Topics

• Frasca: Video Games of the Oppressed
• Flanagan: Critical Play
• Patterns of critical play.
• New Games movement.
• Warning:
  – Can a course on critical play be politically neutral?
  – Can an education in critical thinking be politically neutral?
“We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.”

Texas Republican Party Platform 2012
Frasca: Video Games of the Oppressed

• Based on Augusto Boal:
  Theater of the Oppressed

• Based on Paulo Freire:
  Pedagogy of the Oppressed
Narrative v. Simulation

• Is narrative inherently conservative?
  – “Here is the story.”
  – “Deal with it!”

• Is simulation inherently progressive?
  – “Here are some possibilities.”
  – “Pick one and make it happen.”
Critique of Immersion

• Immersion encourages player to accept the designer’s world as something inevitable.

• Critical thinking requires distancing oneself from the game.
  – Questioning the assumptions and values inherent in the game.
  – Questioning the designer’s intentions.
Boal: Forum Theater

1. Watch performance showing protagonist in a situation of oppression.

2. Discuss the situation and possible solutions.

3. Watch performance again:
   a. Audience member may call “freeze”
   b. Come on stage and replace protagonist.
   c. Change series of events.
Critical Play

- Mary Flanagan: *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*.

- E.g., Subversive doll games in the 19th century.

- TED Talk Video:
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ8R9iiGk9g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ8R9iiGk9g)

- Encourages the player to think critically.
Patterns of Critical Play
(Flanagan)

• **Unplaying**: Enact a counter narrative in a game with a dominant narrative, e.g., murder your doll.

• **Re-Dressing or Re-Skinning**: Change the visible representation of a person or space to undermine the theme of the game, e.g., clothe your doll in funeral attire.

• **Re-Writing**: Write and tell your own story, outside the game, e.g., tell a doll story the way the doll would like it to go.
3 Player Chess

Ruth Catlow

'pawns preserve peace by blocking the aggression of the higher pieces and the checkerboard battleground disappears in the undergrowth'
Vicari-X
Alison Abreu-Garcia and Rebecca Marcus

- Web site has list human vicaritars available to be played, along with their personality profiles.
- Player selects and controls a vicaritar for his/her purposes.
- Vicaritar carries web cam streaming to player’s laptop.
- Player gives vicaritar commands via cell phone.
- Vicaritar will generally do what it is told to do.
- Depending on personality, the vicaritar sometimes needs persuasion, or simply disobeys orders.
- Critiquing the structure of desire in the player’s relationship to the avatar and game world.
New Games Movement

• “Play Hard, Play Fair, Nobody Hurt”.
• Bernie DeKoven, *The Well-Played Game*.
• Is excellent because of the way it is played.
• Focus on having fun, rather than winning.
• Playing to win, but not having to win.
• Design of games to promote this attitude.
Vampire

This game comes to us from Transylvania. (Where else?) Although it's not as physically demanding as its next of kin, the Blob, we don't recommend it if you have jumpy nerves or even a mild case of anemia.

To start, everyone closes their eyes (vampires roam only at night) and begins to mill around. You can trust the Referee to keep you from colliding with anything but warm living flesh. However, you can't trust him to protect you from the consequences, for he is going to surreptitiously notify one of you that you are the vampire.

Like everyone else, the vampire keeps her eyes closed, but when she bumps into someone else, there's a difference. She snatches him and lets out a blood-curdling scream. He, no doubt, does the same. (The vampire would be advised to avoid leaving telltale marks on the necks of her victim.)

The quality of her performance depends solely upon the authenticity and élan with which she executes her snatch and scream.

If you are a victim of the vampire, you become a vampire as well. Once you've regained your composure, you too are on the prowl, seeking new victims. Now perhaps you are thinking that this game too quickly degenerates into an all-monster convention? Ah, but then you didn't know that when two vampires feast on each other, they transform themselves back into bread-and-butter mortals.

Will the vampires neutralize each other before all mortals are tainted by the bloodsucking scourge? Why don't you try a little experiment and see. There's always hope, even in the midst of a blood-curdled crowd.

Note: In jurisdictions where Hazardous Toys and Games Legislation has been enacted, we recommend that you place rubber tips on your fangs.

Andrew Fluegelman, Ed.,
The New Games Book