

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM
BUILDING BOARD GAMES**

by

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Abstract

Back in 2001, when I created my first board game I approached it naïvely, using *Game and Play Theories* by instinct and dragging from my early memories all the knowledge and feelings I gathered as a child related to games and reflected them in my board game. For my dissertation, six years later after the creation of that first game, I explored those same topics with a keen mind, fully aware of the capacity within my art pieces and eager to apply their social potential. In the process, I learned to dissect games and understand its parts and how they related to culture, education and the potential that board games have to influence society. In this essay I described the elements that I faced and applied while creating new board games and some of the outcomes that came from participants who played my games when I was in the process of gathering information for my dissertation. I conclude with my vision of what can games can accomplish if they where introduced as a common practice in schools.

Introduction.

Novels may activate your imagination, and music may conjure up powerful emotions, but games force you to decide, to choose, to prioritize. (Johnson, 2006, p. 41)

I made my first board game *Crossing the Bridge*, in 2001, after the 9/11 attack to the World Trade Center. In that first version, I wanted to denounce the excessive time that it was taking to cross the international ports of entry from México into the U.S. In the game, just like in life, the player took forever to cross the international line and this resulted in continuous frustration. The board game was a representation of cultural theories and discourses about the border and border-related issues that are important to explore in depth (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1999; Del Castillo, 1990; Gómez-Peña, 1993). I knew I had made something interesting, something important, but I never got to work on the deep topics that the game was representing. Back in 2001, I acted naïvely, using *Game and Play Theories* by instinct and dragging from my early memories all the knowledge and feelings I gathered as a child related to games and reflected them in *Crossing the Bridge*. For my dissertation, six years later after my first game, I explored those same topics with a keen mind, fully aware of the capacity within my art pieces and eager to apply their social potential.

Throughout my dissertation, my main intention was to talk about immigration and the issues surrounding the U.S.-Mexican border. To date, these topics have been presented in the form of essays, art, propaganda, or political demonstrations, among others. But early in my research I started to formulate a few questions: How can we talk about these topics if we ignore the process that is generating the conflicts? How can we initiate a dialogue, face each other without confronting, expose the issues without placing blame, or visualize the “other’s point of view?” I then visualized that some board games will encourage people to talk about their

experiences (or lack of experience) with the topic, receiving information back from other players that might have a different view on the subject. I want the players to question the situation on the border, feel curious about the system that works on both sides of the frontier, and inquire about the people that are directly affected by the politics of two nations that do not want to, or seem to not want to, find a solution to a very serious conflict. And furthermore, I want to create interest in border issues in order to promote social justice and awareness.

In 1597, the game of *Goose*, a race game based on luck and not strategy, was used as a cautionary technique to “teach moral lessons to children” (Provenzo & Provenzo, 1981, p. 20). Also, the popular games of *Uncle Sam at War With Spain* or *Roosevelt at San Juan* in the late 1890s, which allowed the player be the protagonists of the then recent war between Spain and the U.S., promoted the ideology of American Imperialism (Hofer, 2003). But we do not need to go back that far since the perfect model of a capitalist society was established in 1935 with *Monopoly*®, a game that preceded the economic domination of Western culture. If theories can be imbedded within games and games can influence players in these ways, if in the past people were able to learn about social morals, supremacy in war, and greed with the use of “simple” games, then I can attempt to use the same mechanics, the same technology, to teach players about hybridism, injustice, equality, and regional lifestyles: in other words, I can use games to teach about borders and *borderism*. In order to accomplish this I had to learn what games were made of. This essay is a description of my findings while engaging in the process of building board games.

Part II: Why Board Games?

The research and study of board games could be seen as a “dead science” for many, especially now that a well-developed, digitally interactive media has found “videogames” to be a very prolific market. There have not been extensive studies in the area of board games. Researchers have sporadically appeared and disappeared, leaving a legacy that few have systematically followed (e.g. Bell, 1979; Sales & Zimmerman, 2004). I have had a difficult time finding material, especially new material. During the research process, I have found canonic works like *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga, 1949), *Man, Play, and Games* (Caillois, 1961), *The Oxford History of Board Games* (Parlett, 1999), *Finite and Infinite Games* (Carse, 1986), and the one that I consider the most important of all, *The Study of Games* (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971), to list a few.

Interest has been sporadic throughout decades, for example in the early 1970s, there was a rebirth of interest in games and board games in the U.S. For example, the *New Games Foundation* organized by Stewart Brand in San Francisco, decided to promote and initiate interest in collaborative games. In *The New Games Book* (Fluegelman, 1976), reads:

Pacifists and war resisters in 1966 were opposed to warfare in any form, including competitive games. To test that opposition, Stewart designed a game that would give lots of opportunity to express aggression. (p. 8)

The *Anthropological Association for the Study of Play (TASP)*, created in 1988, became an interdisciplinary place for scholars interested in the study of play. In Europe, the *International Society for Board Game Studies (BGS)*, “an interdisciplinary group dedicated to research on board games and the history and development of board games around the world” (www.boardgamestudies.info, 1990, para. 1) has been organizing yearly colloquiums in three

different continents since 1995. In my opinion, BGS is the organization that has made the strongest effort to continue the research and understanding of board games.

Unfortunately, all these attempts have been discouraged by the digital outburst of the early 1980s. The digital medium has become so invasive to the study of play that much of the language once used to express the research of “physical games” has been appropriated into the language of the digital counterpart. For example, the word “gaming,” once a slang word that meant the act of someone playing, is now directly associated to people that play digital games. Even in some cases, the term “Game Theory” has been strongly related to the creation and use of digital games. This transition is not universal; it is mostly being done in the U.S. and, with a vengeance, in Japan (Kelly, 2007; Sinclair, 2007). I confess that I also began my research on games through digital avenues, but soon I discovered another area of study that has become marginalized: board games. By studying board games, I fell in love with the potential that this medium offers.

According to Stoll & Inbar (1970), “Games have been predicted to induce virtually every individual and social skill imaginable,” and it is my belief that board games still have something to offer an audience that is now used to the immediacy of digital technology (p. 374). Key elements board games offer are face-to-face interaction and increased socialization, skills that seem to be limited by the individualistic approach taken by high technology societies and their educational methods that teach isolation and alienation (Goffman, 1967; Johnson, 2006). For the present moment, video games have taken the initiative to evolve and generate a multiplayer experience superior to the one that any gamer could have had in the last three decades; still the capacity of computer games has not been able to reach or simulate the experience of board games (Gibson, Aldrich & Prensky, 2007). Zagal, Nussbaum, & Rosas (2000) concluded that

“although the vast majority of games played all over the world are collective in nature, practically all electronic games are individual” (p. 448). I am interested in face-to-face interaction, which has been described by Goffman (1959) as “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence” (p. 15). In relation to board games, the game itself mediates the face-to-face interaction. It becomes the intermediary and center of the interaction, something that might or might not occur with videogames.

Part III: Games Dissected

Through the process of game exploration, I reached the conclusion that games are not metaphors of culture but are instead an output or result of culture. Wolf-Meyer & Heckman state that “games are much more than games; they are ways of seeing, of socializing, of subjectivizing” (p. 1). Consider chess, for example: in this game, the inclusion of the Queen as a central piece in the game happened to be because, in a certain time period, many of the most important kingdoms and/or empires were being ruled by women (Yalom, 2005). It was necessary to include the Queen in order to maintain cultural accuracy. I also deduce that the cultural outputs in the form of board games can induce interest in the players as long as they assist with the recognition or discovery of identities through which the player can project emotions and fantasies. These identities could be strong enough to initiate interaction. In other words, the form and presentation of the game, the stories behind it, and the appeal of it become starting points that capture the attention of the player but do not guarantee continuous interaction. It is developing the game’s activity that determines if the player wishes to remain in the game.

The particular interaction between the game object and the players who engage in the action of play or gaming made me wonder: what is in a game that makes it a “game”? After researching many games, their cultural environments, time periods, and rules, I reached the following conclusions that I think would be important to add to the scholarship on *Play Theory* (Pellegrini, 1995):

- a. **Games represent thorough abstraction.** By this I mean that the game itself might be the abstraction of a story, a history, a religion, or an activity. Within the physicality of the game, there are abstracted pieces that stand for something in particular. As I mentioned earlier, in the game of GO the black and white marbles represent the yin and the yang; in Western *Chess*, political and military forces from the middle ages are being represented by six different pieces; in the modern game of *Battleship*®, each player has small plastic naval figurines, an armada abstracted.
- b. **Games have a mechanics that determines the game’s activity.** The mechanics takes the form of a question: “what do I need to do in the game in order to play it right?” In serpents and ladders (or chutes and ladders), the mechanic is very simple: all the player needs to do is to throw a die or a pair of dice, letting fate decide where his or her piece will move. The twist in the game is that if the piece lands in a ladder, it should move upwards accordingly, or if the piece lands on a snake, the player will move backwards. Other games can also have a simple mechanics but can become very complicated such as *Othello* or *Chinese Checkers*.
- c. **Games have a goal.** Through the use of the mechanics, the player tries to reach the desired goal in order to win or achieve a conclusion. For example, in *Clue*®, the goal is

to find out “who did it” before anyone else in the game; in *Stratego*®, the goal is to reach your opponent’s flag before he or she finds yours.

In addition to the three elements that I just described, we need to take into account two factors that, throughout history and across cultures, have been taken as the distinctive factors that divide games: strategy and chance. Roger Caillois (1961) calls these two factors *agôn* and *alea* respectively. *Agôn* is the capacity within the player(s) like speed, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc., and *alea* are the external forces that can influence the performance of the player(s) or the outcome of the game, such as luck, magic, destiny, or fortune, to name a few.

Archeologically, there is evidence that points to race games as the first types of board games that ever existed (Murray, 1951); a crucial mechanism of those games was the inclusion of chance, for example the *Royal Game of Ur* and *Senet* (Falkener, 1961). As games’ mechanisms evolved, becoming more strategic in nature, chance in games started to be seen as inappropriate because it could be historically traced back to divination and because such games encouraged gambling (Pennick, 1997; Craig, 2002). For these reasons, games that incorporated some elements of chance were prohibited and banned (Phillips, 2006; Yalom, 2004). As with many other activities, strategy games, like *Chess*, *Go* and some types of *Mancala*, were masculinized and prohibited to women (Craig, 2002; Yalom, 2004) since women were often considered inferior and of an uncontrollable nature similar to fortune or chance (Guerrilla-Girls, 1998; Pennick, 1997).

Caillois (1961) states:

In contrast to *agôn*, *alea* negates work, patience, experience, and qualifications [...] It grants the lucky players infinitely more than he could procure by a lifetime of labor, discipline and fatigue [...] It seems an insolent and sovereign insult to merit. (p.17)

Although historically there has been an interest in separating the strategy games, the “real games,” from games based on chance, there is little to be said about the success of this process. And even despite the separation that Caillois ascribes, in my experience of game playing, I have seen that chance never ceases to be a part of a game. Never. Not even in those games considered purely strategic like *Chess*, or *Go*. The division, to me, is in reality a gradual addition of chance, recalling that chance is all the external force affecting the gamers or the game’s outcome. On one side, we can include the games already mentioned where, in reality, chance has a role in determining the state of the players that day, their mood or their mental freshness, all of which can affect their performance. On the other extreme, we have games that depend entirely on chance like the game of *Goose* or *Snakes and Ladders* where there is no room for strategy at all. It seems to me that although chance has a minor or total participation in the games, strategy is the one that can be incorporated or omitted. As a middle ground, we have games that combine the elements in different gradations; for example, *Backgammon* is a game that requires the ability of the player and depends upon the throw of the dice. Similarly, the games of *Parcheesi*®, *Monopoly*®, *Clue*® or *Risk*® also incorporate both strategy and chance elements. Card games depend entirely on both aspects as well, and players rely on luck to get an appropriate hand to play with while simultaneously maneuvering their cards for their benefit.

Chance, whatever shape or form it might take, is an essential element of life; it follows us and affects us whether we want it to or not. Returning to the topic of the International border and immigration, which is the basis of my games, it is by luck that a person might be able to cross the border illegally without being caught: precaution and luck. It is by luck that someone might get caught when crossing drugs: bad arrangement and luck. For this reason, I have created my games to keep in mind the reasoning that I just presented and have included both factors. You, as the

player, have decisions to make, but the action of chance always lingers. All of my games use dice to determine moves, merchandise, and decisions. It is the combination of these two factors that give the games their final likeness to real life, becoming the appropriate outcomes of culture: determination is what pushes the player to generate a strategy, and chance is the flavor that makes the game interesting.

Because games are an outcome of culture and cultures change through time, the abstraction of the game can potentially lose its representative meaning or might be changed by other cultures that embrace it. In relation to the mechanics and goal, similar things could happen: depending on time and culture, these elements might be changed. What is clear to me is that all three combined elements (abstraction, mechanics and goal) create a tangible game experience. A good abstraction creates interest; a good mechanics maintains the interest; a good goal forces the player to end the game and afterwards might make the player want to play again.

Part IV: The Promoting Capacity of Board Games

In their research, Avedon & Sutton-Smith (1971) have found that due to their capacity to promote interaction while presenting directed information to the players or participants, games have the capacity to teach complex material that normally might not be retained. Games' potential for educational success is thanks to the inclusion of interpersonal experience in the learning process. For these reasons, I propose promoting interaction through **socially based board games** and presenting social topics in a way that keeps people interested and involved. I strongly believe that board games have the potential to effectively present the same academic issues as written forms such as articles, essays, or books. It is not my intention to replace such materials. Using this medium (the games), it is my purpose to introduce a new audience to the

topics of the border and immigration, with any luck, encourage them to continue nurturing the knowledge they gained through conventional forms, such as books.

In 2006, when I began to think about the benefits of games and how to proceed with my dissertation, I envisioned a movement, a call for artists to “stop making non interactive art and break the wall between the art object and the passive viewer” (ludoztli.com/about.html), I called this movement “ludoztli” which I translate as “making games.” In the ludoztli.com (2006) manifesto, I wrote:

In this movement, games cease to be purely recreational objects and become active art. Anyone who wants to express an opinion, make a social statement, or to declare an injustice can approach it this way. I expect that the game-art, the ludoztli product, will place the viewer in the eye of the hurricane, transforming him/her from a simple viewer into an active participant, into a socially aware gamer. With ludoztli I intend to promote interaction: action and reaction. Board games will lead the way! (para. 4)

Gaming interaction is the key to social awareness. It is hard to make a game, but the benefits multiply, and it opens a new window of options on how to teach and how to learn. Our tools of learning are becoming more and more individualistic. Consider reading, for example, think about how far in the practice of reading the person leaves behind the interaction of group reading and becomes isolated (Johnson, 2006). While by making board games in the spirit of the ludoztli manifesto, the following benefits are realized:

- The student (or person designing the game) exercises his or her mental capacities of imagination, projection, abstraction and cognitive association.

- The designer researches and explores the social topics that he or she wants to display in the games, exposing the designer to social awareness, cultural understanding, or self-exploration and evaluation.
- The designer practices his or her writing and reading skills in the creation of game rules. And because the feedback will be tangible when players of his or her games try to understand them, the designer will appreciate the importance of clear expression via writing.
- The designer manufactures the product, exercising his or her artistic capacities of craftsmanship in many disciplines: modeling, drawing, painting, sculpting, cutting and pasting, or even photographing.
- The designer tests the product, engaging in social interaction by presenting the game to others. In this way, the designer will be challenged by critique and understand the importance of modification.

It is my opinion that the result will be a product where the designer invites others to explore its life. In this case, for example, the creator of the game is not just giving us a picture of her life, or a description of her house, but it is inviting us inside, or placing us in her shoes. I see the creation and design of social board games as the ultimate design project, where all skills and capacities are implemented and the projection of visions and ideas become palpable. I see with enthusiasm the reaction of students, educators, and friends when they see the possibility of creating their own games within their reach.

Part V: Applying What Was Learned

In my case, through the construction of my board games, I am making the games present pieces of realities just as I have experienced them in a life nearly known and mostly misunderstood: the Mexican-U.S. border life, my hybrid life. The games are my way of talking; they are my narrative. Though they offer different narrative from a painting, a song, a book, or a speech, through these board games, I feel I can disseminate what would be hard to express in words or in writing. According to Betty S. Flowers (2003), “remembering a story is not the same as experimenting with it and imagining alternatives” (p. 31). In the process of trying to find a way of telling my stories, I asked myself the same question that she proposed in her writings: how can the scenario be made more memorable? My solution was the creation of board games that I expect will create an immediate and multilayered discussion. At the same time, I intend to benefit from the interaction between my players. I want to hear them talk about the border and immigration; I want to know how much they think they know about these issues; I want them to discover things behind their political positions. It is my expectation that, through the dynamic play, players will reveal the truths hidden in their hearts exposed by their competitive souls, the gaming soul, and I hope that game play will liberate the truth that I will be taking and transforming it into the core knowledge that I use for my research.

The methodology for this is based on the notion of *The Metagame* as defined by Richard Garfield (2000). To him, metagame refers to “how games interfaces with life” (para. 5). In other words, “*metagaming* refers to the relationships of a game to elements outside of the game” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 489). Garfield’s metagame is divided into four categories (para. 7):

- **What a player brings to a game:** This translates to the cultural background, personal histories, experiences, ethnography, and personal racial affiliations that each player will bring to the game sessions.
- **What a player takes from a game:** This refers to the player's personal analysis of the games, the issues presented (i.e., immigration and the border), the interaction with other players, and thoughts given during the final conversations.
- **What happens between games:** This category consists of conversations during the set up between one game and the next.
- **What happens during a game other than the game itself:** This category refers to the interaction between players and conversations during the games.

In summary, the games that I designed to use as illustration of socially based board games contain the following components: (1) exemplification of life in the border and illustration of immigration issues related to the use of the border as a passageway from México into the U.S., (2) autobiographical material extracted from my experiences, and (3) the application of theories focused on the *Methodology of the Oppressed* as practical means to understand equality (Sandoval, 2000). In other words, I locate players in the Mexican-U.S. border environment and create realistic outcomes for the life in the border and border-related issues; I expect that information will be transmitted through the players' active participation. The games are based on three different and commonly stereotyped scenarios: smuggling merchandise, illegal immigration, and the process for legal status in the U.S. Each game has a different game mechanics that allows the players a very dynamic variation on role-play. All games are bilingual, in Spanish and English (which presented a challenge for the creation of the rule's booklets), but I believe it better reflects the hybrid culture on the border.

Part VI: Resistance to Play

I have mentioned before in this dissertation that some people might consider the study of board games to be dead science. Personally, I have been confronted by some who would prefer to see a digital version of my games rather than try to understand why I research board games and why I bother to design them. In my research I have encountered some players that noted that board games are related to their early youth activities and now, although they talk about some games in a nostalgic way, they lost the enthusiasm about playing with board games. I can not blame them, instead, I blame an industry that has infantilized board games and cannot evolve from games created 30, 40 or even 50 years ago. My players view those games nostalgically because that is what they are in America: nostalgia items. They are objects encapsulated in time by the toy industry and bought out of nostalgia by parents for their children. Regardless of their outdated capacities, these games still function as objects that promote interaction and socialization, serving as stepping-stones for other, more evolved, games, and constitute —according to Bailyn in *Education in the Form of American Society*— a “process by which a culture transmits itself across generations” (as cited in Wallace-Adams & Edmonds, 1977). Sadly, board game mechanisms, or probably the topics displayed on them, no longer attract many gamers’ interest. How it is possible then that players in my research sessions, who since childhood have abandoned the interactivity of board games, have experienced so much enjoyment by participating in an experiment based on board games? To answer part of the question, I think it was the feeling of communion, association, and a deep connection that it is necessary for human beings as social creatures that we are (Boyd, 1938). According to Kelly-Byrne (1983) “there is a

close relationship between social play and intimacy,” something that, as I mentioned before, videogames cannot yet replicate (p. 160).

I admit that from the beginning there was certain skepticism on the part of the players involved in my research sessions; you could feel a type of aversion, and I almost thought that they were going to leave before even starting. I do believe they were drawn to the game sessions by curiosity about the topic, but they stayed because of the mechanisms of the games. Furthermore, I believe that players enjoyed the experience because of the aims of the games and because of the interaction that the games facilitated. The games that I designed for these events had “challenging mechanisms” and topics that interested my audience. My games worked on a level that can be appealing and interesting to an advanced audience, beyond the over-used mechanics of “who gets there first” common in commercial games like *Trouble*®, *Sorry*®, and *Candy Land*®, among others.

One might have the impression that we lose the capacity to play games because there is a stigma that says that there is something childish about playing games (Johnson, 2006). Instead, I think that, as we grow up, we lose the taste of playing games made for children after surpassing that developmental stage, and as grownups, we learn that there are little or no board gaming options available. Not all of us enjoy chess or canasta, both considered “adult games,” and not everyone can meet the demanding requirements of some digital games. This begs the question: where and what are the “grownup” games? In some instances, Mr. Yehuda Berlinger, a well known *bloger* in the world of game and gamers has said that *Euro games* like *Settlers of Catan*®, *Puerto Rico*®, *Ticket to Ride*® and some other blockbuster hits are the next evolution of challenging board games since they require the skills of an older audience (Haynes, 2006).

In these cases, “the skill” that Berlinger is referring to is the capacity of the players to deal with the game’s mechanics like exchange, deceit, alliances, and visualization of future outcomes. However, there are other games that concentrate on the maturity of the topic rather than the mechanics, like trivia games (e.g., *Scene It*®, *Trivia Pursuit*®, *Jeopardy*®, etc.) that assume the players will have to be a certain age in order to recall aspects of culture [1]. Trivia games are one of the oldest types of games in the industrialization era, and they can be very entertaining as long as one person does not dominate the entire game (Hofer, 2003). By experience, I can say that these games also tend to be intimidating to some people because they require specific knowledge of a topic.

Based on the spirit of trivia games, one of the youngest and most popular companies of board games around, *Cranium*®, has developed a series of games that appeal to old and young audiences simultaneously. In these games, well-known game mechanics have been mixed (like charades, pictionary, etc), and the trivia questions are not too demanding for a less experienced audience, allowing players to succeed in the game according to their own individual capacities: as their slogan says, “Everyone shines.” I think that it is important to highlight this mixture of mechanisms in order to advance the development and creation of games. That is exactly what I did in my games: I incorporated a series of “nostalgic” mechanisms, making them more dynamic than other, “more commercial games,” in addition to adding a topic that made the games appealing. As a result, intrigued players saw the final product of my games with interest; they found the mechanics entertaining and enjoyed the experiences of the game sessions. From the results, I could perceive a positive feedback: here was a group of young adults enjoying board games, interrelating, interacting, laughing, and playing. It was not about being childish or

encountering the inner child. It was about enjoying a natural impulse, socialization, and taking pleasure in the challenging activity of playing games.

As a Conclusion

Through the application of the knowledge acquired during my research about board games and gaming, I approached a series of questions that I dragged with me since I started to present the first version of *Crossing the Bridge* back in 2001: can these games make a difference? Could it be possible for a group of board games to present the situation of the border and create a discourse between players? Furthermore, can games actually change someone's mind on the subject of border relations?

I feel that my set of board games succeeded on their purpose. I got people to talk about the border even when games were not being played. The players who did not have much experience with border issues expressed realization and interest about what was going on. For a brief moment, there was a transmission of knowledge from those that have lived on the border to those who have only heard about the border. There were some that expressed that they learned nothing about the topics presented in the games, but without realizing it they learned that others do not know about the issues or have different opinions about them.

I presented a small sample of a bigger reality through my games, and now that reality is marked, pointed out, called on to be reviewed, re-read, and explored by those affected by the games. According to Salen & Zimmerman (2004):

We do believe that all games reflect culture to some degree, as they are objects produced and played within culture at large. But not all games manifest transformative cultural play to actually transform culture. (p. 507)

I believe that my games do have the capacity to transform culture through one of the oldest activities in nature: gaming (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971). This craftsmanship and the exploration of game objects have a potential that, as I expressed earlier, has been left unexplored. There has always been an understanding that board games are powerful tools for education and change (e.g., Katter, 1988; Sanoff, 1979), with capacities as powerful as art (e.g., Kasfir, 2007; Legal, 2003), but because of all the elements that need to be processed to create a board game, the effort is directed toward other activities or products. Marsh (1981) states, “the teachers’ reasons for not using simulation games were related to skepticism about their educational benefit, concern over costs, and an unwillingness to spend the preparation time needed” (para. 2).

I think that board games should be included and taught in classrooms at an earlier stage in education, and board games should not just be used but created. These games should not just be for the benefit of playing, but should also be socially based. Games should say something about the way we live and can express subjects that are hard to understand because they do not relate to our lives. Games can give us an idea of what it feels like to live in poverty in Africa, or in constant persecution in Eastern Europe, or explain what it feels to be bullied in the park in front of your house. We can write about these things, we can make art and songs, but it is through the process of interaction with others that we exchange our perceptions, compare our ideas, and feelings (Sutton-Smith, 1979). According to Goffman (1986) “a plaything while in play provides some sort of ideal evidence of the manner in which a playful definition of the situation can utterly suppress the ordinary meanings of the world” (p. 43); this transforms the routine into something that goes beyond contemplation and instead enhances awareness.

After almost three years of intensive work and research where the abstraction, mechanics, aim of the games, and game design were created, modified, and settled, I felt that the result was a

strong trilogy of projects. The games were strong not only conceptually, but artistically, as well. Still, the last word should not come from the creator but from an audience; after all, these are games that need to be played with, used, and experimented upon, acquiring in this way a life of their own

Notes

[1] Although I am well aware that there are trivia games for kids, these also depend on the maturity of the child to have an archive of the culture in question and understand the contents of the games.

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