Vincent Berry
The sociology of MMORPG and player profiles: in favour of a social theory of online (video)game activities

This article offers an analysis of the public playing the massively multiplayer online role playing games World of Warcraft and Dark Age of Camelot. Firstly, using quantitative and qualitative data, some features of the population are presented and correlations highlighted between the practices and certain socio-cultural variables. Secondly, theoretical ideas are put forward in an attempt to understand, from a sociological perspective, the way in which we can apprehend the analysis of the public playing online videogames. While the analysis of the social variables (age, gender, social environment, habitus) remains a key point, the players’ game culture also seems to be an essential variable to understand the public, practices and usages of videogames.

Maude Bonenfant
Digital worlds are not “virtual”: the example of online videogames

The “worlds” of online videogames are often qualified as “virtual”, and the use of this qualification would imply that these worlds are outside “real life”. However, the virtuality in question here is not that defined by etymology and most philosophers, and cannot be applied to define what “really” happens during the practice of videogame playing. This way of considering videogames stems, among others, from the introduction of the concept of the “magic circle” at the beginning of studies on game playing, the separation between work and play, and the incorrect usage of the word “virtual”, which already categorises online videogames as “unreal”, “intangible” and “false”. The incorrect usage of this term prevents us from considering the positive and negative effects of online videogames at their right value and measuring the “real” impacts, including the socialisation of players.

Ayméric Brody
Investing the home with betting games: the example of poker

At a time when the French monopoly on the distribution of betting games is opening up, especially in the field of “online” poker, this article runs against the current with an analysis of the private “hardcopy” poker world. From an angle outlined by Anselm Strauss around the notion of the “social world”, we attempt to understand how a betting game like poker has managed to enter into the private world. In the home environment, the poker table appears as a privileged place where groups of players come together, organise themselves and may even intersect each other. As a contributor to this process, whereby the home environment takes on a playful aspect, the money stakes introduce betting games into the everyday life of these private worlds.

Aurélie Choné & Jean-François Alizon
Play in the light of alchemy: symbolic and anthropological stakes

Alchemy was qualified as a “serious passe-time” by the private doctor to Rudolf II, Michel Maier (1568-1622). The title of his work written in 1616, Lusus serius, may lead us to consider, with Hector Rodríguez, that “many manifestations of serious culture intrinsically possess playful aspects”. This article examines how a theoretically non-playful activity has become invested by play and shows that the idea of serious games is only an oxymoron in a society which sets games against fiction or in a mode of thought which sets arts against science, science against religion, mythical thought against rational thought, logos against mythos. Games reconstruct a way of being in the world implying attention, imagination and creativity in a modern society which is deeply marked by the rationality of our modes of thinking, our schedules and our modes of production.
Maxime Coulombe  
Rescue by fiction: World of Warcraft and virtual recognition

Massively multi-player online games engender an escape from reality which is also a form of criticizing today’s society. Adolescents find hidden means of making a transitional space for themselves in which they can socialize at a low cost, experiment in different ways and sometimes contest the world of expectations that their parents, educators and society in general arrange for them. The alternative world of online games distills a drug that is stronger than any toxin: recognition. We must therefore remain cautious and not condemn these games, as they express a lack of recognition in our society. They offer an answer to this lack even if they do not propose a solution.

Sylvie Craipeau, Raphaël Koster, Bruno Rocher & Jean-Luc Venisse  
«Excessive» play as an analyser of videogame practices

This article is the fruit of cooperation between psychiatrists and sociologists, thereby enabling a comparison of the discourses of videogame players (mainly massively multiplayer games), who have turned to psychotherapy to help them stop playing (consulted) and players who have not consulted. Three features alone seem to distinguish these populations: the pleasure of playing, the ability to invest the everyday world and the world of games in quick succession, and the perception and place of the body.

Sociability differs according to whether the players have consulted or not, but they all take part in the same social phenomena of transforming modes of sociability in our industrial, technical society. The social world is experienced as a restriction, and the game as an escape but also as a possible alternative and a place to experiment other modes of being “separately together” or in “collective solitude”. The world of games offers a new social space where recognition is finally possible for some and an endless quest for others. Finally, most players avoid closing themselves entirely into the digital world of games, their body reacting as an ultimate alarm which other people cannot hear.

Marie-Noëlle Denis & Alain Ercker  
Toys in the educational theory of Pastor Oberlin in the age of Enlightenment

Jean-Frédéric Oberlin (1740-1826) was Pastor of Ban de la Roche, one of the poorest and most isolated regions in the Vosges Mountains, for almost 60 years. An enlightened individual, in spite of living far from the philosophical currents of the European capitals, he became famous for his original educational methods applied not only to the pupils of the village schools in his area, but also in teaching adults and above all young children in what were called the “knitting stoves”, which were the forerunners of infant schools today. Pastor Oberlin integrated games and toys into his educational methods, using pleasure and amusement as part of the school learning experience, thereby making him a precursor of educational toy designers.

Nadia Foisil  
Actor’s play and child’s play

Acting forms part of the social comedy and the actor brings that to the stage. The roles depend on the structure of society, the actor’s place in society and his or her individuality. They evolve according to factors that are inherent in and exterior to human nature. Some actors take on their role more easily than others, and cast off a role to play another one with surprising ease. They navigate within society, adopting the behaviour and discourse of each class, and shed one costume to don another. They take part in a new round of social games, whereas others can only master a single one. Their latitude is more restricted. The theatre is the arena for this professional role-playing. Bearing this in mind, questioning the actor’s latitude to play requires contextualisation and engenders the issue of what is inborn and what is acquired. Do humans act from the outset or do they learn how to act and if this is so, what phases mark out this path?

Sébastien Genvo  
Thinking through the phenomena of “gameifying” the digital world: in favour of a theory of playability

Since they first appeared, videogames have moved from the periphery to the centre of the digital world, on an economic, technological and cultural level. The technical devices originally developed by the videogame industry have been applied to a number of sectors. To this effect we can observe a more pronounced and widespread form of using play in information and communication technologies. This “gameifying” of several digital technologies has induced deep changes in the cultural representations linked with games. At present, the term of game is applied to realities which nonetheless seemed foreign to this field just a few dozen years ago. This observation confirms a hypothesis expressed by Jacques Henriot who suggested that meanings linked to games are built up culturally, that people have different ideas as to what play is, and that this evolves through time and space. What therefore is the process by which certain activities are integrated into or cast out from “game” activities? How can we think through and uniformly analyse the way in which digital media are set up in a playful manner if we consider that play is a moving process undergoing perpetual change? By developing the concept of playability, this article suggests that we reconsider certain acquired contemporary traits concerning the ontology of games in order to form a theoretical framework which may act as a gateway to new paths of research on the process of gameifying.

Pascal Hintermeyer  
Children’s games with food in an age of industrial reproduction

If we do not reduce food to its physiological and functional aspects, it offers a rich variety of anthropological
meanings. Among these meanings concern the aesthetic and play aspects. Several examples demonstrate the importance granted to food in different socio-cultural contexts. Playing with food is therefore nothing new, but it is a tendency which skirts around moral reprobation, which often opposes such behaviour. This attraction for games with food is anticipated, stimulated and transformed today by manufacturers who integrate a playful dimension in their offers on food, especially when targeting young consumers. Based on theoretical references and surveys conducted in Alsace, we seek to reflect on the expectations, meanings and consequences of including playful dimensions in the design, production and use of food targeting children.

Leila Jeolás
Play and masculinity rites: young drivers at risk, between the pleasure of speed and the assertion of bravery

This article studies illegal car and motorbike races improvised on the public highway or on racing tracks in Brazil, called rachas. Brazilian statistics quote boys as having the highest rate of accidents, this being the second highest cause of violent death among this population after homicide. Qualitative studies on what is generally called risk behaviour among young people interpret this as an ambivalent way of calling for help or a means of questioning the value of their own existence. Without setting aside these interpretations, an on-the-ground survey among these young people has also underlined the playful nature of experiencing the rachadores, which should be analysed taking into account the key importance of the competition, challenges and bravery involved in these races as central values of the hegemonic model of masculinity.

Jean-Paul Lafrance
Between cunning and cheating: how are the rules applied to social videogames?

Without laying down rules, games and in particular videogames have no substance. This article puts forward the following questions: is it possible to cheat in complex social games? Is there a difference in nature between cheating and cunning which defines the status of the competent player? Can we consider cheating as a voluntary perversion of the rules, or is playing according to the rules part of the game, insofar as the game consists in exercising its inherent freedom? It would seem that cheating supposes a moral, legal or aesthetic judgement which may not be the same for everyone. In the footsteps of Duflo, who established that play is the invention of freedom through and in the rules, the article concludes that playing is both respecting the rules and going beyond them.

David Le Breton
Contemporary passions for vertigo

This article revisits practices qualified as risk behaviour in the light of the notion of Ilinx, researching into vertigo, which is a key factor in one of the four game classifications with reference first of all to Roger Caillois.

Pascaline Lorentz
The construction of gender-based representations in play practice: example of the Sims

Today in Europe, videogames rank top for leisure activities for the under 25s and have gained the status of a cultural practice. This sector mainly attracts a male public. However, there is one videogame which is an exception to the rule – The Sims®, which mainly attracts girls. This article will set out the reasons for this success and demonstrate that the playful socialisation of young girls, oriented towards their future role as women, wives and mothers, predisposes them to appreciate the gameplay in this game.

Louis Mathiot
Celebrations and related games with food: transgressive usages under control

Celebrations are opportunities for children and adults to temporarily suspend the rules and standards which structure everyday meals. These spaces invested by consumption, allow guests to break with the prohibition of “playing with food” and release some play-based food practices. Based on observations of celebratory meals and interviews with families in the eastern France, this work examines the ceremonies, rituals and usages specific to these exceptional moments with a view to understanding how their specific frameworks prescribe “play”. Precise examples such as Candlemass, St Nicholas’s day and Epiphany allow us to examine the transmission of everyday standards structured by the celebrations, and also to reinterpret intergenerational relationships.

Cornélie Matter
The playground at infant school: play and recognition

Observing children at play during breaks at infant school reveals a system of practices where groups of children seem to possess a genuine culture with specific modalities of acquisition, transmission and regulation. The extreme diversity of playful practices demanding a structure for proper study and successive classifications with reference first of all to Roger Caillois through his spirit of the game then Jean Piaget and Henri Wallon for their knowledge in the development of young children, help to highlight a major function of games, the inter-human link - socialisation. Analysing games, divided into 4 different typologies according to their social meaning, reveals a true system of exchange where children experience the elementary human relations of giving, receiving, returning.
Laurence Schmoll
Educational usages of online games: the example of language learning

Online games can be particularly well adapted for use as learning tools in certain disciplines which require time and repetition. Indeed, they offer interactions with others, simulation of concrete situations, actions put into context and involvement in community life, encouraging people to remain within a game space over a period of time and to accept to face difficulties, even if they are repetitive.

The application of online games in education and language learning, which is a learning process that requires time and interactions, has therefore been developed over the last few years. This article presents the most significant of these online games in the specific field of learning French as a foreign language. It underlines that most applications are limited through their parsimonious use of the potential of network technology: the low use of images and video, little or no interaction between players, over-explicit learning objectives cancelling out playful elements, teaching methods based on closed exercises etc. The article also presents a contrasting concept with a massively multiplayer online role-playing game for learning languages, for which Zon (Michigan State University) and Thélème (Strasbourg University /CNRS/ Almédia) are the pioneering examples using simultaneously all the scope of online games: interactivity, immersion, simulation and playfulness.

However, interest for these games raises questions linked with conflicts of the models they give rise to: learning models, actor-learner and actor-teacher models, underlying social models (systems of values). There is therefore a gap between the theoretical interest and the practical success which these games encounter on the market.

Patrick Schmoll
Serious games: exploration of an oxymoron

The first decade of the 2000s has seen the success of the denomination serious games to designate computer applications for useful purposes using the scope of videogames. The term covers very diverse situations, such as game based educational software, simulation exercises for a given activity (driving a vehicle, surgical operations, company management), and the use of videogames for advertising, militant, informational and brain training purposes. All these applications have a point in common, in that they act as a vector for useful content by calling on motivations to play and playful mechanisms. From many points of view, the term of serious game seems to be new packaging for déjà-vu achievements, especially in terms of simulation exercises and game-based educational activities. By using a new terminology, it gives a more encompassing legitimacy to new, more controversial applications, in particular advertising, militant and ideological applications, but it also opens up new markets for the videogame industries.

This article explores what is at stake with this new terminology and examines its relevance beyond simple marketing. In particular the expression “serious game” is only an oxymoron in a society which resolutely opposes “game” and “serious”, stressing the value of work rather than amusement and therefore making it a paradox for the futile to become useful. The development of such games demonstrates that the frontiers of play have become blurred today, referring to a change in the status of games in our societies, which itself goes hand-in-hand with the transformation of societies overall.