

Figment: The Switching Codes Game

ERIC ZIMMERMAN

I am a game designer. Figment, my contribution to this volume, reflects my disciplinary activity: it is a game for you to play.

The rules, instructions, and cards for Figment appear on the following pages. It is a real game, not a conceptual exercise that flirts with the form of a game or a playful gesture toward something gamelike. The proper way to experience it is to cut the cards out of this book or download them from <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/switchingcodes>, read the rules, and sit down with a handful of friends to play. (For those of you suffering from a temporary lack of playmates, there is a solitaire version as well.)

Each of the cards in Figment contains a fragment of text taken verbatim from one of the essays in this book. In playing the game, players combine and recombine these fragments, making statements and declarations that are sometimes profound and sometimes comical. But in each case, a move in the game makes use of raw textual materials from this book, remixing them into novel statements. Playing Figment is thus necessarily an exercise in the playful creation of meaning.

Starting a Game

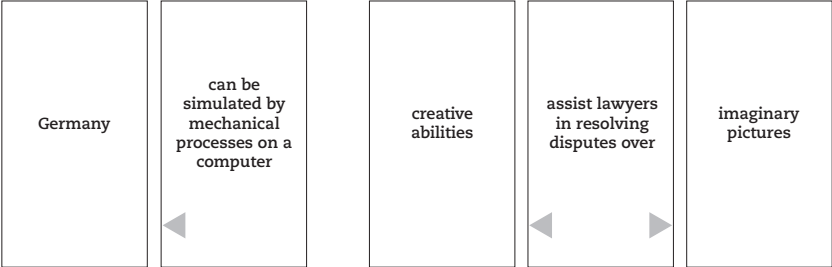
Shuffle all of the cards and deal each player seven cards, which should be kept hidden from the other players. Place the rest of the cards face-down in a deck.

The goal of the game is to make and modify statements using two or three cards, and to be the first player to get rid of all of the cards in your hand. The youngest player goes first by making a statement, and play continues clockwise around the table.

If the youngest player can't make a valid statement to start the game, that player draws a card and the player to the left has a chance to start the game, and so on.

Making Statements

You make a statement by placing two or three cards next to each other in the order that they are to be read. There are two kinds of cards: CONCEPT cards, with no arrows on them, and LINKING cards, with one or two arrows. The arrows on the linking cards show how they connect to concept cards. When you make a statement, every arrow on a linking card must point to a concept card. In starting the game, you can make two kinds of statements:



If you use a linking card with two arrows to make a statement, you must use three cards.

Every statement must make grammatical sense; subjects and verbs must agree in number. In addition, a statement must bring some kind of insight to its subject matter. Nonsensical statements (even if grammatically correct) are not permitted.

After you play a statement, you must explain to the other players why the statement is insightful, by reading the new statement and then saying, "Because . . ." Other players can challenge the statements you make. (More on explanations, insight, and challenges below.)

Play

Play continues clockwise around the table. On your turn, you can do one of three things:

- **Create a new statement** by playing cards from your hand on the table in front of you. Each player can create only one statement per game.
- **Modify a statement** by playing cards from your hand onto any existing statement.
- **Draw a card** if there is nothing else you can do.

To **CREATE** a statement, play two or three cards from your hand to make a completely new statement. This new statement can be modified by other players on subsequent turns. When you make a statement, place the cards on the table in front of you. Each player can create only one statement per game.

To **MODIFY** a statement, play a card from your hand on top of a previously played card, replacing it in the existing statement. All of the rules for making valid statements hold true when you modify a statement: the modified statement must be grammatically correct, it must be insightful, and you must explain it to the other players.

If you play a linking card to modify and the new card has a different number of arrows than the card you are replacing, you must change the number of concept cards in the statement accordingly:

- If you replace a two-arrow linking card with a one-arrow linking card, you must remove the concept card to the right and put it in a discard pile.
- If you replace a one-arrow linking card with a two-arrow linking card, you must also play a concept card from your hand to complete the statement.

If you **DRAW**, take the top card from the deck and add it to your hand. You do not get to play any cards if you draw.

Challenges

In addition to being grammatically correct, any created or modified statement must bring insight to its subject matter. Each time a player makes or modifies a statement, the player must read the new or modified statement to the group and then explain, “Because . . .” The explanation should make clear how the statement brings insight to its subject matter. The standard for what is considered insightful will, of course, vary from group to group and context to context.

After the explanation is complete, a player who feels that the statement does

not bring insight to its subject matter—because, for example, it is nonsensical, patently false, or simply too conventional—can CHALLENGE the statement. The player who challenges presents an argument as to why the statement should not be permitted to be played, and then the remaining players vote. Challenges should be used sparingly.

If the challenger convinces a majority of the other players (not including the player who made the statement) that the statement is not insightful, the challenge succeeds. Otherwise, the challenge fails.

- **If the challenge succeeds**, the player who played the challenged statement takes all of the cards played that turn back into his or her hand and restores the modified statement to its previous state. The player also draws one card from the deck, and his or her turn ends.
- **If the challenge fails**, then the statement stands on the table. The challenger draws one card from the deck and play continues as usual.

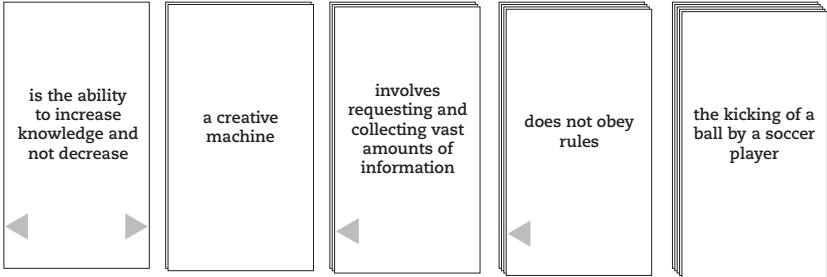
The End

The first player to successfully play the last card in his or her hand wins the game.

Figment Solitaire

Because we so often lack playmates, rules are provided for a solitaire version of Figment. It lacks the disputation and social negotiation of the full game, but the core mechanism of remixing the meanings of the essays in this volume remains.

To prepare, deal five cards across in a row, face-up. Deal four cards on top of the first row, starting with the second card from the left, then three cards, starting from the middle card, and so on, so that the cards are arranged as shown:



If you can create a two-card or three-card statement using the five visible cards, take the cards off the piles and arrange them to one side to make the statement. If you can't make a statement from the visible cards, deal another card on each pile until you have cards that *can* be made into a statement. Criteria for statements are the same as in the regular game, including grammatical correctness and insight.

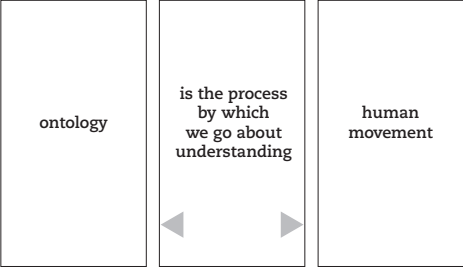
Set the rest of the cards aside (you won't be using them). The goal of Figment Solitaire is to get rid of all of the cards in the piles you dealt by modifying the statement and creating new ones. In the solitaire version of the game, unlike the full version, there is always only one statement visible for you to modify.

To play the game, you can take one of two actions:

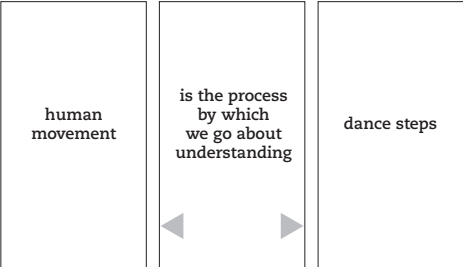
- **Create** a new statement
- Play a single card from the piles to **modify** the current statement

When you **create** a new statement, take the cards for the new statement off the dealt piles and play them right on top of the current statement, covering up the old cards.

When you play a card and **modify** a statement, you can rearrange any of the currently visible cards in the statement. For example, if the current statement is



and you want to modify the statement by playing the concept card “dance steps” from a pile, you could rearrange the visible statement cards like so:



One last clarification: Sometimes, you will be turning a three-card statement into a two-card statement. This happens when you create a two-card statement on top of a three-card statement, or when you replace the two-arrow linking card in a three-card statement with a one-arrow linking card. In these cases, you will be left with a visible card that isn't part of the current statement. That's OK. You can decide whether the unused card is the concept card on the left or the right. And on subsequent modifications, you can use any of the three visible cards, not just the two that are being used in the statement.

To win, play the last card from the piles of cards. If you get stuck in a position where you can't play, you lose. As with other solitaire games, there is some luck involved. However, by playing strategically, using cards from your deeper piles first, keeping an eye on which kinds of cards are visible, and thinking two or three moves ahead, you will greatly increase your chances of winning.

the skyscraper

COOVER

play

ZIMMERMAN

**the muscleman in
gay culture**

COOVER

a Möbius strip

COOVER



game design

COOVER

Pinocchio

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

trust

LIU

democracy

D'IORIO AND BARBERA



Wikipedia

LIU

nature

WHITE

an out of the blue e-mail

POWERS

truth

BERNSTEIN



childhood

POWERS

Mozart

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

the seductive power
of the web

FOSTER

witchcraft

FOSTER



the behavior of the entire
climate system

FOSTER

a chessboard

FOSTER

World of Warcraft

FOSTER

Ada Byron-Lovelace

GANSASCIA



Aristotle

GANASCIA

artificial intelligence

BORGMAN

mathematics

BORGMAN

an artificial jazz player

GANASCIA



intelligence

BORG MANN

**a blog entry in
livejournal.com**

HENDLER

**the essence of
human communication**

HENDLER

the real world

CLANCEY



a lot of money

HENDLER

Frankenstein

QUASHA AND HILL

composer/writer
John Cage

QUASHA AND HILL

the body

COOVER



the art of origami

QUASHA AND HILL

the primal urge

QUASHA AND HILL

a glockenspiel

QUASHA AND HILL

a tear

CLANCEY



Hollywood

LATOUR AND LOWE

the absolute Platonic ideal

LATOUR AND LOWE

Shakespeare

LATOUR AND LOWE

that worldwide cut-and-
paste scriptorium called
the web

LATOUR AND LOWE



the road to hell

LATOUR AND LOWE

bicycling

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**the structure
of scholarship in the
real world**

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

a self-organizing system

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER



**a totally immersive
environment**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**the recent massive
popularity of social-media
sites on the Internet**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**the success of the
Nintendo Wii**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

data

DONATH



an epileptic jerk

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

Germany

SORENSEN

a martial art

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

all of human culture

CEUSTERS AND SMITH



**weapons of
mass destruction**

STEFIK

**the tireless work
of the machines**

STEFIK

California

CLANCEY

reality

DONATH



digital environments

SORENSEN

wax statues

COOVER

**athleticism, power, and
sexual desire**

COOVER

body parts

COOVER



**train stations, pubs,
cafes, bridges,
apartments,
and other everyday
London settings**

COOVER

**archives, libraries, and
bookstores**

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

**the principles that
undergird scholarship**

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

**normal web addresses
that we type into our
browsers**

D'IORIO AND BARBERA



all digital objects

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

Sunny Afternoons

POWERS

pets

POWERS

friends and friends of
networked friends

POWERS



all the pictures in creation

POWERS

**images of a hundred
million stars**

FOSTER

massive quantities of data

FOSTER

time and space

FOSTER



art critics

FOSTER

the first electronic
computers

GANASCIA

games

ZIMMERMAN

mathematicians and
logicians

GANASCIA



unicorns

GANASCIA

a billion documents

HENDLER

every photograph in Flickr

HENDLER

**smaller birds that migrate
huge distances**

HENDLER



biological experiments

HENDLER

existence and
nonexistence in
electronic timespace

SORENSEN

poets

QUASHA AND HILL

geometric forms (square,
circle, triangle, point, line)

QUASHA AND HILL



**spoken and
written text**

QUASHA AND HILL

art teachers

LATOUR AND LOWE

**dance music, theater—the
performing arts—**

LATOUR AND LOWE

**intellectual
oversimplifications**

LATOUR AND LOWE



tiny painted dots

LATOUR AND LOWE

**abstracted avatar
representations**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

virtual worlds

SORENSEN

**YouTube, MySpace,
and Second Life**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER



**the millions of rhythms
and cycles in our body**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

bodily movements

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

opinions

LIU

**dances such as
the polka**

CEUSTERS AND SMITH



space and time

COOVER

**algorithms for detecting
and interpreting humans
and human behavior**

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

mistakes

LATOUR AND LOWE

**today's web
and search engines**

STEFIK



teenagers

STEFIK

multiple perspectives

STEFIK

religion and politics

STEFIK

machine-learning
algorithms

GANASCIA



**expresses an absence
of time**



COOVER

is artificial and misleading



COOVER

is unnecessary



D'IORIO AND BARBERA

**is more a legal question
than a technical one**



D'IORIO AND BARBERA



is not structured
like a list or a tree but
rather like a graph

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

has hundreds of members

POWERS

can determine the
percentage of factual
accuracy of any web page

POWERS

may be so enormous
that only specialists
possessing large
computer systems
will be able to make
effective use of it

FOSTER



is a process by which we human beings investigate, and obtain understanding of, our world

remains painstakingly, sometimes mind-numbingly slow



FOSTER



FOSTER

is analogous to finding one's way in a maze of intricate passageways and blind alleys

remains a theoretical concept that is of no help to anyone



GANASCIA



GANASCIA



is like the dark side
of the moon

seems a daunting task.
And it is.



HENDLER



HENDLER

brings the artist near
to a primal truth

is in theory inexhaustible



QUASHA AND HILL



QUASHA AND HILL



**is alive and has a mind
of its own**

has been irreversibly lost

QUASHA AND HILL

LATOUR AND LOWE

**has been turned into a
copy of itself that looks
like a cheap copy, and no
one seems to complain**

**is paved with good
intentions**

LATOUR AND LOWE

LATOUR AND LOWE



creates technological
topographies in which
the spectators
construct meaning

has always been the
interpretation and
recreation of reality

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

shifts the creative practice
of art very much away
from being a manual craft
into one of conceptual
engineering

has served throughout
history as an important
force for social cohesion

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

CEUSTERS AND SMITH



constitutes the
backbone of the
European cultural
tradition

is the process by
which we go about
understanding the world

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

STEFIK

is mostly
a solitary activity

does not serve us very
well as individuals

STEFIK

STEFIK



can serve as a powerful
democratizing force

may be broken down into
logical steps that can be
simulated by mechanical
processes on a computer



FOSTER



GANASCIA

opened a quite new
path for art

cannot be searched
efficiently



QUASHA AND HILL



CEUSTERS AND SMITH



passes the Turing test

become a kind of language

BORGSMANN

COOVER

never come to fruition

are often contained in documents

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

D'IORIO AND BARBERA



involve bathroom fixtures
and treadmills

allow diverse data to be
stored, searched, analyzed,
and displayed



POWERS



FOSTER

results in a charming
paradox

advance civilization



D'IORIO AND BARBERA



FOSTER



address creativity in an original manner

play a key role in creative activities

GANASCIA

GANASCIA

are now holding us back

provide a single, high-quality, reliable model of the world

HENDLER

HENDLER



sit like deer in a field

speaking of nothing
but themselves



QUASHA AND HILL



QUASHA AND HILL

are looking for trouble

has long been
rendered invisible



LATOUR AND LOWE



SORENSEN



**exemplify the peak of
human creativity**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**cause one to rethink
the artist's role and the
relationship of the artist
to audience**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**prefigure the shape of
things to come**

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

**are nothing more than
groups of pixels**

CEUSTERS AND SMITH



need to be relaxed
in order to address
the complexities
of real situations

tend to look rather serious

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

tell the difference
between good and
bad sources
of information

still fall far short
of their potential

STEFIK

STEFIK

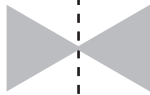


promotes a broad
perspective on

is a wonderful and very
successful example of



CLANCEY



D'IORIO AND BARBERA

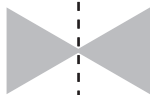


is more practical than

is missing in



D'IORIO AND BARBERA



POWERS



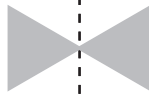


tends to move more slowly than

does not explain



FOSTER



GANASCIA

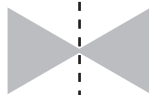


have held us back from

has played a critically important role in the composition of



CLANCEY



QUASHA AND HILL





remains concealed and
ambiguous in

is at the furthest pole from



BORGSMANN



QUASHA AND HILL



resembles almost exactly

is now just an expensive
copy of



LATOUR AND LOWE



LATOUR AND LOWE





remains in the background of

continuously redefines itself in response to

LATOUR AND LOWE

SHAW, KENDERDINE, AND COOVER

presents the viewer with

has accounted for a significant percentage of

SHAW, KENDERDINE, AND COOVER

CEUSTERS AND SMITH



has generally been considered to be an incidental part of

automatically improves the quality of

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

STEFIK

is typically less important than

involves a spontaneous emergence affecting the very meaning of

STEFIK

QUASHA AND HILL



can be dynamically
rearranged according to

can blind us to the
limitations of

D'IORIO AND BARBERA

FOSTER

can help us to understand

is never defined by

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

QUASHA AND HILL

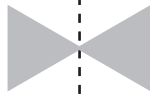


is defined with respect to

help scholars to retrieve



HENDLER



D'IORIO AND BARBERA

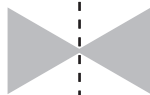


may serve as a guide for

can see, analyze, and
interpret nineteenth-
century paintings
better than



D'IORIO AND BARBERA



POWERS



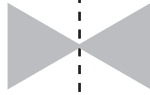


allows human users
to access

are used to study the
implications of



FOSTER



FOSTER

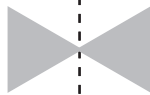


are not magical; they are

in many ways outperform



GANASCIA



HENDLER





“exist” only by virtue of

have dramatically altered the surface and appearance of

QUASHA AND HILL

LATOUR AND LOWE

engender specific forms of artistic expression and

react in real time to

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER

SHAW, KENDERDINE,
AND COOVER



are being used to help
unlock the secrets of

foster the development of

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

CEUSTERS AND SMITH

recalls one of the oldest,
most canonical forms of

compete for

LIU

STEFIK

