

Published by Inter Arts Center, Lund University
Text © The authors, 2024
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37852/oblu.362.c886>

1, 2, 3 Playtime

ISBN:

978-91-531-2612-6 (print)

978-91-531-2613-3 (digital)

Publications from Inter Arts Center, no 1

ISSN: 3035-7586

Suggested citation: Sérgio, I.-A. 2024, 'Revised Theory: Circular Stories', i M. Edström & H. Jalhed (red.), *1, 2, 3 Playtime*, Inter Arts Center, Malmö.
<https://doi.org/10.37852/oblu.362.c886>



Revised Theory: Circular Stories, 2024. Booklets, podium. Installation view, *Malmö Gallery Weekend* 2024, IAC. Inês A. Sério

Revised Theory: Circular Stories

Inês A. Sérgio

Revised Theory: Circular Stories is an essay and a theory in its early stages. It is a reflection of several months of research in Game Studies and practical workshops in fundamental notions of Game Design and Game Development. In the early stages, those explorations, both theoretical and practical, didn't necessarily have this essay as an end goal. In fact, this prototype came to be due to reoccurring considerations that appeared throughout this initially broad and diverse exploration.

The only point in common when I, a researching art historian, would explore these diverse topics was myself, and how I, personally, would make sense of the abstraction. Though objectivity is something to be aspired to in *Revised Theory*, I left the underlying subjectivity show through *Circular Stories* in a narration that showcases the subjectivity inherent in thinking of things, including Game Studies. Those who read Haraway are familiar with the said author's famous statement: that 'it matters what matters we use to think other matters with'¹. Which tools we use to build other tools. Which references we use to support a statement. Or, in my case, which textbooks illustrated my mind throughout abstraction into a point where I could consume and think game theory through old-learned biophysical concepts about membranes.

The biophysics class made me reflect more about what passes through a membrane, including why and how it does. At that time, membranes felt like an abstract gate that was

¹ Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

in constant mutation, adapting to what was going on in both places that it bordered. Instead of being this dictating separator, membranes were more mediators sensible to multiple and complex factors. The system of interactions was deeply complex and dialectic and the membranes (the borders of the system) were a sensible part of the equation, a reflection of what was going on around them.²

An idea came to me while reading about a known concept in Game Studies: the Magic Circle. As I read Calleja's critique on it ³, I ended up thinking of how this border-issue associated with the concept could be 'solved' if we would think of it as membrane-like. Pictures of old textbooks came to mind, and a process of mediation – not separation – was laid down in satisfactory terms, for my own conception at least. It got me reflecting on a further extrapolation from Calleja's text, one that considers not only games as not separate from everyday life, but also everyday life as not separate from theoretical divagations. And an essay came into being.

So, what is lacking in the Magic Circle? I believe the answer is that it simply lacks a more accurate representation of the messiness, or at least one that is more open to the complex nature of a dialectic system. In particular, when it comes to this separative quality which somehow got associated with the fictitious border of the conceptual Magic Circle. As Calleja argued it is alluring to have a dividing line between play and non-play, between order and chaos, however, there isn't a clean severance between selves and modes of action.⁴

The consideration of intricate relationships between an academically desirable objectivity and the unescapable touch of subjectivity is not something groundbreaking. It's considered in many fields through their methodology and ethics. Furthermore, my work is just a prototype of an idea. An artefact of a line of thought that followed me during *1, 2, 3 Playtime*. Perhaps, a matter that could be used to think about other matters with. Or, a conclusion to an itch that started during the first lecture on the first day, from the first discussion of 'what is a game?' into magical circles that turned into membrane-like structures.

As an art historian, whose profile is made up intersectional methodologies

2 Sérgio, Inês A. 'Borders, Boundaries, and Membranes. How the textbooks you read illustrate your mind', in *Revised Theory: Circular Stories*, 2024, 16, Inter Arts Center.

3 Calleja, Gordon. '11. Ludic identities and the magic circle', in *Playful Identities* (2015), 211.

4 Sérgio, Inês A. 'Thinking digital games as not separated from everyday life. Ludic Identities and the Magic Circle by Gordon Calleja (2015)', in *Revised Theory: Circular Stories* 2024, 10–11, Inter Arts Center.

and encouragement to explore the cultural and sociological aspect of an artistic manifestation, I often find myself establishing plausible bridges between different established schools of thought, literary references and different case studies. This project, however, because it is not academically bound, allowed a different type of exploration. It is both personal and researched, it is a hybrid that encapsulates how one person experienced research while researching, while playing and thinking about games. It is an artefact that just leaves a reminder that the borders of binomial structures can be a sensible part of the equation.

Nothing is separate. The border is a sensible part of the equation.

