junkyard Sports, authentic, cooperative games designed in part by the players with recycled, found objects (DeKoven, 2004). Ludica introduced this practice into the digital discourse by staging a Junkyard Games event with Bernie DeKoven at SIGGRAPH 2005. With this iterative design approach to the already established New Games, DeKoven is empowering people to become cultural producers of deep play embedded with values that resonate with timely forms of activism and environmentalism. DeKoven's efforts beg consideration of not only how players engage with games but, most importantly, their accountability of how they interact with each other. It is critical for digital game designers and theorists to address the creative crisis in mainstream game development by examining the human element of what it means to truly play with other people, perhaps even more so than how to play with games. For the very heart of the New Games Movement is not merely play's the thing, it is about the players as people: "Play Hard. Play Fair. Nobody Hurt" as DeKoven (1978) says in his book *The Well-Played Game*.

Case Study: New Games Day at USC

In October of 2004, as presidential candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry bickered bitterly about the cost and conduct of the war in Iraq, social security reform, tax cuts, and same-sex marriages in one of the most divisive U.S. elections in decades, a group of University of Southern California (USC) students, faculty, and staff looked to New Games as a source of inspiration and political empowerment. The idea that playing together in a public forum could be considered a political act was intriguing to several of the students who had read *The New Games Book* (Fluegelman, 1976) and *The Well-Played Game* (DeKoven, 1978) in a recent seminar on game studies. Kellee Santiago, a graduate student in interactive media, first approached the USC Game Design Community with the idea of holding a New Games Day and then, joined by Chris Hanson, a graduate student in critical studies, and Frank Kearl, an undergraduate student in philosophy, set about to plan the event. With all confidence, a date in November was set and publicized, and Janine Fron, a former program manager and researcher for the USC Annenberg Center for Communication's Institute for Multimedia Literacy, set about finding reference material and game props, such as Earthballs and parachutes.

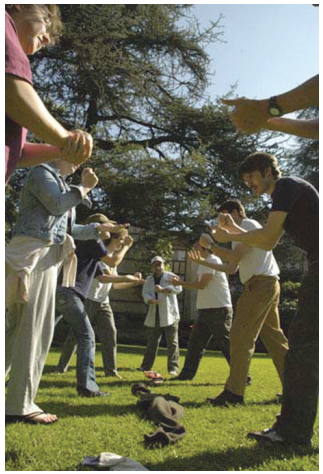
All was not as simple as it sounded; it turned out that finding a vintage Earthball was nearly impossible. The only one available was broken and the two people from the old New Games Foundation in charge of restoring it were in a fight. "The Earth[ball] is broken," Fron reported to the team, disconsolately, "and the baby

boomers are fighting over it, so what can we do?" In a stroke of serendipity, Tracy Fullerton, faculty advisor for the USC Game Design Community, was introduced to Bernie DeKoven, one of the key players in the original New Games Foundation and the author of *The Well-Played Game,* a week before the event was to take place. DeKoven listened carefully to the enthusiastic plans for the event and then offered to come to USC to train the team as New Games referees beforehand. During DeKoven's visit, he talked about the history of New Games and cautioned the group that these games came from a very specific moment in time, a historical and political context that could not be re-created by simply playing the games today. Although DeKoven meant this as a warning, it was clear from the reactions of the group that many felt they were living in an environment of extreme political disempowerment and hyperaggressive nationalism that mirrored the original inspiration for the New Games movement. The training day was held November 12, only 10 days after the 2004 presidential election, and a number of participants expressed a sense of defeat and disenfranchisement in the wake of Bush's reelection.

During this initial training session, however, something quite amazing happened to the Game Design Community. This small group, a rather loose organization of people from various backgrounds and disciplines united by an interest in games, became a true community of play. DeKoven's training created a safe environment for students and faculty alike to put down their serious, intellectual baggage and interact at an entirely different level. All of the games required touch and trust while fostering laughter and fun. During one early game of Prui, in which players blindly wander the playing field to find their leader, one of the participants changed the rules inadvertently so that the outcome of the game was not as expected. In spirit of the New Games vision, combined with a dose of surrealist prankish humor, she protested the chosen Prui and became the self-appointed Prui, essentially breaking the rules of the game. "These things happen," DeKoven told the group equably. "Sometimes you have spontaneously generating Pruis. There's no harm in that." It was clear from the beginning that these were not your normal schoolyard children's games. And it was also clear that the goal was not to win or lose but to relearn how to play well together.

By far, the group favorite was a game called Rock-Paper-Scissors Tag (see Figure 1). In this game, two teams face off across a line. On the count of three, each group shows rock, paper, or scissors, having huddled beforehand to decide on a strategy. The team that shows the losing sign turns and runs to their home base, about 15 feet behind. The team that shows the winning sign gives chase. Any person tagged by the winning team transfers to that team for the next round of play. The key to the game lies in the fluidity of the teams. Although you may have started on Team 1, soon you will be on Team 2, then back to Team 1, and so on. The game goes on until there is only one team or until everyone is too exhausted to continue. This game is rousing good fun, highly competitive in the critical moments of play, and yet overall declares no winner and encourages a global allegiance to the play of the game itself rather than to the success of any particular team.

Figure 1
Rock-Paper-Scissors Tag



Source: Image by Kurt MacDonald; reprinted under a Creative Commons license.

Figure 2
Players at an Early New Games Event Play the Lap Game

Other games that DeKoven taught the group included Dum-Dum-Da-Da, Hug Tag, Panther-Person-Porcupine, Knots, and the Lap Game. Hug Tag is just like regular tag except that players who are hugging cannot be tagged it. Players must hold their breath while they hug and must let go when they let it out. This crazy game of fiercely clinching friends and brief acquaintances alike, although not a popular as Rock-Paper-Scissors Tag, set the group up for the final game of trust: the Lap Game. In this game, the entire group stands in a tight circle and, all at one time, sits down until each person is sitting on the lap of the person behind. Done right, the circle is stable and everyone is supporting each other as they sit comfortably. Rising on another count, everyone gets up together, and the circle is gone but not broken (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 3
Knots Demonstrate the Physicality of New Games

At the finish of the training day, the team was extraordinarily aware of the gift they had been given by DeKoven. Although he could not attend the following week's event, the core group now knew that their job would be to create a safe atmosphere of play and social interaction for the attendees. When the day of the event arrived, several interesting things occurred. A large cage ball, a colorful replacement for the Earthball, arrived just in time for the event. Also, the team was able to borrow two large multicolored parachutes from the elementary school next door (see Figure 4). Joining the core group were students from engineering, anthropology, cinema-television, interactive media, communications, and many other disciplines. The students ranged from undergraduates to PhD candidates. Later in the day, the students from the elementary school even joined in.

The cage ball and parachutes proved to be a great icebreaker, as DeKoven had predicted, explaining to us that props help people to focus their play (see Figures 5 and 6). The group played all of the New Games that DeKoven had taught. After lunch, however, a new spirit struck some of the attendees, and several spontaneous games were created. Chris Hanson remembered a game called Lifeboat from his childhood, in which two teams had to race across the yard stepping only on strips of cardboard, the lifeboat. Chris Swain, a professor from USC's Interactive Media Division, came up with a pantomime game and a competition involving the cage ball. Soon, the group began to diverge into separate play circles, with some people preferring the more aggressive, physically active cage ball competition and others revisiting the more creative, cooperative Dum-Dum-Da-Da and parachute games. A small blow-up globe was found, and the parachute group bounced the Earth as high as it would go.

Figure 4
Playing With the Parachute

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One of the key revelations that participants came away with was the importance of subjective engagement in the game experience. It is as easy to get ensnarled in theoretical intellectualism as it is to become preoccupied by the technical demands of game making. This exercise brought the group back to the central purpose of creating a satisfying player experience and awakened in the participants the possibility that there is more to gaming than the marketing departments of mainstream game companies would have us believe. The group parted with a sense of renewed hope and enthusiasm for the enterprise of game making that could only have been arrived at through a highly personal experience of play.

This small experiment did prove true to many of Brand's original theories about using games to create strong social bonds and empowerment, if just at a local level. It has had a lasting effect on the culture of game design at USC, inspiring Kellee Santiago's thesis project on gestural interfaces, "I Am More Than My Thumb," and "Communio," an experiment in "cooperative and intimate gameplay" by master of fine arts student Brad Newman; another day of training with DeKoven in his Junkyard Games; and a graduate class in experimental game play cotaught by DeKoven and coauthor Tracy Fullerton.[4]

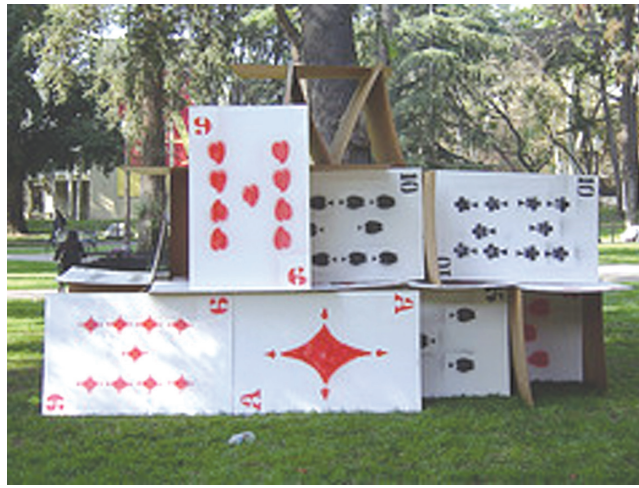
In this class, the final group project was called the Big Card Game—a person-sized 52-card deck of playing cards.[5] The students took the cards out onto the lawn of the university and began to play classic card games with this huge deck of cards,

Figures 5 and 6
At the USC New Games Event, a Substitute Cage Ball Was Found for the Damaged Earthball

Source: Images by Kurt MacDonald; reprinted under a Creative Commons license.

trying to attract passersby into the game. One of the emergent happenings related to this experiment were that several brand new games were created by players on the spot, using the size of the deck as inspiration. The inherent familiarity of playing cards was an initial attractor and icebreaker for both designers and players, but the dramatic change in size, and the accompanying change in perspective it afforded, provided a freedom from those initial expectations and offered a sense that the players were indeed welcome to create new games with these objects and become "owners" and "authors" of their own play experiences (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Big Card Game, Created by Students in USC's Interactive Media Program



New Games in a Digital Context

Digital Seeds of New Games

Whereas New Games were largely about outdoor, physical sports, we can begin to see their spirit manifest in the digital sphere, even without the advent of a movement per se. Digital games create a particular inhibition to the reinscription of rules due to the fact that the rule structures and roles are encoded in the game construction itself. Furthermore, these games tend to valorize particular skills over others; thus, players who are adept with a particular type of controller, fast at a particular type of maneuver, strong in target aiming, or possessive of specific types of spatial rotation skills will tend to excel in games that value these types of skills. In typical console games, players are limited to playing only one role or character in the game. Even in games such as fighting games or massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), the range of roles available to players are often highly limited; players typically must choose from a set of preordained roles rather than constructing a role to suit their own play style or personality. Unlike board games or even sports, the rule structures of most digital games is also opaque—like the ubiquitous "man behind the curtain," they constrain players' actions without recourse to alteration.

Regardless of these constraints, players manage to find unique and inventive ways to reinscribe rules, often hijacking features or flaws or making a superfluous frill a central part of a game mechanic. In Lineage 1 (NCsoft), for example, players turned

a somewhat annoying feature of dropped objects appearing on the ground into a creative tool. The most commonly dropped item, a candle, had little value in the game. Yet players would arrange these objects that otherwise composed litter to create elaborate designs and décor for ritual events, such as in-game weddings. This provides a glimpse of the potential for a form of Digital Junkyard Sports and other New Games genres in a digital context.

Players in the recently rereleased Uru (Cyan/Ubisoft, 2007; Cyan/Gametap, 2006) invented their own games within the Myst-based MMOG. Uru revolves around restoring the lost culture of the D'Ni people, who feature throughout the Myst games. Some of these games, like hide-and-seek, mimic real-world children's games, amplified by the complex and fantastical environments of the game. When, some months after Uru closed, players arranged to run their own servers, a plethora of new games emerged, resulting in the formation of the D'Ni Olympics. Events in the D'Ni Olympics were very site specific and arose out of unique properties of the game world. For instance, a particularly tricky stunt involved walking your avatar up a rope that was part of a tent structure in the ruins of the D'Ni Ae'Gura, the mysterious abandoned city whose restoration is at the heart of Uru's primary game play. Another game, "avie bowling," involved exploiting a collision detection flaw to sink your avatar into the floor and run as fast as possible with only your head popping up through the floor. The head would thus be used in lieu of a bowling ball to knock over traffic pylons, which abounded in the game world and served as bowling pins for this activity. In a sense, the ruins of D'Ni became a playground in which players could inscribe their own rules and game activities. When the initial beta test closed in 2004, Uru players also immigrated to other games, bringing the game's culture into player-created worlds such as Second Life (Linden Lab, 2003) and There (There Inc., 2003). Uru's Guild of Greeters has now extended into a virtual worldwide newbie greeters guild, with sects in other games, including The Matrix Online (Monolith/Sega, 2005). It is interesting to note that the Uru demographic, due to its roots in Myst fan culture, skews both older and more gender balanced than most MMOGs, with players' average age in the 40s and 50s and about equally split between men and women. Uru was rereleased by Gametap in 2007, and during the beta for the rerelease, fans insisted on maintaining a number of features that would allow them to continue these forms of improvised play (Pearce, 2006).

There are a number of games that allow for player level building but generally with the same core mechanic of the primary game. Even some console games, such as Halo 2 (Bungie/Microsoft, 2004), allow for creation of custom rule sets, giving players the ability to create their own minigames using available materials (i.e., features) within the existing game. Technically astute PC players can create entirely new games through the art of modification, such as the Half-Life-based (Valve/Sierra, 1998) Counter-Strike (Counter-Strike Development Team, 2002), which began as a mod but was later released as a commercial game. Although Counter-Strike introduced the new game mechanic of team-based play, its basic play activity actually differed little from the

Figure 8
Uru Immigrants in There Playing Buggie Polo

Source: Image by Celia Pearce; reprinted with permission.

original game, suggesting that niche players will tend to make more minor, successive modifications rather than take a radical departure from an original game's intent. In the end, both games are first-person shooters, and Counter-Strike makes no markedly subversive statement about its precursor or about war games in general. Interventionist game artists Schleiner and Condon's Velvet-Strike, a series of antiwar graffiti patches for Counter-Strike, was more subversion than the game community could handle.[6]

It is just such subversion that we are advocating in digital games—the turning on its head of traditional, competitive, and combat-based models of game play. And there are few contexts in the digisphere with allowances for this type of subversion. The two current examples that now exist are the aforementioned There and Second Life. The former is highly constrained but still allows for the creation of entirely new games within the limits of the game code. An excellent example is a game created by Uru immigrants in There: Buggie Polo is a team-based, soccer-like game using dune buggy vehicles, which can be modded with enlarged wheels and custom textures. The ball is a large, translucent sphere inhabited by an avatar. While the game is under way, the player in the ball remains passive, allowing the ball to be knocked around at will by the two teams of dune buggies. However, if the ball should go out of bounds or get stuck in a tree, the person who is driving the ball becomes active, steering it back onto the playing field. Thus the ball, being a player, has its own role to play in the game (see Figure 8).

Probably the best example of the open architecture approach to game worlds is Linden Lab's Second Life. This somewhat anarchic environment allows for elaborate object creation and scripting and boasts a wide variety of player-created artifacts, environments, and games within a single shared server grid. When left to their own devices, players will generate everything from first-person shooters and role-playing games to various sorts of unusual sports and board game derivatives. One entire island is devoted to a life-sized board game. Immigrants from Uru, cited above, re-created areas of the game in Second Life as well as building a completely new Myst-themed game. Linden Lab's boldest experiment was to modify its membership policy to allow players to own their own intellectual property created within the game. This led to an increase in player productivity, which culminated in one of Second Life's most popular games, Tringo (a multiplayer puzzle game combining aspects of Bingo and Tetris), obtaining a real-life publishing deal. Part of what is interesting about this environment is that there is a built-in community to serve as players for a diverse array of game play experiments. Although Second Life embodies its own set of values, especially in terms of how it views economics and property, it has the widest range of affordances for the reinscription of rules of any digital game to date.

All of these examples suggest a longing among players to take back the rules and break free of the oppressive constraints of commercial games, which offer a very narrow array of options and little flexibility within those. Like children in a playground, some digital gamers yearn to play free rather than be confined within "worlds that they never made."

Digital New Games

Commercial game culture notwithstanding, we continue to see new attempts at works that could be characterized as New Digital Games. Emerging game genres such as Alternate Reality Gaming and Big Games, which bring digital gaming into the physical sphere, as well as the Games for Change Movement, which addresses social and political issues through games, epitomize what we see as an emerging New Games movement for the digital age. All of these types of games are specifically designed around radically different concepts than traditional digital games and, in some cases, blend the analog and the digital in a unique and intriguing way. Three in particular are cited below. In each case, the player experience and community are placed first, and each game has affordances to adapt to the player as the game evolves. The focus is on humans rather than on code. As DeKoven would say, the game does not measure the value of the people, but the other way around.

While the alternate-reality game I Love Bees (Terdiman, 2004) was originally developed as a marketing tool for Halo 2, it took on a life of its own during its limited run. The game propelled clues out into the real world via phones, Web pages,

and other means. I Love Bees followed in the footsteps of The Beast, developed to promote the Stanley Kubrick and Stephen Spielberg film *AI*, and Majestic, the ill-fated suspense thriller by Electronic Arts whose slogan was "the game that plays you." These games were designed to blur the boundary between game and reality, creating fissures in the "magic circle" of the game. Part of what was particularly interesting about I Love Bees was the employment of puppetmasters, members of the development team who deployed game memes on a daily basis to the player community. This introduction of a live person changes the cadence of the game and introduces something that looks more like the traditional sports referee—a real human charged with monitoring and interpreting the game rules.

The Big Urban Game, created by Nick Fortugno, Frank Lantz, and Katie Salen for the University of Minnesota Design Institute in 2003, an example of an emerging genre of games that are played in large-scale public spaces, may be one of the best examples we have seen of a New Game–style experience.[7] Part of what distinguishes it is its highly physical nature, capturing an essential part of the New Games' attention to scale and perceptual alteration. The Big Urban Game, focusing on the best means of getting around the Minneapolis–St. Paul Twin Cities area, entailed the use of three giant inflatable game pieces carried by a crew of people. Players could register for a team online and then vote on the best route for that playing piece to take. This became a highly public event as teams carried the pieces through traffic from Point A to Point B. Participants at checkpoints greeted and cheered for their teams and rolled a pair of giant dice for a time advantage (see Figure 9).

The first festival on Big Games like The Big Urban Game was held in New York City in September 2006—called, appropriately, the Come Out and Play Festival.[8] Many of the games were played on the streets of the city, integrated among crowds of unsuspecting New Yorkers, who, while going about their business, were turned pawns in these giant-scale games. Cruel 2 B Kind, for example, a game designed by Ian Bogost and Jane McGonigal, saw a 10-block stretch of Broadway turned into a giant game board for an hour or so as teams of players armed with cell phones tried to "capture" each other by hurling "vicious" compliments at one another, often mistaking innocent pedestrians for other team members and causing no end of funny, random social encounters with perfect strangers in a city hardly known for its small-town feel.[9]

These emerging genres strive to create forms of public play that are malleable and transparent so that players can take back the rules and play on their own terms. They also serve to reclaim public space as a playscape.

Conclusion

Ludica proposes the initiation of a new, new games movement. Such a movement would generate games that use the innate potential of both the technologies we are

Figure 9
The Big Urban Game, by Nick Fortugno, Frank Lantz, and Katie Salen

exploring and the players who put the games in motion. One of DeKoven's (1978) key points in *The Well-Played Game* is that the game should not measure the players but serve as a focal point for social interaction. Players should adapt the game as they go in order to create opportunities for everyone to play well together.

The spirit of New Games can also be infused in digital games by approaching rule adjudication in a more flexible fashion, empowering the players to have some agency over the rules and roles by which they play. Mostly, players break rules by hacking, finding flaws in the system, or simply creating their own games on top of existing game mechanics. We can also see an entirely new approach to the design of digital games, wherein much like a deck of cards, players can negotiate rules based on their own personal interests and needs. In addition, drawing form DeKoven's work (1978), players should be able to adjust rules to varying skill sets so that groups of diverse experience can play comfortably together. As DeKoven suggests, we

propose that players not be judged by whether they are good enough for the game but by whether the game is good enough for them. This also becomes a way to mitigate the growing alienation that many players feel from video games, which tend to favor particular forms of mastery over others, thus creating a gap of both enjoyment and skill among players who do not meet up to the game's standards.

Imagine games in which what emerges is not the victory of a single player over a digital construct—a set of encoded rules dictated by some sort of artificial intelligence (AI)—nor a victory for a group of players over the game's AI, but a game that is created by and for the players within a safe digital environment built not to wield authority over them but to provide an even playing ground in which they themselves are empowered to play: a temporary world that encourages a new, participatory relationship with each other rather than with a machine. We begin to see signs of this in some digital context, as cited in some of the examples earlier. But we can imagine such a movement emerging much like a stadium wave. We just need to rise at the proper moment, and before you know it, it's a phenomenon. Emergence in its most interesting form comes not from the interaction of rules adjudicated by a machine but from the interaction of thousands of players adjudicated only by their own sense of play. Can we imagine new forms of digital culture that put the player front and center, in command of her or his own play experience? Can we play by our own rules?

> "How we play the game may be more important than we imagine, for it signifies nothing less than our way of being in the world."
>
> —George Leonard, *The Ultimate Athlete*

Notes

1. For more on the work of Ludica, visit http://www.ludica.org.uk
2. For more on the work of Bernie DeKoven and ideas for New Games activities, visit http://www.deepfun.com
3. For R. Buckminster Fuller's World Game (c. 1960s), see http://bfi.org/taxonomy/term/41
4. K. Santiago, "I Am More Than My Thumb," http://interactive.usc.edu/projects/immersive/20070122-i_am_more_.php, and B. Newman, "Communio: An Intimate Interactive Installation in Cooperative Gameplay," http://interactive.usc.edu/members/bnewman/archives/Brad%20Newman%20-%20Thesis%20Paper%20-%20Communio.pdf
5. Big Card Game, http://interactive.usc.edu/projects/games/20051208-big_game.php
6. Velvet-Strike. Patch to Counter-Strike Half-Life mod, http://www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/
7. Big Urban Game, http://design.umn.edu/go/project/TCDC03.2.BUG
8. Come Out and Play Festival, http://www.comeoutandplay.org/
9. Cruel 2 B Kind, http://www.cruelgame.com/

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