

Critical Play

Radical Game Design

Mary Flanagan

The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England

© 2009 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

MIT Press books may be purchased at special quantity discounts for business or sales promotional use. For information, please email special_sales@mitpress.mit.edu or write to Special Sales Department, The MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142.

This book was set in Janson and Rotis Sans by Graphic Composition, Inc., Bogart, Georgia, and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Flanagan, Mary, 1969–

Critical play : radical game design / Mary Flanagan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-06268-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Games—Design and construction.

2. Games—Sociological aspects. 3. Art and popular culture. I. Title.

GV1230.F53 2009

794.8'1536—dc22

2008041726

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface and Acknowledgments

As both an artist and a writer, in order to give due focus on some of the ideas for *Critical Play*, I have for the most part avoided discussion of my own work. It is the case, however, that much of my own creative work parallels the various concerns in this book, as the book was developed in concert to my own creative practice. Further, it is to my own creative practice that I owe the concept of “critical play,” and this book is an attempt to propose this approach and give ample background material for its set of methods.

I am deeply indebted to friends and colleagues who helped make this book possible through the years of research. *Critical Play* emerged from my doctoral work in theory and practice at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London, and I am deeply indebted to my supervisors: Dr. Lizbeth Goodman, Patricia Austin, and James Swinson, as well as the community of scholars working in and around the SMARTlab center in London. Many thanks to my supportive colleagues at the University of Oregon and Hunter College for their encouragement during my research. Thanks are especially due to those working with the Tiltfactor Laboratory at Hunter College in New York from 2004 to 2008.

Gratitude floats out to the artists who have shared their work with me, and provided images of their work to offer a rich text. Their contributions need be celebrated as they forge playful interventions and games.

I greatly appreciate all the people who have shown an interest in the work, and pay tribute in particular to those who have given their time and energy to discussion. In this, I would like to especially thank Helen Nissenbaum and our Values at Play work that has helped critical play cross into new disciplines through a values approach.

I should not forget to thank my mentors, the practitioners and scholars who have influenced my work tremendously over the years. Alison Knowles was generous in sharing her important work and insight for this, and future, work.

Angela Ferraiolo read the manuscript with a discerning eye, and her insight is appreciated. Alice Bonvicini and Suyin Looui have helped keep the laboratory growing and useful along the way; Jarah Moesch and Steven Kowalik assisted with some key images for the text. James Bachhuber pitched in with enthusiasm to support critical thinking and play. Gratitude is also due to the CUNY Faculty Fellowship Publication Program, which provided me with valuable time to write this book, and the National Science Foundation, because the project continued to be inspired by my funded research into games and human values.

Special thanks go to my parents, family, and friends, who brought to me all sorts of influential games! Much gratitude goes to colleagues who are artists and game designers themselves. Tracy Fullerton and Celia Pearce were particularly supportive, and I send them my infinite gratitude.