

Game Worlds: A Howard Becker Influenced Institutional Theory of Games

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Abstract

*Usually the term "Gameworld" or "game world" refers to an in-game space of a digital game designed by developers and enjoyed by players. In this article, I am not using the term in that way. I am interested in situating the makers, supporters, and critics of the game world in relationship to one another, using the template set forth in *Art Worlds* written by Howard S. Becker in 1982. His institutional theory of art serves as an exemplar to comprehend the game world from a sociological viewpoint. Currently, no one has taken the time to sort out the sociological structure of the construction, delivery and reception of games. This article fills that gap.*

Keywords: Artworld, Gameworld, games as Art, Howard Becker, institutional theory, video games, game field analysis

1. Introduction

Usually the term "Gameworld" or "game world" refers to an in-game space of a digital game designed by developers and enjoyed by players. A plethora of game studies articles uses this context. (e.g. Gazzard, 2011; Miller, 2008; Doh & Whang, 2014; Latorre, 2015; Grimshaw, et al., 2011; Cassar, 2013) As David Surman put it: "Gameworlds are the expression of a complex cultural and textual interaction, in which the foundational structures of the videogame solicit investment and belief from the player" (Surman, 2007, p. 153). I am not using the term in this way, however in this article, I am, instead, interested in situating the makers, supporters, and critics of the game world in relationship to one another, using the structure set forth in *Art Worlds* by Howard S. Becker. (1982, 2008). His institutional theory of art serves as a template for analyzing the game world from a sociological viewpoint. He is not interested in elucidating the aesthetic experience. He rather "takes an agnostic position on aesthetics" (Battani, 2011, para. 2.1) and his "art world (or worlds) is understood as a set of institutions that organize the production and reception of art" (Bonsdorff, 2012, para. 4.5).

When I look at how often Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* is invoked in game studies, I only find a small handful of citations. (e.g. Lowood, 2006; Camper, 2005; Glander, n.d.; O'Donnell, 2012). O'Donnell goes as far to state, "In many ways, the game industry actually makes more analytic sense through the lens of the 'Art World'..." (O'Donnell, 2012, p. 21) yet he does not pursue this line of thinking to its end. While these instances reveal a slight awareness of Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* within the field of game studies, none explore what this theory could contribute to an understanding of game worlds or the Gameworld. Furthermore, no one in the field of sociology has conducted a field analysis or taken the time to sort out the structure that manages the construction and delivery of games (e.g. Cultural Sociology, 2007-2016; The British Journal of Sociology, 1949-2016; Current Sociology, 1950-2016; British Sociological Association, 1966-2016; New Media & Society, 1999-2016; Media, Culture, and Society, 1979-2016). This article steps in to fill this gap.

1.1 Organization of the Article

In the first section, for the purpose of establishing the origins of my methodology, I give an overview of Howard Becker's ideas about naïve, folk, maverick and integrated professional artists and their relationship to "The Artworld" (Danto, 1964). By using these two sources, I have also chosen to simplify this inherently complicated discourse by eliminating the myriad of theories (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993; 1996) that could also serve as a basis for a similar inquiry.

The second section of the article discovers the game world equivalents for each of the types of artists in Becker's theory. This elucidates the sociological organization of members of game worlds and Gameworld, who manage the production and reception of games. It is important to note that some of these artifacts are found in non-scholarly sources and, when necessary, I have cited them to aid in the clarification of the sociological structure.

Finally, I reach conclusions about the current structure of the game world through the lens of Howard Becker's theory.

2. Understanding Howard Becker's *Art Worlds*

An *art world* according to Howard Becker, is a social collective with a cooperative network of people all doing his or her own part to make, support, distribute, and preserve art. An art world is a self governing entity. It edits and evolves, decides what has value and what does not. Art worlds decide membership, as well as conventions, mobilize resources, and distribute artworks. "Wherever an art world exists, it defines the boundaries of acceptable art, recognizing those who produce the work it can assimilate as artists entitled to full membership, and denying membership and its benefits to those whose work it cannot assimilate" (p. 226). People then choose to align themselves or not, in relation to one or many art worlds. The four (4) roles that he defines are: (1) the naïve artist, (2) folk artist, (3) maverick, and (4) integrated professional; these terms "do not describe people, but rather how people stand in relation to an organized art world" (p. 228). I describe these relationships and roles in the following four (4) subsections.

2.1 Naïve artists. Known for its childlike visual aesthetic and a lack of sophisticated illusory space, which causes it to be referred to as "primitive" in nature, naïve art exists outside of the established art world. Normally the work of these artists is lost because they "are unable to explain what they do in conventional terms" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 259), and they "work in no established medium and belong to no organized art world" and as a result the work "often fails to survive" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 221). Grandma Moses (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 258; Chill, 2003-2014, para. 1) is an exception to this rule, and is among the most famous naïve artists because her work was collected by museums after it was "discovered."

Naïve artists are unconventional in the sense that they have not been traditionally trained, know very little about the media they work in, have no idea what the accepted conventions are, and therefore do not adhere to them. Eccentric use of alternative materials can be found in the work of Simon Rodia, who built the *Watts Towers* out of soda bottles and broken pots in Los Angeles (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 260; Hale, 1957) and the creator of the *Orange Show* in Houston, Jeff McKissack, who scavenged materials such as roof tiles from the old Capital Theatre and a railing from a Stowers Furniture Company's fire escape (Martin, 1977, p. 123). These artists are recluses (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 260; Martin, 1977, p. 121). Yet another example of a naïve artist working in isolation is Henry Darger. He created an illustrated epic novel of more than 15,000 pages, titled "In the Realms of the Unreal" and an incomplete 8,000 page sequel. His work was "discovered" after his death in 1973 in Chicago by his landlord, art world figure Nathan Lerner who, "cut apart his self-bound volumes of artwork, scrambling their context as illustrations, in order to sell the pieces individually" (MacGregor, 2002, para. 16).

What all of these artists have in common is that that "their works just *are*, and can be described only by enumerating their features" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 260). The relationship of naïve art with the established Artworld is that there isn't one, except in the rare cases, like the aforementioned ones, when a member of the Artworld steps forward to preserve, or perhaps exploit, the work for its monetary and aesthetic value.

2.2 Folk artists. The work of people doing the tasks that are ordinarily done in a culture to fulfill a need, such as quilting or worksongs, is classified as folk art. The former provide warmth and familial support, whereas the latter coordinate groups such as chain gangs in the fulfillment of hard labor (Becker, pp. 248, 256; Jackson, 1966, para. 2).

Folk art can be recognized by the following features. First, the pieces often do not have the name of their maker(s) attributed to them (American Folk Art Museum, 2014, p. /quilts; Jackson, 1999, p. 29). Signing the work for the purpose of recognition is not a concern, because these works were not made with the intention of making art, and there is "No organization devoted itself to discovering exemplary works, purchasing them, and preserving them for later study and display" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 257). A second attribute of folk art is that folk artists often have more understanding of formal skills needed for the execution of the work than they can articulate, and this lack of language limits the boundaries of their community.

"Without a generalized language of judgment, standards must be local and ephemeral...No larger world can grow out of this" (p. 254). Third, the standards and techniques of the craft are passed down from older to younger members of the community. Working in a community is a fourth feature of folk art, and, while this differentiates folk artists from naïve artists, it is also what gives folk artists something in common with the established art world. According to Becker, "Folk artists resemble canonical art world artists in one respect: they belong to and produce their work as part of a well-organized community" (p. 248).

The long history of worksongs is a good illustration of the folk art community's emphasis on community and participation.

In ancient Greece there were songs for pulling ropes and drawing water and stamping barley and treading grapes; in West Africa there were songs for almost every kind of work; in the Georgia Sea Islands there were songs for mashing grain and shucking corn and rowing boats; in the Hebrides there were songs for pulling wool to make tweed. (Jackson, 1999, p. 29)

Worksongs were used for a variety of reasons: to give directions, time work, keep balance, and in some cases, to protect an individual. "If a man were singled out as working too slowly, he would often be brutally punished. The songs kept everyone together, so no one could be singled out as working more slowly than everyone else" (Jackson, 1966, para. 4). Participating is more important than performance and "what has always mattered first with the worksong is the ability to keep the time going and to be heard, not a pretty voice or wide range" (Jackson, 1999, p. 29).

Folk art is generally collected in the Artworld for its decorative or historical value. This hurts the relationship of folk art to the established art world in that it "may be remarkable for the cultural clues it holds, but these often become elusive when the artworks are removed from the context of their creation" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 258). The inclusion of folk art in art collections has also had an impact on contemporary artists, who are beginning "to exploit the aesthetic possibilities" (p. 258) of this alternative world, and as a result, the aesthetic significance of folk art is preserved as it enters the Artworld. One example of such appropriation is the work of Luke Haynes, whose work "can be classified as quilts since..., but they are much more. His concepts and images pull from the annals of historical painting and sculpture but are also allowed to pull from craft ..., this allows for pieces that have multi layers of visual as well as conceptual intrigue" (Haynes, 2013, para. 4). (Figure 1)

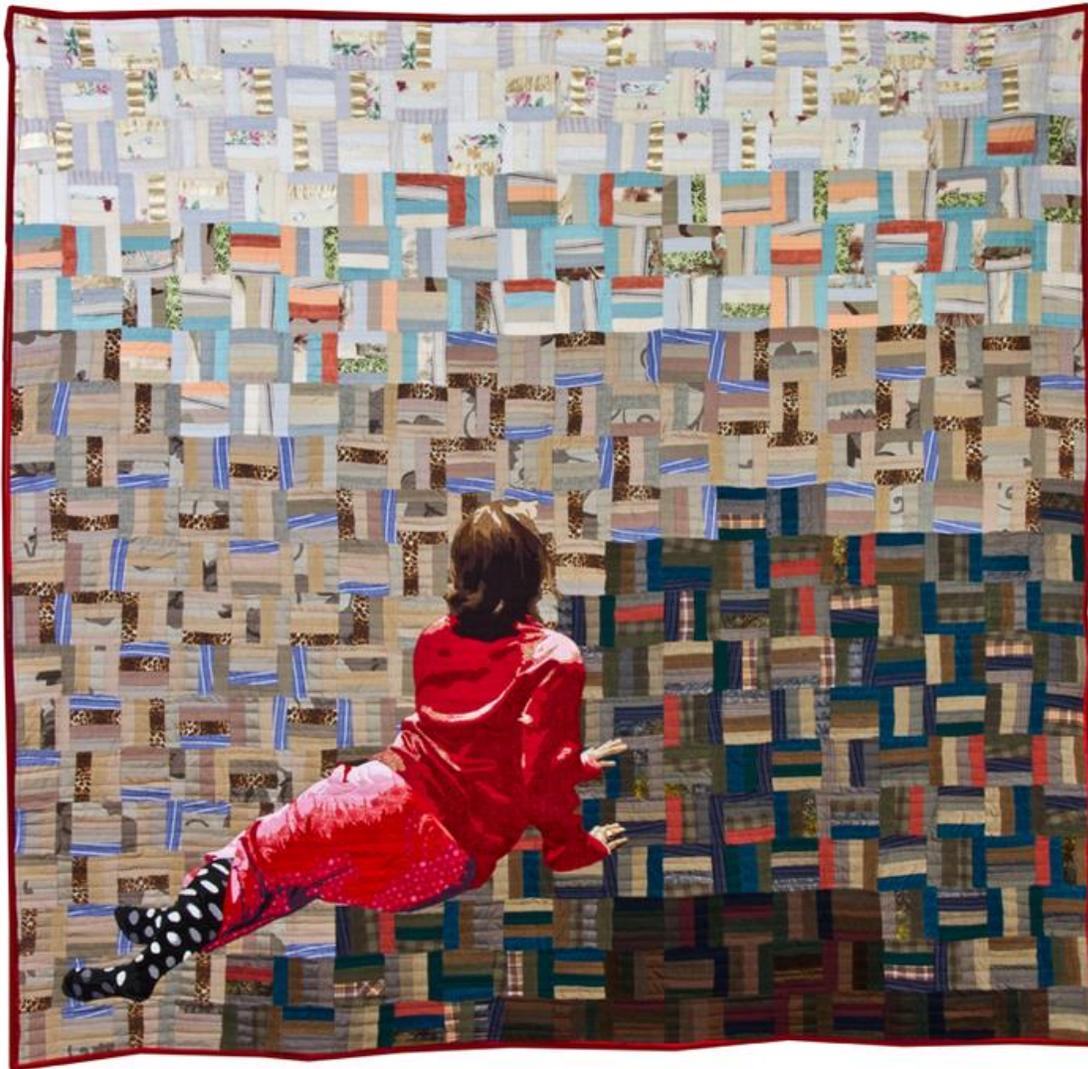


Figure 1: (The American Context #16) Christina's World, 2014.
Re-printed with permission from the artist, Luke Haynes.

2.3 Mavericks. In every art world there is a set of artists who become dissatisfied with the constraints demanded by the conventions of that world. Howard Becker refers to these artists as "mavericks." (1982, 2008, p. 233) They begin as apprentices in the conventional art world, and so have been trained to enter into the establishment. They know all of the expectations, find them too limiting, and end up proposing innovations that the conventional art world has difficulty accepting. One of the most famous mavericks, according to Becker, is Charles Ives. He studied musical conventional composition, harmony, and counterpoint at Yale. He proved, in general, that he understood *the approved* musical forms. But while in school, he began to deviate from these forms. Ives experimented with polytonality, among other things, and many of conventional musicians of the day dismissed his work for more than twenty years as "willfully ignorant or crude, filled with dissonance, formless and relying tastelessly on vernacular music of the time, both popular and religious, for raw materials" (p. 234). Not surprisingly, Ives, like other mavericks, met with hostility from the art world. When his work was rejected, he turned away completely from performing his work.

Artists of the maverick sort often turn to alternative venues. Even though his music was rejected again by the critics and composers of the time, Ives self-published his music in a book titled *114 Songs* in 1922 (Hitchcock, 1997, p. 26). In the visual arts, artists often, "create their own display spaces, or galleries ... thus escaping ... the stylistic tyranny of museum directors, curators, and financial supporters" (Becker, 1982, 2008, p. 235).

An example of this is artist Piero Manzoni who founded the art gallery Azimut in 1959 (Cappelli, 2003-2014, p. /EN/biography.htm para.3) and was known for, among other unconventional works, a piece titled *Linee (Lines)*.

On December 4, 1959, Azimut opened in the sub-basement of a furniture store on a narrow street around the corner from La Scala in Milan with an exhibition of Manzoni's most radical work to date: *Linee (Lines)*, drawings of a single line on a length of paper, signed, rolled up and sealed in a cardboard tube, which he then labeled. A youthful, experimental exhibition space that lasted just eight months, Azimut presented thirteen exhibitions and became a nerve center for an international set of provocative young artists. (Gagosian Gallery, 2011, para. 2)

The recognition of Manzoni's work has come about posthumously, as shown by continued exhibitions (Cappelli, 2003-2014, p. /EN/exhibitions.htm) and the acquisition of his work by museums many decades after his death in 1963. The Foundation dedicated to preserving and protecting his work, Fondazione Piero Manzoni, lists his work to be included in the collections of twenty-one art museums, globally (Cappelli, 2003-2014, p. /EN/resources_links.htm). Additionally, his work was exhibited at the highly respected and influential Gagosian Gallery in 2009 and then again in 2011-2012. (Gagosian Gallery, 2009; Gagosian Gallery, 2011) Charles Ives was a bit luckier in that he lived to see his work accepted and recognized before he died in 1954. His success was a slow burn; it took decades to garner support and collect advocates from the established art world.

Even before his death in 1954, Charles Ives commanded an unusual, almost cultlike following. ... Ives emerged from his self-imposed but necessary exile, gaining wider admiration that peaked with the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize in 1947 ... Having proven the value of his work decades after it was first conceived, Ives's reputation ... was secured and his years in isolation and neglect vindicated. (Magee, 2008, pp. 1-2)

The careers of Ives and Manzoni are examples of the maverick role as described in *Art Worlds* and illustrate the parallel existence that they have to the Artworld. Becker describes this relationship as follows:

Mavericks are sufficiently near to art world practice and sufficiently interested in calling the attention of the art world to what they do, that art worlds sometimes eventually incorporate their work, assimilating them after the fact of what they have done rather than during its making (Becker, 1982, 2008, pp. 367-368).

2.4 Integrated Professionals. According to Becker, this group has four (4) characteristics. First they have "the technical abilities, social skills, and conceptual apparatus necessary to make art" (p. 229). An integrated professional "would cause no trouble for anyone who had to cooperate with him, and his work would find large and responsive audiences" (p. 229). Second, although this type of artist knows the conventions, this knowledge does not guarantee an easy life. This group is often overworked. For example, Becker points out that a "composer of a film score may have to produce eighty or ninety minutes of music, meeting complicated technical specifications as well as creating an intangible but important mood, in six weeks" (p. 230). Third, they work within a collective practice of challenges and resolutions to those challenges. This is essential because it facilitates the cooperation needed to support the making of art; "no art world would continue to exist without a ready supply of people capable of turning out its characteristic products" (p. 230). It is significant to note that these professionals are truly *integrated* in that once this status has been achieved they become a part of the supply that is used to "fill the slots" (p. 231) within the distribution system run by art organizations. This blurs the line between the individual artist and the art world and leads us to the fourth characteristic: the production of large quantities of artworks. While individual artists generally do produce prolifically, the distribution system encourages many artists to produce many works so that it may single out exceptional works for preservation. The interest in the distribution and preservation of the work is the relationship between the "Artworld" (Danto, 1964) and the integrated professional. This mutually beneficial affiliation makes it possible for both of them to exist.

3. Finding Corresponding Game World Equivalents

I begin, as Becker did, with explaining the conventions and boundaries of the integrated professional game designer. I then move on to the developers that left lives as integrated professionals to break free from the conventions: the mavericks of the Gameworld.

Next, I explore the game makers that exist between the Gameworld and a pragmatic game world who have applied games for a purpose in the same way as folk artists who also have a practical use for art production techniques. Lastly, I find and discuss game developers in a naive game world. These game makers are working in isolation and their work is naive in comparison with the other three groups in the Gameworld.

3.1 Game World Integrated Professionals. This group is comprised of game designers who, as in the Artworld, exhibit the same four (4) characteristics. First, they have the technical and conceptual apparatus to make games. Their games are distributed through mainstream channels and widely marketed. Further evidence of their skill is found in the abundance of game design books written by these professionals (e.g. Schell, 2008; Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2008; Rouse III, 2004). Second, they work hard just as their art world colleagues do (e.g. Wimmer & Sitnikova, 2012). Studies show that there is a "long hours culture and the potential need to relocate" (Prescott & Bogg, 2011, para.1) within this sector. This group fulfills the third characteristic in that they know and follow the established conventions for game design. For example, this group accepts the norm that their games are for entertainment (e.g. Aarseth, 2012, para. 3; Segal & Koleva, 2014, p. 181). Additionally, these professionals are aware of the game sales market through services like the NPD Group (2015) and The ESA (2014). Like the Artworld professionals, this group is also truly *integrated*. The Board of Directors for the International Game Developer's Association (IGDA, 1994-2014, p. /?page=board) either have or are currently working for established game companies that produce "AAA" titles. Greg Donovan of *Volition, Inc* defines this rank of game as, "a game that exceeds sales projections and is critically acclaimed due to a number of factors like originality, innovation, visuals, immersion, etc. and overall leaves most players with a fun, compelling, and memorable gaming experience" (Evans-Thirlwell, 2012, para.5). The members of this group are also sensitive to critics and the effect that reviews have on sales. One article states:

Key figures in the game industry have made no secret of their concern with the scores assigned by Metacritic to games with which they have been involved...(Greenwood-Ericksen, et al., 2013, para. 4).

Ken Rolston is an integrated professional in the Gameworld. He started his career designing pen and paper Role Playing Games (RPGs) in 1982. In a recent interview (Rolston, 2014) he cites his involvement with the second edition of *Paranoia* (Costikyan, 1995-2013, p. /ludograf.html). After 12 years in the table top industry, he moved on to be the lead designer on several commercially successful and award-winning role-playing video games, including but not limited to: *Elder Scrolls: Morrowind* (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2002-2014, p. /morrowind/; Waggoner, 2009, p. 57), *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* (p. /oblivion/; JKDMedia, 2007, para. 3), and *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2012-2014, para. 1; Moriarty, 2012, para. 4). Further proof of Rolston's standing as a game world integrated professional is found in his willingness to share his challenges and resolutions to help other game designers. His approach to game design has been the subject of industry magazine articles (e.g. Horn, 2014; Remo, 2009; Rolston, 2014). Rolston continues to be a sought-after game design consultant and, like his art world counterparts, is one of the few that the game community uses to "fill the slots" when there is a game design opportunity. Substantiation of this phenomenon is found in the written accounts in industry magazines every time he changes his place of employment (Rose, 2014; Haas, 2014; Handrahan, 2014). Rolston's authority and standing goes beyond the game industry, as his games have also informed game studies and are used in many academic papers (e.g. Schröder, 2008; Bresciani, et al., 2010; Quijano-Cruz, 2011; Lankoski, 2011; Bateman, 2014). *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* has also been the subject of at least one study (Martin, 2011).

The relationship between the Gameworld and the integrated professional is like the Artworld in one aspect: the interest in the distribution of the work. This interest creates a mutually beneficial affiliation that makes it possible for the required sales. The sales, whether considered a successful number or not, create the space where the publishing/distribution apparatus and the game designer can co-exist.

3.2 Game World Mavericks. In the Gameworld there are game designers who have become dissatisfied with the constraints demanded by the conventions of that world. One such game maker is Chris Crawford. Like every maverick, he knows all of the expectations of the game world but finds them too limiting. In particular, he saw games as vulgar shooting experiences and railed against this limitation in the 1980s.

Games became more common and more vulgar in the process," he says. "I fought that trend as hard as I could. I tried to make games with a message, or with ideas: political, social, personal, artist [sic] — anything other than the mindless shoot 'em ups. But I was fighting a losing battle (Parkin, 2013, para. 49)

Crawford has been publicly proposing innovations that the conventional game world has been having difficulty accepting since his 1992 "The Dragon Speech" delivered at the Game Developer Conference that year (Crawford, 1992; Magitem, 2014). Not surprisingly, like Charles Ives in the Artworld, Crawford met with hostility in the Gameworld. Crawford speaks of an inauspicious review of "Balance of the Planet," perhaps the one from "Compute" in 1991 (Mann, 1991, p. 90), as "most unflattering" (Crawford, 2003, p. 447). This game, his first "educational simulation" (Crawford, 2012, para. 1), was a realization of his dream:

...of the day when computer games would be a viable medium of artistic expression. An art form! I dreamed of computer games encompassing the broad range of human experience and emotion (Crawford, 1992; Magitem, 2014, para. 16).

Aki Järvinen made a point in 2002, ten years after Crawford's public break with the commercial game world, that "Crawford's effort has not found its way into general discourse, maybe because Crawford's visions...haven't rang true" (Järvinen, 2002, para. 4). Another study comments on the effects the rejection of his ideas have had on the lack of growth in games:

...commercial interests inhibiting creativity in videogame production may be interpreted as symptoms of a more ... vital problem which performs an obstructive function in diverse spheres of ... creative activities. If Crawford's (1984) prediction of videogames as a powerful new art form is to be realized it arguably may require a more critical appreciation of certain elements of games creation which would seem, at this point to be misunderstood (Murray & Maher, 2011, para. 2).

In addition to opposition from the commercial game sector, antagonism from individual gamers at large continues. In a game forum one participant admits, "I had a hostile reaction when reading *Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling*" (Aerothorn, 2009, para. 10).

Chris Crawford's rebellion on the basis of creative freedom opened the door for a whole generation of mavericks producing art games. (e.g. Rohrer, 2007; Humble, n.d., *The Games meaning*, para.2). Tracy Fullerton and Bill Viola created a game mechanic for enlightenment in the game "The Night Journey" termed *reflection*. "When players choose to reflect, the world 'transforms' under their gaze. Reflecting also transforms the player, though they may not realize this immediately" (Fullerton, 2009, p. 6). It is an important discovery that because of art games placement between the Artworld and the Gameworld, and their intention to break free of Gameworld conventions; art games are not serious games as previously thought (e.g. Breuer & Bente, 2010, pp. 8,16).

Creative freedom is not the only reason game makers turn away from the established Gameworld. Developers who are also looking to exercise greater control over their workload and reap greater profits from the sales of what they create. They "want to stay small and keep it all" (McAllister & Ruggill, 2010). One example of such a venture is the game company 2D Boy. Ron Carmel and Kyle Gabler left jobs at Electronic Arts to start the company. In their own words, they are an "indie game studio based in San Francisco, making games the old fashioned way - a team of two, a few ideas, and a whole lot of 'love'" (Carmel & Gabler, 2007-2014, p. /about.php). This small game company made "World of Goo," which explores "themes of corporate greed, pollution and frivolous excess" (Gelugon_baat, 2013, para. 7) in the game play. 2D Boy also provides a correlation with the artist of the maverick sort, in that; they too, have turned to alternative venues. In the game world, this means digital distribution via the internet. Additionally, they are a part of a founding group for Indie Fund, which is "a funding source for independent developers, created by a group of successful indies looking to encourage the next wave of game developers. It was established as a serious alternative to the traditional publisher funding model" (Indie Fund, 2010-2014, p. /about).

The relationship of these maverick game developers with recognized publishers mirrors one analogous to their counterparts in art with the Artworld's established galleries and museums. Sometimes assimilating into that world is possible. If these independent game developers prove to be commercially viable, a door will open for them. Two cases in point are 2D Boy's "World of Goo" availability on the Wii (Carmel & Gabler, 2007-2014, p. /games.php) and Jonathan Blow's distribution of his independently developed platformer "Braid" on the Xbox Live Arcade (Blow, 2008-2014). The mavericks that distribute their games in this way have returned to the Gameworld.

3.3 Community Game Makers. I propose that the work of people making games to fulfill a pragmatic need, such as education or social change, be classified as community games. These game makers reside between the Gameworld and a game world. The intention of purpose correlates community games with folk art in the art world. I have used the term "community" instead of "serious" because educational and serious games, while related, do not always have the same end. Educational games are concerned with pedagogical goals, whereas serious games are intended to be useful to a population, with goals such as public policy development or pain management. There may or may not be an instructional component in a serious game, whereas an educational game, always has a pedagogical goal. The article "Why so serious? On the Relation of Serious Games and Learning" maps out these nuances (Breuer & Bente, 2010).

This is where the correlation that community games have with folk art ends. Community games are different from folk art in these ways. First, folk art includes no reference to its maker(s) because individual recognition is not a concern. In community games, it is always known who the maker of the game is because these games are often found in academia and attribution of credit is a currency in these circles. Knowing the maker brands these games as they make their way through alternative distribution venues (e.g. GlassLab, Inc., 2014-2015; Flanagan, 2008-2015). A second attribute -- that folk artists have more understanding of formal skills needed for the execution of the work than they can articulate -- is also not shared with this community. Community game makers publish and lecture frequently about the games they make, as well as about related research. There are several conferences devoted to serious and educational games (e.g. Serious Games Association, 2009-2015; Games For Change, 2003-2015; GLS Center, 2003-2015). Many national conferences have "summits" or "tracks" dedicated to community games (e.g. GDC UBM Tech, 2015; ACM SIGGRAPH, 2015). There are peer-reviewed journals in which these researchers publish their findings (e.g. Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab, 2006-2015; Game Studies Foundation, 2000-2015; Sage Publishing, 2005-2015; Digital Culture & Education, 2008-2015; Routledge, 2008-2015). There are many books that have been published by this group (e.g. Flanagan, 2013; Sicart, 2011; Kapp, 2012; McGonigal, 2011). A third feature that folk artists display that community game makers do not is intergenerational effort. For community game makers, a professional affiliation with assembled teams takes the place of the familial social structure of folk artists.

The relationship of community game makers with the Gameworld is contentious. Evidence of this is found in the magazine feature titled "We're Not Listening: An Open Letter to Academic Game Researchers" (Hopson, 2006) that was rebutted by the journal article "Letter from the Wilderness" (Mullen, 2009). Another piece of evidence is the #GamerGate movement. In response to criticism and feedback that depictions of characters were homophobic, racist, and sexist this movement lashed out with personal threats against female video game critics and popular game journalists (e.g. Olson, 2014; Clickhole, 2014; Grant, 2014). Academics and professional game organizations responded with open letters to condemn the actions of the movement, provide harassment resources, and to reiterate the values of inclusion and integrity. (e.g. Fullerton, 2014; DiGRA, 2014; Lantz, 2014; IGDA, 2014)

3.4 Naïve Game Makers. In an art world naïve art exhibits a childlike visual aesthetic and a lack of sophisticated illusory space, which causes it to be referred to as "primitive" in nature. When looking for a game world equivalent, I found that there are games that adopted gameplay of existing games, or whose in-game goals and/or gameplay were unclear to the player. Sometimes these characteristics are accompanied by less than sophisticated graphics. Frequently these games have less than refined programming; these are experienced as "buggy" games. These games can be found outside of the established Gameworld but occasionally will be found within that community.

One game that has sophistication in graphics and concept but has issues with programming and communicating gameplay is "Blueberry Garden" (Svedäng, 2009). The frequency of the game crashing during gameplay and the lack of clear instructions to overcome difficult obstacles are the features which earn it the classification of naïve. Additionally, reviews are mixed and some players express frustration with what they perceive as a lack of gameplay (Metacritic, 2009-2012).

A second example of a naïve game is "Close Up Art Card Game" (Birdcage Press, n.d.). There is no evident release date which shows a naïveté of Gameworld conventions. This product includes versions of the games "Old Maid" and "Memory" graphically skinned with famous Art works. It does not explore game mechanics on its own terms. This is evidence that it was produced by game makers who have not been traditionally trained in game design and know very little about games as a medium. It is distributed online and through art museum gift shops.

This venture is very similar to naïve artists who produce works for broad appeal and profit such as Thomas Kinkade (Kinkade, n.d.-2015) or Anne Geddes (Geddes, 1988-2015)

The relationship that naïve game makers have with the established Gameworld mirrors that of naïve artists in so far as there is not much of a relationship. In the world of integrated professional, games have a high profit and are distributed with making money in mind. In contrast, most naïve games are distributed by a single developer for personal reasons, and do not realize the profit that the established game world enjoys. Game makers that adopt and skin existing games for profit have the goal of making money in common with integrated Gameworld professionals. However, these products are distributed in venues not associated with the established Gameworld.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that Howard Becker's institutional theory of art can be applied to understand and discover the structure of production and reception of games in the Gameworld. (Figure 2) Specifically, it shows that the circumstances and conventions of the integrated professional game designer are very similar to the corresponding art professional. It also uncovers that maverick game designers share much in common with maverick artists. This study reveals a surprising new look at art games. Their makers belong to a game world separate from educational and serious games. Since art games are borne from dissatisfaction with the conventions in the integrated professional Gameworld, their attitude marks them as mavericks. Serious and educational games, meanwhile, serve a pragmatic pedagogical purpose, and this categorizes their makers as community game makers with their equivalent in the art world being folk artists. Lastly, this study exposes that naïve game makers are very much like naïve artists. In particular, naïve game makers create games in isolation for personal reasons as Henry Darger did, or create superficial games that appeal to a broad audience to make a profit similar to the work of Thomas Kinkade.

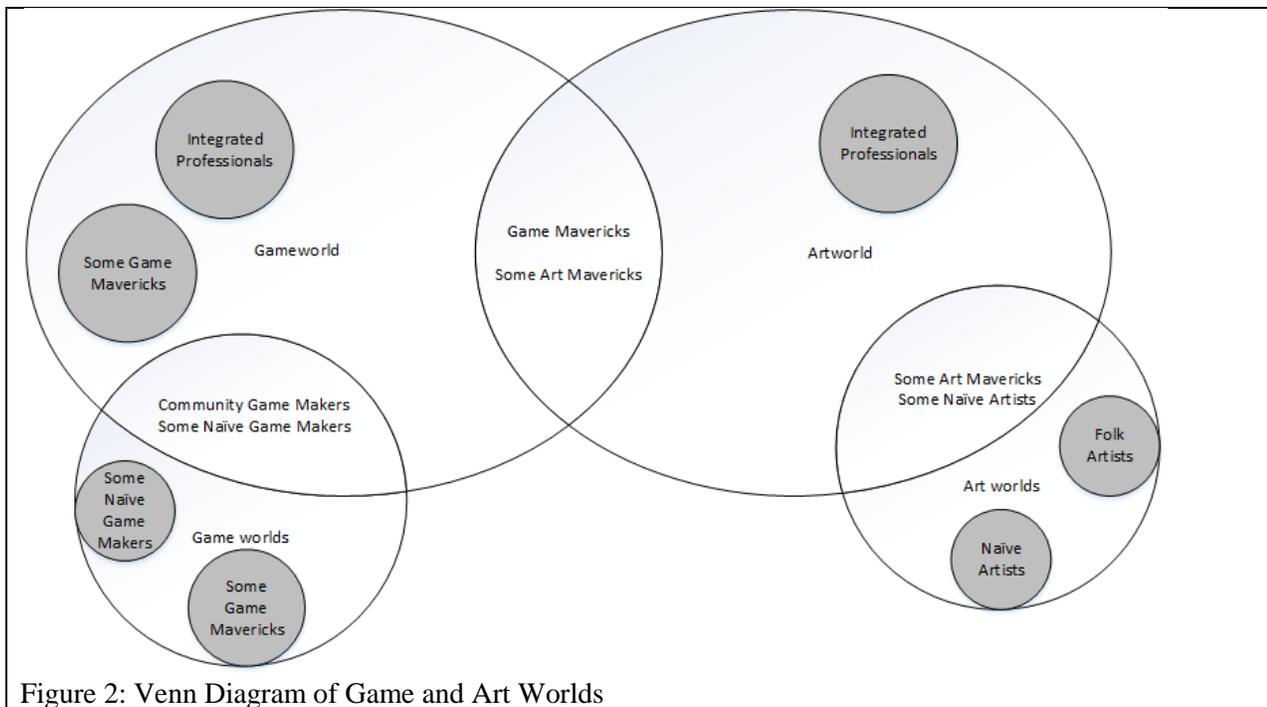


Figure 2: Venn Diagram of Game and Art Worlds

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