The Rules of the Game
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Rules, Games, Theories

The Game Of Life

If life were a game, what game would it be? Certainly not the game of all possible games. And not Magister Ludi 's Glass Bead Game: the aesthetic athletics of the intellect.[1] It must rather be either war or race; in either case, it is a contest.

These games are played on a field. The abstract field of contest is a schematic representation of the territory beneath our feet: a map of the world. It is at once a field of combat as an un-owned commons, an empty space, and the territorialized space of land as possession, with all places and possible positions marked out. The map of play is divided and made discrete.

What is needed for play is the grid. Against this grid the move is made; the move is measured. In a grid, the pieces find their places. Their states are known. Their relations are established. Two illustrious gaming genealogies descend from this basic form: the wars and the races. One gives us Chess and checkers, the other Backgammon and its ancient predecessors Nard and Senat as well as Parcheesi and Snakes and Ladders.

The archeological evidence of Mesopotamian versions of the race games date as far back as 3000 BCE.[2] In the Pali cannon (*Brahmajala Suttra,* 1st Century BCE) there is a list of games from which Buddhists should abstain (life may be impermanent, empty, and full of suffering, but for them it is not, apparently, a game). Mentioned are the *Dasapada*–a ten by ten board whose original rules are lost, but whose moralizing descendent *Mokshapat* is a progenitor of Snakes and Ladders–and the *Ashtapada*–an eight by eight board that provides the probable basis for the game of chess–as well as nine by nine, seven by seven, and five by five variants.

What distinguishes the race from the war is not simply the violence of the metaphor, but also the epistemological scenario. The race is governed by chance–the die is cast–and strategy is subordinated to luck. A player knows neither the opponent's strategy nor either

of their fates. While in war, it is only the strategy of the other which is unknowable prior to their action. In the most fatalistic variants of gaming, there is no strategy at all, and players are wholly dependent on the weather of destiny (as is the case in Snakes and Ladders).

If the game board and its rules are an allegory of a cultural field we must measure the strength of its implication in units of metaphorical perversity: the force of forced metaphors. There is a brutality here, a symbolic violence in the reductive gesture that is matched by what is referred to, by what happens in the social spaces, by the violence of political fields. The iterative in-turning of rules on themselves re-produce bitter morphologies. Attacking them unravels us more than it undoes the rules. Rulemaking is corrosive only in so far as it shows rules to be mutable. What is killing, is the immutable rule.

Not the Only Game in Town

Experiments which aim to queer the rules of the game foreground the conventionality of rules, the arbitrariness of rules, the relationship of agency to rule making, the location of changing rule sets within the diachrony of history, and the aesthetic nature of rules and rule making. They strive to play the meta-game, where a tweaking of the rules creates a field of aesthetic difference … to imagine the ramifications on a field of political difference ... to avoid changes whose results contribute to a monotonous array of games where the significance of a given differ-ence is negligible–lost in a miasmic haze of noisy randomness.

This requires a shift in perspective. Where we have told each other stories and understood history and therefore also politics as narra-tive, we must learn to see the game of it instead.[3] Even as I act in history–if, against all likelihood I manage to imagine that I might act there, and not simply receive the story as some kind of revelation from beyond my time or place–I play a game, the rules of which where conceived and established prior to my participation in it.

To see the game of it does not require that the possibility of a narrative frame be extinguished, only that a ludic frame be allowed to come into view, and be appreciated for what insight it might contribute to understanding.

"To play a game, " writes Bernard Suits, "is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity."[4] He suggests, in other words, that we accept rules because of what they make possible, and he implies that there is some pleasure in that. However, this is an image of gaming that is equally teleological and tautological; if we can find pleasure in the constraints of some set of rules, to what extent is that pleasure located in the reaching of the goal, which the game and its rules establish, or alternatively, in the play of the rules themselves–in the act of following, in the confirming and delineating facticity of being subject to rule.

The derivation of the word "game" suggests another possibility: it is from the Old Norse *gaman,* meaning participation or communion (a compound of "*ga*-," together, and "*man*").[5] A primary consideration of the function of the game should be that it enables the participa-tion of individuals in a common activity, and in that way constructs the group.
If one of the terms given to the field which plumbs the depths of gaming, ludology (the others are "game studies" and "game theory"), foregrounds the question of pleasure (its latin root, *ludus*, means "fun" or "play") the science ought to pay equal attention to questions of communion, and of law. The tendency, though, is to focus on law. Any reference to a game is paired with a consideration of its rules, if not the recitation of them. The centrality of rule implies the importance of a kind of legal sovereignty in the game, and suggests the stasis of regularity, and the bureaucratization of regulation, but does not exclude the styled aestheticism of pattern, or the niceties of communion.

The correlation between the rational, legalistic structures that co-here the social, and the arbitrary valuation of a certain type–a certain style–of life is a strong one. This is what I understand from reading Nietzche: "Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement,

too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life."[6] From this perspective, the aesthetic judgment which validates the particularity and the peculiarity of a singular culture, lies behind the rationality of its law. We can locate the game in the theatre of ideology, and highlight the aesthetic dimensions of play: the legitimizing apparatus that mobilizes notions of efficiency, progress, or tradition, for the preservation of particular rule sets, is ultimately aesthetic and idiosyncratic in its motivations and rationalizations–even if the real effects of play are felt in other registers: the economic, the bodily, etc. …

If, within the narrative frame, we find ourselves always riding the tail of history into futurity, in the game, we are always already playing. The question is said to be, are we winning or losing? Are we playing by the book? Or are we cheating the game? The question *should* be, rather, do we understand the rules as fixed? Are we bending the rules of the game? If we can play a game whose rules exist, can we make one up and bring rules into existence? A game might be seen as consisting of consensus around a rule set, or a regime of enforcement around an externally imposed law. Various levels of force (social and penal) are applied to policing the participation, the fixity of the rule set, and the adherence to the rules. And still the refrain, "No rule is absolutely immune to change."[7]

The pleasure in the recognition of rule produced pattern is just as implicated in a desire for law– a desire to be ruled–as the slavishness of following the leader, and following the rules. If this desire can be redeemed at all, it must be redeemed in a willingness to engage in rule making and rule changing. The participation in this kind of free play is a utopian rehearsal for another world which may be possible inside of this one.

Distance is useful; step outside the game. Play the meta-game: the game of games, where rules are never fixed and each game suggests a different one. Work to rule: rules are seldom self-identical, and the difference between the rule that is told and the rule that is followed opens to a gap where there is plenty of room for resistance. Refuse to play the game; play another one. There are always other games being played. Change the game: it was not always played

the way it is being played now anyway–no matter what the dungeon-master says. "… these petrified relations must be forced to dance by singing their own tune to them!"[8]

Game Theory

The idea of a theory of games arises in the middle of the twentieth century. What the science promised was a way to model and predict economic and political behavior that was assumed to follow the rational choices of individual actors. *Homo economicus* had a more or less adequate understanding of their own interests–and the relation of those interests to all possible actions.

Economistic assumptions and preoccupations predominate in the typologies and structures of games as understood within the theory. Games are mapped according to a possible "pay-off." The "strategy" played by each participant is indexed to the strategy played by the others, and associated with a particular pay-off for each permutation. In a "zero-sum" game, any gain by one player is accompanied by an equivalent loss for another.

Positivist tendencies aside, the modeling of behavior as games has the benefit of revealing a panoply of game structures which broaden the way that social interaction might be understood. And some of these models cannot be neatly solved by the application of a rationality based on individual interest. The exercise of schematizing behavior in games has the perverse consequence of suggesting problematic games that violate assumptions about rational behavior. These end up providing both compelling representations of human predicaments and delivering a rebuke to rational choice theory.
The Prisoner's Dilemma[9] is perhaps one of the most well known of these games that defy the application of rational choice. In the game, two imprisoned suspects are separately given the opportunity to betray the other or to remain silent. If they are both silent, they each receive a short sentence. If they betray each other they both serve a moderate time. If only one betrays the other, the betrayer is set free while the betrayed serves a long sentence.

The decision made out of rational self interest is always to betray. Not knowing what the other will do, a player reasons that in either case, they benefit most by betraying the other. The fourth case, where each is silent and together they server less time is excluded. Cooperation is seemingly incompatible with rational choice in this scenario.[10]

An important aspect of the game is that that players cannot know each other's minds, and because of that, have to use reason as compensation. Reason substitutes for collaboration, as it excludes it. The variants of these games, as found in Poe's "Purloined Letter," or as proposed by Lacan in "Logical Time," emphasize the problem of uncertainty, and the logic of putting oneself in the place of the other as a method for solving it. In Poe's story, the detective must find the missing letter; he does so by imagining the reasoning of his adversary. [11]

The knowledge of the other that these games require is purely aggressive since that knowledge brings victory at the other's expense, which makes them zero-sum games through a kind of truncation. Either by bracketing cooperation within the operations of self-interested rationality, or by definition, there is a refusal of *communitas*. All these games are contests; there are winners and losers, and therefore, it seems, no community. Is a game without winners and losers still a game? And would such a game allow for a consideration of some notion of community?

The contestatory character of the game is based on two economistic presumptions: that there ought to be a particular goal defined in terms of maximization; and, that the criteria of success be applied at the level of the individual player. To alter either of these presumptions would result in a very different field of play. A change from individual criteria to communal criteria is obvious. Imagining a replacement to maximization that wouldn't simply be its equivalent (like minimization would) is more difficult; one possibility might be to endeavor to play in such a way that the game will not end–because if the play stops, then the community of players, as a whole, would be let down. The difference here introduced is significant since such play proceeds without the introduction of an external and quantitative system of

reward and punishment–*i.e.* no pay-offs. Participation would be its own reward.

The paradigms of game theory have a symmetrical blindness in regard to questions of community since the defining impossibility of cooperation inside them is matched, on the outside, by the exclusion from consideration of questions of participation and constitution. Games are abstractions whose relation to the world is representational. The test of a game's validity is empirical: how well does the model predict actual data. But if the game bears any relation to real social scenarios, questions about the genealogy of the rules and the conditions of participation become crucial. In the hypotheticals of game theory, the participants find themselves Kafkaesquely in the game–possessed of an agency that is circumscribed by the moves the existing rules allow. This is at once our actual situation and not our situation at all. There is another field of contest that overlaps any game, and that is the game of the rules.

Computer Game

Rules connect the world of games to the province of computation; rules are the mechanism of both domains. On the side of the machine, there is no fraught social predicament where adherence to rule is subject to a contest of will: computers follow rules as long as they are inscribed in the logic of the machine. There is no place for will and no separation between the rule's reception and its being followed. Reading is compliance in the computer. Reading is following, is execution, is work. But for the user, or for the programmer of the computer, the language of computation, the formal procedures of rule making, offer up worlds of possibility, and potentially liquefy the perception of rules' fixity.

Marcos Novak observes that the computer makes every constant a variable.[12] At its most radical, computation can be a solvent of convention, and of representation, and of realism. Programming is a game that is always played at the meta-level. The situation that any given program is only one of many possible programs that could satisfy some arbitrary requirement defines the task of programming.

Still the programmer arrives at a solution. All programs are provisional solutions to the problems presented by changing conditions: there is no final solution.

"All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind," write Marx and Engles in the *Manifesto*.[13] This liquefaction describes the revolutionizing tendencies of the bourgeoisie, as compared to the conservative ethic which preceded them. It would be tempting to fault the revolutionizing tendency of computation with a litany of evils similar to those which they hurl at the bourgeoisie. The liquifactionist camp contains as many demons as angels. But in the final phrase of the sentence they hint that the melting of the solid ultimately will reveal something crucial (that the bourgeoisie are digging their own grave!).

Programmers, like everyone else, are prisoners of superstructral constraints that limit the imagination. There is no reason to value the work of the engineer over that of the garbage collector; to do so only reproduces the hierarchies already well inscribed in our social imaginary, and codified within the rules that govern remuneration. But all labors offer particular insights. What is important within the work of computation is its invitation to variation: both the rhizomatic profusion of difference, and the methodical systematization of variability are characteristic. One would hope that computation could instill a certain suspiciousness of the instrumentalizing subordinations of rule making, and clarify the aesthetic dimension of making rules.
"There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena … " we read, again, from Nietzsche.[14] Ultimately, it is the reception of aesthetic gestures that are determinative of their meaning. Here, offering the game, and more specifically, the computerized simulation of the game, as a kind of didactic exemplar is an aesthetic gesture of uncertain efficacy. A gambit …

Games of Rules

Game Board

(Experiential Structure [inhabitable | executable])

The Game

The rule exists as a social given, like language, that precedes our presence and conditions our participation as the horizon of social legibility. Apprehension of convention in this manner, as fixed and immutable, suspends us in the place of the other, somehow outside of the history of consensus-making, and outside of the political, and therefore, merely subject to it. To be an agent in history requires a willingness to negotiate the rules for oneself.

The Rules

- Here is a board where the rules are written.
    - In a turn you may change a rule on the board.
    - In a turn, you may write a rule on the board.
    - In a turn you may erase a rule from the board.
    - In a turn you may follow a rule on the board.
- Take a turn.
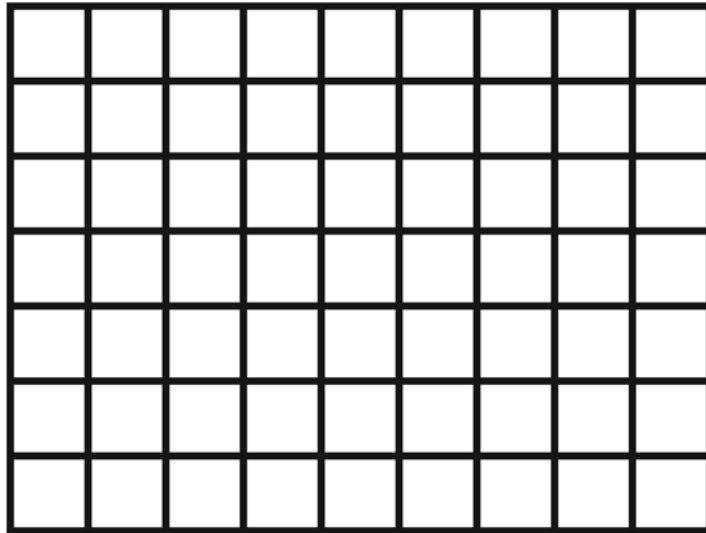
Floor Plan

**(Experiential Structure [inhabitable | executable])**

The Game

              Entering a space makes us subject to its rules; the door divides our attention between a self-conscious appraisal of our conformity to law, and a referencing of the room's markers of convention with our internalized archive of applicable statute. It is rare that habitation includes an invitation to invent a manner of being in the place. Being in a place is being in agreement with the normitivizing force of the social which governs it.

On the floor is a grid dividing the space into parcels. What game is this? What are its rules? Surely, there is no shortage of rules. And when at a loss for what to do, we are tempted to borrow some rules from somewhere else. This is to say to oneself, "If I were the *one in charge* of *this* which is like *that* of which there really is one in charge, how would I arrange things?" We carry this *one in charge* around with us for just such occasions so we are never at a loss for what to do. The rules are whispered in our ears–from the inside.

The Rules
- Divide the space into parcels.
- Make rules that assign significance to the parcels.
    - Rules governing possession.
    - Rules governing habitation.
    - Rules governing movement.
    - Rules governing use.
- Play according to the rules.
- Recruit others for the game.
- Discipline others for violating the rules.
- Reward others for observing the rules.
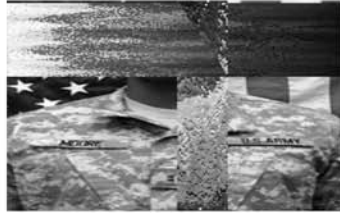
Contest: War and Peace

[Hermeneutic Allegory [visible | computable]]

The Game

There is a new archive of photography, and the photograph itself is changed. The archive is the structured columnar accumulation of endless banality to which any- and everyone contributes, and from which we all can also retrieve at will, and through those same worn channels, not just the singular image, but a stream of categorical similitude. Meanwhile, the photo–properly, no longer the "photo," but simply the more generic "image"–in order to accommodate the new regime, has been fractured into bits in a grid: the emulsive indexicality of photography has been exchanged for an information dense field divorced from referential imperative. The over-heated image economy subjects us to an overwhelming swirl of pictures, all competing for our attention, and demanding iconic recognition for the ideas and the entities for whom they act as agent.

In this maelstrom, the poor subjects of visual assault struggle to search, sort, and sense for the images that can orient them in the world. Will the categories of the old regimes (*e.g.* the opposition of *studium* and *puctum*) be of any use; or are they hopelessly bound by the material and epistemological conditions of the old regime? How else might we understand the ordering of these images in our cultures, or in our minds? Should we look to the virtual minds we have created, which, after all, are only externalizations of our thoughts that we have set inside machines, and then used like buckets to hold everything that we cannot bear to hold in our heads?

Each image is assigned a place, a spacio-temporal location, and a political one. We reorder the pictures, the diagram of our place in relation to the law; it gives us a feeling about the war, about our government, about how we are constituted in relation to the law, about our proximity to, or responsibility for, the carceral. We chart these relations as a law of ordering: the relation of law *to* order. Putting the images in order–placing each in its place–we must contemplate simultaneously what we are inside of and why. How have things been color-coded and tagged?

There is an orange which sets us inside of Guantanamo, and a certain kaki that puts us on one side of a barrel, while another color puts on the other. But there is no single system which produces all orderings; a multiplicity of rules simultaneously order and reorder the field. The multiple semantic overlays of image as tags recognize then abstract and separate elements of image: content and characteristic. Iconic significations link image fractions with conventional figurations–to a cultural repository of associations: with brands, experiences, feelings … Coke, terror, Nike, our troops … victimizations, enthusiasms, hagiographics, desires, heroizations, …

Here, there is a working through of the image as the result of a competition between different rules of ordering: it is a war between war and peace. Embedded, official, commercial, and unauthorized images of war and anti-war compete for iconicity and attention as they circulate and settle into sedimentary strata within the networks of electronic mediation. The semantic fields vie with content-neutral informational schema for the authority to regulate the ordering of image.

Semantic criteria lend themselves to use at the level of the image (sub-image division is also possible). But informational schema are applicable at every level down to the atomic pixel (and even lower). There are millions perhaps billions of possible orderings. The horizontal rule competes against the vertical one. It is possible that they come to a kind of accommodation, but the original image is obliterated–torn apart. Some pixels never find a place where they are not caught up in the struggle between the different orderings.

In the end, the image's referential quality is gone, but all the pixels, the color information, is preserved. The pixels' locative information is destroyed by the imposition of new sets of rules. What was figurative, is now resolutely abstract. There is no possible return to the image, but it is still present, if in a different way. What is that way? What is that presence which remains. What kind of trace is it? Does it speak to anything other than the generic constitution of image within the digital regime?

There is a violence in the reduction of image–not to mention of the human–to mere information. This violence stands to the side of a violence where the human is reduced to its bare state; to the utter subjection of the stateless refugee without legal standing, or the imprisoned enemy combatant. They are beyond a certain conventionality of rights and civility, but not beyond the imposition of certain logics of forced migration, interrogation, incarceration, and torture. It is a different nomic regime, but it has its rules; it is constituted, enacted, "run" on bodies. The horror, that we witness now in images, is just that *being subject to rules* which is both arbitrary and instrumental. These are rules that are difficult to make visible, even though they are often rules of visibility.

Does it make sense to make sense of those rules using tools which operate in a like manner. Or, does it reproduce the dumb blankness that overtakes me as I review those images, and reorder them in a vain attempt to understand what it is I am seeing. Somehow, in that intimate recirculation of some fraction of the archive, I arrive at ideas about images. I process them, I store them, erase them, efface them. The program, however, maintains its ignorance in relation to the images–the machine is in a space beyond meaning. It has data, and it has space–it can move a thing from one place to another. It is outside, however, the consideration of agency or its lack.

The machine is the human made thing. And software which follows an ordering that transforms the human visage to pure information is a kind of evil algorithm. Perhaps the difference of one of these orderings from another is insignificant. Any ordering that erases humanness, is an ordering of violence: one no more or less violent than another. All orderings are un-orderable in any meaningful way.

The Rules

- Retrieve at random of selection of images from Flickr.com which are included in photo pools dedicated to the topics of war and peace.

- Select a group of images which share the same tag irregardless of which pool they were from.

- Place the images in a Grid.
    - Calculate the average color of each image.
    - Arrange the images in the grid according to two different randomly chosen color orders: one for the horizontal dimension, and one for the vertical.

- Select each of the image in turn.
    - Arrange the pixels in the image according to two different randomly chosen color orders: one for the horizontal dimension, and one for the vertical.

- Repeat.

Game Over

High Scores

230 ... ...

430 ... 118

173 ... ...
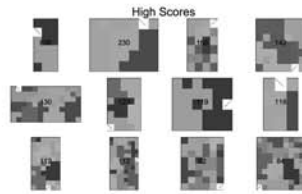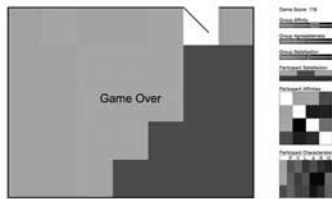
Disposition of the Space ...

The game for dividing up the gallery. The more
satisfied all the participants are, and the more
positively they feel about each other, the higher the
score. Initially all assignments are random. Players
can offer to trade what they have for what they want,
but that doesn't mean anyone will agree.

Key to Participant Characteristics:

P :: Proximity is valued.
C :: Contiguity is valued.
L :: Location is valued.
A :: Affinity is valued.
R :: Requests are selective.
O :: Offers are selective.

High Scores

140 430

118 173

75 70 66

Game Over
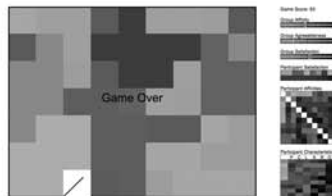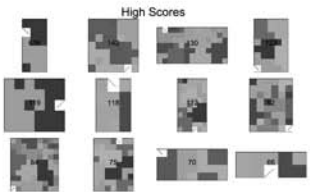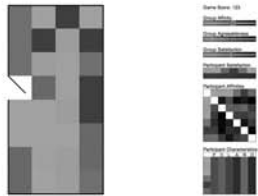
Disposition of the Space

[Social Simulation [visible | computable]]

The Game

Ever since the enclosing of the commons, there seems to have been
a tendency for all grouped uses of space to reenact that tragedy
on a petty scale. We have unlearned so well the communal use
of space, that it is practically inconceivable; its laws and its rights
are lost. Space is received by a group as a whole and in common,
but its use is understood as individual and exclusive. Therefore, the
space is divided. The extensive is exchanged for the discrete, the
collaborative for the proximate, the expansive for the contained.

In a system that is governed equally by the unspoken assumptions
of convention, and the only half-secret complexities of social rela-
tions, the disposition of the space is accomplished quickly, and
with barely a sign of its reason, or a trace of its deliberations. If the
question of fairness were raised, how would it be decided?

One solution might be to intensify the division of space; to fracture
the area into more pieces than participants. A random distribution
of the parceled resources to all participants evens out the inequality
that results from the differential value of specific areas: everyone will
have a little of everything. The fractions could then be used as is,
or if the participants desired, they could exchange them with each
other. At least then, they could negotiate the relative value of all the
positions and track the material consequences of obligation and
resentment.

The model for this experiment is the space of the gallery; the prized
positions, for convenience and visibility, are those near the door and
the walls.

The Rules

- Allow a random number of participants to play the game.
- Endow the participants with either the same or unique characteristics for how:
  - they value the proximity of their possessions.
  - they value the contiguity of their possessions.
  - concerned they are about the location of parcels (near doors and walls).
  - sensitive they are to their affinity with other participants;
  - selective they are in their requests.
  - generous they are with their possessions.
  - affected their behavior is by their current level of satisfaction.
- Create a room of random dimensions with a door in one of its sides.
- Divide the space into equal parcels and distribute them at random to the players.
- Let the players take turns trading what they have for what they want in order to attempt to find a consensus for the disposition of the space.
- In a turn players offer one of their least valued possessions for one of the parcels they value most.
  - The likelihood of the trade being accepted might depend on the affinity of the other player for the player making the request.
  - The likelihood of the trade being accepted might depend on the other's current level of satisfaction.
  - The likelihood of the trade being accepted might depend on the difference between the other players estimation of the value of the offer compared to the value of the request; if the difference is positive the trade is advantageous, if negative, disadvantageous.

- If a trade is accepted, the difference in value (as distinctly estimated by each side) is added to the affinity of each player for the other.
  - If a trade is rejected, the difference in value (as distinctly estimated by each side) is subtracted from the affinity of each player for the other.
- After each turn the satisfaction of all players is calculated as the relation between their average valuation of what they possess compared to their average valuation of what they do not possess.
- Group satisfaction is calculated as the average of all the player's individual levels of satisfaction.
- Group agreeability is calculated as the historical tendency of all players to accept rather than reject offers to trade.
- Group affinity is calculated as the average level of affinity among all the players.
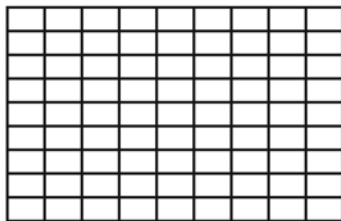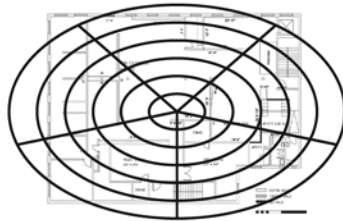
Super Imposition

(Virtual Structure [~~un~~imaginable | computable]])

The Game

Observe that even without a grid, the rooms you now inhabit are partitioned and assigned specific uses. How have these been determined and allotted? How is that one corner has become the territory of a certain artist, and one wall, the domain of another? This exhibition was "designed"; that is, the space was divided up and allocated to the participants. In addition to the proprietary notions attached to the object, art production, display, and exchange depend on a notions of private property in relation to space, especially when there is a desire to leave the proprietary of the object behind.

If on the floor of the gallery a map of the territory suddenly appeared, would it be possible to articulate the rule sets which governed the disposition of the space? Would the social relations of the participants also become suddenly visible? If the conventions of artistic display revealed themselves in maps, would the art thus exposed lose its allure? Would the spell of artistic integrity be broken if the petty struggles for attention, inscribed in the competition for gallery space, left traces on the walls and the floors?

We take convention for necessity. We feel as if we have arrived organically at the most natural, necessary and logical of all schemes. We manage to accommodate the wildly divergent and individualistic projects that we dream up when we are apart. And then we experience the warm feeling of easy camaraderie when we display the fruits of our labor together, harmoniously. These are the minimum conditions of legibility for our practice: empty space, a room of ones own–uncontaminated, unmarked, uninhabited–like the pre-colonial condition of the other world, ready to receive its new kings. Until the arrival of the artist, the space of exhibition is completely devoid of any trace of its social, political, or material entanglements. (It is as if the experiments of Haake, Buren and the others–the decades of institutional critique–had never happened.)

So there are no grids; the borders seem soft and inexact (except for the rooms and the doors). If there were grids, their geometry would seem confining rather than utopian: the most primitive, least imaginative and most carceral arrangement of lines able to form discrete spaces. Why suggest this hyperbolic reenactment of the enclosure of the commons? Why insist that the social relations which govern the distribution of resources be symbolically played out through exchange? Why violate the "rights" of the other participants by denying them the basic conditions of intelligibility for their practice?

Simply because: *there is no empty space*.

The Rules

- Align a grid to the floor of the gallery.
- See what happens.

```
Immutable Rules

101. All players must always abide by all th
102. Initially rules in the hundreds are imm
103. A rule-change is any of the following:
104. All rule-changes proposed in the proper
105. Every player is an eligible voter. Ever
106. All proposed rule-changes shall be writ
107. No rule-change may take effect earlier
108. Each proposed rule-change shall be give
109. Rule-changes that transmute immutable r
110. In a conflict between a mutable and an
111. If a rule-change as proposed is unclear
112. The state of affairs that constitutes w
113. A player always has the option to forfe
114. There must always be at least one mutab
115. Rule-changes that affect rules needed t
116. Whatever is not prohibited or regulated

Mutable Rules

201. Players shall alternate in clockwise or
202. One turn consists of two parts in this
203. A rule-change is adopted if and only if
204. If and when rule-changes can be adopted
205. An adopted rule-change takes full effec
206. When a proposed rule-change is defeated
207. Each player always has exactly one vote
208. The winner is the first player to achie
209. At no time may there be more than 25 mu
210. Players may not conspire or consult on
211. If two or more mutable rules conflict w
212. If players disagree about the legality
213. If the rules are changed so that furthe
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Nomic

(Ludic Contract [audible | executable])

The Game

The creator of the game **Nomic**, Peter Suber, describes it this way:

> Nomic is a game in which changing the rules is a move. In that respect it differs from almost every other game. The primary activity of Nomic is proposing changes in the rules, debating the wisdom of changing them in that way, voting on the changes, deciding what can and cannot be done afterwards, and doing it. Even this core of the game, of course, can be changed.[15]

This game models the self-amending rule set that is the basis of the American legal system. Suber, a logician, was interested in the paradoxes that arise in a system where logical contradictions inside of a self-amending rule set cannot be straightforwardly resolved. The unequal distribution of the power to change the rule set, and the hierarchy within the rule set itself, deforms the very democratic structure which it purports to establish.

One is invited to listen to the rules; play if you will.

The Rules
- Read the rules of the game Nomic.
- Repeat.
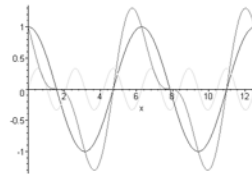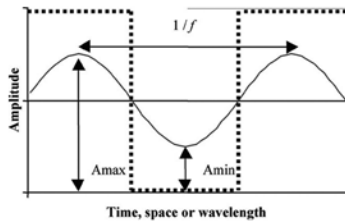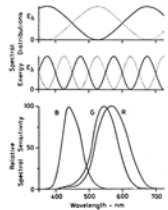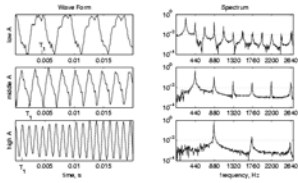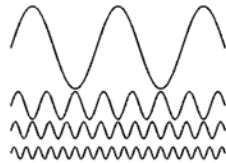
0502.2156

(Lyric Abstraction [audible | computable])

The Game

There is an unfortunate sense of naturalness in the use of the screen as the main output device for computational experiments. It is common to divide generative art from generative music, but there is no real necessity for the distinction; the underlying structures and code may be almost identical. That is the case for this work, where the same randomly generated data simultaneously produced both visual and aural output based on sine waves. In this case only the sound is presented as a kind of protest against vision's primacy.

The generative form, of which 0502.2156 is an example, is defined by the expansiveness of its infinite productive capabilities: a system which can produce endless variation. That possibility is arrested here; the program was run only once, and the results have been preserved and marked with the time of their singular execution: May 2, 21:56 (2002). Yes there are rules here, but what is the game of this? The winning and the losing is undefined, the play, however, of the knowing of procedure against the not knowing of outcome produces a kind of fascination. But if a game is played only once, is it really a game.

The Rules

- Compose a ten minute long song made up only of sine waves.
- Divide the time into one constructing movement and one de-constructing movement.
    - In the constructing movement double the number of waves in each subsequent phrase.
    - In the de-constructing movement halve the number of waves in each subsequent phrase.
- Divide the movements into eight similar phrases.
- Divide the phrases into four bars.
- In each bar pick the parameters (frequency, phase, amplitude, etc.) of the waves at random.
- Move gradually from the previous parameters to the new parameters over the course of the bar.
- Play each wave in sequence for an equal fraction of the bar.

The Rules of the Game

The only rule you may be told this is one.
The only rule you may be told is one this.
The only rule you may be told is this one.

Only be is told one you may this rule the.
Is the this told may rule only one be you.
Be told one may this is rule you the only.
May the told be rule one this only you is.
Only rule one the you this told is may be.
Is told you be rule only this may one.
Rule the you told may be only one is this.
The only rule you may be is this one told.
The only rule you may be is this told one.
The only rule you may be is told one this.
The only rule you may be told one this is.
The only rule you may be told is this one.

The only rule you may be is told this one.
The only rule you may be told one this is.
The only rule you may be told is this one.
The only rule you may be told this one is.
The only rule you may be told this is one.
The only rule you may be told is one this.
The only rule you may be told is this one.

The only rule you may be is this one told.
The only rule you may be is this told one.
The only rule you may be is told one this.
The only rule you may be is told this one.
The only rule you may be told one this is.
The only rule you may be told is one this.
The only rule you may be told this one is.
The only rule you may be told this is one.
The only rule you may be told is one this.

Is the may you one this only be told rule.
Rule this may told one only is the be you.
Is be only the this may told rule you one.
Only be is told one you may this rule the.
Is the this told may rule only one be you.
Be told one may this is rule you the only.
May the told be rule one this only you is.
Only rule one the you this told is may be.
Is told you be rule only this may one.
Rule the you told may be only one is this.
The only rule you may be is this one told.
The only rule you may be is this told one.

May is you only be told one rule the this.
This the you rule only told is may be one.
Be this the rule you one only may told is.
Is the may you one this only be told rule.
Rule this may told one only is the be you.
Is be only the this may told rule you one.
Only be is told one you may this rule the.
Is the this told may rule only one be you.
Be told one may this is rule you the only.
May the told be rule one this only you is.
Only rule one the you this told is may be.
Is told you be rule only this may one.

You may rule is only one the this be told.
Told the this be you only rule may is one.
May is you only be told one rule the this.
This the you rule only told is may be one.
Be this the rule you one only may told is.
Is the may you one this only be told rule.
Rule this may told one only is the be you.
Is be only the this may told rule you one.
Only be is told one you may this rule the.
Is the this told may rule only one be you.
Be told one may this is rule you the only.
May the told be rule one this only you is.
Only rule one the you this told is may be.

## The Only Rule You May Be Told Is This One

(Political Allegory [visible | audible | computable])

The Game

The game of Mao has many rules, but only one that is spoken: "The only rule that may be told is this one." This game models a rule set located in the social in such a way that the articulation of the rules is prohibited while their obsessive instantiation is required. The splitting between the utterable and the unutterable cleaves the social into the contradictory territories of the said and the done. The telling is mere nonsense; it is truth by a technicality. It performs its vacuity endlessly, yet it disciplines the receiver to abandon discourse, attend carefully to the knowing speaker, and follow submissively and ever in fear of unintended disobedience. The law is given, Pavlov style, by reward and punishment. If this game sounds fun to you, it is because you have already learned to enjoy playing it.

The Rules

- Speak one of the 3,628,800 permutation of the ten words in the phrase every three seconds.
  - In even minutes utter a permutation of the phrase in the order.
    - Write the word in white on black.
  - In odd minutes utter a permutation chosen at random.
    - Write the word in black on white.
  - Write the phrase at the top of the screen.
  - Move the phrase down at the rate of one line per three seconds.
  - Fade the phrase out in proportion to its time on screen.
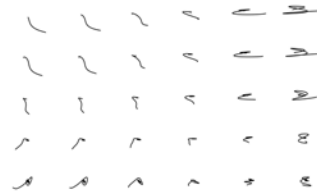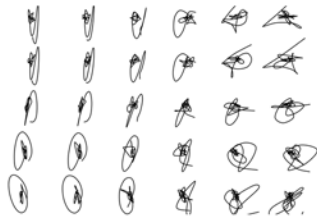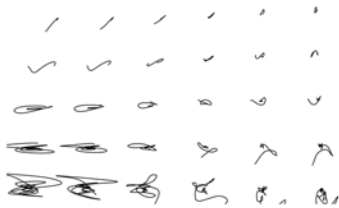
Harmonomic

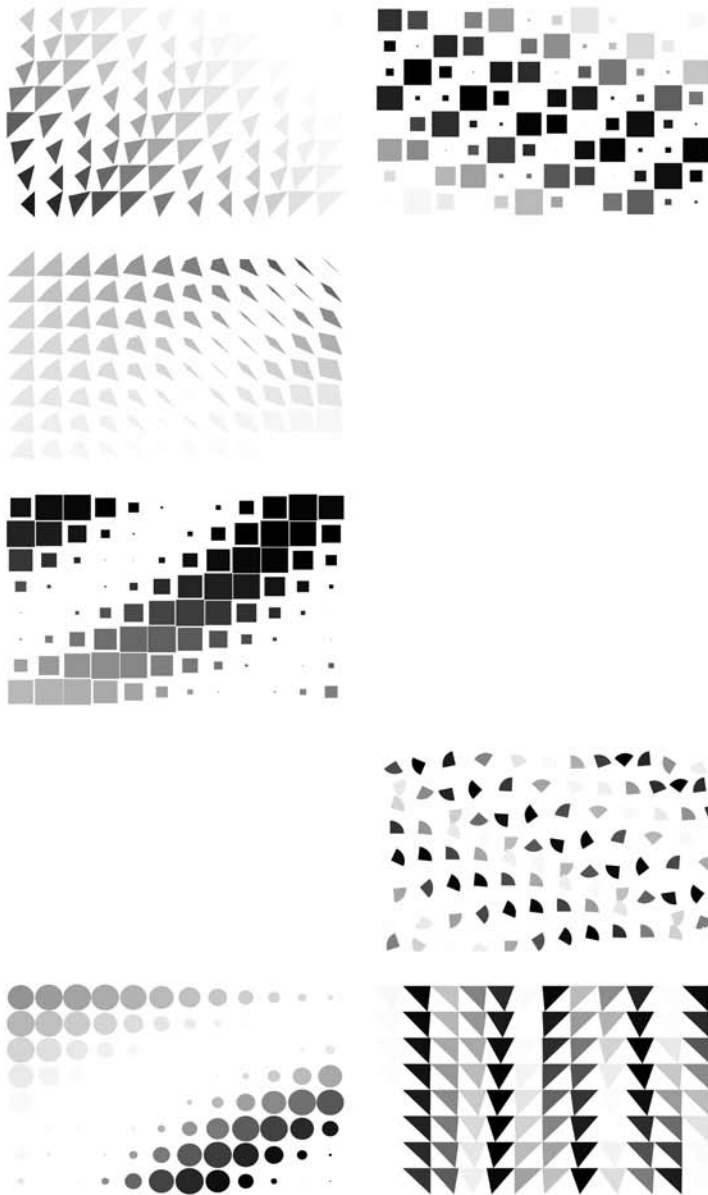(Social Abstraction [visible | computable])

The Game

The ideology of individualism requires the maintenance of some semblance of interpersonal difference. The horror produced by the idea of cloning, or the imagined forced conformity of communist society, is surely tied to a certain attachment to the idea of difference. At the same time, conformity exerts a strong influence and difference is disciplined away. The ineradicable race, gender, sexuality, and national origin based discrimination and violence that plagues the U.S., a full half a century after the dawn of the civil rights movement, is testament to that. But things have changed.

We negotiate the gradations of difference delicately–being not too different and not too much the same. To satisfy the law of individualism and at the same time not violate the rule of conformity. To be at once one of the hive, and yet just different enough to deny it. The careful calibration of difference that locates the self in a place that is an interpolation between known others–inside the grid–locatable. These are what we strive for. To be different unsystematically, or outside of the accepted and normative structure of difference is to be an alien, but to be different inside of the system is to be part of it.

The Rules

- Distribute a number of elements on a grid such that:
  - Each element is a unique.
  - Each element is similar to neighboring elements.
  - The degree of similarity depends on proximity.
    - the closer the more similar.
    - the further the more different.
- Change each element over time by interpolating between its current state and a new state chosen at random.
- Preserve all relations through the changes.
- Let the elements be highly variable harmonographic curves.

Untitled (After Riley)

[Social Abstraction [visible | computable]]

The Game

Clearly the desire for the same is operative in various ways in many domains: at the level of nationality, within the social, in terms of class, or by political identifications, subcultures, etc.[16] Just as frequently, the desire for the same is challenged by its opposite: the desire for the different. One thinks of the capitalist imperatives of horizontal market differentiations, or the temporal shifts of planned obsolescence, both of which are implicated in the manufacture of the drive to consume, and to understand consumption as an exercise of will rather than a submission.

Mary Douglas explains the laws of commensality as an attempt to protect and preserve difference, to defend the boundaries of categories like nature and culture, *kosher* and *treif*.[17] But her structural explanations also identify a pattern of zones which extend from the household and divide territory into the locations for alternating type-consistent and intermediary categories of animals. This emanation of proximity based pattern suggests an alternate reading of the relation in the binary same/different: not as boundary defense but rather as shifting gradation. The power of the dyad is that its self-mediating opposition can create a system of graduated waves of similarity and difference that allow the perception of both tendencies simultaneously. Each becomes a phase of a wave which rolls in as necessary and does not obligate the disavowal of the opposite.

The visual logic of Bridget Riley's work exemplifies this sort of standing wave pattern. The paintings are constructed around ideas of systematic change across the space of the canvas. They rely on periodic structures: geometric figures combined in patterns of repet-ition and difference. The effect is that a balance is maintained between the poles of opposition; they are held in tension. From the stasis of the image one can imagine the wave of difference that could pass across the picture plane; the variations which each canvas instantiates form a cinematic continuum from which they are extracted.

In this piece, the systematics of Riley's work are animated in the machine, and their wave-like potential is realized.

The Rules

- Distribute a number of elements on a grid such that:
    - Each element is of the same type.
    - Each element is in a different state than its neighbors.
    - But each element is in a similar state to neighboring elements.
    - The degree of similarity depends on proximity.
- Change the state of each element over time by cycling through the range of possible states.
- Let the elements be from a set of variable geometric figures whose state can be changed in terms of orientation, shape and brightness.

Endnotes

1 See Hermann Hesse, The Glass Bead Game, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

2 "Backgammon History," Gammoned.com, <http://www.gammoned.com/history.html>.

3 Cf. Manovich's discussion of database (and algorithm) as a "symbolic form" which supercedes narrative, or places it in relation to the database as simply one form among many, in Lev Manovich, *Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001, Ch 5.

4 Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1978, pg 34.

5 *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50092163?query_type=word&queryword=game&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=2&search_id=uy34-0kmPNV-6250&hilite=50092163>.

6 Friedrich Nietzche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* Project Gutenberg*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4363>, §3.

7 Peter Suber*, Nomic: Initial Set of Rules,* Earlham College, <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/nomic.htm>, Note to Rule 103.

8 Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, February, 1844, Marxist Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

9 Richard Serra videotaped an enactment of the game in his 1974, "Prisoner's Dilemma," which he said was a comment on the role of TV in the contemporaneous Watergate scandal. See Jonathan Jones, "Caught on Tape," The Guardian, July 28, 2003, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,11710,1007084,00.html>.

10 It is not strictly accurate to present game theory as incapable of treating cooperation since some games, like "Stag and Rabbit Hunt" (and "Prisoner's Dilemma" too), explicitly deal with the problematics of cooperation; but they do so using the same economistic presumptions.

11 Lacan's three prisoners each wear one of five hats, two white and three black, that can only be seen by the others; the one who can determine his color will be set free. To solve the problem requires a reasoning that includes imagining what the others see. The Turing Test, where a person must guess if an unseen interlocutor is human or a machine by asking questions, is also a variant of the prisoner's dilemma. In that game of identification and dissimulation, the contestants must navigate

asymmetrically the expectations that correspond to the identity of the other: machine to human and vice versa. To win is to out think the other in its own terms: the computer must answer as if it were human, or as if it were a human impersonating a machine, and so on, iteratively. The questioner must reason in a way that accommodates this regress. It has been remarked that this situation bears a striking similarity to that of the closeted homosexual–which Turing was, and for which he suffered tragically.

[12] Marcos Novak, lecture at ìInteractive Frictionsî conference, University of Southern Californa, Los Angeles, June 6, 1999, referenced in Lev Manovich, 2001.

[13] Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," 1848, Marxist Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>.

[14] Friedrich Nietzche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* Project Gutenberg*,* <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4363>, §108.

[15] Peter Suber, *The Paradox of Self-Amendment*, Earlham College, <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/psa/>, Appendix 3, p. 362.

[16] Irigaray describes the desire for the same punningly as *hom(m)os-exualité,* a pathology she locates squarely in the masculine camp. Man's desire for the same is equivalent to man's desire for man; the pleasure of self-representation becomes the cornerstone of the phallogocentric edifice. Every instance of (masculine) cultural production is a mirror to his vanity and woman is invisible behind the specularity of her surface. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985.

[17] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* 1966.

Bio

My work as an artist focuses on language, politics and software. The intention of this practice is to press the artifacts and techniques of computation's ubiquity towards a connection with the social and intellectual circumstances of their context. To this end, I have produced websites, videos, software applications, and robots; all these projects have at their core a deep commitment to understanding the political, philosophical and cultural implications of computer technology.

Software, as an art practice, promises to break open the question of artistic labor. Can the notion of signature and gesture remain the same when compared to the production of unique and recognizable graphemes by a machine? Immaterial, and indeterminate, software represents yet another challenge to the entrenched object centered practices, which have been attacked already by various conceptualist strategies for decades.

It has been important for me to insist that computation be understood not simply as a tool or a media, but as culture itself–a constructed, historically situated, and manipulable artifact of human sociality. It is also important to differentiate my practice from a simply technophilic enthusiasm for computers and new media. My commitment is not to software,
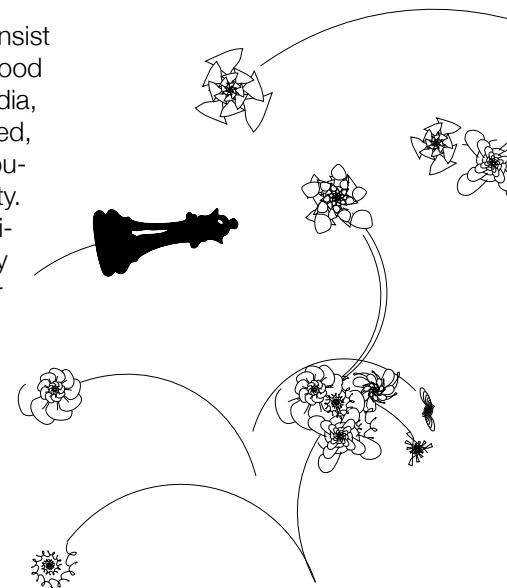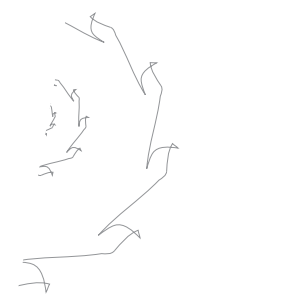
per se, but rather to thinking, writing, and critique. I find it difficult not to account for the place of the thinking machines, however, in the contemporary scene, and perverse not to let those ubiquitous objects enter discourse as both signs and agents of moment.

I worked as a web developer through the 90s at various design and branding firms in the Bay Area, which gave me both technical insight and an understanding of how language and image are manipulated in corporate media. I hold a BA degree from the University of California Santa Cruz, an MA from the University of Chicago, and an MFA from the University of California San Diego, Department of Visual Arts.