

## Slippery rules and porous limits: freedom, boundaries and the problem of subjectivity

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### Abstract

Play is often described as apart from what might be termed 'real' life, taking place in what Gregory Bateson calls a frame, and Johann Huizinga a magic circle. The essays in the forthcoming *Philosophical Perspectives on Play*\* raise a number of challenges to this. In particular, many question the notion that play is distinct from 'real' life, suggesting that play's enframing should be understood as porous and relational.

This presentation explores the ways that play's frames, its limits, rather than being absolute, may be understood as providing a bridge between rule systems rather than delimiting play within a discrete 'magic circle'. If play is understood as 'as if', we must therefore question both how many rule systems there are implied by this approach, and if one is 'play' what is(are) the other(s)?

Alongside this discussion, contributors also consider the status of rules, suggesting that the foundational rule is to agree that 'this is this play', thereby creating the frame. Some argue the existence of rules leads to a form of freedom, a creativity to play innovatively within the constraints of the agreed rule system. Others assert that the violation of any rule challenges the foundational rule.

All this raises questions about decisions, choice, agency, ethics and the problem of subjectivity for play, playing and players. Many of these questions are left hanging.

These themes form the structure for the sections of the forthcoming book, which we sketch out. These sections are: 'Playing at the limits'; 'Play, aesthetics and performance'; 'Metaphysics and ontology' and 'Ethics of work in play and play in work'.

[\*Philosophical Perspectives on Play\*](#), edited by Malcolm MacLean, Wendy Russell and Emily Ryall, is a collection of essays from the 2013 Philosophy at Play conference, to be published by Routledge).