

In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the history of the concept of the magic circle, its criticism and the numerous other metaphors that have been used to capture the zone of play or the border that surrounds it, such as world, frame, bubble, net, screen, reality, membrane, zone, environment, or attitude. The various conceptions of social, mental and cultural borders are reviewed and identified. Finally, a model is put forward where the psychological bubble of playfulness, the social contract of the magic circle and the cultural game forms are separated.

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It also suggests paths for further developments, focusing on the relationship between social and symbolic boundaries, cultural mechanisms for the production of boundaries, difference and hybridity, and cultural membership and group classifications. INTRODUCTION. In recent years, the idea of "boundaries" has come to play a key role in important new lines of scholarship across the social sciences. It has been associated with research on cognition, social and collective identity, commensuration, census categories, cultural capital, cultural membership, racial and ethnic group positioning, hegemony. The basic underlying assumption of an individualist environment or culture is that people do, in practice, make their own decisions. People believe that you basically can't make people change their behavior (or, that techniques for making people change their behavior are coercive and thus unacceptable.) I see a lot of writers these days raising problems with modern individualist culture, and it may be an especially timely topic. The Internet is a novel superstimulus, and it changes more rapidly, and affords people more options, than ever before. We need to think about the actual consequences of a world where many people are in practice being left alone to do what they want, and clearly not all the consequences are positive.