

“This is the Best Game!”
Rejecting and Redefining Arcade Norms
in *Bee and PuppyCat*

Jacqueline Moran

Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture
Volume 16, issue 1 (Fictional Games), pp. 39–55

“This is the Best Game!”

Rejecting and Redefining Arcade Norms in *Bee and PuppyCat*

JACQUELINE MORAN

Abstract

This article analyses *The Best Game*, a fictional arcade game encountered in the YouTube animated series *Bee and PuppyCat*. Although arcade games in North America have long been conceptualised as sites of masculine skill-based competition and mastery, this reputation obfuscates the diverse history of arcade games and reinforces capitalist design conventions. *The Best Game* offers a critique of these assumptions. By examining this fictional game through arcade history, masculinity, capitalism, and dance, this article explores how *The Best Game* eschews design conventions to align with the show's *mahō shōjo*-inspired themes and leverages its fictionality to suggest a game that neither trains nor evaluates its players, although the result expresses resentment more than it incites resistance.

Keywords

Bee and PuppyCat; fictional games; work; capitalism; sports; arcades; masculinity; dance

Games in works of fiction may be unplayable for a variety of reasons, ranging from incompleteness to illegality. However, these fictional games are uniquely expressive. They can reflect the fictional society's ideologies, represent the narrative's themes, or deepen the fictional world (Gualeni & Fassone, 2023). This article examines a fictional game encountered in season 1 of the animated series *Bee and PuppyCat* (Seibret, 2013–2018). *Bee and PuppyCat* is a comedy drama created by Natasha Allegri, inspired by the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres and targeting an adult audience. The series stars Bee, a precariously employed young woman, and her friend PuppyCat, an intergalactic temp worker. Mihailova (2019, p. 1017) summarises *Bee and PuppyCat* as the story of “a young woman incapable of holding a steady job ... Perpetually almost-broke, Bee splits her time between lounging on the couch and accompanying PuppyCat on intergalactic temporary work assignments”.

This essay examines Bee's favourite game, which she only calls "*The Best Game*". *The Best Game* is located in a prototypical arcade parlour called Glitch Gorge (a maze of closely spaced cabinets with bright art, blinking lights, and overlapping music in a dark room) and follows a montage of prototypical arcade games (joysticks and buttons, points, competition, winners and losers). Amidst this familiar gaming canon, *The Best Game* is a dancing game without scores, competition, goals, or tangible controls. Since "it is difficult for us to imagine games ... that are not characterised by activities related to an attitude of instrumental rationality" (Gualeni, 2021, p. 191), *The Best Game* is particularly difficult to decipher. In contrast to the familiar conventions of sports, work, and standardised controls, *The Best Game* is better understood as an unchoreographed, unmeasured expression of lights, sound, and movement. Through its inherent ambiguity and unplayability (Gualeni & Fassone, 2023), *The Best Game* problematises arcade and videogame conventions, draws attention to designs that neither train nor evaluate players, and offers a ludic representation of the *shōjo*-inspired fictional world of *Bee and PuppyCat*. However, as underspecified and incomplete fictions, *The Best Game's* resistance to capitalist, masculine conventions and Bee's resistance to labour and steady employment both remain indulgent fantasies.

Welcome to Glitch Gorge

The Best Game and the arcade parlour Glitch Gorge appear in episodes 5 'Birthday' (Abrams & Allegri, 2016) and episode 6 'Game' (Allegri, Winter, & Farias, 2016) of season 1.¹ In these episodes, it is Bee's birthday. We learn that, although she used to celebrate with her dad at Glitch Gorge, her dad is no longer around and she has not been to Glitch Gorge in some time. Bee has been celebrating her birthday by doing what she typically does any other day: "I find something in the couch to eat, then I take a nap until I get a headache". PuppyCat encourages her to go to Glitch Gorge. They trudge through the rain and forest to find Glitch Gorge overgrown and abandoned. They break in, Bee restarts the generator with a kiss, and they play.

In the montage that follows, the games appear for only a few seconds each, but it is clear how they work. We see Bee and PuppyCat side-by-side, staring at a screen and rocking joysticks and rapidly pressing buttons. One machine has buttons labelled "BITE", "EAT", and "KICK". Audio from another machine asks, "Which hamster can kiss the best?" while a "+1" appears above two kissing hamsters. A machine labelled "Bad

¹ This essay will only analyse *The Best Game* and Glitch Gorge as they appear in season 1 of *Bee and PuppyCat*. Both appeared again in season 2, which reboots season 1, but significant changes were made, including Bee's absence from Glitch Gorge, the other arcade games, and Bee's behaviour in the arcade. For these reasons, only season 1 will be considered in this analysis.

Baby” has baby bottles embedded in its interface and another machine labelled “Water Man” has life-sized watercooler bottles for Bee and PuppyCat to handle. At almost every game, Bee engages in trash talk, the sports and videogame practice of taunting competitors to improve one’s own performance or harm another’s (Irwin et al. 2023; Johnson & Taylor, 2020). “I’m gonna kiss that hamster so hard you’re not gonna know what—”, “I’m gonna fill up so many workspace watercoolers, you’re not gonna know what—”. The games throughout this absurdist parody of arcade culture conform to our expectations of arcade games in particular and videogames in general: competitive, two player, equal controls, quantified performance, point accumulation, wins and losses. Players can “BITE”, a kiss is awarded with a point, Bee wants to win against PuppyCat.

In contrast, *The Best Game* is shown on screen for much longer but is far more ambiguous. According to Bee, “this is the best game! My dad came up with it when I got sick.² It used to be in our apartment. I played it non-stop”. When we first see *The Best Game* in episode 5, it looks much the same as the other machines (see Figure 1): an upright cabinet, two joysticks each surrounded by an equal number of buttons, and a screen depicting a serene anthropomorphic white bunny who invites potential players to “Help me fill my dark heart with stars”. If *The Best Game* adhered to the established pattern, Bee and PuppyCat would stand at the tangle controls, face



Figure 1. Screenshot of Bee standing at *The Best Game*'s cabinet in episode 5 'Birthday' (Abrams & Allegri, 2016) of *Bee and PuppyCat* season 1. © Frederator Studios

² Bee says her dad made “some of these games” in Glitch Gorge but *The Best Game* is the only one she specifically confirms was made by her dad.



Figure 2. Screenshot of Bee and PuppyCat playing *The Best Game* in episode 6 'Game' (Allegrì, Winter, & Farias, 2016) of *Bee and PuppyCat* season 1. © Frederator Studios

the screen, and compete to, perhaps, collect more stars than the other, while Bee proclaims, "I'm gonna get so many stars, you won't know what—".

However, at the end of episode 6, when Bee and PuppyCat return to Glitch Gorge with the coins needed to play *The Best Game*,³ we see Bee and PuppyCat standing side-by-side in the dark away from the cabinet. No cabinet silhouettes, no blinking lights, no beeping music. Bee stamps her foot. Pink stars illuminate on them, the walls, and the floor. 'Insert Coin' plays, a downtempo⁴ song composed by electronic musician Will Wiesenfeld (a.k.a. Baths), who composed all the music for seasons 1 and 2 of *Bee and PuppyCat*. The stars hang for a moment before slowly drifting across the walls like a disco ball's reflections. Bee and PuppyCat turn to face one another, hold hands, and dance, turning in a small circle with little hopping steps (see Figure 2). This is all we see of the game. This scene lasts 13 seconds. We see Bee and PuppyCat dancing for 10 of these seconds. This game is shown on screen for longer than any other arcade game, and yet this game and its mechanics are far less clear.

³ When Bee finds *The Best Game*, she has no more money to play. The majority of episode 6 takes place during the temp job they accept to earn more money. In further contrast with *The Best Game*, the temp job is a role-playing game parodying many role-playing conventions such as tedious side-quests, levelling up, and a 'chosen one' hero who saves a helpless populous from a threat that will wait patiently until the hero is ready. The show's commentary on role-playing game conventions is amusing but straightforward and any further theorizing will be no different from existing discussions of non-fictional role-playing games, and thus, will not be discussed further in this paper.

⁴ As tagged on RateYourMusic.com.

The *shōjo* flair

Bee and PuppyCat is one of many animated series inspired by the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres. The Japanese word *shōjo* describes a young woman between preadolescence and social adulthood and the *shōjo* genre is about the independence and agency experienced by Japanese women when they are outside the parental and marital spheres (Darley, 2023). In the *mahō shōjo*, or ‘magical girl’, genre a young woman with magical powers of transformation triumphs over adversity (Darley, 2023; Saito, 2014). Although magical girls face supernatural dangers, the real conflicts centre on their personal and domestic lives and they use empathy and compassion to save the people and relationships they treasure most. According to Darley (2023), *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* anime were popular among Western audiences in the 1990s for showing that, in a media landscape dominated by boys, it was okay to be a girl. North Americans who grew up watching *Fruits Basket* and *Sailor Moon* went on to create shows like *Adventure Time*, *Steven Universe*, and *Bee and PuppyCat* “with a *shōjo* flair” (Hemmann, 2020, p. 149). Consequently, these shows appeal to “young women (and young-at-heart women) who may have felt excluded from traditional male-centred genres” (Hemmann, 2020, p. 154).

On one hand, the *shōjo* genre’s increased prevalence and the manga industry’s tradition of adopting fan talent are economically driven and often exploitative. *Shōjo* manga and anime in the 1960s and 1970s were essentially toy commercials (Saito, 2014) and they became more prolific in the 1980s and 1990s in Japan when more young women were entering the workforce and had the disposable income to become a profitable audience (Darley, 2023). And, as Woodcock (2019) explains, the convention of co-opting fan talent into official projects converts fan works from anti-establishment to pro-establishment and normalises industry exploitation of fan playbour. On the other hand, the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres were empowering escapes from heteroromantic and patriarchal social structures (Darley, 2023). The blurred boundary between fan and professional, common in *shōjo* publishing in Japan but rarer in North America, allows fans like Allegri to tell stories from perspectives historically excluded from corporate settings and traditional pathways (Hemmann, 2020). Allegri accrued a fan following on social media through her gender-swapped redesigns of *Adventure Time*’s protagonists (Hemmann, 2020; Hobbs, 2022), which led to Pendleton Ward, *Adventure Time*’s director, giving Allegri the opportunity to create a short animation for *Cartoon Hangover* (Hobbs, 2022; Mihailova, 2019). This pilot episode became the first episode of *Bee and PuppyCat*.

As in the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres, *Bee and PuppyCat* values compassion and relationships more than conflict and achievement. Bee’s “utterly unremarkable” (Darley, 2023, p. 70) life is more important than her magical powers. This makes Bee a relatively uncommon and thus interesting protagonist. For similar reasons, *The Best Game* is an uncommon and interesting arcade game.

Rethinking the arcade

The 1970s and 1980s were the “golden age” of arcade parlours in the West (Imai & Woite, 2024). As Kocurek (2015) and Skolnik and Conway (2019) explain, the North American arcade industry, journalists, and popular culture positioned arcade games as socially acceptable, rather than a waste of time and cause of delinquency, by connecting them with activities and qualities socially expected of young men. They presented arcade games as sports-like, skill-based activities that developed mastery and promoted digital literacy, the defining characteristics of “middle-class masculinity” (Kocurek, 2015, p. 99) and the “postindustrial economy of the 1980s” (Skolnik & Conway, 2019, p. 747). These social and cultural factors around arcade games, more than the design or technologies of the games themselves, naturalised an association between arcade games and youthful masculinities characterised by “entrepreneurship, technological development, and success” (Kocurek, 2015, p. 125).

This persistent image of arcade games as elite and masculine festered into the concept of “hardcore games” (Kocurek, 2015). Videogames are considered hardcore if they are “expensive, difficult to learn and master, and time consuming” and are associated with masculinity (Chess, 2017, p. 13). Anything falling outside those bounds tends to be marginalised as “casual” and associated with being cheap, easy to learn, and played by dilettantes: those who are feminine, elderly, unknowledgeable, unskilled, or uncommitted to games (Chess, 2017).

The hardcore-casual dichotomy is political, not theoretical. It is often deployed to legitimise games that fit dominant industry standards while dismissing nonconforming games as fringe and unimportant (Chess & Paul, 2019). Juul (2010) argues games are labelled “casual” when they are more flexible in how, when, and by whom they are played, and Vanderhoef (2013) points out these judgements are frequently gendered. Hardcore games seem more official because they receive more industry, journalistic, and academic attention (Chess & Paul, 2019), but non-hardcore games are not necessarily less popular or less played (Coavoux et al., 2017). If the “casual” label encompasses games that, as Juul (2010) concludes, appeal to people who were previously ignored by an industry that prioritised young male players with the time and money to play long, difficult videogames and learn its obscure conventions, then *The Best Game* is casual. However, this alone does not reveal much.

It could perhaps be considered a “cozy” game, but the term “cozy” has many “overlapping descriptors and design elements” with “no absolute” definition (Boudreau et al., 2025, p. 2648). Waszkiewicz and Bakun (2020) characterise cozy games by “the emotional reaction it causes in players” (2020, p. 226), specifically by offering “safer, emotional, heart-warming experiences” (2020, p. 228). While Andiloro (2024) and Bódi (2024) both argue cozy games replicate the same capitalist and consumerist values typical of other videogames and the daily life from which cozy games supposedly offer a reprieve, *The Best Game* seems to lack the progress, accumulation, and evaluation characteristic of capitalist coziness. However, if, as Boudreau et al. (2025,

p. 2648) argue, coziness is a culturally determined "feeling" or "vibe" of warmth, comfort, and safety, then *The Best Game* could be cozy to Bee simply by reminding her of her dad and her childhood.

The Best Game may also be what Navarro-Remesal (2016) calls a Zen game. Unlike "mindful" games, which present undemanding activities to "reduce stress and produce a calm state of mind" (Navarro-Remesal, 2016, p. 7), Zen philosophy encourages "a deep, non-personal knowledge" (Navarro-Remesal, 2016, p. 3) not for the sake of achieving relaxation but to encourage an awareness of the body as historically situated. This practice allows us to better understand our actions as they arise from our context. Navarro-Remesal argues Zen play, or more specifically play-prajna, occurs spontaneously during immediate engagement with the particulars of one's context and historical moment, such as playing *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1998) in an arcade, which involves the whole body, the whole machine, and the audience. A Zen game would be one that "has no goals, not even relaxing", where we "notice everything, every process in the present moment" (Navarro-Remesal, 2016, p. 7), where importance is placed on "the encounter with the particular before the abstraction, of the body as situated in the world and time" (Navarro-Remesal, 2016, p. 8). *The Best Game* is certainly not a relaxing game. It demands more bodily action and effort than the other games in Glitch Gorge. Rather than standing in place and moving their hands and eyes and focusing on a single screen, Bee and PuppyCat are in constant motion, moving with the lights, music, and one another. They focus on the present moment, not a goal in the future. And, without knowing the goals or rules, we as an audience also focus on the present moment.

This difficulty in understanding and classifying *The Best Game* is not entirely due to its fictionality or on-screen brevity. The other games in Glitch Gorge are just as fictional and fleeting, but they are more easily understood because they fit our cultural image of arcade games. With the decline of arcade parlours, the ones that remain become "'secret' places of desire" for the past, where patrons can "remember certain moments and re-encounter places of their childhood" (Imai & Woite, 2024, p. 15). This "nostalgic arcade" is "a constellation of stereotypes, fragments of facts and historical realities mixed seamlessly with the values and desires of the present moment" (Kocurek, 2015, p. 187). Certain arcade games have survived in public consciousness through films, TV shows, merchandise, and documentaries, inflating the perceived importance of a supposed arcade canon and obfuscating the diverse range of arcade games that existed. *The Best Game* disrupts what we have learned to expect of arcades and videogames. It may be fictional, but it could have existed.

Unproductive, unregulated, unevaluated

According to Henricks (2015, p. 11), societies "dominated by individualistic, middle-class mythologies" that "endorse commitments to self-control, the future, social mo-

bility, material and cultural acquisition, procedural fairness, and education as pathways to success” tend to value play for its functional purpose. Play develops skills. Play has value when it betters the players and play betters players when it is “formally organised with established (adult) leaders, timetables, supervised competitions, and measurable outputs” (Henricks, 2015, p. 13).

By regimenting, evaluating, and measuring behaviour and rewarding progress, arcade games, like sports, “ideologically reproduce the world of work” and “defend the capitalist order and bourgeois rule” (Brohm, 1978, pp. 69–70). Glitch Gorge’s arcade games reduce mundane and innocuous tasks (babysitting, refilling watercoolers, kissing hamsters) to standardised actions that can be systematically measured and compared. Their systems constrain the body to stereotyped movements, removing bodily spontaneity and maximising efficiency. Bee is treated as a machine, trained to “sustain prolonged effort and maintain the necessary regularity of pace” (Brohm, 1978, pp. 55–56) to maximise output in the form of scores: kiss hamsters better, fill more watercoolers. Bee is only concerned with progress and success when playing these arcade games. While Bee is lackadaisical and laidback throughout the series, in Glitch Gorge she is aggressive towards PuppyCat and obedient to each game’s rules. She insists she will win against PuppyCat (who must lose). It is as though these games raise anxieties around success and production that are absent across the rest of the series. Bee may not efficiently use her time or maximise her output in any other part of her life, but she will try in Glitch Gorge.

Arcade games were promoted as the forefront of technological advancement, training boys and young men for their future work (Kocurek, 2015; Skolnik & Conway, 2017). *The Best Game* seems far from technologically advanced. The machine provides music and light, but without clear indications of any points or evaluation system, *The Best Game* could potentially be played with a nightlight and music box. Specialised equipment, such as the joysticks and buttons of arcade games, require holding one’s body in a specific position and learning intricate and precise movements through repetition (Chess, 2017; Keogh, 2018). Such standardised equipment reproduces standardised dominant ways to play (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017). As Keogh (2018, p. 93) explains, standardised controls “demand a preexisting habitualised knowledge of the gamepad”, which, due to socially and culturally gendered circumstances and expectations, are more likely to be possessed by young men and boys. Consequently, controller standardisation privileges a young, male audience.

The Best Game’s lack of evaluation and standard controls makes it incongruous with the rest of Glitch Gorge, but those other arcade games are incongruous with the rest of *Bee and PuppyCat*. Much of Bee’s identity is tied up with work or, more specifically, her dislike of work and her lack of a stable job. According to Mihailova (2019, pp. 1017–1018), portraying Bee’s predicament in a “sympathetic, non-judgemental way” is a key source of the show’s appeal, particularly for young adult women. *Bee and PuppyCat* appears to express the Japanese concept of *iyasareru*, or a desire “to relax

and escape from an alienating, exhausting work environment” (Dale et al., 2017, p. 5).

According to Kagen (2022), the ambivalence and guilt around leisure time under late capitalism lead to games increasingly resembling labour. Giddings (2018) argues computer games are microcosms of capitalism, simulating economies and reifying the worker’s body under capitalist conditions. While most of Glitch Gorge’s games reproduce capitalist systems that would consider Bee a failure for her precarious work and insufficient income, *The Best Game* aligns with the show’s *shōjo*-like preference for empathy, compassion, and relationships over conflict, domination, and success.

While standardised controls privilege a masculine audience, *The Best Game* appears to use a mimetic interface where players engage with the game through familiar bodily movements learned through the player’s everyday existence (Keogh, 2018). Rather than standing side-by-side facing a shared screen while operating joysticks and buttons, Bee and PuppyCat stand facing one another, not touching any tangible controls nor watching any screen. This interface seems unnatural for an arcade because standardised controllers have produced and reinforced dominant modes of input, marginalising alternative modes such as dance (Keogh, 2018, p. 87).

Dance like nothing is watching

Keogh (2018) argues videogames are primarily about movement with audiovisuals. Goals provide a context for performing particular actions, but the resultant “sights and sounds is the point” (Keogh, 2018, p. 120 emphasis in original). Rather than focusing on goal-driven activities, Keogh argues we should consider “videogames as a more open-ended form of expression” (2018, p. 121). Similarly, Miller describes dance as a multisensory experience where dancers “bring techniques of listening, moving, watching, and touching into powerful alignment” (2017, p. 95). Dance games match bodily movements with sounds and visuals “capturing the *sensation* of music in the player-dancer’s gestures” (Keogh, 2018, p. 122 emphasis in original). For example, “to play a song in *Audiosurf* [Invisible Handlebar, 2008] is to experience that song’s form through sensorial fields other than hearing” (Keogh, 2018, p. 125). While interactivity is usually discussed in terms of a machine adapting to a player’s actions, we can instead talk about “proprioceptive interaction” (Miller, 2017, p. 101), where the user’s bodily movements change their perception of the machine’s audiovisuals. “In this form of interactive audio, the perceptible effects play out through players’ bodies ... a machine provides the input in the form of musical sound, and a human carries out the kinesthetic translation of this material to create a danced output” (Miller, 2017, pp. 102, 107). *The Best Game* allows Bee to experience the song through not just sound, but also movement, space, and lights.

Dance videogames challenge Western gameplay conventions. Kirkpatrick (2011) argues all videogames can be understood as dances, but he privileges hardcore conventions of complexity, manual skills, mastery, and winning. Players must figure out the “right” manoeuvres in the dance “puzzle” and perform perfectly (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 134) and the player’s role is “to follow [the game’s] instructions” (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 137). As Snowdon (2019) explains, the precise and complex dance Kirkpatrick describes is more like masculine-coded choreography than feminine-coded dance. Similarly, Smith (2006) argues *Dance Dance Revolution* tournaments and “tech play” (playing to get a high score) are attempts to athleticize and masculinize what is perceived in North America as threatening feminine gameplay. Even dance criticism tends to assume that technical, powerful, and masterful choreography is more important than the precognitive body, individual dancers, and the labour, knowledge, and emotion situated in the act of dancing (Snowdon, 2019).

Miller (2017) explains that console dance videogames *Just Dance* (Ubisoft Paris Studios, 2009) and *Dance Central* (Harmonix Music Systems, 2010) were treated with suspicion by Western reviewers for their graphical and technological simplicity and humiliating gameplay. Standardised controls require training and literacy but, once learned, are consistent and precise. By eschewing these habituated bodily techniques, dance videogames lead to “uncoordinated, disorderly, reactive, and excessive movements” (Miller, 2017, p. 35). Their more naturalised mimetic interfaces allow “different kinds of bodies to be comfortable with gaming” (Chess, 2017, p. 161): bodies that do not already have the technical literacies and skills required for specialised equipment (Jacob et al., 2008), bodies that are likely non-masculine (Chess, 2017; Keogh, 2018).

Miller (2017) argues dance games found popularity in shamelessness. One may dance badly but the gaming context makes it safe and shared. Skilled and unskilled dancers alike perform awkwardly. Everyone is brought low and thus allowed to explore and feel bodily movements neglected by standardised gaming interfaces. However, even these dance games involve choreography (Snowdon, 2019) and train players through ongoing dressage (Keogh, 2018). The game system is always watching and responding to the player’s performance, even when playing in private (Miller, 2017). Although dance games embolden gamers to dance badly, it is always in contrast with the cultural values and practices perpetuated in each game’s dance routines. Revelling in failure may be a rejection of mastery, but it does not reject the evaluative system that defines failure and mastery.

In contrast to these routines that equally train and shame players, let us consider the moments in these dance and music games where players are not evaluated. In *Rock Band* (Harmonix Music Systems, 2007) and *Guitar Hero* (Harmonix Music Systems, 2005) there are breaks in the precise button-based routine for players to perform their own unevaluated solos (Keogh, 2018). In *Audiosurf*, choosing the mono

character⁵ generates a racetrack of mostly obstacles to avoid rather than coloured blocks to collect, "allowing for a more relaxed surf focused less on scoring or optimal play and more on simply moving through the music" (Keogh, 2018, p. 125). *Dance Central* has freestyle breaks during routines where players are encouraged to do whatever they want in reaction to the music (Miller, 2017). Even *Dance Dance Revolution's* announcer's vague commentary, such as "I see tomorrow in your dance" and "Are you a monkey?" (Smith, 2006, p. 199), obscures what is being praised or criticised.

The context in and with which one plays shapes the play forms that emerge by making it easier (or possible) to "carry on" in one way or another (Henricks, 2015, p. 32). There is more to a dance game's context than just its hardware, software, and evaluations. *Dance Dance Revolution's* floor pads only detect the dancer's foot placement. A dancer can express "creativity, virtuosity, and authenticity" by performing "acrobatic moves and feats of agility" undetectable by the machine (Miller, 2017, pp. 8–9). If *Just Dance* can be played and even won by sitting on a couch and waving the Wii Remote (Miller, 2017, p. 41), then moving the rest of one's body is an interpretive choice by the player. Players value movements that game system either do not evaluate or cannot measure.

The Best Game's context comprises lights, music, the floor, the room, Bee's and PuppyCat's own bodies, and (seemingly) no evaluation, no tangible interface, and no screen. These absences are important. *The Best Game* is entirely freestyle solo. By constraining the body and treating it as a machine, sports deny the body "playful or aesthetic pleasure" (Brohm, 1978, p. 74). Even the dance and music videogames discussed above enforce standardised postures through their choreography and evaluative systems. In contrast, *The Best Game* embraces feminine-coded dance and allows Bee and PuppyCat to explore and revel in bodily movement, to carry on in ways that do not involve perfecting standardised movements or competing against each other.

Resentment without resistance

Although *The Best Game* eschews capitalistic and masculine videogame conventions, it is a reprieve more than a revolution. Much like the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres that inspired *Bee and PuppyCat*, *The Best Game* is an escapist fantasy that neither subverts nor offers an alternative to capitalist structures. Darley (2023, p. 77) argues the *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* genres offer a "safe form of resistance" and ultimately maintain more than resist "patriarchal power structures". Saito (2014, p. 145) argues

⁵ In *Audiosurf*, the player must select a character before generating a racetrack for a song. The chosen character determines the nature of the racetrack.

mahō shōjo manga and anime send “mixed messages”. The protagonist’s magical transformation and powers are presented as empowerment and womanhood, especially when the magical transformation involves bodily changes. However, if the central message of *mahō shōjo* is the strengths of *shōjo*-hood and the undermining of this magic, then *mahō shōjo* also rejects that empowerment. Rather than empowering women, many *mahō shōjo* instead depict a prolonged childhood of being cute and carefree without the responsibilities of motherhood and subservience that their audiences cannot avoid without being considered a failure.

Bee’s dislike of work and preference for sleep also aligns her with the Sanrio character Gudetama. Gudetama is a lazy egg that resents its job of being food, rejects the glorification of labour, and only wants to sleep. He has become popular among workers whose jobs make them feel useless, unwanted, and unrewarded, first in Japan and then across the Western world (de Vries, 2017). Much like Gudetama, Bee’s resentment towards labour and consumption is “an indulgent fantasy” of resistance, a safe expression of dissatisfaction that “will never change the inequitable situation that workers face today” (de Vries, 2017, p. 269). Bee’s *mahō shōjo* characteristics in particular compromise her portrayal. According to Darley (2023), *mahō shōjo* heroines are often uniquely powerful and display symbols of financial opulence to emphasise their agency and importance. Although Bee is a temp worker, she, much like her *mahō shōjo* inspiration, is powerful and does not appear to suffer from financial struggles beyond occasional embarrassment. She lives in her own comfortably furnished apartment, has an amicable relationship with her landlord, always has enough to eat, and, although temp work is by definition precarious, she always has work when she needs it.⁶ Bee and Gudetama embody lethargic pleasure that their audiences cannot afford.

Just as Bee avoids work without suffering any consequences, *The Best Game* is itself a superficial rejection of capitalism. Its mechanics may eschew capitalist and industrialist conventions, but Bee must still pay money to play it. Additionally, the episodes disconnect Glitch Gorge, *The Best Game*, and Bee’s game designer dad from capitalist systems and global infrastructure. The show implies Bee’s dad is the only person who made these games, omitting all other vital roles from marketing to the material labour of mining and producing metals and plastics (Woodcock, 2019). This romanticises the self-employed indie developer who creates videogames from nothing without worrying about the job insecurity, competition, or exploitation rife in videogame production (Woodcock, 2019). Even Glitch Gorge is glamourised as a wonderland hidden in the forest without need for electricity or e-waste disposal.

⁶ Throughout the series, when Bee needs money there is always a temp job conveniently available.

The Best Game, and *Bee and PuppyCat* overall, are what Page (2017, p. 79) calls “cruel relief”, a practice that offers a respite from the stresses of precarity, low wages, and surveillance and thus “normalises neoliberal capital and work”. Page calls it “cruel” because the relief helps the subjugated worker further endure exploitation, thus bolstering capitalism.

Conclusion

A fictional game’s “underspecification” can be used for “expressive purposes” to surprise audiences with “unexpected in-game situations, devious strategies, and the revelation of latent in-game possibilities” (Gualeni & Fassone, 2023, p. 25). Through its inherent incompleteness and unplayability, *The Best Game* is ambiguous to the audience and even the writers and animators and thus can eschew capitalist ideologies and masculine posturing without fully explaining how. *The Best Game* seemingly has no goals nor points, requires no skills, has no means of evaluation, lacks a tangible interface, and involves little if any punishment for mistakes and failure—if concepts like mistakes and failure are even meaningful. This presents a videogame that is more dance than sport. Designers often associate these features with games for women, but these are simply good design features that would appeal to any non-experienced player (Chess, 2017, pp. 46–47). “Playing dance games offers constant reminders that the human body is not a mass-produced technical interface like a traditional game controller, nor a playback device that repeats the same material the same way again and again” (Miller, 2017, p. 111).

The Best Game is distinctive for being the only arcade game in Glitch Gorge to not resemble work or reproduce capitalist ideologies and masculine posturing. Bee works when playing games in Glitch Gorge, when selecting a job, and when earning money. The work stops with *The Best Game*. Here, Bee is not concerned with skilful performance, maximising output, or competition. She is neither motivated to succeed nor worried about failure. However, much like its *shōjo* and *mahō shōjo* inspirations, *The Best Game* and *Bee and PuppyCat* are safe forms of resentment that do not offer actionable resistance. While *The Best Game* seems to offer an alternative to the competitive, masculine, work-like games of the “nostalgic arcade” (Kocurek, 2015, p. 187), its depiction in these episodes and Bee’s depiction across the series ignores work without resisting the capitalist structures in which they are embedded. Bee and *The Best Game* are both powerful and unproductive, but also remain underspecified and fictional.

References

- Abrams, L., & Allegri, N. (Storyboard Artists). (2016, November 11). Birthday (Season 1, episode 5) [YouTube series episode]. In F. Seibert (Executive Producer), *Bee and PuppyCat*. Frederator Studios.
- Allegri, N., Winter, M., & Farias, E. (Storyboard Artists). (2016, November 11). Game (Season 2, episode 6) [YouTube series episode]. In F. Seibert (Executive Producer), *Bee and PuppyCat*. Frederator Studios.
- Andiloro, A. (2024). Comfortably numb: An ideological analysis of coziness in video-games. *Replay. The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, 11(1), 79–92. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2391-8551.11.06>
- Bódi, B. (2024). The duality of cozy games: cozy agency, neoliberalism, and affect. *Replay. The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, 11(1), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2391-8551.11.04>
- Boluk, S., & LeMieux, P. (2017). *Metagaming: Playing, competing, spectating, cheating, trading, making, and breaking videogames*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1n2ttjx>
- Boudreau, K., Consalvo, M., & Phelps, A. (2025). Whose vibe is it anyway? Negotiating definitions of cozy games. *Proceedings of the 58th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2645–2654. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/109161>
- Brohm, J.-M. (1978). *Sport, a prison of measured time: Essays*. Links.
- Chess, S. (2017). *Ready player two: Women gamers and designed identity*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1pwt7z7>
- Chess, S., & Paul, C. A. (2019). The end of casual: Long live casual. *Games and Culture*, 14(2), 107–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018786652>
- Coavoux, S., Boutet, M., & Zabban, V. (2017). What we know about games: A scientific approach to game studies in the 2000s. *Games and Culture*, 12(6), 563–584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016676661>
- Dale, J. P., Goggin, J., Leyda, J., McIntyre, A. P., & Negra, D. (2017). The aesthetics and affects of cuteness. In J. P. Dale, J. Goggin, J. Leyda, A. P. McIntyre, & D. Negra (Eds.), *The aesthetics and affects of cuteness* (pp. 1–34). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315658520>
- Darley, S. J. (2023). The magical girl mirror: Reflections and transcultural transformations of Euro-American fairy tales in the maho shōjo genre. In K. N. Sheehan

- (Ed.), *Cross-cultural influences between Japanese and American pop cultures: Powers of pop* (pp. 69–111). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- de Vries, N. (2017). Under the yolk of consumption. In J. P. Dale, J. Goggin, J. Leyda, A. P. McIntyre, & D. Negra (Eds.), *The aesthetics and affects of cuteness* (pp. 253–273). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315658520>
- Giddings, S. (2018). Accursed play: The economic imaginary of early game studies. *Games and Culture*, 13(7), 765–783. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018755914>
- Gualeni, S. (2021). Fictional games and utopia: The case of *Azad*. *Science Fiction Film & Television*, 14(2), 187–207. <http://doi.org/10.3828/sfftv.2021.13>
- Gualeni, S. & Fassone, R. (2023). *Fictional Games: A philosophy of worldbuilding and imaginary play*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Harmonix Music Systems. (2005). *Guitar hero* [PlayStation 2]. RedOctane.
- Harmonix Music Systems. (2007). *Rock band* [Xbox 360]. MTV Games.
- Harmonix Music Systems. (2010). *Dance central* [Xbox 360]. MTV Games.
- Hemmann, K. (2020). The cultural cross-pollination of *shōjo* manga. In K. Hemmann, *Manga cultures and the female gaze* (pp. 147–169). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18095-9_7
- Henricks, T. S. (2015). *Play and the human condition*. University of Illinois Press.
- Hobbs, J. (2022). Understanding the layers of engagement through the consumption of online cartoons. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.20474/jahss-8.2.1>
- Imai, H., & Woite, L. (2024). The liminality of subcultural spaces: Tokyo's gaming arcades as boundary between social isolation and integration. *Urban Planning*, 9, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.6969>
- Invisible Handlebar. (2008). *Audiosurf*. Audiosurf.
- Irwin, S.V., Naweed, A., & Lastella, M. (2023). The AACTT of trash talk: Identity forms of trash talk in esports using behavior specification. *Journal of Electronic Gaming and Esports*, 1, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jege.2022-0024>
- Jacob, R. J. K., Girouard, A., Hirshfield, L. M., Horn, M. S., Shaer, O., Solovey, E. T., & Zigelbaum, J. (2008). Reality-based interaction: A framework for post-WIMP interfaces. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1357054.1357089>

- Johnson, C., & Taylor, J. (2020). More than bullshit: Trash talk and other psychological tests of sporting excellence. *Sport, Ethics, and Philosophy*, 14(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2018.1535521>
- Juul, J. (2010). *A casual revolution: Reinventing video games and their players*. MIT Press.
- Kagen, M. (2022). *Wandering games*. MIT Press.
- Keogh, B. (2018). *A play of bodies: How we perceive videogames*. MIT Press.
- Kirkpatrick, G. (2011). *Aesthetic theory and the video game*. Manchester University Press; Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kocurek, C. A. (2015). *Coin-operated Americans: Rebooting boyhood at the video game arcade*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Konami. (1998). *Dance dance revolution* [Arcade game]. Konami.
- Midway Games. (2004). *Mortal kombat: Deception* [PlayStation 2]. Midway Home Entertainment.
- Mihailova, M. (2019). Drawn (to) independence: Female showrunners in contemporary American TV animation. *Feminist Media Studies*, 19(7), 1009–1025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1667065>
- Miller, K. (2017). *Playable bodies: dance games and intimate media*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190257835.001.0001>
- Namco. (1980). *Pac-man* [arcade]. Namco.
- Navarro-Remesal, V. (2016). *What's zen about zen modes? Prajna knowledge versus mindfulness in game design* [Conference presentation abstract]. The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference 2016, Malta. <https://www.gamephilosophy.org/wp-content/uploads/confmanuscripts/pcg2016/Victor-Navarro-Remesal-Whats-Zen-about-Zen-Modes-Prajna-Knowledge-Versus-Mindfulness-in-Game-Design.pdf>
- Page, A. (2017). “This baby sloth will inspire you to keep going”: Capital, labor, and the affective power of cute animal videos. In J. P. Dale, J. Goggin, J. Leyda, A. P. McIntyre, & D. Negra (Eds.), *The aesthetics and affects of cuteness* (pp. 75–94). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315658520>
- Saito, K. (2014). Magic, *shōjo*, and metamorphosis: magical girl anime and the challenges of changing gender identities in Japanese society. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73(1), 143–164. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911813001708>

-
- Seibert, F. (Executive Producer). (2013–2018). *Bee and PuppyCat* [YouTube series]. Frederator Studios.
- Skolnik, M. R., & Conway, S. (2019). Tusslers, beatdowns, and brothers: A sociohistorical overview of video game arcades and the *Street Fighter* community. *Games and Culture*, 14(7–8), 742–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412017727687>
- Smith, J. (2006). Digital dance hall: The fan culture of dance simulation arcade games. In K. O'Hara & B. Brown (Eds.), *Consuming music together* (pp. 193–209). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4097-0_10
- Snowdon, T. (2019). Dancing with the hands: Frictions with videogames, dance, and gender. *Proceedings of DiGRA 2019 Conference: Game, Play, and the Emerging Ludomix*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.26503/dl.v2019i1.1085>
- Vanderhoef, J. (2013). Casual threats: The feminization of casual video games. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 2, 1–28. <https://hdl.handle.net/1794/26294>
- Ubisoft Paris Studios. (2009). *Just dance* [Nintendo Wii]. Ubisoft Entertainment.
- Waszkiewicz, A., & Bakun, M. (2020). Towards the aesthetics of cozy video games. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, 12(3), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw_00017_1
- Woodcock, J. (2019). *Marx at the arcade: Consoles, controllers, and class struggle*. Haymarket Books.