

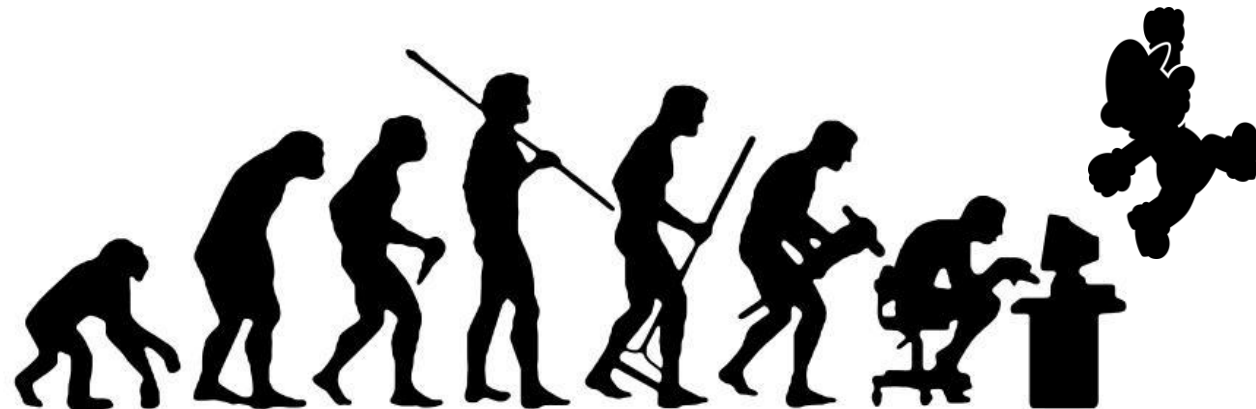
Digital Media, Society, and Culture

Angus A.A. Mol

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Digital Playgrounds



Games are now!



Squid Game (2021)

In the 20th Century, the moving image was the dominant cultural form. While music, architecture, the written word, and many other forms of expression flourished in the last century, the **moving image came to dominate**. Personal storytelling, news reporting, epic cultural narratives, political propaganda – all were expressed most powerfully through film and video. The rise of the moving image is **tightly bound to the rise of information**; film and video as media represent linear, non-interactive information that is accessed by a viewer.



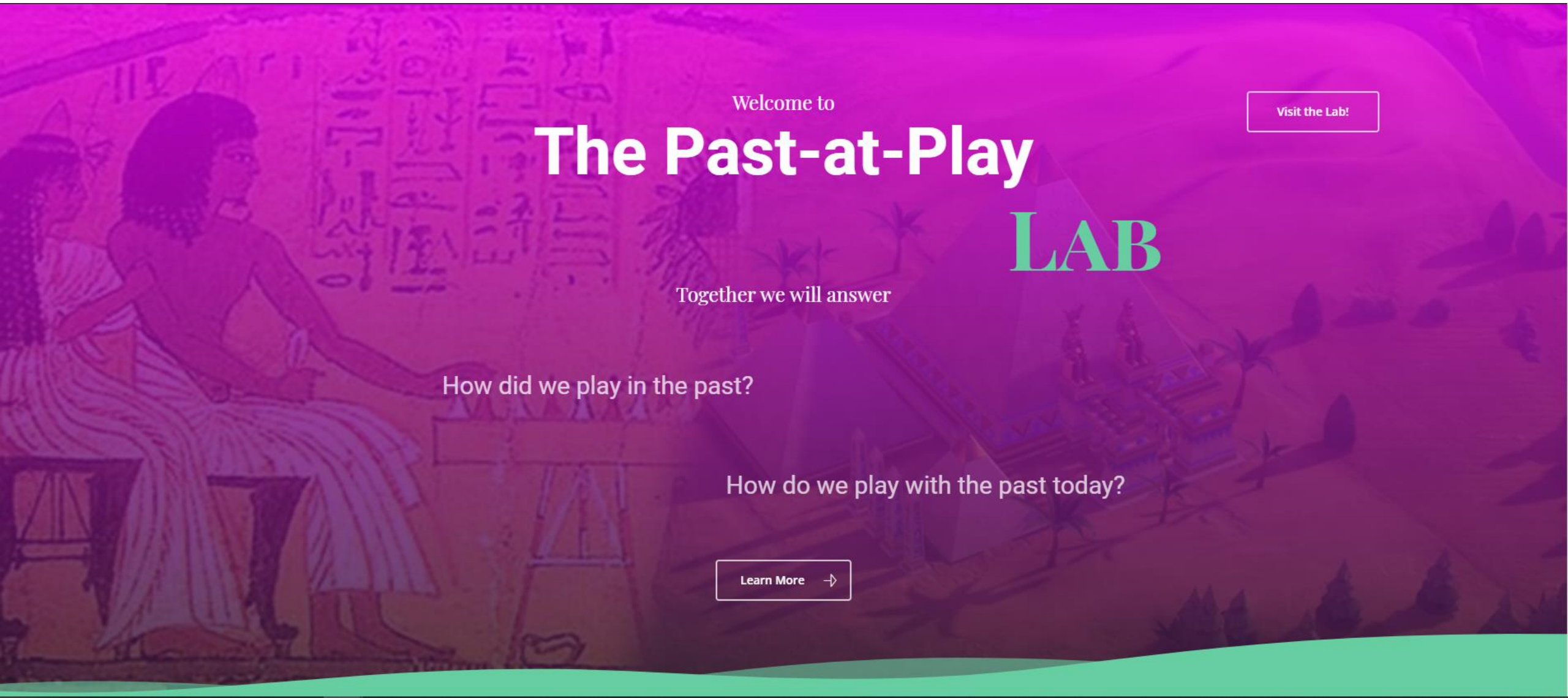
The Ludic Century is an era of games.
When information is put at play, game-like experiences replace linear media. Media and culture in the Ludic Century is increasingly systemic, modular, customizable, and participatory. Games embody all of these characteristics in a very direct sense.

~ Eric Zimmerman, [Manifesto for a Ludic Century](#)

Animal Crossing: New Horizons (making a home in my lockdown home in April 2020)

Games are also ancient...

pastatplay.com



Welcome to

The Past-at-Play

LAB

[Visit the Lab!](#)

Together we will answer

How did we play in the past?

How do we play with the past today?

[Learn More](#) →

Play is even more ancient!



My dog and I playing

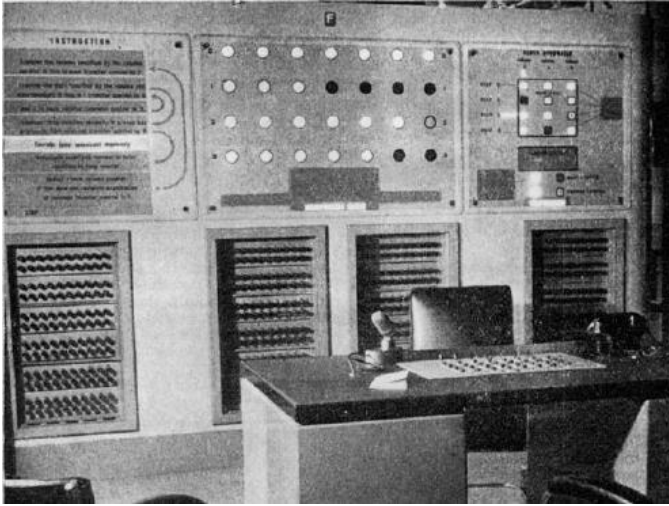


Gorillas playing tag

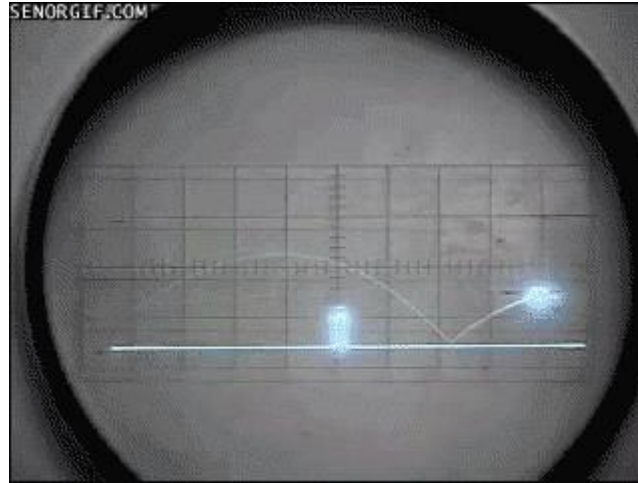


Squid Game
Octopus playing with Lego

Video games are pretty old already...



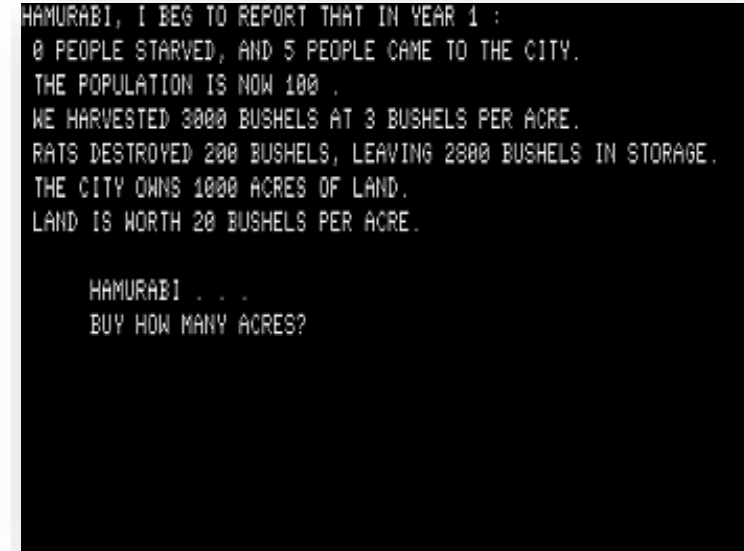
Nimrod (1951), world's first
videogame-playing computer
[Check it out](#)



Tennis for Two (Brookhaven, 1958)



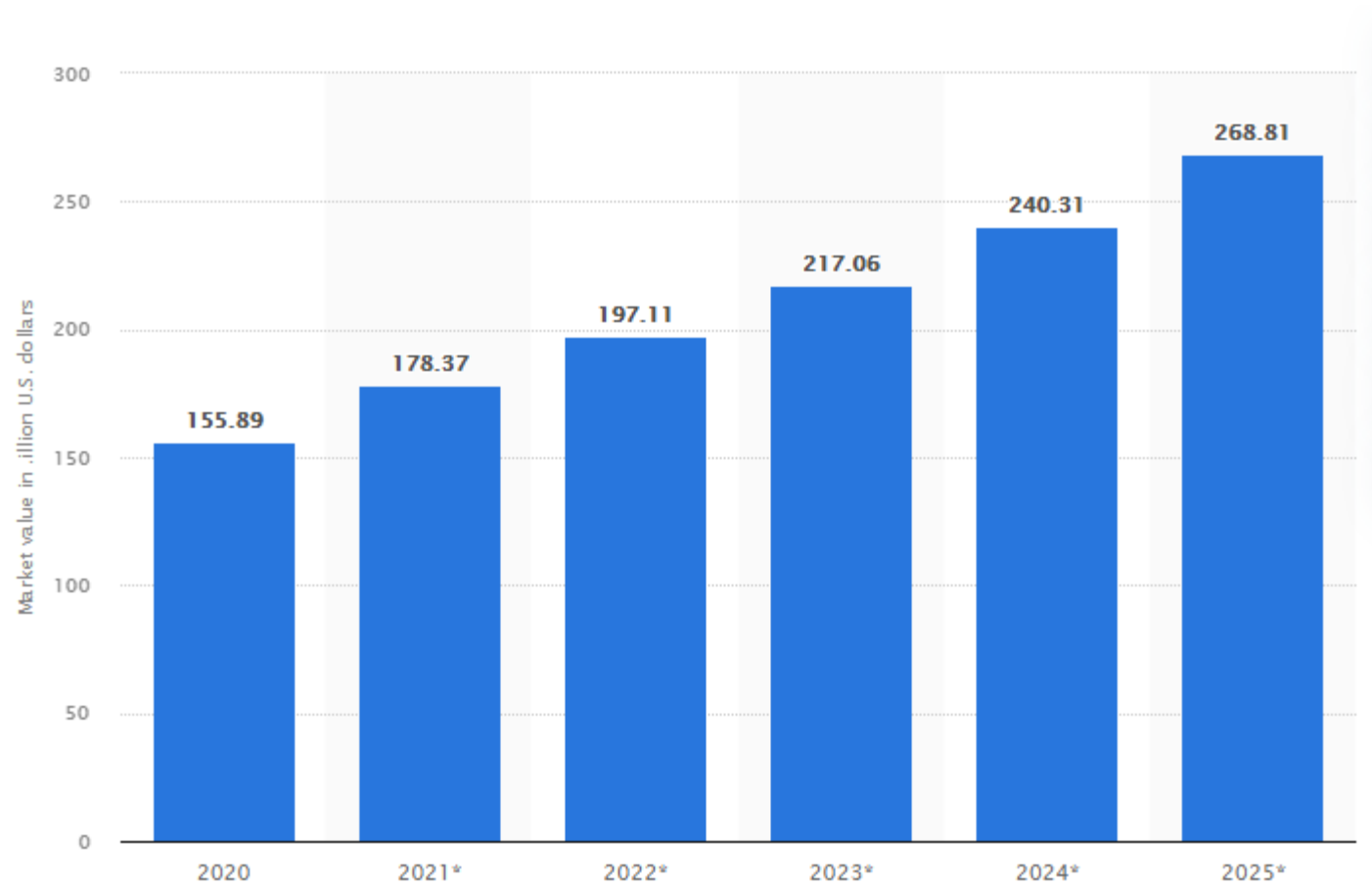
Spacewar! (MIT, 1962)



The Sumerian Game (1964)

[Check it out](#) (Hamurabi, BASIC version)

Video games are big business



Source: [Statista](#)

Everyone and their mother plays video games

THE VIDEO GAME PLAYER COMMUNITY

More than two out of every three Americans play video games. There are players of all ages and from all backgrounds.



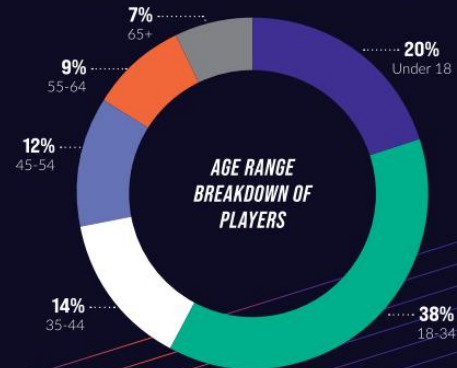
77% voted in the 2020 election

The average video game player is

31 years old

Across all ages, 80% of players are over

18 years old

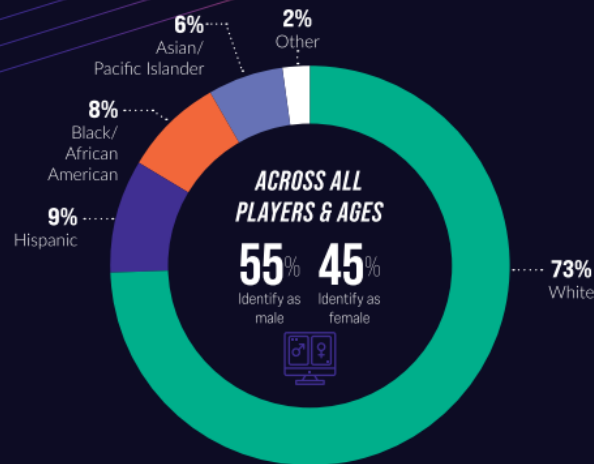


67% of American adults (age 18+) are players

76% of American kids (under 18) are players

THE VIDEO GAME PLAYER COMMUNITY

PLAYER ETHNICITY



87% of players agree that video game players are a diverse group of people



74% of Americans have at least one video game player in their household



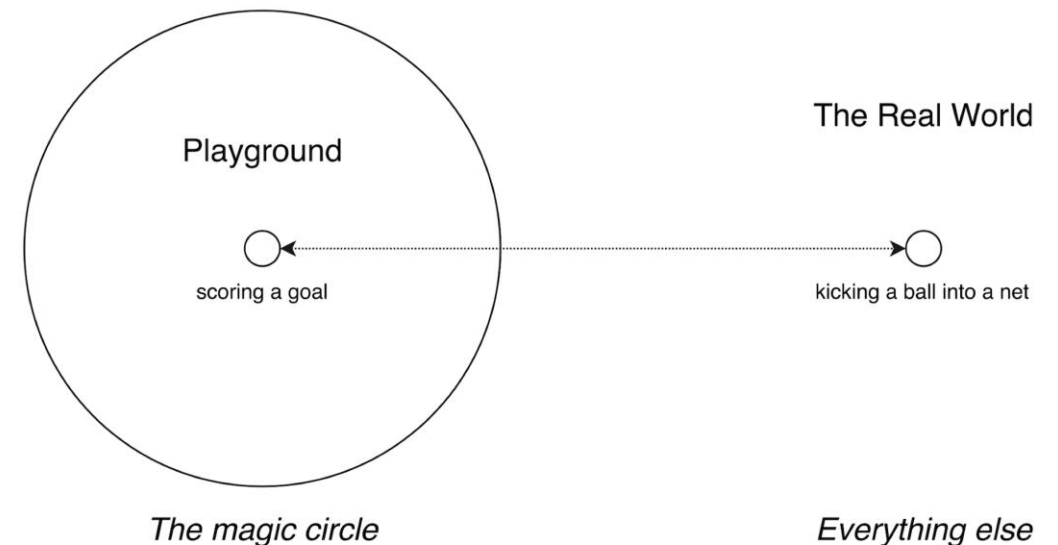
32% of players have children under 18 in their household

But what is a
game even?



Homo Ludens (Huizinga 1938)

- Play (1938, this from 1955, p.8-10):
 - **Free:** freeing and voluntary.
 - **Imitates:** is not "ordinary" or "real" life.
 - **Set apart:** is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration.
 - **Rule-based:** creates order, is order.
 - **Seriously not serious:** connected with no material interest



Research: Only slight risk of coronavirus contagion on football pitch

28 April 2020 - 3:53 PM



Photo: PA Images | Celebrations should be limited, and balls sanitized to further reduce potential spread among professionals



Things that are not play

The Playground/
The Magic Circle/
Where Play Takes Place

Things that are playful

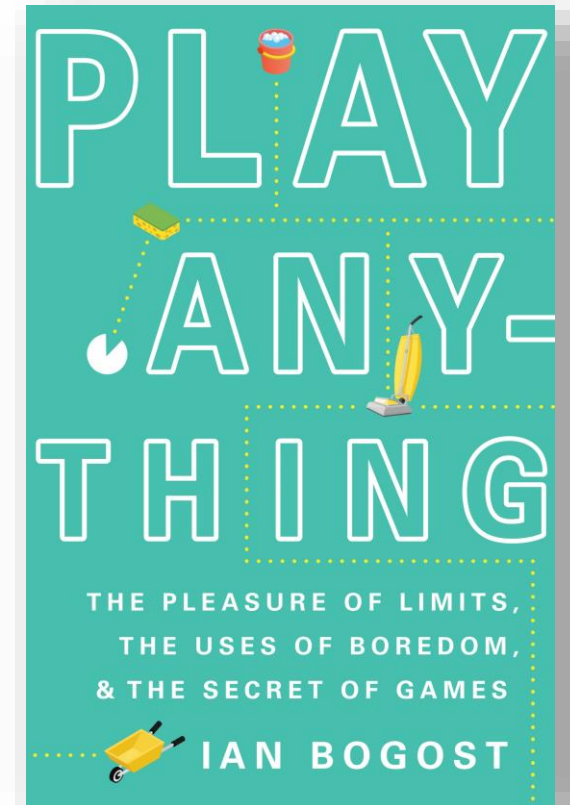
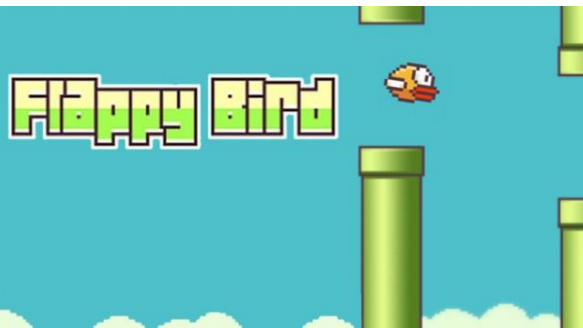
Things that are drawn into play

Things actively
kept out of play



Play Anything (Bogost, 2016)

- Builds on *Huizinga's* 'Magic Circle' (*Homo Ludens*)
- **Playgrounds:** anything with boundaries and content that is experienced as fun.
- Fun: any activity that is related to with commitment, attention, and care.
- Against: the irony baked into modern life
- Pro: seeing play in more than just digital games



But still...what are video games?

- “Any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platform such as personal computers or consoles and involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment” (Fraschi 2001, in line with OED)
- Seems simple, but videogames are also “artifacts that evaluate performance” (curious about this and other definitions, see [here](#))



Table 2.1 The elements of a videogame

<i>Graphics</i>	Any images that are displayed and any effects performed on them. This includes 3D objects, 2D tiles, 2D full-screen shots, Full Motion Video (FMV), statistics, informational overlays and anything else the player will see.
<i>Sound</i>	Any music or sound effects that are played during the game. This includes starting music, CD music, MIDI, MOD tracks, Foley effects, environmental sound.
<i>Interface</i>	The interface is anything that the player has to use or have direct contact with in order to play the game . . . it goes beyond simply the mouse/keyboard/joystick [and] includes graphics that the player must click on, menu systems that the player must navigate through and game control systems such as how to steer or control pieces in the game.
<i>Gameplay</i>	Gameplay is a fuzzy term. It encompasses how much fun a game is, how immersive it is and the length of playability.
<i>Story</i>	The game's story includes any background before the game starts, all information the player gains during the story or when they win and any information they learn about characters in the game.

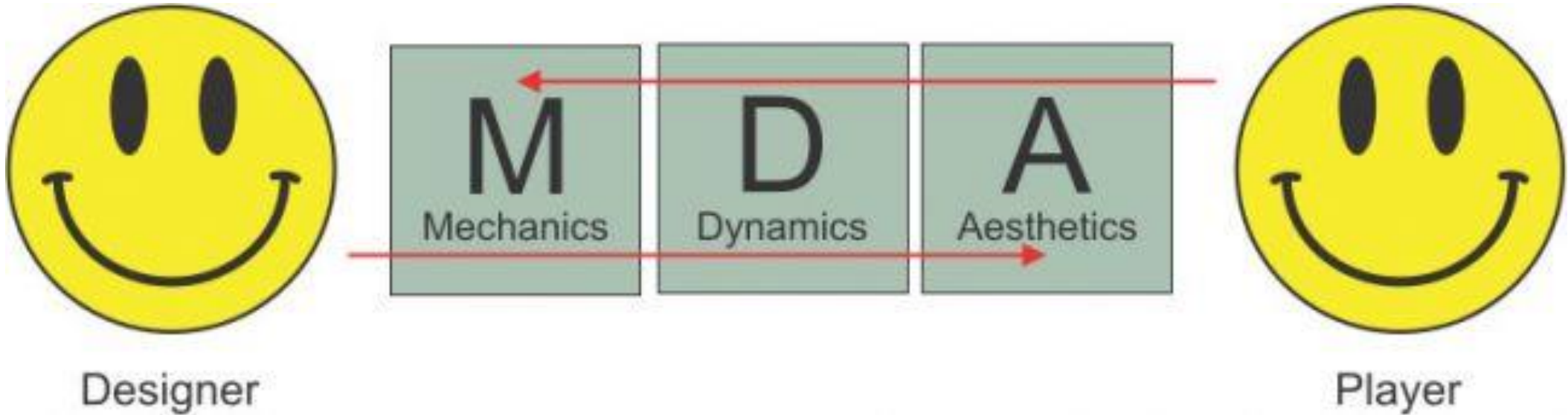
Source: Adapted from Howland 1998a.



Pong

From Newman's [Videogames](#) (2010)

How to think about games?



MDA framework (Hunicke et al. 2004)

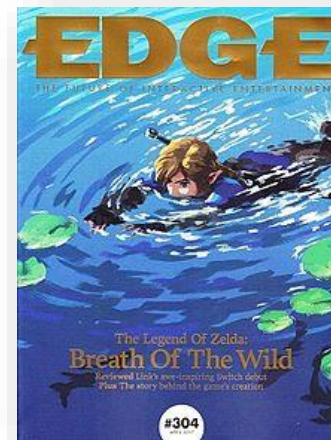


Disciplines involved with videogames

- Game Design
- Game Studies
 - [Game Studies Journal](#)
 - [Games and Culture](#)
 - Ludology vs. Narratology
- Computer Science & Engineering
- Media Studies
 - Media Archaeology
- Game Journalism
 - Many news outlets
 - Kotaku, Rock, Paper Shotgun, Eurogamer, Polygon
 - Declining number of print magazines
 - Edge



[Spacewar!](#)



EUROGAMER

**ROCK
PAPER
SHOTGUN**

PC Gaming since 1873

KOTAKU

My own work on Games

- How do we experience the past through play?
- VALUE Foundation
 - Playfulness
 - Accessibility
 - Knowledge
- Past-at-Play Lab
 - pastatplay.com
- Streaming the Past: (streamingthepast.com)
- Perhaps (in 2025): A Play and Games Studies MA



My own work on games

- How do we experience the past through play?
- Put the playground in the ivory tower
 - VALUE Foundation
 - Playfulness, Accessibility, Knowledge
 - Past-at-Play Lab (pastatplay.com)
- Streaming the Past: (streamingthepast.com)
- Perhaps (2025): A Play and Games Studies MA



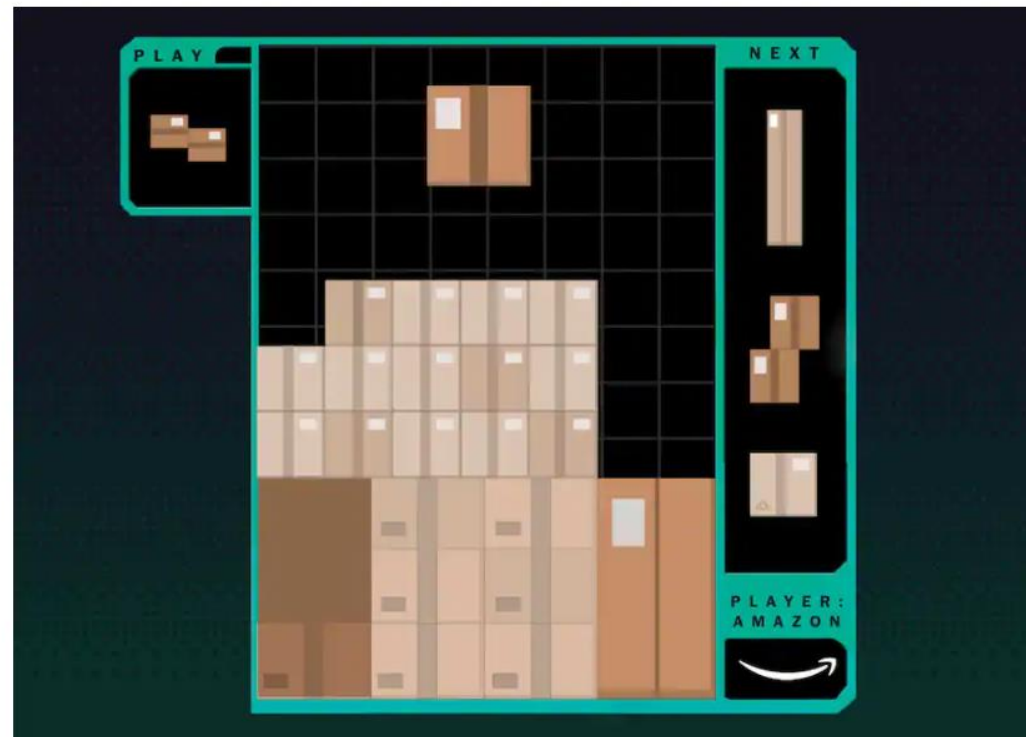
Knowledge at Play 



Gamification: What happens when work becomes play and when play becomes work?



‘MissionRacer’: How Amazon turned the tedium of warehouse work into a game



(Washington Post illustration/iStock)



The Washington Post

Have fun with Flappy Bird!

