

Vol. 4 (12/2005)

The Ethics of E-Games

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Editorial: On IRIE Vol. 4

There is not much left to be said in the editors' foreword to this issue on the ethics of e-games as its guest editors, Elizabeth Buchanan and Charles Ess, already completed it with a profound introduction to the subject. Their opening paper provides an excellent overview of the field starting with its theoretical background, moving on to the specific moral questions raised within and finally introducing well informed to the single articles putting them into a systematic context. We therefore would like to confine our foreword mainly to our expression of gratitude to Elizabeth Buchanan and Charles Ess for their outstanding piece of work not merely editing this issue but also contributing to it.

It seems like the subject hit the mark. In fact e-games are among the most dramatically expanding phenomena of ICTs in a world increasingly shaped by computing and networking technologies. They represent some of the most sophisticated utilizations of the potentials of computing and network technologies – and both their stand-alone and online versions implicate a complex array of ethical questions. They include issues of individual and community responsibilities, cross-cultural interactions, etc., alongside central philosophical questions concerning reality and its construction in human experience, human nature and play, and, ultimately, the nature of the good life, both individually and in community. At the same time, however, these compelling philosophical interests have largely been neglected in contemporary scholarship and research.

We hope that the articles collected here not only contribute in helpful and significant ways to what amounts to a new field of (cross-cultural) Computer and Information Ethics - and, further, that these articles may demonstrate especially the practical importance of such research as these articles contribute to serious social and political debates regarding E-games and their ethical dimensions. The reviews of this issue perfectly complement this approach as they critically focus on some well-observed publications on the subject of E-Games published in German as well as in the English language.

Therefore we are confident that the issue in hand will encourage scholars and practitioners from all over the world to provide new intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives to this exciting and simultaneously important debate on questions and problems of high economic relevance.

Yours,

Rafael Capurro, Thomas Hausmanninger, Karsten Weber and Felix Weil, the Editors

Elizabeth A. Buchanan and Charles Ess

Introduction: The Ethics of E-Games

Abstract:

E-games are a dramatically expanding dimension of contemporary exploitations of computing and computer network technologies - one that, thus far, has evoked much more heat (often, in the form of "moral panics") among parents and politicians than light in the form of serious scholarly and philosophical analysis. We argue that e-games deserve such analysis in part because of their intrinsic philosophical interest as they raise primary philosophical questions of ontology, epistemology, human nature, the character of gameplay," - and most especially, of ethics. We further suggest that such analyses - exemplified by the articles collected here - may also contribute to resolving the larger social and political debates evoked by e-games.

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Across the world, e-games – which we understand to mean primarily games that require computer processing for their play, in either standalone or network-based environments – have long evoked fierce debate in many circles, raising sentiments across the board. As is often the case as new technologies appear and diffuse in societies, these sentiments, responses, and issues range from discomfort, anger, and pleasure, to parental concerns and serious addiction problems. Within these parameters, the ethical debate surrounding e-games is certainly growing. But this debate threatens to become paralyzed on the one hand by simple-minded and, in some cases at least, unwarranted characterizations of e-games and their impacts, and, on the other hand, by overly simple ethical analyses that would force us to choose between Manichean polarities of absolute evil vs. absolute good. Moreover, while numerous articles on the ethical dimensions of e-games have appeared over the past two decades – within the philosophical literature, e-games have received remarkably scant attention. However, as a sign of the growing scholarly interest in and importance of gaming, two journals, *Game Studies*¹, which began in 2001, and *Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media*², premiering January 2006, are dedicated to an intellectual and critical examination of gaming.

In our view, however, e-games – as a rapidly growing social, economic, and perhaps political phenomenon – deserve serious ethical reflection first of all as an important component of the larger fields of Computer and Information Ethics that seek to bring the tools and insights of philosophical analyses to bear on computing technologies and their multiple interactions with our ethical and political existence. In fact, as we shall see by way of conclusion here, the articles collected in this special issue – as one of the very few (if any) such issues in the philosophical literature – contribute to several of the central discussions in Computer and Information Ethics. Moreover, if we as individuals, families, communities, and scholars are to debate effectively and fruitfully regarding e-games, including their potential impacts on our children, families, and societies; and if we, in the light of those debates, are to develop and implement ethically-justified resolutions to

demonstrably significant (i.e., empirically-grounded and ethically important) problems – then these debates and discussions require precisely the substantive philosophical reflection that e-games deserve in any case. In presenting what we take to be significant contributions to such analysis, we hope that this special issue will encourage further philosophical reflection of the highest order. In doing so, we further seek to take contemporary ethical discussion of e-games beyond such Manichean dichotomies between “moral panics,” on the one hand, and self-interested defenses, on the other hand, and thereby contribute some of the approaches and insights needed to fruitfully resolve these important debates.

Before turning to the articles collected here, it may be helpful to briefly consider the contemporary ethical and political landscape regarding e-games. In the United States, industry labeling of video games began in 1994. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) uses five different rating symbols and over 25 different content labels that refer to violence, sex, language, substance abuse, gambling, humor and other potentially sensitive subject matter. It is not surprising that e-games are contributing to current political discussions. Recent legislation has been introduced to protect minors from “inappropriate” games; Senators Clinton and Lieberman proposed the Family Entertainment Protection Act, noting that “There is a growing body of evidence that points to a link between violent videos and aggressive behaviour in children. We are not interested in censoring videos meant for adult entertainment but we do want to ensure that these videos are not purchased by minors. Our bill will help accomplish this by imposing fines on those retailers that sell M-rated games to minors,” Senator Lieberman said (Clinton 2005).

Across Europe, e-games are also hot-button political issues. In Germany, for example, the new coalition of the SPD (Social-Democratic Party) and CDU (Christian-Democrat Union) has urged legislation that would forbid so-called *Killerspiele* – “killer games” such as first-person shooters (FPSs) that, some studies have suggested, increase tendencies towards violence among their users (see especially Gordana Dodig-Crnkovic and Thomas Larsson, this volume, for a review of the relevant literature). Critics counter, it is worth noting, that such studies may be flawed in important ways – and that, for example, only 3% of computer games in Germany are for “adults only”, in contrast with the vast majority of games designed especially for educational use among young people (Networld 2005).

¹ See <http://www.gamestudies.org/>

² See <http://gac.sagepub.com/>

This issue includes eight articles, each of which contributes to the growing scholarly discussion of e-games. We begin with three articles that take up the ethical dimensions of e-games from more general and theoretical perspectives. These articles (Mia Consalvo, Miguel Sicart, and Gordana Dodig-Crnkovic and Thomas Larsson) serve to introduce us to the large theoretical frameworks and issues central to philosophical reflection on e-games, including primary questions of ontology, epistemology, human nature, and the character of "gameplay" – the experience of playing that, precisely as the human agent engages with the game as a formal system of rules, both actualizes the potentials of the player and the game, and thereby constitutes the peculiar "reality" of the game as a *construction* "between" the player and the game (so Sicart). Within these larger philosophical frameworks, these articles then introduce us to the various ethical dimensions of e-games, as well as provide a helpful overview of the relevant literatures, including current research on the positive and negative psychological and sociological impacts of e-games and gaming. These articles are followed by ones that address more specific ethical and legal questions – namely, questions of race in games (Dean Chan); what it means to cheat online (Kai Kimppa and Andrew Bissett); the legal dimensions of cheating (Dan Burk); and the ethical dimensions of Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) (Dorothy Warner and Mike Raiter, Jengchung Chen and Yangil Park).

We begin, then, with Mia Consalvo's "Rule Sets, Cheating, and Magic Circles: Studying Games and Ethics." This article offers potential frameworks for studying e-games; in particular, it asks "what is game ethics or what would it look like?" This article moves us towards a critical stance, much beyond the simple-minded, "is this a good game or a bad game" mentality that often permeates social and political sound bites surrounding e-games. By asking questions of an ethical nature at various levels and of various stakeholders in the gaming process, for instance, the gamers themselves, the game industry itself, and the game developers, significant and interesting questions arise — questions that contribute productively to our understanding of gaming. Consalvo's questions move us into the sometimes unique and complex issues in the ethics of e-games, issues which will be addressed in greater detail in subsequent articles.

Miguel Sicart continues our initial focus on the larger philosophical questions of frameworks by demonstrating first of all how and why computer games

pose ethical problems. Sicart reiterates Consalvo's point that the ethical dimensions of e-games are multi-layered, first of all as they implicate both designers and players: indeed, players bear a particular set of ethical responsibilities as they are central agents in the overall construction of the *meaning(s)* of computer games. Sicart then takes up Aristotle's virtue ethics to examine the particular nature of computer games and to develop a specific framework for undertaking ethical analyses and constructing ethical approaches to e-games. In this way, Sicart helpfully ties ethical analysis and reflection on e-games to a central philosophical framework in the Western tradition – one that has enjoyed a renaissance, moreover, in contemporary ethics. Sicart's approach is thus especially useful for furthering robust analyses of e-games that seek to draw on the full range of available philosophical resources, and thereby contribute to the nascent development of e-game ethics as a component of Computer and Information Ethics.

Gordana Dodig-Crnkovic and Thomas Larsson's reiterate and amplify Sicart's understanding of the *ontology* and *epistemology* of e-games: "a game is always embedded in reality and interpreted both inside and outside its conceptual space." An ethical analysis must then take into account both the ontological and epistemological functions of games. Further reiterating Consalvo's multi-layered analytical approach, Dodig-Crnkovi and Larsson likewise call attention to the multifaceted social position games assume. Their analysis emphasizes a central point made by Consalvo and Sicart as well: only when all invested parties assume an integral role in the ethical discussion will we see the development of an ethically sound game culture.

These initial analyses of the ethical dimensions of e-games, as intertwined with their ontological and epistemological dimensions, make clear that the nature of e-games is complex, and both reflects and is reflexive of reality. Given this duality, e-games are an important focal place in which we can fruitfully examine complex social issues.

To begin with, if we accept that e-games are always informing and are informed by social space, the issue of race is of paramount importance. Dean Chan's "Playing with Race: The Ethics of Racialized Representation in E-Games" describes the racial overtones and representations in war, sports, and action adventure games and urges more critical reflection and engagement with such racialized representations. Through a reflexive engagement and by advocating for greater diversity of represen-

tation, Chan believes that gaming design and development can continue in a more ethically grounded way.

Next, Kimppa and Bissett take issue with cheating in online gaming communities. The authors assert that for a variety of reasons, cheating in e-games has not been considered as serious as cheating on other game venues, noting that it is a significant offence when considered in specific ethical parameters. They offer us a taxonomy of cheating and countermeasures intended to help us understand the potential array of offences. The authors argue for serious consideration of cheating as a way to ensure a fair and moral playing field for all in e-games.

The types of cheating raised in Kimppa and Bissett's, "The Ethical Significance of Cheating in Online Games," do not typically fall into legal discussions, though one could envision such debate. Dan Burk takes the legal issues head-on, as he examines the disparate interests of game players, publishers, and legality. Using an American copyright framework, Burk's "Electronic Gaming and the Ethics of Information Ownership" critiques current copyright law and addresses its shortcomings as a model for allowing and enabling player expression and creativity. By questioning existing intellectual property models vis-à-vis e-gaming, Burk moves the discussion forward in a meaningful and significant way.

We conclude with two articles that delve into the unique ethical dimensions of an emerging type of e-gaming, namely, Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs), in Dorothy Warner and Mike Raiter's, "Social context in Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs): Ethical Questions in Shared Space," and MUDs and MMOGs in Jengchung Chen and Yangil Park's "The Differences of Addiction Causes between Massive Multiplayer Online Game and Multi-User Domain." Warner and Raiter describe unique ethical issues raised by the cross-cultural and transitory nature of MMOGs, and the authors rightly recognize that the consequent level of diversity of perspectives, circumstances, and expectations in MMOGs results in a particularly complex social context where ethical boundaries are stretched and tested.

Beyond these boundaries, Chen and Park examine another level of social concern surrounding e-games: addiction. How addictive are MMOGs and MUDs, and why? What social consequence does such addiction hold? Chen and Park illustrate significant differences in the causes of addiction between MMOGs and MUDs. This article explores two theo-

retical bases for addiction, Use and Gratification Theory, and Flow Theory to explore the ever-increasing discussion of addiction and gaming.

Taken together, then, these articles provide first of all a primer on the basic philosophical dimensions of e-games – their ontology and epistemologies, as well as their ethical dimensions – and in ways that, as Aristotle would require, reflect the real-world *praxis* of our ethical behaviors, both online and offline, as well as contemporary psychological and sociological research that helps provide empirical foundations for both the positive and negative claims regarding the impacts of e-games. In this way, these articles help carry forward the basic philosophical work of developing and applying coherent frameworks for ethical analysis – frameworks that, we trust, will prove fruitful for serious reflection and debate on e-games that seek to move beyond simple "good/bad" polarities and divisions. By the same token, the various analyses of specific ethical and legal questions of e-games help flesh out the more general and theoretical reflections with substantive contributions to reflection and debate concerning particular legal and ethical issues.

In these ways, this special issue brings together a distinctive collection of philosophically and empirically robust articles that significantly contribute to the still nascent literature on e-games. While we trust that the articles collected here will helpfully contribute, both individually and collectively, to this nascent literature – clearly, the coherent, empirically-informed, and philosophically robust analysis and reflection that this special issue represents are only in their earliest stages. In particular, while these articles help articulate and define important frameworks and issues for such analysis – they by no means raise all the significant questions, nor exhaust all possible philosophical approaches: indeed, these articles are further significant for the ways they open up still more possible routes of important philosophical exploration. For example, while Aristotle's virtue ethics, as a major component of ancient and contemporary Western ethics, figures prominently here – e-games deserve and require analyses based on the widest possible range of ethical frameworks, including those that draw from consequentialist and deontological traditions, as well as from contemporary feminist ethics, ecological ethics, etc. Moreover, the discussions here of the sometimes unique and distinctive character of gaming and gameplay thus highlight e-games as a significant example in *praxis* of one of the most important meta-theoretical debates in Computer and Information Ethics – namely, whether computers

introduce genuinely novel ethical problems, and/or whether the ethical issues they evoke can be resolved simply through the application of already established ethical frameworks (cf. Tavani 2004). In addition, the multi-layered approaches developed here by Consalvo, Sicart, and Dodig-Crnkovic and Larsson suggest that an adequate ethics of e-games must move beyond prevailing (modern-Western) emphases on atomistic *individuals* as the primary locus of moral responsibility to conceptions of moral responsibility as shared among a community of ethical agents – conceptions that are brought forward in contemporary ecological and feminist ethics, for example, as well as in pre-modern Western ethics (such as Aristotle), and, most importantly for e-games as a *global* phenomenon, Eastern ethical traditions (such as Confucian thought).

By the same token, the debate regarding the nature of the gaming experience, e.g., as in between our ordinary, real-world experiences and a virtual reality that may have no connection with and impact on our real-world lives, likewise serves as a fine-grained example of similar discussions that have emerged in recent decades under the rubric of “the computational turn” (Cavalier 2005). That is, computers and computer networks create new environments that, in their contrast with our prior notions and experiences of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, thus help sharpen our understanding of these earlier experiences and notions, and offer new electronic venues for testing both traditional and novel philosophical views in the *praxis* of online social experiences.

Finally, while the articles collected here represent a wide range of national traditions and perspectives; and while Warren and Raiter especially emphasize how MMOGs entail a range of cross-cultural encounters – our authors by no means exhaust the possible perspectives on e-games as a *global* phenomenon, one that engages both designers and players from a wide range of cultures and thereby a wide range of ethical traditions. As with e-games themselves, the extant philosophical analyses of what Rafael Capurro has helpfully called “intercultural information ethics” – as the larger field for what we might call by extension an intercultural e-games ethics – is only at its beginning stages (Capurro 2005; Ess 2005). The emergence of e-games ethics, as calling for approaches, norms, and practices that would claim moral relevance and legitimacy across the global range of diverse cultures and ethical traditions, may thus serve as an important and suggestive focal example in the larger project of intercultural information ethics.

Especially as e-games continue their phenomenal growth and impact on our lives, both individually and collectively, we very much hope that this special issue will both contribute to and inspire further, much-needed philosophical reflection and debate on the ethics of e-games – both in light of the frameworks and issues brought forward by our contributors, and in light of the questions, issues, and frameworks still left to be explored.

We close this introduction with a special acknowledgment to the reviewers whose careful and critical comments helped our authors improve on their original drafts - and thereby contributed significantly to the quality and substance of this special issue: Wolfgang Coy (Humboldt Universität, Berlin), Bernd Frohmann (University of Western Ontario, Canada), Soraj Hongladarom (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok), Marti Smith (Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA), Richard Spinello (Boston College, USA), Tadashi Takenouchi (University of Tokyo, Japan), Wolfgang Wunden (SüdwestRundfunk [Southwest Radio], Stuttgart, Germany).

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Mia Consalvo

Rule Sets, Cheating, and Magic Circles: Studying Games and Ethics

Abstract:

This paper provides frameworks for understanding how ethics might be expressed in gameplay situations, and how we can study the ethical frameworks that games offer to players. There are many ways to delve into such topics, and this paper considers only a few approaches. It briefly surveys some of the important questions and critiques arising from audience studies, theories of play and games, and work on cheating, and begins to build a framework for considering ethics in relation to games and players that transcends the “place apart” that games are often constructed as.

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 - Console video games and global corporations: Creating a hybrid culture, *New Media & Society*, forthcoming.
 - Cheating can be good for you: Educational games and multiple play styles, *On the Horizon*, 13 (2), July 2005.

For the past four years I've been asking game players how they define cheating in games, and how they negotiate and enact cheating practices. Some react as if I'm asking them to reveal their utter lack of ethics and values, and they then respond with clear denunciations that cheating is wrong and they would "never do anything like that." When asked "like what," answers begin to fragment, and lose moral certainty. Clearly, we need a better understanding of how ethics might be expressed in game-play situations, and how we can study the ethical frameworks that games offer to players. Research in this area is beginning (Reynolds, 2002), but many interesting questions remain to be asked.

There are many ways to delve into such topics, and this paper considers only a few approaches. It briefly surveys some of the important questions and critiques arising from audience studies, theories of play and games, and work on cheating, and begins to build a framework for considering ethics in relation to games and players that transcends the "place apart" that games are often constructed as.

Active audiences vs. couch potato players?

Much of the earliest research focusing on game players took a social scientific approach, seeking to learn how violence in games (the central concern) "affected" various types of players, in different ways (Sherry, 2001). Although critiqued by many (Goldstein, 2005; Jenkins, 1999), that paradigm has continued to shape how many individuals view the playing experience. Gamers are often seen as actively participating in games, but at the same time being actively (and negatively) affected by the content within the game. Fundamental to such an approach is the negation (or dismissal) of how players constantly make choices about their in-game behavior, as well as consider and frame their game actions relative to other daily situations and contexts. While it has not been much linked to game-play yet, active audience theory can aid us in better understanding player choices and decisions, and the ways that individuals negotiate meanings drawn from a wide variety of "texts."

Theorization of an active media audience has a strong history, with current questions investigating the degree to which resistance and negotiation might take place in viewing situations, rather than debate if such activities occur at all (Fiske, 1987). The conceptualization of the active audience arose

to counter effects' theorists insistence on passive media consumers sitting at the end of a one way tunnel of content—the receiver that might contend with some noise but ultimately was supposed to take delivery of an intended message. Media theorists have accepted ideas of active audiences, yet the term "active" is always attached, perhaps to remind ourselves that the term "audience" implies someone not as active in the process as we would hope. Active audience theory also confirms the presence of polysemic content, which challenges the view that media texts are closed, or can be read or understood in one particular way. Hall has carefully explored the encoding process, arguing that even as media producers attempt to control the meanings they embed in their messages, that process is always incomplete or partial (Hall, 1973/1980).

Considering the interactive nature of videogames, polysemic content as a conceptual category with which to think about games becomes even more relevant. While television shows and films may invite different interpretations, the viewer is confronting a somewhat static text, with an unchanging story or plotline. Indeed, some audience theorists have contested the idea that viewers easily or radically reinterpret texts, as such processes take energy and often result in little pleasure (Kellner, 2005). However, games are hardly static—they are as Aarseth argues, ergodic texts, requiring non-trivial effort to explore. Games also have varying levels of interactivity, which demands that players make choices, choices which can then alter (sometimes very distinctly) the story or experience of a particular game.

Games such as those in the Grand Theft Auto series perfectly illustrate the conditions and consequences created by polysemic content. Players are given the opportunity to follow the game designer's storyline(s) involving mission completion, as well as chances to explore the space of the gameworld, which is almost completely interactive. More and less violent solutions to problems can often be found, and players can create their own "versions" of the game. Likewise, the PC game *The Sims* has no pre-set storyline, allowing players to explore all sorts of "what if" ideas they may imagine for their simulated people.

Game playing by definition (and in practice) demands activity and volition. How could a person passively play a game? The player is fundamentally implicated in the gameplay situation, and referring back to Hall (1973/1980) and Fiske (1987), we see that players are constantly making meanings, decoding icons or actions or texts in the game. And

different players of varying ages, social classes, nationalities, ethnicities and genders bring their own experiences with them to each game. They may be hardcore or casual (whatever those terms imply). They may be dedicated Role-Playing gamers but trying their first Real-Time Strategy game (RTS). Or they may be replaying their favorite games for nostalgia and enjoyment. Given such variables, and such activity, it seems almost ludicrous to posit an "effect" of one game on particular players or one game experience for all players. Better to wonder: How do individuals make games part of their lives? What do they make of the gameplay experience?

That starts us off in a more productive direction. We can look at players and games and their intersection to ask: Do games pose interesting ethical questions for players to take up? What layers or levels are involved? For example, many games offer the player the opportunity to revert to a previously saved version of the game. So if I feel guilty about leaving my Sim zombie fenced up outside to die (which I did), I can revert back to a stage of the game where he's still alive (which I didn't). How do players think about and engage with such choices? Are players seeing such opportunities in games to experiment with ethical decision-making? Is Sim "murder" a common activity? What reasons do players construct for such actions? Furthermore, how has our larger culture(s) portrayed games and what implications does that picture have for how we all approach (and judge) games?

So what is game ethics or what would it look like? To begin, there are at least several layers that we can consider as a basis for asking questions. The actions and choices made and offered by game developers, game publishers, marketers, game players, and the choices coded into the game itself can all be investigated. Here are just a few examples of where such questioning can lead.

In the game industry, for example, we can look at the decisions made by a company such as Rockstar Games, developer of a string of controversial titles such as the Grand Theft Auto series, Manhunt, and the forthcoming The Warriors. What did the company's management consider when deciding to create such games? Was the potential for controversy and divisiveness considered? Was it considered a positive or negative component of the each game's release? Does the company have any wider responsibility to the game development community? Do their games set precedents for legislation? Should the actions of one game company speak for all game companies?

Moving down a level, we can ask what game developers consider as they build games. How much violence and of what type is considered acceptable? Does that change with different player demographics? Do game developers even see their software coding in ethical ways? What about the design of individual characters—both central and peripheral avatars?

Finally, we can examine the individual player. How do players make choices about what they will or won't do in games? Do they follow rules in all circumstances or bend rules to achieve a greater good? Would a player shoot a dog in a game if that was the only way to win? How does a player justify murder in a game? Do players position the experience as "just a game" or as a cathartic release from everyday pressures?

Such questions only scratch the surface of what we can investigate in relation to games and ethics. Yet they point to central issues and areas of interest. We need to move beyond the simplistic ideas of good and bad, legal and illegal, to the more interesting and relevant factors related to the process of making moral choices. How do developers, publishers and players decide what is right and wrong? What do they conclude is right and wrong for them? And how does that play into or break through a magic circle into the everyday? We're only beginning to ask such questions—the answers should prove fascinating.

Magic circles and play boundaries

Another critical area to consider is the role of games and play in our lives, and how the spaces of games intersect with the spaces of daily life. Huizinga felt that play and games were central experiences of human beings, and went so far as to argue that play constituted culture (1955). While games have always existed, they defy easy categorization—as games can be for fun or in deadly earnest (as in war games), with no stakes or high stakes involved. Games can involve escape, but not always. Huizinga felt that games were protected by a "magic circle" or bounded space set apart from the everyday (much like the difference between the sacred and the profane), with rules as a boundary system for maintaining them.

Yet is this indeed true, or a useful way to think of games? Is there some boundary that delimits the playing field, separating the game from other, non-game space? If we take this idea to be valid, what

happens to our conceptions about games? In that scenario, games are walled off as a space apart—where we can create different rules, rewards, and punishments for the activities that take place within. Killing can be rewarded, and civilizations might best be taken over by “culture flipping” them. Players can experiment (to greater and lesser degrees) with potential actions, including exploring, socializing, empathizing, killing, being selfish, being silly, being inconsistent, or being all powerful. The results of those actions will vary based on the game being played, and its own particular rule set. Attempts to “game the game” can also provide players with elaborate, rich opportunities for exploration, experimentation and greater knowledge.

If we acknowledge games can provide such opportunities in “walled off” spaces, is it appropriate to judge games, or game player actions, by an external set of rules—rules that originate outside the magic circle? Games may reward players for particular actions—actions that would definitely not be rewarded in daily life. But should our standards for appropriate actions in daily life carry over to our game life? The Sims encourages players to create happy successful families, but also allows players to kill their Sims through neglect as well as indirect actions. Yet the player may be rewarded by the game for such violent actions (getting that family-wrecker out of the home, for example). We should not be so quick to question such actions, if we do believe games really are a space apart, governed by a “different” set of rules.

What results when such judgments are applied is an infantilization of the game space. It suggests players cannot understand a separate set of rules and rewards, or that we can have no spaces where such alternate systems might function. A one-to-one mapping of values robs games of their unique character, and their rule set, creating a space derivative of ‘real life’ standards of behavior. When that happens, choices that might be interesting or significant within a game are diminished, and choices are robbed of their playful, experimental quality. And the game space becomes impoverished, leaving game players with two sets of rules to negotiate—the in-game rules for rewards, and the daily life rules that impose larger judgments onto their actions.

Where does such theorizing of play and games leave us, in relation to ethics? Obviously play and games are central parts of the human experience, and ethics are likewise centrally placed in our lives. How do the two come together? To suggest that games

are a “space apart” from daily life and our normal rules for living is just as much of an ethical choice as making them conform to and integral with our daily codes of conduct. We cannot say that there are “no ethics” in games or that players bring no ethical frameworks to their gameplay—instead we leave the question unexamined, which is itself a choice. What we need to do instead is actively involve ourselves with the questions, seeking to determine how ethics fit, how we see them informing games and gameplay, and how we choose to integrate games into our lives (or not). Although not tied specifically to games or ethics, one way of beginning that discussion is through theories of active media audiences.

Cheating in games and daily life

My own work has focused on how individual players have defined and negotiated various cheating behaviors in their regular gameplay. As I have learned, many players define cheating in a fairly restrictive way and then proceed to “break the rules” with abandon. In a different context (such as writing a paper for a school assignment) such rule-breaking might be troublesome, but here something different is at play. While some players do certainly keep connections between the rules of their non-gaming and gaming lives, others draw distinctions between them. For some (if not many) players, the game world is a space apart where normal rules don’t apply.

Leaving aside the question of whether a magic circle is operating or not, such behaviors raise interesting questions about the role of games in our lives. For many players, playing games is, in some measure, a playing with rules and their boundaries. Games offer a bounded space (although some games are more bounded than others, depending on how many people are playing) for the exploration of actions and consequences as well as the ludic expression of activities deemed inappropriate (if not illegal) in regular life.

Many players cheat in games (single as well as multiplayer) to “play God” or have fun, without necessarily wanting to get ahead or defeat another human player. Such individuals have made a decision that while their activity may or may not be self-defined as cheating, such shortcuts or code alterations are acceptable in the space of the game. Huizinga reminds us that games are a “stepping out” of real life into a space apart. Although more games are now following us into real life (IMs from guildmates, phone calls to friends to enter the game

and help out, real-money trade that alters game economies), the space of the game itself instantiates particular rules which players must negotiate. And apart from breaking the terms of a EULA, there are few "real" consequences for breaking the rules of a game.

Similarly, many players "cheat" in games when they get stuck. Having reached a point where they cannot progress further without help, they turn to guides, codes, or friends to help them get past the point of difficulty. This is the most common and accepted form of cheating (some players don't see it as cheating at all), suggesting that the reaching of an impasse and resulting request for help is something not very divorced from regular life.

Likewise, players cheat in order to "fast forward" through unpleasant or boring parts of a game, in order to reach its endpoint. That practice, found in single and multiplayer games (using cheat codes to skip levels or using a power-leveler in a MMOG) is usually instrumental in nature, recognizing that a player wishes to complete a game yet not fully engage all aspects of it. Most of the time we can't fast forward through our lives, and even if we could, we actively choose not to. Most students research and write papers rather than finding one on the Internet to download, and most drivers stop at deserted intersections, even if no police are in sight. Yet games offer us a space where we can experience that freedom, without significant consequences.

What is unfortunate is that popular discourse tends to judge in-game behaviors by the rules that operate in daily non-game life. I can see this in the way that many players have defended their actions, trying to reassure me that a particular code use was "necessary" to continued progress in a game. Players also state that "it's just a game" as a way to deflect criticism in advance of their actions. But why must we hold our actions in games to what is really a separate standard? Why don't we allow for more play and variation in games, allowing players to experiment with actions, identities, and practices that in "real life" are forbidden?

Individuals might find in games a space to explore the consequences of various actions, and challenge or reify their own beliefs about what are appropriate or inappropriate actions to take in specific circumstances. They can also play at taking what are normally the "wrong" actions for them in daily life, gaining perspective on other choices made. We expect children to play but adults are considered

juvenile when engaging in "childish" actions. Games are and can become even better at becoming spaces for exploration of not only fantastical worlds and rhetorics of power, but also of playing with rules and their boundaries.

"Is this a good game or a bad game?"

When the question above is posed, typically, two groups have done the asking, and they are addressing fundamentally different issues concerning games which have more to do with judging games than examining ethical processes. Those groups are game players and game critics (such as politicians and activist groups).

When game players ask 'is this a good or bad game' they are asking whether the game will entertain them, if the story is intriguing, if the gameplay delivers what the marketing promises, and if the game is thus successful at providing entertainment value. When politicians and interest groups ask the question, it invokes issues such as the glorification of violence and the amount of violence in a particular game, whether there are prostitute or drug dealers or other criminal 'types' present, whether or not the game depicts women or minorities in a negative light, how religions (including the occult) are shown, and how all those elements might influence an impressionable child.

Both sets of questions are banal, I believe, and neither addresses the question of ethics. While game studies scholars have begun to examine gameplay to determine what it encompasses (it's definitely a slippery term), it has not been tied in any formal way to an expression of ethics. At the same time, the questions of good and bad that are raised by such groups often have little to do with better understanding games and player experiences with them—rather they are tied to calls for censorship or general moral outrage.

What this paper has outlined, in contrast, is a path to exploring more interesting questions about games and ethical choices. We can study how games are a space apart with separate rules and rewards, and we can also explore how games are spilling over into our daily lives in pleasurable and troublesome ways, with real consequences. That approach takes us further, I believe, in understanding the role of games in contemporary culture, and how we negotiate our beliefs as we play at them, either walled off or happily integrated into the rest of our lives.

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Miguel Sicart

Game, Player, Ethics: A Virtue Ethics Approach to Computer Games

Abstract:

As the contemporary heirs of popular music or cinema, computer games are gradually taking over the markets of entertainment. Much like cinema and music, computer games are taking the spotlight in another front – that which blames them for encouraging unethical behaviors. Apparently, computer games turn their users into blood thirsty zombies with a computer game learnt ability of aiming with deadly precision.

The goal of this paper is to pay attention to the ethical nature of computer games, in order to understand better the ways we can evaluate their morality in western cultures providing a framework to understand some of these concerns. This paper poses questions about the ontology of games and their ethical meaning, in an attempt to give ethical theory a word in the analysis of computer games.

Agenda

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Introduction

When researching about computer games and their value system, it is a usual method to analyze the behavior of their users, evaluating the results in order to understand what computer games are and how they affect their users (Anderson & Dill: 2000). The problem is that these studies are trustworthy only when it comes to understanding how game users react to game testing. They say very little about what computer games are, and what is to be a player, because the answers to those questions seem to be given by default.

This paper argues for the understanding of what games are, what a player is, and which kind of ethical questions computer games pose from an ethical theory perspective. Following Philip Brey's applied ethics methodology (Brey:2000), this paper will first determine why computer games pose ethical problems. Those problems will be described using ethical conceptual terms, and finally they will be interpreted by ethical theory trying to reach a resolution on the ethical nature of computer games.

This paper intends to address two communities: philosophers and ethicists should be interested in the analysis of computer games as they pose ethical dilemmas in the intersection of arts, culture and technology. On the other hand, game designers might be interested not only in the argumentation that explains the ethics of games, but also because implementing ethical discourses in game design might lead to more mature, challenging products.

What games are

Chess, go, football, poker, *Counter Strike*: what do these objects have in common? They are all games, but they all are very different kinds of objects and experiences. They do present, though, some elements that make them definable as the same class of objects. Those elements, then, are what make certain objects be considered games: which are those? How can we define games?

Since 2001 (Aarseth:2001), it is possible to talk about computer game research as an academic field, related to a broader discipline with a relative short tradition; a discipline whose founding fathers are Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, and Brian - Sutton-Smith, whose influence reaches the works of Espen Aarseth or Eric Zimmermann (Salen & Zimmerman: 2003). The central research question for

most of these theorist is: what are games. In this paper I will use the latest most comprehensive approach to the ontological nature of computer games: the work of Jesper Juul.

According to Juul, "a game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable" (Juul: 2004, p. 30). And video games are "games played using computer power, where the computer upholds the rules of the game and the game is played using a video display" (*ibid*, p. 1). Juul has achieved a syncretism in the ontological level that allows game researchers to share concepts and approaches. In a certain sense, the ontological question about computer games needs to be grounded in a common language, and that is what Juul has provided.

For this paper's sake, the most interesting distinction in Juul's definition details the difference between a level of systemic rules, and the level of fictionality that most computer games create. This approach actually means that games can be analyzed as systems and as worlds, and as both, in the ways they interrelate. Both the virtual world and the rules are formal abstractions that seem not to take into account the existence of a player, or the phenomenology of playing. This dichotomy is crucial for the ethical understanding of a game, as it empowers the players as moral beings with the ability to judge their own experiences according to ethical values and cultural practices.

Summarizing, a game is a formal set of rules that project a fictional world that a player has to experience. A game is also the experience of play in a formalized rule set environment (Zimmerman & Salen: 2003). Therefore, it might be possible to say that a game only exists when played, even though we can describe its rules. These rules, being the objective nature of the game, might be considered as a relevant part in the ethical construction of the experience, as the constraints and affordances that impose on the player might actually have embedded values (Winner: 1986, Norman: 2002) If we want to understand the ethics of computer games we need to be able to determine precisely how a computer game as a moral object and experience is constituted. To do so, I will apply Aristotle's distinction between *potentia* and *actio*.

Games *in potentia*, Games *in actio*

I can take the rulebook of any game, say chess, and read it. Holding that book in my hands, I can say, this is chess. In a certain sense, I am not committing a fallacy. On the other hand, I am neglecting not only the whole history of chess, but also many things that are a part of the game, but that are not in that rule book: the physical presence or absence of the players, the sudden glimpse of a flaw in the opponent's strategies, ... A game is not only its rules, its material aspect, but also its experience - the act of playing the game. A game is both its rules and the practical existence of those rules. To understand this duality, I will use a classic distinction of Aristotelian metaphysics: that of potentiality and actuality.

According to Aristotle's metaphysics, things present a potentiality, the capability of becoming into a different and more complete state, which would be the actuality of that thing. The classic example would be a boy being the potentiality of a man. More importantly, Aristotle argues that actuality is prior and has priority over potentiality: before defining what a potentiality might be, we have to have known its actuality; and it is this actuality which is the reason why the potentiality is not only acquired, but developed.

In computer games, as in any other kind of games, this would mean that the rules of a game contain the potentiality of the game, but only when the game is played we can actually say something about the game as such. In a game like *Tetris*, the rule set (geometrical pieces fall down at an increasingly fast rhythm, the goal is to avoid filling the screen with these pieces) is the conditions for the game, that which the players have to accept in order to play. The rule set, in its own, contains the ways the game can be played, but only the presence of a player will activate those potentialities and make them become a game.

When game designers talk about their practice, they often say that their role is to predict player behavior, and plot their interaction with the system in ways that encourage the playability of the game. This means that the rules of the game are designed with a series of affordances and constraints, relative to the choices given to the players, which condition the experience of the game by its users. The potentiality of the game, therefore, is a designed formal system that predicts a certain experience. We can analyze the rules of a game as ethical objects - because they constitute the potentiality of a game, but we

cannot say that it is the rule set of the game, or in a broader sense its design, that which sets the ethical values of the game.

When reading the criticism some games like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* has received for its violent content, media and game critics seem to focus only on the analysis of the ethical affordances of the game as a possibility. Ultimately, a game is not the object we describe when we write about the rules and the fictional universe, but the experience constructed by the interaction of a user with that world. In a sense, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, only exists as a moral experience when played, while it certainly is a moral object of incomplete nature when only described.

Games from their design are moral objects, but we need to consider how they are experienced by players in order to fully understand the ethics of computer games. In the next chapter, I will make a short introduction to what is a player, and how she relates to the given, designed experience a game's actuality is.

Being an Ethical Player

Aristotle (1998) defined ethics as a practical science, as a practice of virtues oriented towards the achievement of a better life. To do so, human beings had to use their judgement to evaluate the situations in which they were immersed, and thus take choices according to the will of being a good human being. In Aristotle's terms, ethics is a praxis guided by the *phronesis* or judgment, of the human beings that have the desire to achieve virtue.

Applying Aristotle's virtue ethics to computer games introduces a certainly interesting set of conditionals: If a game is a set of unambiguous rules the player has to accept in order to achieve goals, it might be possible to say that a good player in Aristotelian sense is who obeys the rules and uses her judgment in order to achieve the goals given the appropriate circumstances. If this were true, the whole notion of sportsmanship would be rendered obsolete. But that does not happen. There is more to a game than just its rules, and therefore being a good player from an ethical perspective is more than just obeying uncritically the rules.

Computer games players are moral beings that evaluate their actions and the choices they make. There is an explicit use of what Aristotle would call *phronesis* in the acts of any computer game player:

as long as the rules of the game and the fictional world are seen as a coherent entity where the choices contribute to the enjoyment of a valid ludic experience, the player accepts the "willing suspension of disbelief". But playing a game, the act of activating the potentiality of the rules and fictional world by engaging in pre-established play, is an act of judgment too. Fair players are not those who just want to win, but those who play in an ethical way.

Playing is an act of judgment of the rule systems and the fictional world the player is presented with. So far, I have defined a game as a system of rules that projects a fictional world that has to be experienced by a player in order to achieve its actuality. A player is then the ethical being that interacts with the rules and the fictional world, and whose choices are determined by the goals of the game, limited by the rules, and evaluated by a combination of the individual values, the players communities values, and the cultural, or in real life (IRL) values. The following chapter will prove with a game example that this is a valid way of approaching the ethics of computer games.

The Honor of Players

Azeroth is a world is devastated by a unending wars. The Alliance of followers of the light is in trouble when seeing the mighty powers of the Horde. Local struggles as well as huge battles are everyday's source for sorrow and glory in this world, for its four million inhabitants.

Azeroth is, needless to say, a virtual world. It is the *World of Warcraft*, the Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying game that at the moment of writing, September 2005, dominates the market of online gaming. And it is also the best example for the complexity of ethical discourses and attitude computer games actually present, thanks to the historical evolution of the so-called Honor System (<http://forums-en.wow-europe.com/thread.aspx?fn=wow-pvp-en&t=24040&p=1&tmp=1 - post24040>).

When the game was launched in March 2005, it came as almost a surprise that the designers actually implemented a system for player vs. player combat (pvp henceforth) in certain servers. Traditionally, pvp gameplay was limited to certain spaces were, by common agreement, players could actually engage in combat that is much more satisfying than defeating a very limited A.I. The following success of the game only reassured the designers in their

choices: players were happy with that design decision, which actually matched very well with the fantasy world created by the game.

The designers decided to take pvp one step further, and chose to implement an honor system, by which players could get points after killing other players; points that yielded lucrative in-game rewards. An honor system, worth is mentioning, that did not include dishonor. This fact, coupled with a very poor information provided by the designer team and the very nature of the Honor reward system, motivated the spawn of what the community considered unethical actions, corpse camping (that is, waiting for the other player's to resurrect to eliminate them again while they were weak) and ganking (attacking players who cannot defend themselves) being the most widespread. The quality of gameplay was lowered in the pvp servers, and the community soon expressed its polarized division in the game forums. Some liked the Honor system, but some disliked it to the extent that they abandoned playing in the pvp servers.

Currently, the situation has improved, as the designers have included special map instances focused exclusively on pvp combat, with rewards that are still honor based – but now honor is acquired faster and more effectively in these so called Battlegrounds.

Why is *World of Warcraft* a good example of how computer games' ethics are constructed? Because through time it is possible to see the different instances that create the overall values of the game. In the design of the game, both in the rules and in their implementation as a fictional world, we can see the designers initially affording certain kinds of gameplay, pvp, and leaving its constraining to the community. When playing this game, players constructed an implicit code of values that controlled the values of the game. Then the game designers decided to include Honor as an affordance hard-wired in the rule system of the game, but they did not provide any constraint to the behaviors this system might encourage. The community largely reacted against this implementation, as they understood as highly unethical this new set of affordances, to the extreme of abandoning the pvp servers. Finally, designers came up with another affordance, the organized battlegrounds, that would satisfy those players who saw indiscriminate pvp as a threat to their gameplay, but that would also grant popularity among those players who actually enjoyed the honor system.

In this example it is possible to see both how the game can be designed or implemented with certain affordances on the rules level that affect the ways players experience the game; but, most importantly, it also shows that players act as moral beings, that they reflect upon those values that are contained in the system of the game, and that they evaluate them keeping in perspective the values of the game world, of the player's community, and ultimately cultural values. The honor system proves that players are reflective moral beings that afford a series of values in the games they play, and evaluate their acts with what Aristotle would call *phronesis*. Players are morally accountable, just like computer games are. As a matter of fact, the game as being, the actuality of the game, is a moral object and experience because its two main elements, the player and the rule/fictional systems, are ethical entities responsible for the well being of the whole experience of playing a game.

Conclusions

Computer games pose new and interesting questions to ethical theory. As ethicists, we should take a step forward and try to understand why computer games are attributed these almost magical powers when it comes to their effects on the player's values. In this paper I have argued for a virtue ethics reading of computer games, one that takes into account the particular nature of computer games, but also that considers players as a key element in the overall construction of meaning of computer games.

There are, though, a whole set of issues I have not analyzed in this article, which provide interesting ethical dilemmas within computer games culture. For example, some MMOs do have an effect in real-life economy (Castronova: 2003), which brings forth interesting ethical questions concerning the relations between the gameworld and the real world, and how both interrelate. In this article I chose to provide a more general framework by which these questions could be approached, but I leave for further research any closer look to other ethical questions about computer games that, I would argue, could be analyzed using the virtue ethics framework I have here suggested.

I have argued that players are actually reflective, and responsible for the choices they take while playing games. Games are objects designed with affordances that suggest a certain experience that is evaluated by its players' moral sense. As an ethicist,

I would look at the game design, but also at the community practices and players' responses to the content of the game. Because it is players who ultimately give reason for games to exist, and without them, their morality is just a potentiality, but never just a game.

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Gordana Dodig-Crnkovic and Thomas Larsson

Game Ethics - Homo Ludens as a Computer Game Designer and Consumer

Abstract:

Play and games are among the basic means of expression in intelligent communication, influenced by the relevant cultural environment. Games have found a natural expression in the contemporary computer era in which communications are increasingly mediated by computing technology. The widespread use of e-games results in conceptual and policy vacuums that must be examined and understood. Humans involved in designing, administering, selling, playing etc. computer games encounter new situations in which good and bad, right and wrong, are not defined by the experience of previous generations. This article gives an account of the historical necessity of games, the development of e-games, their pros- and cons, threats and promises, focusing on the ethical awareness and attitudes of game developers.

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Computer Aided Homo/Femina Ludens

In his book *Homo Ludens*, or Man as Player, Johan Huizinga (2000) discusses the importance of the play-element in culture and society. For Huizinga, play takes place in a specific conceptual space, the Magic Circle, in which various actions acquire their meanings, sanctioned by the game, meanings that may be unacceptable outside the play context.

However, it is not easy to draw a clear borderline between the Magic Circle of a game (virtual) and other symbolic expressive ways used as a manifestation of the world "as is" (real). The distinction is subtle – a game is always embedded in reality and interpreted both inside and outside its conceptual space. Play can also be seen as the activity of emulating life in a safe context e.g. when children play at fighting or parodying adults.

Play is not only a human activity – animals also play. In both cases, play is used for learning patterns of behaviour and for communication. Play and games, rule-based forms of play, seem to be an indispensable mode of intelligent behavior. The most fundamental relations between humans, such as love, kinship, and social ranking as superior/subordinate are intimately connected with ritual play. Celebrations are frequently accompanied by play and often also by games – play is a characteristic part of marriage rites and many other religious and secular ceremonies.

The ways we play vary with civilizations; they are influenced by the cultural environment. In the computer era, in which communications are more and more mediated by computing technology, games have found a natural expression. Computer games are nowadays used in education, entertainment, advertising, and many more fields - often combined with computer simulation. As a consequence, the study of computer games steadily increases in importance.

Reality, Representation, Simulation - An Eternal Golden Braid

In this area computer scientists focus mainly on the technology of e-games production, while other researchers are endeavouring to obtain an understanding of workings of e-games, the players, and the interactions between them. The two

dominating theoretical approaches in the study of e-games are ludology and narratology.

The term ludology originates from non-electronic games, but became associated with e-games when used by Gonzalo Frasca (2003). Major issues are illuminated through the opposition between *narrative* and *simulation*.

Within the narrative tradition, an interesting literary analysis relevant for understanding gaming and its relation to "real life" is given in *The Glass Bead Game*, a novel by Herman Hesse (2002). The novel contains an analysis of the ideal of a universal language and a knowledge system with a synthesis of philosophy, logic, aesthetics, mathematics and sciences with arts and music, implemented in the form of a game. The book is about humanity's continuous search for enlightenment and for union of intellectual reflection (externalist stance, narrative) and agenthood (internalist, ludic).

In considering the ethics of games, we must take into account several meanings of the term "game". Our basic ideas about what is important, what matters, what is valuable or good in games are dependent on our understanding of what a game is and what it might be. If we conceive of a game as being at the heart of our conceptualization of the world, then our ethical analysis will need to take into account both the ontological and epistemological functions of games. The epistemological significance of games can be analysed in the interactive learning process. Computer games in particular are powerful tools able to change our ideas about the world and our agency in it.

Game Ethics

Research into the Effects of E-games as a Persuasive Technology and a Learning Tool

The capacity of interactive media to change people's attitudes and behavior has been addressed by Fogg in his study of computers as persuasive technology (Fogg, 2002). Web sites, mobile phones, video games, and virtual reality applications, for example, can be designed to serve as interactive tools affecting users' attitudes, behavior, motivation, and worldview. Fogg points out that computers can be more persistent than humans, offer greater anonymity, manage huge volumes of data, use many modalities to exert influence, easily adapt to increased demands, and can be used where humans may not be welcome. Hence, consumers need to be

aware of this new type of manipulation, in which computers are used in refined and cunning ways, perhaps with a hidden agenda. As an illustration, consider the computer game "America's Army", which was designed for recreating "the US Army for the benefit of young civilians" (Zyda, 2003).

Among the positive effects of games, besides the pleasure and fun they may bring to players, we can mention their usefulness in health care and as educational tools. For example, there are specially designed games used in habilitation and rehabilitation (Griffiths, 2003). Games can improve the teaching of eye-hand coordination and visual spatial ability, help in fostering creativity, encourage exploratory and non-linear thinking, make children feel comfortable with computers and technology in general, and develop literacy, logical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaborative skills.

The reason why e-games provide such a powerful learning environment is because of the active participation inherent in games, particularly through focused attention, repetition, and reinforcement. As suggested by social learning theory, these are key factors in learning, and they can be powerful enough to even affect the players' actions in the real world outside the games (Bandura, 1997). Learning is also enhanced by games giving rise to intrinsic motivation through e.g. triggering fantasy, control and challenge (Cordova and Lepper, 1996). A desire to beat the game might engage children to such a degree that they are activated to learn, searching for solutions, both within and outside the game.

In today's highly complex games, players might be e.g. encouraged to actively investigate historical events by replaying known history. They can experience new social roles by building and exploring virtual communities and societies (as in *Sim City*). Some of these games require the testing of hypotheses, analyses, and interpretations. Attempts to bring this type of game into the class-room have been made with some interesting results (Squire 2004).

Constructivist learning theory views knowledge as constructed by people, in a common context based upon the interpretation of experience and previous knowledge, and it can be easily applied to e-game-induced learning. James Paul Gee discusses as many as 36 learning principles present in various e-games. These include the principles of active critical learning, the regime of competence, achievement, amplification of input, and multi-modality. (Gee, 2003).

He argues that designers of "good games" build on superior (interactive, dialogical, ludic) learning methods in comparison with traditional pedagogy based on mechanical narrative, monotonic drilling, repetitiveness and rigidity.

The potentially negative effects of e-games include reduced physical fitness (Vandewater et al., 2004), risk of addiction and reduced prosocial behaviour, and lowered academic performance (Gentile, 2004). Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of e-games is that those involving a considerable degree of violence appear to be extremely popular and prevalent. Research studies indicate several undesirable effects of violent video games, such as aggravated anti-social behaviour, desensitization, increasingly violent attitudes and behaviour and delinquency (Funk et al, 2003 and 2004; Anderson, 2004).

Although the study of the effects of violent video games is a relatively new field, the number of research publications available has now become large enough to permit the application of meta-analytic methods. The first meta-study (Anderson, et al., 2001), later updated to include studies from a total of 45 published works (Anderson, 2004), shows that exposure to violence in e-games is significantly linked to increases in aggressive behaviour, cardiovascular arousal, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect.

A summary of the research findings from both experimental and cross-sectional correlational studies strongly suggest that the potentially harmful effects of violent video games must be taken seriously. Complementary longitudinal studies are however needed to make the picture of the problem more complete. For further information, see the available reviews of the research literature (Carnagey and Anderson, 2003, Dill and Dill, 1998).

The Game Designer – Magister Ludi

As the existing research into the effects of e-games indicates, both positive and negative consequences arise as a result of the growing popularity and spreading of computer games. In the light of existing ethical theories such as utilitarianism, virtue and duty ethics, and the ethics of human rights, it is possible to assess their pros and cons and thereby give us a basis for the further development of gaming culture including the design, production, distribution and consumption of games. The utilitarian analysis may give an insight into the overall structure of the gaming phenomena and its significance for different social groups. As an example we

can mention that an already established correlation between violent TV and aggressive behaviour of some viewers may be expected to be even more pronounced in the case of interactive e-games, as besides all other factors already present in a TV media, playing games includes interactivity, and hence reinforcement learning, which can be expected to lead to increasing violent behaviour.

In contrast to utilitarian arguments that center on balancing positive and negative effects, duty ethics emphasizes the importance of the subject's motives or intentions. For instance, by merely focusing on sales and profit, game developers fall into the trap of treating the players as mere means (to an end), thereby violating the categorical imperative to treat humanity "as an end in itself, and never simply as a means."

Virtue ethics can be applied to game developers and consumers, the latter ones being far more numerous. Therefore, we will concentrate on the player's traits of character developed or enhanced by the game playing. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1994) in *The Praise of Folly* depicts Folly (offspring of Inebriation and Ignorance, closely coupled to superficial entertainment) whose close companions are Hedone (pleasure), Philautia (self-love), Misoponia (laziness), Anoia (thoughtlessness), Tryphe (wantonness), Komos (intemperance) Lethe (oblivion), Kolakia (flattery), and Eegretos Hypnos (dead sleep). Many of the vices Erasmus associates with Folly are commonly attributed to excessive game playing by e-game critics.

Thinking in terms of human rights, we can mention that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires us (including the game developers) "to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence", (<http://www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm>). The human rights of children in that sense might be infringed when children are exposed to video game violence.

In brief, as a game designer, you are Magister Ludi of The Glass Bead Game, you decide the available set of possibilities and meanings within a game. This includes the atmosphere, interaction, actions and feedback. A game defines a broad spectrum of actions ranging from "bad" to "good". By modeling the relation of an act to its consequences, the designer signals social approval or disapproval (Brey, 1999). In this way, a sound ethical reflection model may, (or may not), be built into the game, affecting the consumer's ideas and dispositions.

However, rather than elaborating on e-game ethics, game designers often rely on free speech legislation to defend their right not to take into account ethical considerations. In principle, freedom of speech may seem undeniable but at the same time, it must be admitted that game designers do not work for themselves only. Their products reach millions of young people. According to public debate and research about video games, the major current issues seem to be their widespread use of violence and the degradation of women. This, together with the more or less uncontrollable spread of the games through downloading, copying, selling to minors, etc., constitutes an ethical problem. When age restriction is ruled out, the game designers need to reflect on the societal consequences of their product to an even higher degree.

What, then, does it mean to be an ethically aware game developer? First of all, one ought to acknowledge the interactive learning effectiveness of e-games, and try to avoid their possible detrimental effects, making sure that ethically sound games are created. To do this, there are many learning factors and principles involved in today's sophisticated games of which the developer needs to be aware. It is also important that developers weigh the purpose and story of games that "require" the depicting of e.g. violence, against the potential harmful societal effect this might have according to research findings. Furthermore, education in ethics is needed, and professional ethical guidelines should be developed to serve as helpful tools in a game designer's daily work.

Conclusions

Computer games are here to stay. The question is not whether their existence is legitimate, but how the best use can be made of them, taking into account all their potential positive qualities and minimizing as far as possible their negative side-effects.

Responsible game developers need to be aware of research findings concerning the effects of the medium they utilize. Given the positive and negative consequences indicated by studies of gaming, developers need to make knowledgeable decisions concerning the content, purpose and goals of their work. Naturally, this involves different degrees of ethical reflection for different types of games.

One way of improving game design is to broaden the scope of the underlying design documentation.

It should include a discussion of the target group, ethical implications, pedagogical aspects (what will the players learn, how and why), potential or expected positive and negative effects on players and their environment.

Finally, the education system must be the key to achieving the goal of an ethical improvement of game culture. The moral standards of today's secular society are in the first place set and attained within the education system. In particular, game developers are in need of education in ethics within their professional training (Dodig-Crnkovic, 2004).

In addition to game developers, all other involved parties need to understand the ethical issues involved. Parents, educators, and legislators alike should be able to make well-motivated choices based on research findings, expected societal consequences, and accepted cultural value standards. In the long run this will support the development of a more ethically sound game culture.

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Dean Chan

Playing with Race: The Ethics of Racialized Representations in E-Games

Abstract:

Questions about the meanings of racialized representations must be included as part of developing an ethical game design practice. This paper examines the various ways in which race and racial contexts are represented in a selected range of commercially available e-games, namely war, sports and action-adventure games. The analysis focuses on the use of racial slurs and the contingencies of historical re-representation in war games; the limited representation of black masculinity in sports games and the romanticization of 'ghetto play' in urban street games; and the pathologization and fetishization of race in 'crime sim' action-adventure games such as *True Crime: Streets of LA*. This paper argues for, firstly, a continuous critical engagement with these dominant representations in all their evolving forms; secondly, the necessary inclusion of reflexive precepts in e-games development contexts; and thirdly, the importance of advocating for more diverse and equitable racialized representations in commercial e-games.

Agenda

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Race matters in e-games. The overt racism in games like *Ethnic Cleansing* made by white supremacist groups for online distribution have come under scrutiny for their promulgation of racially motivated in-game killings. These games offer obviously problematic treatments of racial identities, however race based themes are arguably evoked in subtler but no less insidious ways in a broad range of commercially available e-games. This paper argues for the inclusion of questions about the meanings and effects of racialized representations as part of developing an ethical game design practice. I use the term 'racialized' here to emphasize the subtle ways in which race may be perceived or inflected within different game-world settings. How, indeed, do we play with race in e-games today? What are the possibilities for developing ethical referents for critically engaging with racialized representations in commercial e-games?

The onus is consequently on developing a critical attentiveness to the constituencies of racialized difference, especially the varied ways in which these differences are structured and re-presented in game-world contexts. The attendant question of ethical accountability in e-games design arises due to the persistent and increasingly prolific circulation of the types of problematic representations that are identified and examined in this paper. An ethical critical awareness in this sense hinges on the consideration of cultural inequities and interrogates the complicity of these e-games in reinforcing hegemonic notions of power, privilege and inequality. The emphasis in this paper is therefore on fostering a sense of ethical accountability that involves a continuous reflexive understanding of the inequities inscribed in unequal social exchange, cross-cultural negotiation and inter-cultural representation.

Introduction

In 2004, the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) formally acknowledged the importance of advocating for diversity in games development, but it has not yet instituted a programmatic plan for initiating cross-sector discussions or drafting industry guidelines for culturally inclusive games design. The fact that e-games are increasingly being consumed by a broad cultural cross-section of gamers underpins current discussions. In the United States, for example, discussions centre on the need to cultivate more ethnically diverse development teams with the aim of creating games that go be-

yond racially typecast characters and stereotypical narratives.¹ At the same time, the prospect of enhancing profit margins comes into focus, especially given a recent study by Nielson Entertainment that identifies black and Latino players as "an emerging market" for the games industry.² While the diversification of development teams is a laudable goal, it is no guarantee of the consequent creation of more equitable racialized representations. As Henry A Giroux cautions, limited diversity-management models have elsewhere "not only failed to link difference to issues of power, parity, and equality, they have also failed to challenge the Eurocentric biases that figure in their notions of history, marginality, modernity, gender, and transformation."³

At any rate, concerns about the racialized representational politics in e-games are increasingly being raised. As Jason Della Rocca, IGDA's executive director, concedes, "We're seeing, to a large extent, that the games that are being designed unconsciously include the biases, opinions and reflections of their creators."⁴ In 2001, the United States based children's media advocacy group Children Now conducted a study on videogame characters and reported on the disproportionate paucity of non-white characters, as well as the narrowly stereotypical and arguably problematic portrayals of Blacks, Hispanics and Asians in videogames. For instance, African-American males typically appear in sports-oriented games, while 90 per cent of African-American females are victims of violence (twice the percentage of white females).⁵ Recent writings by academics and commentators such as David Leonard and Gerard Greenfield offer trenchant critiques of some dominant, but apparently taken for granted, e-games tropes including the re-inscription of unequal racial power relationships and the fetishized commodification of minority group cultures. These

¹ The Associate Press: Video game industry seeking minorities.

² Kilman, Carrie: Video Games – Playing Against Racism.

³ Giroux, Henry A: Impure Acts. 67

⁴ Cited in The Associate Press: Video game industry seeking minorities.

⁵ Cited in Leonard, David: 'Live in your world, play in ours'

tropes are symptomatic of the ways in which racial otherness is configured paradoxically as both a source of anxiety and pleasure. Such broad critiques will be discussed in closer detail in this paper to understand the subtle and myriad ways in which race is represented in three thematic case studies, namely war, sports and action-adventure games.

War Games and the Contingencies of Historical ‘Authenticity’

The present proliferation of war games – that are variously based on the Vietnam War, Gulf War and Iraq War – offers a situated context for analyzing the ways in which game developers’ quest for historical ‘authenticity’ and graphical ‘realism’ are collusive in re-circulating dominant constructions of racial otherness. Critics such as Henry A Giroux, Nick Turse and Nina Huntemann have examined the present trend for war themed games as a symptom of the contemporary militarization of the public sphere.⁶ They are especially critical of increasing collaborations between the games industry and the military in the United States, which have resulted in e-games such as *America’s Army*, *Kuma War*, *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals*. As Turse writes, “*The new military-entertainment complex’s games may help to produce great battlefield decision makers, but they strike from debate the most crucial decisions young people can make in regard to the morality of war – choosing whether or not to fight and for what cause.*”⁷ At the same time, however, discussions on the ethics inherent in blurring the lines between war and entertainment need to include the concurrent promulgation of racialized meanings in war games.

As Gerard Greenfield argues, “*Reinforcing the racism that justifies domination and mass killing becomes a key part of the authenticity of historically accurate war gaming. This is how we find players killing ‘gooks’ in Nam and ‘towel heads’ in Libya...and thus the ‘civilizing mission’ as a battle between good and evil is recreated.*”⁸ Greenfield acknowledges that

some games like *Battlefield Vietnam* allow players to choose to take sides with the North Vietnamese Army, but he also notes that “[c]hoosing to be the ‘enemy’ adds no objectivity, it just makes it harder to win”. The context for war remains a given, re-staged from a hegemonic perspective. Furthermore, as Huntemann notes, “[t]here is no moral or ethical questioning of the specifics of the historical context”.⁹ At issue here is the problematic privileging of ‘authentic’ histories that exclude other histories. David Leonard provides an illustration of this concern: “*Conflict Desert Storm is an attempt to rewrite history in very specific ways. For example, despite the fact that militaries from all over the world, including many from Arab nations, participated in the Gulf War, the game chronicles the war as if it was a battle between American/British forces and Iraqi soldiers.*”¹⁰ In addition, he points out that *Call to Duty* and *Medal of Honor*, which are both set during World War II, contribute to a form of historical amnesia in which conscripted black soldiers are completely absent. Historical re-presentations in games do matter, as evident in the strike in 1997 by workers at Japanese game publisher Koei’s manufacturing plant in China. The Chinese workers went on strike when they realized that the game they were producing contained scenes glorifying the Nanjing massacre in China in 1937. As Greenfield observes, “*The massacre of civilians by the Japanese imperial army in Nanjing is depicted as another battle, led by war heroes (complete with biographical data on their heroism) and counted up as another high score.*”¹¹

The question of how to accommodate ethical design precepts within industry practices remains paramount. Dean Takahashi’s discussion of pre-development arbitration over the use of racial slurs (as markers of ‘authentic’ and ‘historically accurate’ combat experience) in the *Men of Valor* series provides a case in point.¹² While the original decision to include profanity passed muster with the game publisher and retailers, nevertheless the development team opted to substitute outright racial

⁶ See, for example, Giroux, Henry A: War on Terror; Barron, Michelle and Huntemann, Nina: Militarism & video games; and Turse, Nick: The Pentagon Invades Your Xbox.

⁷ Turse, Nick: The Pentagon Invades Your Xbox.

⁸ Greenfield, Gerard: Killing Games.

⁹ Barron, Michelle and Huntemann, Nina: Militarism & video games.

¹⁰ Leonard, David: Unsettling the military entertainment complex.

¹¹ Greenfield, Gerard: Killing Games.

¹² Takahashi, Dean: Ethics of Game Design.

slurs with “*profanity laden stereotypes and creative curses, which they considered to be less offensive than the hot-button words of racial prejudice.*” The team also decided against the depiction of drug use and prostitution because such elements would not have “*truly enhanced the vision of a realistic depiction of combat.*” On the other hand, the possibility of a battleground scattered with health packs was considered by the developer to be a “*dishonor to the war.*” Although I am not necessarily endorsing these design decisions, this example demonstrates that there is at least some scope for reflexive decision-making on the part of game developers. In the end, these predeterminations belie the utterly constructed nature of the game-worlds presented in these war games, as well as the ideological dimensions of realist narratives.

Sports Games, Urban Spaces and ‘Pixilated Minstrelsy’

Sports games provide another context for examining the ideological dimensions of manufactured realism. According to Children Now, 83% of male African American characters in videogames are represented as athletes.¹³ These characters demonstrate a propensity for taunting, trash-talking and physically aggressive behaviour. 80 per cent of African-American males are shown as verbally and physically aggressive, compared to 57 per cent of white males.¹⁴ Questions about the delimited representation of blackness, and black masculinity in this particular instance, need to be extended to the present trend for ‘urban street games’ like *NBA Street*, *Street Hopes* and *NFL Street*. These games recontextualize traditional sports such as basketball and football so that they are played in a variety of largely urban ‘ghetto’ locations and often set to hip-hop soundtracks, thereby staging a convergence of discourses on athleticism, blackness and commodified ‘ghetto cool’. According to David Leonard, these game-world settings function to romanticize impoverished inner city spaces while simultaneously commodifying a narrow black cultural aesthetic. For Leonard, “[*t*]he problematic nature of these games transcends their acceptance and promotion of stereotypes that emphasize the athletic power of

black bodies.”¹⁵ The focus on inner city play “*contributes to ‘common sense’ ideas of inner city communities and the constancy of play with the black community.*”¹⁶ Thus, these games further play to preconceived ‘common sense’ understandings of the ghetto, blackness and the black community’s work ethic. A racialized politics is being enacted in the process of supposedly telling it like it is.

The virtual stage sets in urban street games do not come with an accompanying socio-cultural backdrop. As Leonard argues, “*the ideological trope of limiting discussions of ghetto communities to the play that transpires within such communities obfuscates the daily struggles*” of poverty and unemployment.¹⁷ Robin DG Kelley’s description of televisual representations of ‘street ball’ (used in advertisements for sports shoes) might well be also describing the game-world settings for urban street games; and his attendant critique likewise provides a resonant interpretive cue. He observes: “[*M*]arked by chain-link fences, concrete playgrounds, bent and rusted net[-]less hoops, graffiti-scrawled walls, and empty buildings, they have created a world where young black males do nothing *but* play.”¹⁸ The staging of such scenarios are potentially complicit in “*the circulation of representations that ultimately undergird racist ideologies or ‘success’ narratives that take racism off the hook by demonstrating that ‘hard work’ in the realm of sports or entertainment is all one needs to escape the ghetto.*”¹⁹ Moreover, as Leonard notes, “[*t*]he ubiquitous levels of poverty, the conditions that give rise to chain-link fences and net-less hoops are lost to the ‘virtual ghetto tourist.’” These games rely on longstanding notions of black laziness and athletic superiority to reinforce representations of black males ‘kickin’ it in the hood, while simultaneously glamorizing and commodifying these urban spaces.²⁰

For Leonard, urban street games are akin to digital versions of cross-racial minstrel shows; and they are

¹⁵ Leonard, David: ‘Live in your world, play in ours’.

¹⁶ Leonard, David: ‘Live in your world, play in ours’.

¹⁷ Leonard, David: High Tech Blackface.

¹⁸ Kelley, Robin DG: Playing for Keeps. 196, original emphasis

¹⁹ Kelley, Robin DG: Playing for Keeps. 197

²⁰ Leonard, David: High Tech Blackface.

¹³ Cited in Marriot, Michael: The Color of Mayhem in a Wave of ‘Urban’ Games.

¹⁴ Cited in Leonard, David: High Tech Blackface.

constitutive of a form of 'pixilated minstrelsy'.²¹ Pleasure is derived *through* black male bodies. This is a form of "high tech blackface" in that "[t]he desire to 'be black' because of the stereotypical visions of strength, athleticism, power and sexual potency all play out within the virtual reality of sports games." Tellingly, "[t]he few white players who do appear within NBA Street, NFL Street, and several other games have nowhere near the athleticism or the muscles of the black players." There is therefore a gameplay incentive to 'be black'. Nevertheless, "[a]s with the history of minstrelsy, sampling of the other is not liberating or transgressive: it does not unsettle dominant notions through breaking down barriers or increasing exposure."²²

Action-Adventure Games, *True Crime* and 'Other' Narratives

The most recent iteration of the *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) series *San Andreas* mines a similar narrowly racialized vein. The shift in the choice of protagonist from Italian-American Tommy Vercetti (in *GTA III* and *GTA: Vice City*) to African-American CJ (in *GTA: San Andreas*) marks a parallel shift in narrative focus from 'mob' to 'gangsta', without necessarily transcending or subverting staid archetypes. Michael Marriot, for instance, remains critical of the cultivated sense of "place, peril and pigmentation" in *GTA: San Andreas*.²³ Despite the game developer's maintenance about their intentional use of parody and tongue-in-cheek witticisms, and that their M-rated products are intended for consumption by adult audiences,²⁴ the iconic *GTA* series is arguably still complicit in the pathologization and fetishization of race. After all, there is a fine line to (t)read between parodic critique and discursive reinscription, especially in relation to the deployment of racialized archetypes and the persistent linkage of these archetypes with criminal elements. The series

has in fact become a design paradigm for other 'crime sim' action-adventure games such as *True Crime: Streets of LA*, *The Getaway* and the forthcoming *The Godfather*. The *GTA* series has already generated considerable media and academic debate, however it is equally important to broaden the field of critical inquiry and examine attendant issues in other comparable games. A close textual analysis of *True Crime* may be suggestive of how specific racialized meanings are constructed and narrated through game design elements.

True Crime features a gaming first: a diasporic Chinese protagonist in a naturalistic contemporary setting. In this cross-platform (PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and PC) title, gamers assume the role of Nick Kang, a Chinese-American cop, who attempts to unravel the mystery of his father's disappearance, while going about his daily job of ridding the City of Angels of Chinese triads and Russian gangs. Given the questionable orientation of the latter premise in this third-person action-adventure game, it could be asserted that Luxoflux, the North American developers, proved to be canny in their choice of the main character. This selectivity also extends to the choice of the two main supporting characters. Kang's work partner is the Hispanic reformed ex-gangster Rosie Velasquez, and the Chief of Detectives to whom Kang reports is African-American Wanda Parks. This multicultural ensemble of characters seems calculated to deflect possible accusations of ethnic profiling, or of unduly targeting particular stereotypical ethnic crime groups. The game appears to endorse the view that this is fine as long as the ethnic policing is facilitated by other ethnics. The problematic sub-text of ethnic or diasporic community self-surveillance and self-disciplining within the multicultural nation-state nevertheless remains. In other words, you guys take care of your own, please.

The game uses a distinct West Coast hip-hop soundtrack, featuring music by well-known African-American performers such as Snoop Dogg, WestSide Connection, Ice-T and Coolio, to name but a few. Thus, Kang's activities on the streets of Los Angeles are complemented with a pulsating and identifiable urban sound-scape. Snoop Dogg even features as an un-lockable, playable character in the game. This once again poses questions about the ethics inherent in the representational politics of the game. The act of foregrounding minority representation and visibility in an American setting may be potentially productive or empowering, particularly in American game development contexts that has until recently seldom featured Asian-Americans or African-Americans as central characters in action-adventure

²¹ The term 'pixilated minstrelsy' is derived from an interviewee who is critical of gaming trends for "pixilated minstrel shows" in Marriot, Michael: *The Color of Mayhem in a Wave of 'Urban' Games*.

²² Leonard, David: *High Tech Blackface*.

²³ Marriot, Michael: *The Color of Mayhem in a Wave of 'Urban' Games*.

²⁴ See, for example, Marriot, Michael: *The Color of Mayhem in a Wave of 'Urban' Games*.

games. Nevertheless, I would contend that the game appears too self-consciously resolute in its audio and visual presentation of a sense of perceived difference. That is to say, it pro-actively cultivates a sense of relative cultural 'otherness' to the point of deleterious effect, especially when considered in relation to the overall storyline. In sum, it constantly reminds the gamer that this is the 'other' side of Los Angeles.

Much of the plot is anchored in urban realism – at least by conventional e-gaming standards anyway – until the second half of the game when it completely degenerates into battles with demons and a dragon supposedly lurking below the streets of Chinatown in Los Angeles. Even worse, these 'baddies' are at the service of arch-villain Ancient Wu. While fantasy elements are in and of themselves not too much of a contentious issue in gaming contexts, the positioning of such elements in *True Crime* is problematic in their fantastical coding of 'Asianness' as that which has to be ultimately exorcised by the diasporic subject. In much the same fashion, the game leads Kang to a final confrontation with General Kim, thereby purging Los Angeles and by extension Kang himself of the perceived enemy within. Such narrative closure offers limited scope for diasporic subjectivity apart from domestication and assimilation to perceived dominant and normative ideals.

True Crime offers a surfeit of currently marketable – and racialized – e-game signifiers, ranging from hip-hop through to the use of racially marked urban locations such as Chinatown; and it ultimately inscribes highly specific versions of cosmopolitanism and urban multiculturalism that normalize unequal racial power relations. The choice of an Asian-American central character and the use of neo-Orientalist tropes in this game further demonstrate how racial difference may be simultaneously fetishized and demonized, and how hegemonic whiteness is positioned as the taken for granted racial norm in game-world environments. A sequel to the game is already in development. *True Crime: New York City* features a male African-American protagonist. Marcus Reed is a former street thug who has turned into a rogue street cop seeking to take down four major criminal organizations. The game's producer provides an enthusiastic account of these organizations:

"There's the Italian mob. There's the President's Club, which is an urban gang, then there's the Magdalena Cartel, which is Columbian, and the Shadow Tong, which is Chinese. They all operate around the city but they definitely will have

higher concentrations in certain parts of the city – for example the President's Club is more prevalent in northern Manhattan up near Harlem, whereas the Shadow Tong's base is Chinatown and the Italian mob are in Little Italy."²⁵

It would seem that true crime does pay well after all, especially when you keep mining from a narrowly racialized vein.²⁶

Conclusion: On The Ethics of Racialized Representations

In conclusion, this paper has explored some of the dominant ways in which e-games are complicit in re-enacting race based pedagogies. At issue here are the cultural narratives created by the ideological premises and racialized representational politics inherent in mainstream games. Since in-game representations do not circulate in a ludological vacuum, there are broader social consequences to consider. Recent criticisms have been directed at *GTA: Vice City* and *Hitman 2* for their in-game treatment and alleged vilification of Haitian and Sikh characters respectively. These two games received considerable media attention; and they were the targets of successful protests organised by minority lobby groups in the United States.²⁷ It would be unfortunate, however, to dismiss such social phenomena as isolated 'special issue' incidents relevant only to minority interest groups, and that any potential objections to in-game representations can be simply addressed either by the public relations team or subsequently edited re-issues of the game. The addition or subtraction approach to game design practice does not adequately provide a grounded ethical basis for understanding and confronting the social, symbolic and ideological dimensions of in-game representational politics. Moreover, as Jeffrey A Ow suggests, the mantra "if you don't like it, don't

²⁵ Cited in Stead, Chris: *True Crime – New York City*. 19

²⁶ The titles of other so-called "hip-hop games" that are in production speak for themselves: *Crime Life: Gang War*, *50 Cent: Bulletproof*, *25 To Life*, *Urban Reign*, *Fear & Respect*, and *187 Ride or Die*. See Babb, Pete, et al.: *Hip to the Game*. 22-25

²⁷ See, for example, Diaz, Johnny, and Medina, Eddie: Game maker apologizes to Haitians; and The Sikh Coalition: Eidos Petition.

buy it" often used by game publishers and gamers alike in defence of indicted games is overly cavalier and constitutes an elision of the attendant concerns.²⁸ E-games need to be situated as part of a bigger social picture and broader cultural conversation about race and racialized representations. This paper argues for a continuous critical engagement with these representations in all their evolving manifestations, as well as the necessary inclusion of such reflexive precepts in e-games design and development contexts, while underscoring the importance of advocating for more diverse and equitable racialized representations in commercial e-games.

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²⁸ Ow, Jeffrey A: *The Revenge of the Yellowfaced Cyborg Terminator.* 60

K. K. Kimppa and A. K. Bissett

The Ethical Significance of Cheating in Online Computer Games

Abstract:

In this article cheating in network and specifically online computer games is looked into as a moral offence. Reasons for the public ignoring the issue are brought forth. We present what could be considered as cheating in generic terms and in context. Different kinds of cheating are delineated, and remedies proposed. We also identify what is not cheating.

Agenda

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Introduction

This paper discusses the question of cheating in network gaming communities. Cheating in network—particularly online—gaming is often overlooked and thought to be of little relevance to "real" ethical questions. We present some arguments to the contrary.

For some reason, the effects of cheating on other players have been largely ignored. Cheating in computer games is often dismissed with "well, it is not very important, it is just a game". Cheating in other games, such as chess or poker is typically not regarded as such a small issue but can lead to conflicts between the players. This holds true for computer games as well. Anyone enjoying a game, be it computer game or other, does not enjoy being cheated.

Spending substantial amounts of time creating something implies that one considers it of value. Disrupting that is typically, in the liberal tradition, considered morally questionable. Creating and nurturing a game character could be compared to an author writing an article. If someone was to destroy the article and thus deprive the author of the work done, the fruits of their labour would be lost; what specifically is different in that situation compared to destroying a game character, for example?

According to Bissett and Shipton¹ breaking into other persons' computers and destroying their digital works is considered immoral and even illegal in many if not most countries. It is, however, difficult to press charges based on a destroyed computer game character². The offence may be lesser in the consequences it creates, since typically the

livelihood of a person is not affected by transgressions in a game³ but the intent is still blameworthy.

If we get above the basic levels of "food, warmth, etc." and can start to find the meaning for our life from the more abstract pleasures, then we must consider cheating an offence of the same type, if not of the same consequence, as destroying creative "work". If cheating reduces the happiness or joy which comes from the gaming experience, then cheating could be considered morally wrong.

In subsequent sections of this paper we examine the reasons why cheating in computer games is not generally considered an offence and why it should be considered an offence. We discuss various forms of cheating in the realms of first person shooters (FPSs), real time strategy games (RTSs) and computer role playing games (CRPGs) or massive multi-player online role playing games (MMORPGs) and discuss the amount of harm done to others in these various game types. We are by no means suggesting that these are the only types of games in which cheating can happen, but for the sake of the argument presented, they will clarify certain issues considering the gravity of cheating. Following Benford et al.⁴, we introduce a taxonomy of circumstances in which cheating can take place. We use this framework to discuss different kinds of cheating, with illustrative examples.

Our argument stands on the basis that cheating in a game without any other players might be bad for one's virtue, but in other respects it is not morally wrong. However, when actually cheating other players, other human beings, it will become a moral offence, which should be remedied where necessary.

Moral starting point

In this paper we have a liberal starting point; we do not presume to know what values people hold dear.

¹ Bissett, A. and Shipton, G.: Some human dimensions of computer virus creation and infection

² see e.g. Krotoski, 2005 on trying and failing. A player of an online computer game in China lent a virtual sword to another player who then proceeded to sell the sword in an Internet auction. The first player tried to approach the police in getting compensation for the sword, but the police interpreted the law as inapplicable to virtual objects such as the sword. The case ended up in a very real knife being struck in the offending player's chest which resulted in the death of the offending player.

³ although there are counter examples of this—see e.g. *ibid.*, in which the virtual sword was auctioned for three months' pay in China, or the Cyberathlete Professional League for players who get a major part of their income from playing games, at <http://www.thecpl.com/league/>

⁴ Understanding and constructing shared spaces with mixed-reality boundaries

Thus the only values we presume are those necessary for people to pursue their own values. We propose the right not to be forcibly prevented from doing whatever the person sees valuable and thus the duty of not aiming to hinder others to do what they choose. Other ethical theories will also be addressed, but the fundamental ethical theories used are 1) the traditional liberalist ethic of trying to pursue one's own happiness *as long as it does not directly hamper another's possibility to pursue their happiness*, 2) the (Kantian) deontological standpoint, in which the others should be seen not merely as means to one's own ends (i.e. in this case gaming satisfaction) but as ends in themselves and 3) a consequentialist (utilitarian) view, according to which the aim of the game-ethic is the pursuit of happiness of the people choosing to play the game.

Looking at the issue from a deontological standpoint, if one cheats in an online computer game, the other is not seen as an end in themselves, but only means to one's own direct satisfaction. This would clearly be against the categorical imperative⁵. The problem is that it does not necessarily feel like doing something to another person. Distancing oneself from the other player is the main reason for not seeing even direct actions towards their characters as being wrong when cheating is done. On top of this indirect actions such as copying items instead of finding them from the game can harm the other players playing the game fairly.

The consequentialist problem appears most strongly in the possibility of the game becoming eventually unplayable for all. If enough cheating is done, e.g. through aiming proxies⁶, the game itself can lose all of its entertainment value and thus become unplayable by all players.

Why is cheating in online computer games ignored?

The prejudice that computer games are for kids is still prevalent. This is often used as a justification for

⁵ Immanuel Kant: *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785

⁶ An aiming proxy is a third party software which aids the player of a first person shooter in aiming i.e. sees to it that he or she does not miss but instead hits a point (typically head) in the opposing player's character which causes most damage.

ignoring the field. The justification is false for two reasons: computer games, and especially online computer games are not played solely by kids; and children do worthwhile things as well and are moral subjects. The average age of a computer game player is 29 years⁷. On top of this, it is very common to run into more mature players in online games. If we are consistent in the liberal ethic in which we cannot presume to know what is important to others and what is not, we must acknowledge that anything someone is willing to spend a lot of time on is worth something for them, then we should also consider things children do important—at least to them. Children can also of course be morally wounded by immoral behaviour.

Games are often considered to be low level entertainment and thus not worth serious consideration. The same argument which holds for children holds for anyone—if one is willing to spend considerable amounts of time on something (e.g. a computer game) it must be worth something to them. Locke's labour theory of work⁸ rests on the assumption that if one spends one's effort on something else, they own that other (as long as much and as good is left to others). Why would that only concern work in the liberal thinking? Is it not "work" which the players are devoting to the game and thus do they not "own" the results of that work? If those results are then reduced in value by cheating, is that not a moral question worth our consideration?

What is cheating?

Cheating in games has probably been done as long as games have been played. Following Fairweather⁹, we note that cheating can be seen as "performing some act that falls outside the normal methods of play or competition with an expectation or hope that it will convey an unusual competitive advantage within the game or sport"¹⁰. Fairweather discusses how many cheating methods in stand-alone, single-

⁷ Entertainment Software Association: *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2004 Sales, Demographics and Usage Data*

⁸ John Locke: *Two treatises of government*

⁹ N Ben Fairweather: *Cool New Cheats: cheating and the computer games industry*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

player games are actually deliberately designed extra features that are usually publicized as a marketing aspect of the computer game in question. They are far from secret, deceptive, actions. Cheating in self-contained single-player games involves at most self-deception, but no deception towards other persons. Whether the rules programmed in the code are bypassed, it is done with the consent of all the players—namely the ones playing the game.

Issues such as the effects of playing computer games on one's virtue¹¹ have been addressed in the literature. This kind of thinking is easy to extend to cover cheating as well. It can be considered bad for one's virtue if one learns to cheat on a computer game environment since learning to cheat in a computer game might well affect the player's view on cheating in general. We do not consider the virtue-ethical point of doing bad to one's character by cheating the focus of this paper since the harm to others is, if any exists, indirect. The issue is handled by others, for example Fairweather or Reynolds¹².

Beyond this self-contained game is the newer dimension of network computer games. Here we argue that cheating can cause offence towards other players. We agree with the point that Powers¹³ makes that the possibility of direct real moral wrongs in virtual communities exists.

Cheating in network computer games

In online computer games the other person is not physically present and often (typically) is not even known outside the context. Where the other can be considered to be known at all is not relevant to this article due to the other in any case being a person investing their effort in the game.

As Powers¹⁴ notes, "it would seem easy to dismiss these actions and reactions as morally insignificant, due to the play-like [and in our case actual play] nature of the online community and the mediations of events by 'make-believe' characters." Benford et al.¹⁵ have created a chart which illustrates the point. In the chart, they identify four different types of situations with shared-space technologies. 1) Physical Reality, which is both local and physical, 2) Telepresence, which is physical but remote, 3) Augmented Reality, which is synthetic but local and 4) Virtual Reality, which is both synthetic and remote. Most network computer games fall within the fourth category, and thus the game is distanced from the user. This distorts the feeling of importance in the mind of a person not playing computer games. For a gamer, the distance is irrelevant in the sense that the hours spent on perfecting skills or characters in a computer game do not disappear even though the distance from the user's physical space can seem to matter. A very emotional relationship to the characters and even items results from playing the games. After all, some items are so rare that the players are willing to specifically design characters around such items or do tasking quests in order to name the items.¹⁶ Although it is clear enough that the relationship is not one-to-one with the person in question, this, however, does not mean that the wrongs made in the virtual would not have consequences in the real world for the non-virtual player. The acts done in real world cause the acts which happen in the virtual environment and those again affect the people in the real world¹⁷.

What could be considered cheating in network computer games?

We will start by introducing several forms of cheating in different kinds of computer games (see tables 1-3). These examples are by no means meant to be all-inclusive, but just examples clarifying different categories of cheating possible in different gaming environments.

¹¹ See e.g. Ibid and Bissett et al.: Addressing Ethics In Entertainment Software Development

¹² N Ben Fairweather: Cool New Cheats: cheating and the computer games industry, Ren Reynolds: Playing a "Good" Game: A Philosophical Approach to Understanding the Morality of Games

¹³ Thomas Powers: Real wrongs in virtual communities

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Benford et al.: Understanding and constructing shared spaces with mixed-reality boundaries

¹⁶ See e.g. Ren Reynolds: Intellectual Property Rights in Community Based Video Games

¹⁷ Thomas Powers: Real wrongs in virtual communities

| Cheats | Countermeasures |
|--|--|
| "Camping", i.e. reserving a spot which is optimal for spotting and killing other characters; typically near a respawn area | Verbal (written) complaining, although there are modifications to games which slay or kick the character if they camp too long. Also, some more creative methods exist, such as changing the character to a chicken which cannot attack at all |
| Non-stop jumping to make aiming harder | Verbal (written) complaining, although there are some patches in some games which have rectified this problem |
| See through walls, "wallhacks" | Try to find out if extra information is going in the packets sent to the server from the player and try to divide the map information going to the player to smaller parts to hamper the use of the map information |
| Reflex augmentation | Use program counter measures which try to stop the cheating applications from being used |
| Aiming proxies, i.e. third party applications which enable the player to shoot unerringly | Use program counter measures which try to stop the cheating applications from being used, data scrambling e.g. via encryption |
| Enhanced damage by compromised client | Using checksums |

Table 1. First Person Shooters

| Cheats | Countermeasures |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| "Unfair" alliances | Verbal (written) complaining |
| Raw materials which | Turn beta testing features |

| | |
|---|--|
| do not belong to the player | off from the games before releasing them |
| Map and other information revealing applications | Do not send more information than necessary to the player's client about the map |
| "Horde" handling applications, i.e. third party applications which enable handling of large groups easily | Try to snoop the players using them and shut down the accounts if encountered |
| Enhanced damage by compromised client | Using checksums |

Table 2. Computer Strategy Games

| Cheats | Countermeasures |
|---|---|
| "Muling" items (moving items from the played character to characters which are kept as "mules") | If wanted, can be stopped or hampered with game technical measures |
| Creating characters specifically designed to kill other players' characters and then killing other players' characters (designed for player vs. environment play) with them | Verbal (written) complaining |
| Killing and stealing from inexperienced and ill equipped players | Verbal (written) complaining |
| Fake messages from the server administrations | Rising user awareness or trying to protect account names that resemble administrator accounts |
| Money that does not belong to the player | Turn beta testing features off from the games before releasing them |
| Item duplication or creation | Try to snoop the players using outside applications and shut down the accounts if encountered |

| | |
|--|---|
| Enhanced damage by compromised client | Using checksums |
| Outright killing of characters by cheating | Finding out about these players and closing down their accounts |

Table 3. Computer Role Playing Games¹⁸

Where to draw the line?

From the previous we can identify at least the following categories that could be considered cheating:

1. Macros
2. Game mechanical cheats
3. Beta functions
4. External information sources
5. External software
6. Third party user interface
7. Client changing software
8. Password scams
9. Server affecting software
10. Server hacking

Macros offered by the game itself are very implicitly available and thus can hardly be considered cheating. Game mechanical cheats¹⁹ in which one finds something that one can exploit in the game that was not meant by the game programmers or designers to gain a large amount of experience for the character are more problematic. In-game cheats, through the game beta testing functions can be left in the game and then exploited. The previous two are more a question of patching the game rather than cheating. They should be corrected or turned

off if the game provider does not intend them to be used.

External sources, like web pages which provide in depth information about the game, to a detail not available to a single gamer or even in any direct form through the game²⁰ are more problematic. For this information the player must go outside the game itself and can then use information which is not necessarily available to all players. Also, external software which does not affect the game itself in any way but offers a possibility to quickly check things not readily available from within the game, such as the Runeword wizard for Diablo II, or even within the game as user interface enhancements such as Ingredient helper in World of Warcraft, change the game balance towards those who have knowledge and access to such programs. Many of these are, however, approved by the game developer. If we compare this with using chess-playing computers to aid in a game against another human player, it is typically considered cheating when used in over-the-net or over-the-mail games and it is definitely not allowed in tournaments.

Software which changes the client's functioning, e.g. map hack; getting passwords off new players by fooling them with administrator-like messages either in-game or outside²¹; software which directly affects the server functioning, sending certain packages directly to the server; and straight hacks into the server to change things—these are clear situations in which cheating is taking place. These should be closed with any legal means possible. Counter software is available²² and should be used even more aggressively than is done now. Bans should also be used to exclude players exploiting these.

Conclusions

To conclude, at least some of the cheats used (specifically the last four listed) can always be considered non-allowable cheats, while others are more problematic. Some seem to be in the spirit of the inherent rules of the game, and thus could be considered to be comparable to "cheating" others in

¹⁸ Various sources used for the tables 1-3 from personal online gaming to consulting other online gamers, also see e.g. Suler and Phillips: *The Bad Boys of Cyberspace: Deviant Behavior in Multimedia Chat Communities*; Brundage: *Making EverQuest Easier to Play: Cheating or Not?*; Pritchard: *How to hurt hackers: The scoop on Internet cheating and how you can combat it*; Smed et al.: *Aspects of networking in multiplayer computer games*; Smed: *Offending other players*; Smed and Hakonen: *Preventing Look-Ahead Cheating with Active Objects*.

¹⁹ E.g. luring a monster to a place where it gets stuck and then it is easy to destroy even though it is considerably higher level than the player.

²⁰ See e.g. www.diabloii.net

²¹ E.g. in news groups or e-mail

²² See e.g. Smed & Hakonen: *Preventing Look-Ahead Cheating with Active Objects*

poker by giving them clues on what one has in one's hand while having quite something else. Where to draw the line seems to be the difficult issue, but in some cases, such as the use of most unapproved third party software, it is also very clear.

Destroying other peoples' work is always immoral if no other motive than personal gain or pure maliciousness exists, and in the cases handled, no virtuous motives are to be found. Gaining an unfair advantage in the game is also taking away—at least indirectly but often also directly—from other players through the direct loss of items or characters, or at least through devaluation of the worth of the items fairly playing players gain through approved methods. Unfair players gain them either through the use of "bots"²³ or other advantage-giving third party software.

The arguments according to which games are of little or no moral significance are false—at least from a liberal standpoint. Games are obviously of value to the players of the games, and to the industry, and thus moral issues resulting from them cannot be bypassed by claiming that games would not be important—they are. Also, children and youth both do things which matter, and as humans are most clearly moral subjects.

The issues regarding online computer games and their moral significance have largely been ignored. The authors hope this will not be the case in the future, but that steps are taken to ensure a more fair and moral playing ground in online games.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for their invaluable input on what kinds of forms of cheating in various games exist: Pasi Uuppo and Tomi "bgt" Mäntylä (especially but not only MUDs), Ville Jansen (especially but not only FPSs) and the alt.games.diablo2 Usenet News-group crowd for CRPG related examples.

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²³ Automated software which plays a character very quickly through a certain area in which items of value are easily found.

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Dan L. Burk

Electronic Gaming and the Ethics of Information Ownership

Abstract:

Players of electronic games, particularly on-line role-playing games, may invest a substantial degree of time, effort, and personal identity into the game scenarios they generate. Yet, where the wishes of players diverge from those of game publishers, the legal and ethical interests of players remain unclear. The most applicable set of legal principles are those of copyright law, which is often grounded in utilitarian justifications, but which may also be justified on deontological grounds. Past copyright cases involving video arcade and personal computer gaming suggest that the gaming scenarios generated by players may constitute original selection and arrangement of the game elements, thus qualifying such gaming sequences for copyright protection as either derivative works or works of joint authorship. But this result may be difficult to justify on utilitarian theories. Rather, the personal investment of game players suggests a deontological basis for claims of game sequence ownership.

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Introduction

Electronic gaming confronts the player with an interface, typically textual or audiovisual, that requires creative response in order to play the game. Players typically must choose from a finite number of responses provided by the game developer, but the combination of responses lies in the hands of the player. Any particular game sequence is the result of such player creativity. Whether in solo, or stand-alone game play, or multi-player environments, players take dormant, latent game environments and by their play infuse them with a realization of potential, with activity, with narrative. Even the most limited electronic game scenarios contain some element of player creativity and choice; it is after all the options available that allow the player to display and develop skills that make the game challenging and enjoyable. The more sophisticated the game, the greater number of creative options available to players, and the more unique and personalized the player experience becomes.

At times, however, the creativity infused into games by players may diverge from the creative options initially chosen by the publisher. Players may wish to take the game narrative or experience outside the parameters desired and designed by the game publisher. Players may wish to imbue the game scenario with new objects, new challenges, new choices. Players may wish to link disparate games together, to move characters and narratives between competing game environments, or to link stand-alone games together in multiplayer of the players' choosing. While game publishers may in some instances determine it to be in their own self-interest to permit or encourage such activity, in many instances such player activity will run counter to the business plan of the publisher. Such situations present an ethical conflict between the interests of game developers and game users.

Where the interests of player and publisher diverge, control over the use and development of the game will be at issue, which means that ultimately ownership of the game will be at issue. Ownership of gaming scenarios and player gaming narratives will be largely governed by the intellectual property rights conferred under copyright law, and, in any conflict between game developers and game players, most particularly governed by the division of rights dictated under copyright doctrines addressing multiple authorship. Although no copyright cases to date address the ownership of computer gaming scenarios, principles articulated in several cases

addressing first-generation computer video games suggest how ownership would likely be allocated. Thus the ethical question regarding control of electronic gaming experiences will be largely governed by the moral justification for current configurations of copyright law.

Yet, it is not clear that the moral configuration of copyright law adequately addresses the configuration of interests present in the interaction of players with electronic games. In particular, it is unclear whether copyright law considers and respects the personal investment of game players in game characters and game narratives. In this essay, I propose to examine the failure of current copyright justifications to account for such interests. I begin by discussing the nature of user interaction with electronic games, and the treatment of such interaction under current copyright law. In particular, I review several electronic gaming cases that indicate player game developments or contributions are unlikely to be recognized under copyright. I then discuss the moral justifications for copyright, noting their misalignment with player gaming creativity, especially with regard to character development and narrative. I conclude with some observations as to the moral basis for recognizing the creations electronic game players.

The Nature of the Game

The activity of participants in such multi-player role-playing games generates value in several different forms. For example, in the course of game participation, players may accumulate virtual objects or monetary tokens that have value not only within the game, but which also have value in the "real world" where markets have developed for the sale or barter such intangible property, which may then be used by other players in the game.

To date, a fair amount of commentary has been generated regarding the ownership and property interests attending such virtual objects.¹ But essen-

¹ Lastowka, F.G. and Hunter, D. (2003) *The Laws of the Virtual Worlds*, California Law Review, 92, 1-74; Stephens, M. (2002). Student Note, *Sales of In-Game Assets: An Illustration of the Continuing Failure of Intellectual Property Law to Protect Digital Content Creators*, Texas Law Review, 80, 1513-1535.

tially no scholarship has been advanced to consider the ownership or property interests in the game itself – in the characters and narratives generated by game play. Ownership of this more traditional form of intellectual property may be at issue when conflicts arise between game owners and game players as to control over the progress of a game scenario, over the creation of game sequels or spin-offs, and over mobility or compatibility between different games.

At a superficial level, such matters may seem simple and well settled: At the level of player perception, the output of the game typically constitutes a collection of sounds, images, and animation, and text, constituting an audiovisual work. Such works are protected under the law of copyright; copyright subsists in original works of authorship fixed for a perceptible duration in some tangible medium of expression. Since the audiovisual output of the game is fixed for some duration in computer hardware, copyright law will apply. Additionally, at a more fundamental level, typically unseen by players, the computer code that controls and generates the game scenario will also fall under the system of copyright. Thus computer games comprise a variety of copyrightable works, at a variety of levels.

Copyright vests ownership and control of a work, such as computer code or audiovisual output, in the author of the work -- either a natural person or the employer of a natural person. Copyright law is typically justified on utilitarian grounds, as a means for granting the creator of an original work exclusive rights in that work, providing an incentive to encourage the creation of such works for the benefit of the public.² This view has characterized the American approach to copyright, and has gained increasing prominence worldwide as the United States has increasingly dominated international copyright treaty negotiations. However, copyright has also sometimes been justified under a deontological "personality" theory, a view that has traditionally characterized the continental European tradition. Under this approach, copyright is justified as recognizing the infusion of a creative work with some aspect of the author's personality or individual expression; thus copyright law recognizes and

validates the autonomy of the author.³ These two approaches have been the dominant moral justifications for copyright, although other theories, such as a Lockean labor or "desert" theory, have sometimes been advanced, justifying copyright as a recognition or validation of the author's effort.⁴

Considering Player Contributions

But on more careful consideration, the ownership of an individual gaming scenario, when considered at the level of particular game narrative, presents greater legal and ethical challenges. Game players, especially when participating in role-playing game milieux, may invest a considerable degree of time and creative effort in developing their character attributes, building or collecting portfolios of character possessions, and chronicling their character exploits. Admittedly, such attributes, artifacts, and exploits lie within the constraints of the computer code and worldview laid down by the game designers. But the players contribute new narratives, new character attributes, new combinations of game elements within the general parameters of the game.

Consequently, as a practical matter, no particular game experience can be said to arise wholly from gaming elements established by game creators – rather, players participate in shaping and developing the gaming scenario in which they are engaged. Such contributions may well constitute original expression of the type protected under copyright. Indeed, the output of a game, resulting from the interaction of a player with the game controls or interface, may constitute a series of copyrightable works, each differing from the others due to different user choices and reactions to the options programmed into the game scenario itself. Given the personal and resource investment of game players in their characters, this player investment deserves a legal analysis of the rights of players to own and control their creative contributions. Additionally, whatever the outcome of such a legal analysis, the investment of players a broader ethical analysis of the interest players might properly be accorded in their contributions.

² Landes, W.M. and Posner, R.A. (1989). An Economic Analysis of Copyright Law, *Journal of Legal Studies* 18, 325-363.

³ Drahos, P. (1996). *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property*, Dartmouth, Brookfield

⁴ Hughes, J. (1988). *The Philosophy of Intellectual Property*, *Georgetown Law Review*, 77, 287-291

If a given game scenario arises from the original contributions of both the game developer and the game player, then the law regarding multiple authorship becomes applicable. Although copyright law varies somewhat a bit from country to country, certain general standards are widespread due to international treaty agreements. In general, copyright recognizes two major categories of multiple contribution: that of joint authorship and that of derivative works. The first of these, joint authorship, typically occurs when more than one author contributes original expression to the inception of a work, with the intent of producing a unified final product. In such cases, each contributor has a complete individual right to ownership of the final product. Derivative works, by contrast, tend to occur sequentially, when a subsequent or follow-on contributor adapts an existing work with the authorization of the initial contributor – for example, setting lyrics to music, or adapting a novel into a screenplay. In this case, each contributor owns and controls the portion of the work contributed, not the entire final product. Of course, adaptation of the work without permission constitutes an infringement of the initial author's exclusive right to adapt the work, and such use of the initial work can be halted by legal action. Indeed, under U.S. law, the unauthorized adaptation of a copyrighted work goes unrecognized; the adaptor accrues no rights in the unauthorized contribution, no matter how original.

Recognizing Player Contributions

If players contribute original expression to gaming scenarios, and have at least the implied permission of the game producers, then logically players must either be joint authors or authors of derivative works. But the law has been slow to recognize the contributions of participants in such "ergodic" works. The question arose early in the history of computer-generated gaming, with the commercial advent of video arcade games: Galaxian, Pac-Man, Centipede, Missile Command. Such games, now considered arcade "classics," generated CRT computer graphics in response to user interaction via buttons, joysticks, or trackballs. The player in essence accessed stored images, sounds, and image sequences by means of the game console controls, in response to stimuli generated by the game program. Thus, any given sequence of game play was the product of user choice in response to the program, arguably making the player an author.

For example, in *Stern Electronics v. Kaufman*,⁵ a United States federal court considered the problem of player participation in the context of an infringement suit against the supplier of an allegedly infringing video game. The defendant in the suit challenged the copyright in the plaintiff's game by arguing that player control of the video output the game constituted original expression, a prerequisite condition for authorship in copyright. But the court reasoned that the player control generated only a variation on the plaintiff's game, and the court declined to address the question as to how much participation by the game player would be necessary before the producer of the game could no longer be considered to have contributed enough original expression to be considered an author.

Subsequent courts facing the same issue adopted a similar stance, emphasizing the limited number of choices that could be made by the game player.⁶ At least one court mused a bit as to whether a given video output might be a work derivative of the game software, but concluded in dicta that the manufacturer of the game was entitled to monopolize the work in any event.⁷ In deciding these challenges to these challenges to the copyright of video games, these courts focused on the copyrightable contribution of the game manufacturers to the images and instructions embedded in the game software or semiconductor chips. The authorship of a given game sequence was not directly at issue, consequently, these early courts never squarely addressed the contribution made by the player to any given game – the possibility that the player might be contributing original expression to the output, that the output might be a work of joint authorship or derivative work.

The contribution of players to game sequence, and was more directly addressed by the opinion of a U.S. federal appellate court in *Microstar v. Formgen, Inc.*⁸ There the court considered the status of player-generated add-on levels to the popular "Duke Nukem" computer video game. The publisher of the

⁵ 669 F.2d 852, 856-57 (2d Cir. 1982).

⁶ See *Midway Mfg. Co. v. Artic Int'l*, 704 F.2d 1009, 1012-13 (7th Cir. 1982); see also *Williams Electronics v. Artic Int'l* 685 F.2d 870, 874 (3d Cir. 1982).

⁷ 704 F.2d at 1014.

⁸ 154 F.3d 1107 (9th Cir. 1998).

game had encouraged players to create and trade additional levels beyond those initially programmed into the game; however, a commercial firm had gathered a large number of such player add-ons and was selling them on CD-ROM media without permission of the game publisher. The additional levels were constituted of computer "MAP" files that called up graphics from the standard game image library, and only the MAP files, not the proprietary graphics files, had been copied. But the court nonetheless found the player-created levels to constitute a type of derivative work of the game. The opinion compares the MAP files to narratives in literary sequels, and holding that the original developer had the right to control the distribution of such sequels.

The *Microstar* court's MAP files as literary "sequels" effectively recognizes the selection and arrangement of game elements by players as authorized derivative works. This selection and arrangement analysis would have been equally applicable to the arcade video games cases; given the large number of possible game play sequences that might be generated by player choice, the player contribution was as constrained or as trivial as the *Stern* opinion suggests. The greater number of creative choices for players engaged in electronic role-playing games suggests and even stronger case original selection and arrangement, constituting authorship of a derivative work.

Such derivative works are presumably authorized by the purchase of the game for play. In the video or role-playing game context, some implied license or authorization might be inferred from the nature of the game; the player surely has some type of permission to generate a new game pattern, as that is necessary and presumably intended in order to play the game. Authorization may otherwise be inferred from the publisher's acquiescence in creation of the new sequences -- for example, in *Microstar*, the game publisher's encouragement of the development and trade of additional player-generated levels conferred at least implied, and at times explicit, permission to create the derivative works of the game. Moreover, it is possible in at least some cases that the game sequences might constitute works of joint authorship, as the game developer certainly contemplated and intended the use of the game by players to generate original sequences. Authorization might move the manipulation into the category of derivative work, where the reader's contribution qualifies for its own authorial copyright.

Justifying Player Authorship

The logic of these cases strongly suggests that the narratives generated by user game play constitute original expression as defined in copyright law, and are likely derivative works if not works of joint authorship. Some previous commentary, focusing primarily on the ownership and control of game characters, has mistakenly argued that copyright is inapplicable to role-playing scenarios, a conclusion leading in turn to questionable ethical analysis of game scenario ownership.⁹ The mistaken legal conclusion appears to stem from erroneous assumption that copyright must be unitary, or must vest in a single author.

But with the derivative work analysis for gaming narratives now in hand, can the legal result of player authorship be justified within the ethical assumptions of copyright? From a utilitarian standpoint, offering ownership or control of game adaptations might generate some additional incentive to prompt the creation of such add-ons. Creation and sharing of game improvements might be prompted by the promise of some creative control, and conversely, deterred by the knowledge that, in the absence of copyright for improvers, control of improvements would accrue to the original game owner. However, such improvements seem to arise more spontaneously, without the promise of copyright reward, often motivated by the player's non-pecuniary interest or enjoyment. Little or no incentive seems necessary to prompt players to develop their own game characters and narratives within the framework of the game; players are likely to do so for the enjoyment or challenge of the game, rather than for the reward of some exclusive rights.

Additionally, broad control over copyrighted works and their adaptations has been justified on the argument that an effective incentive for the initial author requires extended control over uses of the work, including ownership of improvements or applications in adjacent markets. On a utilitarian theory, shared control for follow-on improvements would be justified only if the benefit from recognition of player's rights outweighs the lessened incen-

⁹ Reynolds, R. (2002). Intellectual Property Rights in Community-Based Video Games, Retrieved September 10, 2005 from <http://www.reynolds.com/downloads/RReynolds-MMORPG-IPR.doc>

tive for the initial work. Such benefits seem more dubious if improvements will in any event be developed due to other motivations, without the recognition of players' rights. Thus the utilitarian argument for recognition of player ownership seems uncertain.

But from a deontological, personality-based perspective, recognition of player copyright in their characters and narratives may seem more compelling. Players often invest a good deal of effort in character development, suggesting that a Lockean desert approach would recognize some natural right to the results of such efforts. Perhaps even more importantly, players tend to invest a good deal of personal, psychological capital into game character development – forming an attachment to and identifying closely with the game character. Characters will frequently function as a fantasized extension of the player's psyche, or may even form an important aspect of the player's own self-image or persona. Copyright recognition of this personal investment may help to affirm player individuality and autonomy; failure to recognize such as substantial personal investment may tend to undermine the personal autonomy of players when disputes over control of game scenaria arise.

This suggests that gaming may be ripe for application of personality-based theories of intellectual property, both recognizing and protecting an important aspect of the player's individuality and personality. At the same time, the analysis of joint authorship above suggest that the latitude for protecting personal investment as a property right is not unlimited. If the personal investment of players in a game scenario is to be recognized, then we must similarly recognize that the initial game developer may have something of a personal investment in the game as developed. If the work is a work of joint authorship, then the investment of personality is also joint, and the control that comes with authorship must be balanced or shared in order to the validate the personal investment of each party. Current copyright law in fact mandates forms of such sharing for ownership of joint or derivative works.

Additionally, we must acknowledge that personality-based theories of authorship may have their dark side. Personal identification with property has its postive aspects: identification with a home, a wedding ring, a sporting trophy, a doctroral dissertation, or perhaps even with a game character can define the individual in a healthy and affirmative manner. But as Peggy Radin cautions us in her classic discussion of personality-based ownership theories, in-

vestment of identity in property may sometimes go too far, becoming an unhealthy obsession.¹⁰ Certainly signs of obsessive or addictive tendencies may sometimes seen in game player behavior, and in the degree of identification of the player with the scenario being created. Of course, the tendency toward unhealthy property obsessions is not limited to identification with intellectual property, and the potential for personal obsession with corporate securities or sports cars or collectible figurines has not hampered societal adoption of regimes for ownership of such items. Still, it may be appropriate to exercise care in adopting a personality-based theory of ownership that could encourage unhealthy personal investment, ironically damaging the individual whose personal worth is meant to be affirmed.

Conclusion

If characterized as a "narrative" selected and arranged from the elements of a game, player-generated scenaria seem to fit the copyright categories of joint or derivative works. Such recognition of game scenario authorship seems legally plausible from the results of past video game cases, and ethically plausible on a deontological theory of copyright. Of course, many game publishers have hedged against such a result by contractually requiring players to cede any ownership rights in their game narratives to the publishers. Such contracts are at times legally suspect, and require their own legal and ethical analysis.¹¹ But such an analysis can only proceed after the disposition of the underlying property rights in the game scenario are clear.

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¹⁰ Radin, M.J. (1982). Property and Personhood, *Stanford Law Review*, 34, 97-1015.

¹¹ Guibault, L. (2002). Copyright Limitations on Contracts: An Analysis of the Contractual Overridability of Limitations on Copyright, *The Hague, Kluwer.*

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Dorothy E. Warner and Mike Raiter

Social Context in Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs): Ethical Questions in Shared Space

Abstract:

Computer and video games have become nearly ubiquitous among individuals in industrialized nations, and they have received increasing attention from researchers across many areas of scientific study. However, relatively little attention has been given to Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs). The unique social context of MMOGs raises ethical questions about how communication occurs and how conflict is managed in the game world. In order to explore these questions, we compare the social context in Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* and Disney's *Toontown*, focusing on griefing opportunities in each game. We consider ethical questions from the perspectives of players, game companies, and policymakers.

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Since their inception nearly four decades ago, electronic games have received increasing attention from researchers across many areas of scientific study, including psychology¹, biology², child development³, and social policy⁴. Despite this growing body of literature, Massively-Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs)⁵ have received relatively little attention from researchers.

MMOGs allow thousands of individuals to play simultaneously in a persistent online world. In these online game worlds, players gain and lose points, abilities, and resources as they work alone or together in order to accomplish goals within the game. The complex organization of these social structures raises ethical questions regarding players' personal responsibility, behavior, and expectations of each other, as well as how conflict is managed. An additional ethical concern involves how these issues are handled among audiences comprised primarily of children versus adults.

In order to explore these ethical concerns in the context of MMOGs, we present the demographics of players and the unique characteristics of MMOGs that differentiate them from other genres of games. We compare the communities of two games – Disney's *Toontown* (*TT*), whose audience is primarily children, and Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), whose audience is primarily adults -- as well as how players try to "get around the system" through intentional violations of communities' expectations or rules of conduct. Finally, we raise ethical questions from the perspectives of players, game companies, and policymakers in different countries.

Demographics of Players and Games

According to the United States-based Entertainment Software Association, of the most frequent American game players, 43% reported playing online games,

and 60% of these players were male⁶. A study of individuals who play *WoW* showed that the mean player age was 28.3 years, 84% of players were male, the mean number of playing hours per week was 22.7, and players' mean income was approximately the same as the US national median income⁷.

Social Context

Social dynamics are central to the popularity of MMOGs. An integral part of the gaming experience involves strategic navigation through shared space while competing with and against each other for shared resources. Consequently, MMOGs expand the typical social context of electronic play to include identity development, community building, establishing rules of conduct, and efforts to manage conflict that occurs within game communities.

Depending on the game and particular mode of play, individuals can play with or against other players, Non-Player Characters (NPCs), and "mobs," or monsters/enemies⁸. Games such as *WoW* allow players to form guilds within the game, in order to facilitate community building and mutual cooperation. In addition, several games offer players the opportunity to interact within a personalized section of the world that excludes players who have not been specifically invited into that section.

Working toward accomplishing goals within the game is classified as the advancement subcomponent of achievement, an aspect of MMOG players' motivation⁹. While this subcomponent focuses on gaining power over the game environment, another subcomponent of achievement – competition – involves power over other players, frequently through trickery. Intentional harassment of other players is called "griefing," which utilizes aspects of the game structure or physics in unintended ways to cause distress for other players.

¹ Funk, et al., 2002

² van Reekum et al., 2004

³ Griffiths, 2004

⁴ Haninger & Thompson, 2004

⁵ This genre of games is also frequently referred to as MMOs, MMPs, or MMORPGs.

⁶ ESRB, 2005a

⁷ Yee, 2005a

⁸ The term "Mob" originally referred to "mobile" monsters who could move from room to room in Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), non-graphic predecessors to MMOGs.

⁹ 2005b

The social context of MMOGs incorporates online forums that are dedicated to particular communities of players. These forums host discussions regarding problems encountered in the game, tips or tricks learned by players, grieving activities, and in some cases, even blacklists of characters whose grieving activities have exceeded acceptable levels within the community.

Social Context in Two Games

In order to further examine the social context of MMOGs, we compare the communities and opportunities for communication in *WoW*, a game played primarily by adult players; and *TT*, which is designed for children. For each game, we focus on grieving activities in which players have intentionally harassed or caused trouble for other players.

Blizzard's World of Warcraft

WoW is a fantasy MMRPG (Massively-Multiplayer Role Playing Game) in which players take on the identities of characters of different races, classes, and professions in order to explore the medieval world of Azeroth, complete increasingly challenging quests, and battle other players or NPCs. Players use and gain experience with weapons (e.g., swords, dynamite) or special abilities (e.g., spells) to attack their foes¹⁰.

WoW supports a typical set of communication opportunities. Players can send text messages to a single person, to the immediate vicinity, or to a larger area. In addition, players can perform "emotes", which are animations that display gestures and actions. Emotes exist for many emotional expressions, from dancing or flirting to spitting or other rude gestures. If players are being harassed by other players, they are given the option to "squench" the offending individuals, effectively stopping those players from sending them text messages. In extreme cases, players can ask human game masters for help to remove a problem player. External communication in *WoW* occurs through web-based forums maintained by Blizzard, which allows the company to police content. Players can have their game accounts banned for posting inappropriate information on the forums.

Some of the most prevalent methods of grieving in *WoW* involve killing other characters or preventing access to resources by using aspects of the physics of the game world for unintended purposes. A recent update to *WoW* added a "Corrupted Blood" spell that is powerful enough to kill lower level characters almost instantaneously, and the effects of the spell can be spread to other characters, like a plague. As surviving characters returned to towns to restock supplies, they spread the plague to new areas. Many players took advantage of the circumstance as a grieving opportunity and began to intentionally infect other characters, and to "store" the disease by infecting their pets. In order to hamper this type of grieving, developers changed the characteristics of the plague to limit its spread. Another grieving tactic, "corpse camping," involves staying near other characters' corpses so that they are immediately killed upon coming back to life. This method of grieving can lead to iterative retaliation, with increasingly powerful and larger groups of characters getting involved.

Disney's Toontown

TT players protect and defend the colorful world of Toontown from the business-robot Cogs, who attack the world by replacing its landscape with monochromatic skyscrapers. In order to attack Cogs, players can employ the following gags: throws, squirts, drops, traps, lures, and sound effects¹¹. Players gain more experience and power as they use these gags, which eventually unlock more powerful combat items, which can then be mastered to unlock yet more items.

In order to safeguard children's communication in *TT*, Disney allows two options for communicating with other players in the game: SpeedChat and Secret Friends. Using SpeedChat, players click an icon that displays a list of categories, each with appropriate phrases underneath them. In order to speak more freely with others, players must communicate through the Secret Friends option. Players first exchange game-generated security codes, which can only be exchanged outside of the game, so that players must know each other outside of the game in order to communicate within the game world. Once the security codes have been exchanged, players can communicate in an unrestricted manner in the game. However, since Dis-

¹⁰ Kasavin, 2004

¹¹ Colayco, 2003

ney does not run its own *TT* forums, it cannot control the content posted in forums established by players.

Methods of griefing in *TT* are more limited than in *WoW*, and they tend to be performed by more experienced players against "newbies." One way that *TT* players engage in griefing is to harass other players by following them around and repeatedly telling other players "You Stink" through the Speed-Chat communication option and using the laugh emote. Although this may seem mild relative to griefing methods in *WoW*, it has been reported as a frequent source of frustration in the *TT* forums. Another way that more experienced *TT* players can engage in griefing is to escort newbies through tougher areas of the game, which require greater levels of experience, and to "ditch" them by leaving them alone in these areas.

It appears that the structural and design elements incorporated into *TT* in order to regulate content and protect its young audience are effective. The social context of *TT* remains appropriate for children, with almost no opportunity for offensive communication. In addition, far fewer opportunities for griefing exist in *TT* than in *WoW*.

Ethical Questions

One can question how much responsibility rests with the game companies to promote ethical play. Companies communicate and enforce players' responsibilities and expectations of behavior by requiring them to agree to terms established in End-User License Agreements (EULA). Depending on the circumstances of the offense, players who violate the terms of the EULA can have their access to the game suspended temporarily or have their accounts terminated. American game industry officials have stated that it is the responsibility of adult players and parents of child players to make decisions regarding the appropriateness of content in the games that they play^{12,13}. Beyond the financial interests of game companies, their goal is to facilitate a quality game experience – focusing on the playability of the game and players' enjoyment, and leaving primary ethical responsibility in the hands of the players.

¹² ESA, 2005b

¹³ ESRB, 2005b

Some players have defended their potentially objectionable behavior with the argument that any action that is allowed by the game must not be cheating or truly violating any rules. A consequentialist perspective raised by players is that anything that takes place in the game is just part of the game – since it is not "real," there are no "real" acts, or consequences¹⁴. However, given the level of involvement and investment demonstrated by dedicated MMOG players, these arguments may be too simplistic or may portray these problems as less significant than they actually are – particularly for children, whose levels of moral development may limit their understanding of these issues.

Although the possible effects of players' actions may be more difficult to discern in a virtual context, this does not mean that they do not exist. According to Floridi¹⁵, the virtual context involves a distance between players and their actions. It seems that this distance could diminish players' sense of responsibility for their in-game behavior – in combination with the anonymity afforded by online play, "...[this] diffusion of responsibility brings with it a diminished ethical sense in the [player] and a corresponding lack of perceived accountability" (p. 40). From a Kantian perspective, even if no actual harm is inflicted, players' intentions to enact harm could promote their inflicting harm in reality. However, this perspective deemphasizes the role of contextual influence, implying that behavior exhibited in one domain will be exhibited in other domains as well¹⁶. Researchers have argued that the context of play stipulates that, in normative circumstances, players implicitly understand that their actions take place in a world that allows for fantasy and vividly 'non-real' circumstances that are distinctly separate from the 'real world'^{17,18}.

In some extreme situations, undeniable 'real-world' implications of in-game behavior have already been observed. In order to capitalize on the in-game economy of *WoW*, individuals in rural China have been paid to work 12-hour shifts of 'gold-farming' – obtaining virtual gold within the game that is sold

¹⁴ G4 Video Game TV, 2005

¹⁵ Floridi, 1999

¹⁶ Brey, 1999

¹⁷ Gelfond & Saloni-Pasternak, 2005

¹⁸ Penny-Arcade, 2001

outside of the game to players. Rural Chinese workers can earn a higher salary through gold-farming than through agriculture, and this business is made profitable by players who can afford to buy the virtual gold – and would rather buy it than obtain it themselves. Although Blizzard's policy is to close the accounts of these 'career farmers,' it is still possible for this practice to continue, since new accounts can be created for the same purpose. These circumstances bring a new dimension to issues of inequity – through the economic implications of cross-over between real and virtual worlds, and through ethical questions regarding the disparate nature of relatively wealthy individuals in one culture paying a pittance for services performed by relatively poor individuals working in sweatshop conditions¹⁹. The theme of this phenomenon is not new, but this innovative context merits further critical attention.

Since MMOGs are played by individuals around the world, there are inevitably differences in cultural expectations and concerns regarding players' behavior, game content, and the potential for legal involvement in order to modify or restrict MMOG activity. Following the murder of a MMOG player who had stolen a fellow player's virtual sword, China has introduced a system to limit the amount of time that players can access MMOGs each day²⁰. The country has also established a censorship committee to ban online game content that has been deemed to negatively effect national unity; Chinese officials are particularly concerned about online game content that includes sex, violence, and superstition²¹. Although other countries have also expressed concern over sexual and violent content, China's concern regarding superstition is more unique – consequently, it is less likely to be considered by game companies.

Despite any country's best efforts to monitor, rate, or restrict MMOGs, their dynamic and ever-changing content makes them inherently more difficult to regulate than other electronic games. Australia, New Zealand, and most countries in North America, Western Europe, and Asia employ structured game rating systems designed to provide relevant information to consumers so that they can make effec-

tive decisions regarding the games that they or their children play. Some rating boards also restrict the general public's access to potentially harmful games. However, most rating boards have acknowledged that it is not feasible to rate online games – the ESRB includes the proviso "Game Experience May Change During Online Play" as part of its rating of the offline content of online games²².

Cultural differences in perspectives on personal responsibility, censorship, and free speech influence the particular policies of the video game rating boards used by different countries. For example, the Australian Office for Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) effectively bans games it deems too objectionable by denying them classification²³, whereas the US's ESRB does not ban games, although most major retailers will not stock games that receive the ESRB rating of "Adults Only."²⁴ In addition, rating organizations vary in terms of the particular content characteristics on which they focus. For example, Germany restricts games whose content includes Nazi symbols or themes, or red blood, whereas the US restricts games whose content includes nudity or sexual violence²⁵. The implications for these cultural differences are greater for MMOGs than they are for other video games, given the context of multicultural play.

Future Directions and Conclusions

MMOGs are an established yet growing genre of games that are immensely popular. As technological developments increase the sophistication and potential of the gaming experience, the social relevance and influence of these games will play larger roles in people's lives. Although no one can predict how the underlying technology and the games themselves will change, it is clear that significant ethical questions already exist. MMOGs facilitate individuals from around the world to play together simultaneously, and the consequent level of diversity of perspectives, circumstances, and expectations results in a particularly complex social context. In addition, the ambiguous nature of play itself

¹⁹ Felice, 2005

²⁰ BBC News, 2005

²¹ BBC News, 2004

²² ESRB, 2005a

²³ Refused Classification, 2005

²⁴ ESRB, 2005b

²⁵ ebusinessforum.com, 2003

makes it difficult to establish specific guidelines that could apply in even a majority, let alone a totality, of circumstances²⁶. It is important that researchers continue to explore these ethical questions as MMOGs become more complex, so that we can address their possible implications in online and offline settings.

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²⁶ Scarlett, Naudeau, Saloni-Pasternak, & Ponte, 2004

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Jengchung V. Chen and Yangil Park

The Differences of Addiction Causes between Massive Multiplayer Online Game and Multi User Domain

Abstract:

This paper proposes research propositions to study on MMOG and MUD addictions based on their causes – flow state and social interaction. Though previous studies relate MMOG addictions to Internet addictions based on social interactions, this study after examining the underlying theories of Use and Gratification Theory and Flow Theory concludes that what cause MMOG addiction is flow experience not social interaction. On the other hand, the cause of MUD addiction is social interaction. After proposing the propositions of MUD and MMOG addiction causes, this study provides possible impacts of such addictions based on the reasoning between the two theories and two online game addictions.

Agenda

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Introduction

Since the Internet and other IT technologies have become more popular than ever before, the amount of time people spend with computers and IT products, such as Internet and online games, has increased tremendously. There is no doubt that Internet and online games have made enormous contributions to the computer and IT industry, and that they have impacted positively in the manner of their rapid development and expansion. However, it does not mean that Internet and online games always influence people and society in a positive manner. This paper introduces, first, the current situation of Internet and online game use and its negative impacts. The next section describes the two popular kinds of online games, Massive Multi-user Online Game (MMOG) and Multi-user Domain (MUD), and the ways in which they are similar and different. The succeeding section looks further into the factors that cause these differences by using Use and Gratification theory and Flow theory. Suggestions for research propositions and possible implications of such online game addictions are proposed at the end of the article.

Current Status of Online Game Addictions

The continuing boom of information and communication technology is causing the Internet to become a part of everyone's life. People use the Internet not only as a tool for their jobs, but also to participate in virtual communities. Even if the rate of Internet uptake slows considerably¹, the trend still remains upward. There were 275.5 million people using the Internet in February 2000. That number had changed to 605.60 million in September 2002². According to the Horrigan's study³, 84 percent of Internet users in America have participated in a

virtual community. Moreover, apart from the number of people using Internet, the average time spent doing any activity on-line is increasing. Accompanying the increase of time spent online, the symptoms of addiction among heavy Internet users include: spending most of their time on the computer after school, falling asleep in school, not keeping up with assignments, worsening grades, lying about computer or online game use, choosing to use the computer or online game rather than associate with friends or social groups, irritation when not playing online games or wandering online, intensive feelings of pleasure and guilt from using computer or online games, obsession and preoccupation about being on the computer even when not connected, disrupting other matters, and feelings of depression and anger when not on the computer or playing an online game. In order to discover what kind of online games cause addiction, the following section assesses the two most popular kinds of online games: MMOGs and MUDs.

Massive Multi-user Online Game (MMOG)

The largest number of online game players is usually found in MMOGs and constitutes a big cyber-community that includes not only adolescents but adults as well. The appeal of MMOG is that there are many options a gamer can choose. For this reason, gamers are more attracted to MMOGs than any other games, and that is why MMOGs cannot be underestimated as an important area for study. MMOG addiction can be considered in the same way that Internet addiction has also been considered. The advantage of MMOG over solitary gaming is social interaction. Griffiths⁴ describes the favorite features of playing an online game, EverQuest. The features are described as playing for social reasons, enjoyment of violence, being able to play alone, game-specific features, no end to the game, other features (e.g., exploring, strategic thinking, character building etc).

¹ Weisenbacher, P. (2002). Růst Internetu se zastavuje.

² Nua Internet Surveys (2002). How many online?

³ Horrigan, J. B. (2001). Online communities: Networks that nurture long-distance relationships and local ties.

⁴ Griffiths, M. D. (2004). Online computer gaming: a comparison of adolescent and adult gamers. pp. 87-96.

Multi-user Dimension (MUD)

A MUD is a multi-player computer game that combines elements of role-playing games, hack-and-slash style computer games, and social Internet Relay Chat channels. Typically running on a bulletin board system or Internet server, the game is text driven with players reading descriptions of rooms, objects, events, other characters, and computer-controlled creatures or non-player characters (NPCs) in a virtual world. About two-thirds of the MUDs in existence today are specialized for playing a game much like "Dungeons and Dragons" where players are assigned numerical measures of various physical and mental characteristics and then have fantasy adventures in a role-playing style. Nearly all other MUDs are used for leisure-time social activity, with game participants spending connected periods talking with each other and building new areas or objects for general enjoyment.

Use and Gratification Theory and MUD

Many researchers look to Use and Gratification theory as a grounded theory in studies on Internet and other new communication technologies^{5 6 7}. The theory explains why the audience is interested in certain new communication media. Because of the active motivations, the theory serves well on examining how the users' satisfactions change when the attributes of new communication media become different. Several studies have investigated the sub-dimensions of Use and Gratification in order to better understand how it affects the use or abuse of the new media –Internet⁸. Social interaction is found as one of the important factor that causes the

duration of time on a Web site⁹. Sangwan (2005) uses Use and Gratification theory to study on the virtual community success¹⁰. The findings again supported previous research findings: social interaction is the second factor, based on Eigen value, a virtual community succeeds. Based on Use and Gratification theory, the MUD addicted behaviors could result from entertainment, information, convenience, or social interaction¹¹. However, compared with MMOG features, MUD has more attributes relevant to social interaction. Because MUD itself is considered as one of the most successful virtual communities on the Internet, MUD players do use the virtual communities a lot more than MMOG players. Thus based on Use and Gratification Theory and special features of MUD, the following is our first proposition.

Proposition 1: MUD addicts seek social interactions when they play any MUD games.

Flow Theory and MMOG

Flow¹² is defined as a common experience among users when they are totally concentrated in certain activities. The characteristics of users in flow state include: 1. mind of consciences focused on a very narrow field; 2. all the other unrelated thinking and feeling are filtered out; 3. people could lose sensibility and only respond to clear goals and feedback; people feel they have control over the environment. Csikszentmihalyi¹³ states that activities that are most likely to lead to the flow state are that that "1. have concrete goals with manageable rules, 2. make it possible to adjust opportunities for action to our capabilities, 3. provide clear information on how we

⁵ December, J. (1996). Units of analysis for Internet communication.

⁶ Morris, M. & Ogan, C. (1996). The Internet as a mass medium.

⁷ Katz, E., Blumler, J.G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual.

⁸ Song, I., Larose, R., Eastin, M.S., & Lin, C.A. (2004). Internet gratifications and Internet addiction: On the uses and abuses of new media.

⁹ Ko, H., Cho, C.-H., & Roberts, M.S. (2005). Internet use and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising.

¹⁰ Sangwan, S. (2005). Virtual community success: A uses and gratifications perspective.

¹¹ Ko, H., Cho, C.-H., & Roberts, M.S. (2005). Internet use and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising.

¹² Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety: The experience of play in work and games.*

¹³ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). The evolving self: A psychology for the third millennium.

are doing, and 4. screen out distraction and make concentration possible (p. xiv)."¹⁴ Flow Theory has been used in human-computer interaction studies. Montgomery et al¹⁵. found that flow is determined by perceived control and challenge, which in turn direct users to a state that they have never experienced when using IT. Finneran and Zhang¹⁶ integrated a person-artifact-task (PAT) model and proposed propositions that could be applied to online games. One proposition assumes the artifact's telepresence, such as vividness and responsiveness when a person experiences flow. Another proposition is assuming the task be more goal-oriented, autonomous, and at the appropriate level of complexity when experiencing flow. Sherry¹⁷ theorizes the relationship between flow and media enjoyment to provide better understanding on what enjoyment is and why people use media for enjoyment. Flow theory, though not originally designed as an explanation of media, relates to the media enjoyment with numerous studies and fits to the experience as well. Sherry even pointed out that "Csikszentmihaly (1975) seemed to have video games in mind when he developed the concept of flow, though games were not to exist in their popular form for several years¹⁸ (p. 339)." Because the players of online games who have experiences of flow would keep trying to challenge to the next higher difficulty level of the game, players would devote a lot of time which in turn would be harmful to their everyday life. Given the attributes of MMOG and Flow theory, the following is our second proposition.

Proposition 2: MMOG addicts seek for specific flow state in which game's difficulty level and their skills fit when they play any MMOG games.

The Common Factor between MUD and MMOG: Interaction

In spite of differences between the two games, they have one very common factor which makes them become online games. It is interaction that brings the two close together. Researchers have suggested that interaction is an important feature of computer games to result in user's optimal experience^{19 20}. Such interaction can be found in both MUD and MMOG games. For example, for MUD gamers it is very important to interact with their master, the opposite players, or other "observers" during the game. They need such interaction to follow or even negotiate on the master's rules. For MMOG players, it is often times the player's job to kill the monster. In other words the player interacts with the monster for killing the monster while the monster interacts with the player through attacking. Researchers have found that the interaction feature of computer games has positive impacts to the game popularity^{21 22}.

According to Choi and Kim's (2004) study, interaction in online game can be classified as two types: personal interaction and social interaction. They define personal interaction as "the interaction between the user and system" and social interaction as "the interaction between two or more users"²³ (p. 13). The components of personal interaction are: goal, operation, and feedback. Social interaction, on the other hand includes communication place and communication tools. Such distinction does imply the differences between MMOG and MUG games. From the above discussion on MMOG and Flow, the

¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). *The evolving self: A psychology for the third millennium*.xiv

¹⁵ Montgomery, H., Sharafi, P., & Hedman, L.R. (2004). *Engaging in activities involving information technology: Dimensions, modes, and flow*.

¹⁶ Finneran, C.M. & Zhang, P. (2003). *A person-artifact-task (PAT) model of flow antecedents in computer-mediated environments*.

¹⁷ Sherry, J.L. (2004). *Flow and media enjoyment*.

¹⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety: The experience of play in work and games*.

¹⁹ Lewinski, J.S. (2000). *Developer's guide to computer game design*.

²⁰ Mithra, P. (1980). *10 ways to destroy a perfectly good game idea*.

²¹ Eskelinen, M. (2001). *Towards computer game studies*.

²² Cummins, N. (2002). *Integrating e-commerce and games*.

²³ Choi, D., Kim, J. (2004). *Why People Continue to Play Online Games: In Search of Critical Design Factors to Increase Customer Loyalty to Online Contents*.

personal interaction components facilitate MMOG gamers to experience flow given the difficulty level of task and the gamers' skills match. Such flow experience would in turn for the gamers to pursue another higher level of accomplishments. Now that MUD has the feature of interaction as being a kind of online game. Does MUD have the same components of personal interaction to facilitate players' optimal experience? Evidently MUDs interaction includes both personal and social interaction. But the personal interaction components included are not to the same level of those in MMOGs. Table 1 provides a point-to-point comparison between MMOG and MUD in terms of goal, operation, and feedback. Therefore the following are the propositions derived from the feature differences on goal, operation, and feedback between MMOG and MUD.

Proposition 3: MMOG players are more likely to have optimal experience (flow state) than MUD players because MMOG's goal is more specific.

Proposition 4: MMOG players are more likely to have optimal experience (flow state) than MUD players because MMOG has more options for operation.

Proposition 5: MMOG players are more likely to have optimal experience (flow state) than MUD players because MMOG provides more feedbacks.

Choi and Kim²⁴ think that for social interaction there are two components must be considered: communication place and communication tools. The rational is that online gamers must have a place to get together in the virtual place. If the place is difficult for any online gamers to stay because of low bandwidth provided, they may easily feel bored and not to play the game. However, MUD games, as text-based games, would be easier to provide the common communication place than MMOG. The bandwidth requirement for MUD games is much lower than that of MMOG games. In addition, MUD gamers gathered together on fewer dedicated Website servers while MMOG players have many choices because MMOG Website servers are widely spread.

| | MMOG | MUD |
|-----------|--|--|
| Goal | Specific such as killing certain number of monsters at certain level; level of game difficulty achieved. | Usually no specific goals are provided at the beginning; some MUD games also allow players to negotiate for the rules. |
| Operation | Many different kinds of treasures are to be procured for players to be able to killing monsters. | There are some operands offered for the players to accomplish the mission. In addition, MUD game offers opportunities for the players to adjust the difficulty levels of missions by their creativities. |
| Feedback | Immediate scores accumulated are displayed; other feed backs like combat value, experience value, are also provided. | Other than text-feedbacks from the players' opponents and master, MUD players do not receive other feedbacks. |

Table 1 Comparisons of MMOG and MUD in terms of goal, operation, and feedback

Therefore we suggest the next proposition:

Proposition 6: MUD players are more likely to have optimal experience (flow state) than MMOG players because MUD has more centralized and reliable communication place.

In addition to communication place, communication tools are important for people to get involved in any kind of social interactions. With communication tools, online gamers are more easily to share their information with others. MUD relies totally on communication tools to run the game. Text-based chatting is the only way that players, slave or master, can play the game. Furthermore unlike MMOG players who ask for advice by connecting to certain

²⁴ Choi, D., Kim, J. (2004). Why People Continue to Play Online Games: In Search of Critical Design Factors to Increase Customer Loyalty to Online Contents.

Bulletin Board Website for the game, MUD players could relay thoughts or share information right on the play site. Most MUD servers offer different kinds of "domains" among which are the Bulletin Boards offering advice or for association purposes. Therefore the following is the proposed proposition.

Proposition 7: MUD players have optimal experience (flow state) than MMOG players because the communication tools offered are more convenient to use.

The Commonality between Use and Gratification Theory and Flow Theory

The two well-known theories in the field of Communication served different purposes when they first emerged. As mentioned in the above, Use and Gratification theory focuses on the relationship between the proactive behaviors of media users and the choice of media. Flow theory, on the other hand, focuses on the pleasure found in people's immersed activities. The two seemingly unrelated theories however share some commonality. The above discussion on the common interaction factor between MMOG and MUD implies the commonality between the Use and Gratification theory and Flow theory. Based on Use and Gratification theory, media users choose media based on their own active motivation. The major reason of proactive search for media, however, has been suggested and verified as entertainment^{25 26 27}. Other researchers have found that the entertainment factor of media use is very similar to media user's enjoyment²⁸. They argue that what media users mean about entertainment in fact is enjoyment. Incidentally what Flow Theory emphasizes is how enjoyment is formed so that it results in people's (especially for

art performers) immersion. Such enjoyment comes from people's intrinsic pleasure, rather than external rewards. Therefore enjoyment is one commonality that both Flow theory and Use and Gratification base on. Media are famous for their function of providing an environment of fantasy to which people can escape. Looking at media from this view, it makes sense that the two theories used in this study have something in common. Originally, Csikszentmihalyi²⁹ did not intend to investigate the enjoyment of art performers but the creativities enjoyed by them; however, Flow theory seems to be a good theoretical base to explain why people would spend enormous amount of time escaping to the virtual world in online games, pursuing their enjoyments. Since both theories have the commonality of enjoyment, it is important to study in more detail what dimensions of enjoyment both theories share. However, this paper will not explore the common dimensions of enjoyment between the two theories. It is our intentions, however, to distinguish the causes of such enjoyment between MMOG and MUD. Propositions 1 and 2 distinguish the addictions factors between the two kinds of games. Propositions 3 to 7 distinguish the causes of optimal experience (or enjoyment) between MMOG and MUD.

Possible Impacts of MUD and MMOG Addictions

We concluded with the above propositions that MUD players become addicted because of social interaction and MMOG players become addicted because of flow state. Because MUD addictions are caused mainly by social interactions, the following impacts of MUD addictions are observed.

1. MUD players who are good at text-typing would make friends in MUDs through this highly developed virtual system.
2. MUDs could provide an opportunity and socially inhibited people to overcome their difficulty in association with others.
3. MUDs probably are still few uncontaminated areas that marketing people have not yet bombarded with advertisings on the Internet because the dungeons are often fan-

²⁵ Schramm, W., Lyle, J., & Parker, E. (1961). Television in the lives of our children.

²⁶ Rubin, A.M. (1983). Television uses and gratifications: The interactions of viewing patterns and motivations.

²⁷ Finn, S. (1997). Origins of media exposure: Linking personality traits to TV, radio, print, and film use.

²⁸ Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (1994). Entertainment as media effect.

²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1971). An Exploratory Model of Play.

tasy-oriented. We could probably see more anti-corporate messages on MUDs.

The followings are the possible impacts of MMOG addictions given that the addiction is because of the flow experience.

1. MMOG players, especially those addicted, would care very much about the number or functions of the treasures they earned, which in turn would probably result in some unethical behaviors such as stealing others' treasures.
2. MMOG players, especially addicted, would care very much about the "experience value" they obtained, which in turn would probably urge them to screen out other players with lower values when they try to form a group. The possible impact is that MMOG players would make friends with those with comparable "experience values" to fight a monster, not like MUD players who make friends based on common interests or certain intrinsic values.
3. MMOG players, especially those addicted would care very much about their total scores won, which in turn would probably result in developing plug-ins to automatically bump their scores twenty-four hours a day. However the use of plug-in software could be considered as illegal to most of the MMOG games.

Conclusions

The issue of online game addictions has been of wide concern among teachers, parents, students, and researchers in different fields such as Pathology, Psychology, Communication, Management, Human-Computer Interaction, Consumer Behavior, and Management Information Systems, among others. This paper differs from previous studies in three ways: 1. instead of treating all the online game addictions the same, we distinguished the two different online games for the purpose of searching for the right causes of addictions; 2. we resorted to theories to further understand why people addicted to MUDs or MMOGs and proposed the corresponding propositions; 3. based on the proposed causes of MUD and MMOG addictions, we suggested possible implications of such addictions. This paper contributes to both the academic and educational discourse: For the academic contribution, we proposed

a reasoning model which was accrued based on the attributes of online games and the essences of appropriate theories. Also by conceptualizing the relationship between online game features and theories, this paper sheds light on the applications of the two paradigm theories in Communication on studying online game addictions because most previous studies focus on either Flow theory or Use and Gratification theory. To school and family education, this paper presents theory-based study on addiction causes. The discussion here could help teachers identify which kind of game their students are addicted to and try to "cure" them by supporting comparable cause factors.

Future studies will develop appropriate questionnaires for both MUD and MMOG addictions. Though Young's³⁰ questionnaire has been widely used to measure people's Internet addiction, whether the pathological approach of measuring Internet addictions could be used to measure online game addictions is still questionable. Questionnaires account for the differences of two different online games with the considerations of flow experience and social interactions shall be developed to have empirical support.

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Thomas Hausmanninger

Review: Wer hat unseren Kindern das Töten beigebracht? Ein Aufruf gegen Gewalt in Fernsehen, Film und Computerspielen.

Abstract:

Review of Lt. Col. Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano: Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill. A Call to Action Against TV, Movie & Video Game Violence, New York: Crown Publications, 1999, 196 S.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, Gloria DeGaetano: Wer hat unserem Kindern das Töten beigebracht? Ein Aufruf gegen Gewalt in Fernsehen, Film und Computerspielen. Mit Beiträgen von Prof. Werner Glogauer, Barbara Supp und Dr. Bruno Sandkühler, Stuttgart: Verlag freies Geistesleben & Urachhaus 2002, 194 S., € 14,50

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Dave Grossmans und Gloria DeGaetanos schmales Buch teilt mit dem ähnlich schlanken Erfolgsschlagere Neil Postmans – „Wir amüsieren uns zu Tode“ – drei zentrale Charakteristika: Zum einen ist keines seiner Argumente neu. Diese entstammen der seit 100 Jahren vorgetragenen, modernitätskritisch-konservativen Medienkritik, in diesem Fall konzentriert auf die darin geführte, populäre Gewaltdebatte. Deren Anhänger finden sich auf diese Weise von Grossman/DeGaetano dort abgeholt, wo sie stehen. Zum zweiten trifft das Büchlein eine mediale Umbruchssituation. Bei Postman war das hierzulande in den 1980er Jahren die Verbreitung des kommerziellen Fernsehens mit seinen noch unvertrauten, vor allem von den Jüngeren genutzten Angeboten. Nun ist es die digitale Revolution und darin das Aufkommen von PC- und Videospiele, die erneut vor allem von den jungen Generationen genutzt werden und ebenfalls bei den älteren, gegenüber den Spielen nachhaltig abstinenter bleibenden Generationen Besorgnis auslösen. Wie es in den 1980ern Postman tat, so scheinen jetzt Grossman/DeGaetano die Berechtigung dieser Besorgnis nachzuweisen – und damit Orientierung ohne Zumutung der eigenen Beschäftigung mit der Sache selbst und gegebenenfalls der Selbstkorrektur zu liefern. Zum dritten aber bieten Grossman/DeGaetano Kritikweisen an, die aus dem Ghetto der konservativen Modernitätskritik zu befreien scheinen: Ähnlich Postman argumentieren sie ökonomiekritisch gegen eine verderbliche, allein profitorientierte Medienindustrie und holen so auch eher linksliberale BesorgnisträgerInnen ab. Dass dies zumindest oberflächlich mit militärkritischen Positionen verbunden erscheint, unterstützt diesen Effekt. Ihm verdankt Grossman deshalb schon 1999 einen Artikel in der „Zeit“ (Die Zeit Nr. 39, 30.09.1999, Beilage „Leben“), der ihm bereits drei Jahre vor der deutschen Übersetzung seines Büchleins hierzulande Popularität unter Intellektuellen verschafft.

Diese hat seine Schrift jedoch nicht verdient. Die Kernthese ist denkbar einfach und undifferenziert: Gewalt und Kriminalität in der Realität werden kausal durch die Gewaltinszenierung in Film und Fernsehen sowie durch virtuelle Spiele bewirkt. Der Prozess erfolgt in zwei Stufen: Film und Fernsehen desensibilisieren gegenüber Gewalt und erzeugen „das Verlangen und/oder den konditionierten Reflex (...), sich ohne Reue gewalttätig zu verhalten“ (Grossman/DeGaetano 2002, 61). Spiele erlauben dann aber nicht etwa, dieses Verlangen sozialverträglich auszuleben – was im Denkschema Grossman/DeGaetanos auch spekulativ behauptet werden könnte –, sondern bewirken die Fertigkeit, zielsicher

zu töten (ebd. 61, 85-91). Im Verbund erzeugen Film, Fernsehen und PC-/Videospiele Mörder und Amokläufer (ebd.). Die Medien haben dabei die primäre Wirkungsposition (ebd. 17), treten also nicht etwa erst sekundär als Verstärkungsmodi zu personalen Interaktionsverhältnissen als Sozialisationsfaktoren hinzu.

Grossman/DeGaetano verfechten damit schlankweg die alte Stimulus-Response-These. Nutzungsweisen, -kontexte und -motive spielen keine Rolle, ebenso wenig die Subjektposition der Nutzenden gegenüber Medienprodukten. Das Buch ist im Vergleich zur Publikumsforschung – wie sie hierzulande etwa von Roland Eckert, Waldemar Vogelgesang oder Rainer Winter zum Film und von Jürgen Fritz und Wolfgang Fehr zu Spielen vorgelegt worden ist – von einer geradezu drastischen Unkenntnis. Gleichwohl sehen Grossman/DeGaetano auch keinen Anlass, sich für die Aneignungsformen der Publika und deren soziale Differenzierung zu interessieren. Die Nutzenden nämlich gelten ihnen als schrankenlos manipulierte, plastische Masse, in die sich einformen lässt, was die Produkte enthalten.

Entsprechend eklektisch und peripher wird die Literatur zur neueren Wirkungsforschung eingesetzt: Herangezogen werden George Gerbner, Leonard Eron und Lowell Huesman sowie Brandon Centerwall, Autoren also, die auch in der deutschen Gewaltdebatte Konjunktur haben, jedoch umstritten sind. Wie verschiedene neuere deutsche Veröffentlichungen, zitieren Grossman/DeGaetano zudem die Studie von Tannis Williams: *The Impact of Television*, New York: Academic Press 1986, sinnentstellend: Aus einer Untersuchung zur Einführung des Fernsehens in ein zuvor fernsehloses Gebiet wird abgeleitet, dass gewalthaltige Programme eine Steigerung von Gewalt und Kriminalität zur Folge hätten. Gerade die Gruppe, bei der diese Veränderung festgestellt worden sein soll, hatte aber im Unterschied zu zwei Kontrollgruppen kein wirklich gewalthaltiges Programm rezipiert.

Ähnlich wenig wie die Mediennutzenden als Subjekte, interessieren Grossman/DeGaetano die entsprechenden Medienprodukte und Werke. So fordern sie zwar zunächst, die Aussagestruktur und damit die (auch ethischen) Bedeutungszuschreibungen zu berücksichtigen, die Gewalt etwa in den Inszenierungen des Films je und je durch die werkimmanenten Kontexte erhält (ebd. 21). Sie unterstreichen sogar, dass dies – thesengemäß – entscheidend für die Art der Wirkung sei (ebd. 21). Erst gegen Ende des Buches aber kommen sie auf die Notwendigkeit

solcher Differenzierung wieder zurück, indem sie diese erneut lediglich fordern (ebd. 109), ohne diese Forderung dazwischen selbst eingelöst zu haben. Auch nur der Ansatz zu einer Werkanalyse und zur Berücksichtigung von Aussagestrukturen spielt im gesamten Buch keine Rolle.

Ganz im Muster der populären Gewaltdebatte wird stattdessen lediglich auf das Vorhandensein von Gewalt abgestellt und die Häufigkeit von Gewaltakten ausgezählt (z.B. ebd. 51). Dabei kommen Grossman/DeGaetano zu Urteilen, wie dem, dass der Film „Dick Tracy“ gewaltverherrlichender und ethisch bedenklicher sei als „Death Wish“ („Ein Mann sieht rot“), weil im erstgenannten 14 Morde stattfänden, im zweitgenannten hingegen weniger (ebd. 47). Angesichts der Tatsache, dass „Death Wish“ über eine ausgefeilte emotionale Dramaturgie verfügt, die dem Publikum nun in der Tat nahe legt, individuelle Gewaltübung aus Rache und Selbstjustiz gut zu heißen, „Dick Tracy“ hingegen eine hochgradig verfremdende ComicVerfilmung ist, in der Gewalt einen realitätsfernen, genretypischen Tabubruch darstellt, mutet dieses Urteil sachlich mehr als unangemessen an. Es entspricht freilich der Unbekümmertheit, mit der Grossman/DeGaetano Gewalt im Zeichentrick-, Problem-, Kriminal-, Action- und Horrorfilm als gleichbedeutend und -gefährlich behandeln. In der deutschen Übersetzung wird diese Undifferenziertheit nochmals gesteigert, da der von Grossman/DeGaetano benutzte Terminus „violent“ durchgängig mit „gewaltverherrlichend“ über

tragen wird. Dass die Inszenierung von Gewalt kritisch sein kann, kommt nirgendwo in Blick; auch jene hochmoralischen Produkte, wie „The Untouchables“ und „Gunsmoke“ („Rauchende Colts“), in denen stets Law and Order und wertsicheres Verhalten empfohlen werden, gelten Grossman/DeGaetano lediglich als violent/gewaltverherrlichend (ebd. 40).

Im ganzen zeigt sich das Buch damit als ausgesprochen undifferenziertes, um nicht zu sagen: ideologisches Werk. Es sollte seinem Untertitel entsprechend bewertet und behandelt werden: als „Aufruf“ – also als Pamphlet –, dem man wissenschaftlich und im institutionellen Handeln möglichst zurückhaltend und misstrauisch begegnen sollte. Vor allem wissenschaftlich sollte man aus der „Postmania“ gelernt haben und eine „Grossmania“ vermeiden.

Michael Nagenborg

Review: Der virtuelle Krieg. Zwischen Schein und Wirklichkeit im Computerspiel.

Abstract:

Review of Hartmut Gieselmann: Der virtuelle Krieg. Zwischen Schein und Wirklichkeit im Computerspiel. Hannover: Offizin-Verlag 2002. (= Kultur und Gesellschaft, Bd. 5)

The topic of this book is the genre of war game. The author focuses on three main directions, each of which is dealt with by way of exemplary representatives. In this respect his main interest is in the question of how media are able to contribute to making real violence disappear for perception. In this respect his critical analysis aims at the staging of war as a technological rumpus without any victims. This book is particularly worth recommending as the author succeeds in viewing at the genre of the first-person-shooter within a wider context.

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Bücher über Computerspiele veralten schnell, wenn sie Bezug auf zum Zeitpunkt des Erscheinens aktuelle Spiele und Forschungsergebnisse nehmen. Wenn hier die Lektüre eines drei Jahre alten Buches empfohlen wird, so deshalb, weil Hartmut Giesemann sich in seinem Buch einem Genre widmet, das sicherlich für viele zumindest Anlass für moralische Bedenken sein dürfte: dem Kriegsspiel.

Der Verfasser konzentriert sich auf drei Hauptrichtungen, die jeweils anhand von exemplarischen Vertretern behandelt werden: Echtzeitstrategiespiele (Beispiel: „Command & Conquer“), First-Person-Shooter („Counterstrike“) und den Militärsimulationen („Falcon 4.0“). Die Genre und die genannten Vertreter erfreuen sich auch heute noch z. T. großer Beliebtheit: Die Reihe „Command & Conquer“ soll demnächst fortgesetzt werden, „Counterstrike“ erfuhr im letzten Jahr eine technisch verbesserte Neuauflage. Allein die Militärsimulationen im engeren Sinne scheinen an Attraktivität verloren zu haben: Kampfjet- und Hubschraubersimulationen sind heute nicht mehr so dominant auf dem Markt vertreten, wie dies Ende der 1990er Jahre der Fall war. Dieser Trend zeichnete sich bereits 2002 ab (vgl. S. 101). Der Verfasser zählt jedoch auch die Bodenkampf-Simulationen zu diesem Genre – und Titel wie „Full Spectrum Warrior“ oder die Spiele aus der Reihe „Medal of Honor“ stehen hoch im Kurs.

Gleich zu Beginn wird betont, dass die Behandlung des Themas „Krieg in Computerspielen“ oftmals in „eine Diskussion über die Folgewirkungen der gespielten Gewalt [mündet]“ (S. 7). Für den Verfasser lautet hingegen die zentrale „Frage, die wir heute den Medien stellen müssen, ... nicht, ob sie Gewalt produzieren, sondern wie sie es schaffen, die reale Gewalt in der Wahrnehmung zum Verschwinden zu bringen“ (S. 155).

Zunächst betrachtet er die Echtzeitstrategiespiele der „Command & Conquer“-Serie als Spiele, die in einer „fiktiven Welt“ spielen (S. 42) – auch, wenn er später darauf aufmerksam macht, dass diese Fiktion von der Realität eingeholt wurde. Eins der Pluspunkte des Buches ist, dass Giesemann an vielen Stellen die Diskussion innerhalb von Onlineforen für Spieler beschreibt, so auch hier, wenn auf die Debatte „über die vermeintlichen Parallelen zwischen Osama Bin Laden und [dem fiktiven Charakter] Kane“ (S. 59) hinweist. Obwohl Kane im Spiel für ein Attentat auf das World Trade Center verantwortlich ist, wurde übrigens eine Gleichsetzung („fast schon vehement“) abgelehnt. Wenn das Buch insgesamt auch nicht als Beitrag zur Informationsethik zu verstehen ist, so bietet es hierdurch doch zumindest

einen Einblick in die Diskussionen unter den Spielern, die uns in statistischer Übersicht ebenfalls vorgestellt werden. Ein zweiter Pluspunkt ist die Einbindung der exemplarischer Beispiele in ihren Entstehungshintergrund. In jedem Kapitel wird die Geschichte der jeweiligen Hauptrichtung erzählt, im Fall der First-Person-Shooter und der Kriegssimulationen erfahren wir sogar einiges über die Firmengeschichte der beteiligten Entwickler.

Die First-Person-Shooter werden von Giesemann als Beispiel für semi-realistische Spiele beschrieben, da es in Spielen wie „Counter Strike“ zwischen der „Darstellung der Spielwelt und der Darstellung der Waffen zu unterscheiden [gilt]“ (S. 90): Denn im Gegensatz zur Spielwelt, kommen die Waffen ihren Vorbildern sehr nahe.

Im Schlussabschnitt über die First-Person-Shooter geht er auch auf die Zusammenarbeit von Entwicklern und Militär (S. 91ff.) ein – insbesondere auch auf die Verwendung und Entwicklung von ‚Spielen‘ für die militärische Ausbildungszwecke bzw. die Veröffentlichung (modifizierten Fassungen) von Trainingssoftware als Spiel. Damit leitet er dann auch in das Kapitel zu den realistischen Militärsimulationen über, die vorgeben ein „realistisches Abbild des Krieges zu sein“ (S. 99). Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei jedoch auf der als faszinierend empfundenen Waffentechnik, während „Opfer, Verwundete, Vergewaltigungen, ethnische ‚Säuberungen‘, Flüchtlingsströme, Kriegstraumata ... in einer sich realistisch nennenden Militärsimulation keinen Platz [finden]“ (S. 138) – und eben dadurch gleichen sie sich der beschönigten TV-Kriegsberichterstattung an und „verstärken ... den Eindruck, der reale Krieg sei ordentlich und sauber, wie ein Computerspiel ohne Blut und Tote“ (S. 148).

Wie der Verfasser berichtet, stand das Buch kurz vor seiner Fertigstellung als am 26. April 2002 Robert Steinhäuser im Erfurter Gutenberg-Gymnasium Amok lief (S. 155). Im Schlusskapitel verteidigt der Verfasser dementsprechend vor allem seine These, dass ein Computerspiel wie „Counter Strike“ nicht wg. seiner Gewaltdarstellungen, sondern wegen der Nachahmung realistischer Waffen bedenklich sei (S. 162), und kritisiert, dass in der Öffentlichkeit der Tatsache keinerlei Beachtung geschenkt wird, dass in Spielen Kriege zu einem technischen Spektakel umdefiniert werden (S. 164). Rückblickend erscheint dieser Schlussteil etwas pathetisch, aber er schmälert nicht die eigentliche Leistung des Buches: das oft gescholtene Genre des First-Person-Shooters in einem größeren Zusammenhang gebracht und seine

Thematisierung jenseits der Gewaltdiskussion ermöglicht zu haben.

Zusammenfassend ist das Buch also insbesondere für diejenigen zu empfehlen, die sich mit dem Genre der First-Person-Shooter im speziellen und den Kriegsspielen im allgemeinen auseinandersetzen wollen. Sicherlich sind inzwischen neue Spiele auf dem Markt, aber hinsichtlich der allgemeinen Tendenz und aufgrund des gewählten Zugangs über den unterschiedlichen Realismusgrad der Subgenre lohnt sich die Lektüre auch heute noch. Besonderes seien hierbei noch einmal die Hintergrundinformationen zu den Herstellern und die Beurteilung der Spiele durch die Spieler hingewiesen.

Michael Nagenborg

Review: Handbook of computer game studies


Abstract:

Review of Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein: Handbook of computer game studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England: MIT Press 2005.

By more than 450 large-format pages the publishers offer a view of current research in the field of “game studies”. With almost no exception, the 27 articles are of high quality. Readers, however, who are familiar with the works of the single authors are offered only little new information. Unfortunately, the authors mostly focus on western, particularly US-American games and players. But still the book can be recommended both as a consolidating introduction and a textbook.

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By more than 450 large-format pages the publishers offer a view of current research on the phenomenon of "computer games". In their foreword they emphasize their claim of the handbook being "unique in including the broadest range possible of perspectives on gaming – those from cognitive science and artificial intelligence, developmental, social and clinical psychology, history, film and theatre, cultural studies, and philosophy." In most respects they meet this demand, because of which the book can be recommended to anyone looking for a comprehensive, easily understandable but not superficial introduction into "computer game studies". The book may be considered most suitable also for teaching purposes.

However, some gaps must be stated. At first the least surprising one: the lack of an article from an explicitly ethical perspective. In my opinion, however, the lack of the economic and inter-cultural perspective seems to be more serious. The lack of an economic article is regrettable in so far as at least in western countries computer games are on the verge of outstripping other media like TV or cinema, something which may be supposed to have appropriate effects e. g. for the advertising business. The lack of the inter-cultural perspective is as regrettable. I consider it one of the most interesting aspects of the seemingly global "gamer culture" that on different markets there are distinctive preferences for certain games or genres. This is already shown by a quick look the national selling charts. The authors of this volume, however, tend to writing on western – mostly US-American – examples of games and players, even well-known Asian productions, like e. g. the "Final Fantasy"-series, being mentioned only in passing.

But apart from this the reader will find a comprehensive view by a total of 27 articles of almost constantly high quality and in most cases provided with voluminous references. Of the six sections, for our subject most of all the paragraphs on "Games as a Cultural Phenomenon" and "Games as a Social Phenomenon" are of interest. Here we find e. g. contributions by Sherry Tuckle on questions of identity as well as articles on the representation of gender, ethnicity, and history. The contribution by Anna Everett ("Serious Play: Playing with Race in Contemporary Gaming Culture") is a fine example of which moral problems become obvious here, the range being from criticism and the kind of criticism of computer games in the mass media as far as to the question of valuating public domain-software, which indeed may also be used for producing racist contents.

Also the question of the effect of the media is dealt with in detail: besides the good overview-contribution by Jeffrey Goldstein on "Violent Video Games", at once a number of other articles on cognitive and psychological effects is offered, the article on the therapeutical value of computer games being slightly over-optimistic in my opinion.

Altogether, the variety and quality of the material as well as the high-quality fittings justify the purchase of this volume which as far as I know is without alternative. Who is already familiar with the works of the single authors, however, should not expect great new insights.

Richard A. Spinello

Review: Vernetzt gespalten: Der Digital Divide in ethischer Perspektive

Abstract:

Review of Rupert M. Scheule, Rafael Capurro and Thomas Hausmanninger (editors): Vernetzt gespalten: Der Digital Divide in ethischer Perspektive München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004

Agenda

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Introduction

This book is a collection of essays centered on the broad theme of the digital divide. It is the third volume in a series of books published by the Information Center for Information Ethics (ICIE). Regrettably, this work is only available in German, so its audience will be fairly limited. That is unfortunate given the exceptional quality of the essays included and the breadth of topics that are covered. Similar anthologies such as *The Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth* (ed. B. Compaine), have been published on this topic. Like *Vernetzt*, that work too presents a variety of perspectives on the digital divide, but it is more eclectic and less coherent. The problem of a "digital divide" has been thematized in the work of philosophers like Manuel Castells, who is often cited in this book. In his many writings Castells has emphasized that the centrality of the Internet in social and economic life marginalizes those without access. Thus, he has maintained that the "differentiation between Internet-haves and have-nots adds a fundamental cleavage to existing sources of inequality" (Castells, 2001).

Summary

Vernetzt gespalten begins with a provocative "trialog" between the three co-editors, Professors Capurro, Scheule, and Hausmanninger. This unique format exposes the reader to a revealing debate about the main issues of the book, as it provides a context for the essays that will follow in subsequent sections. With the help of philosophers like Lyotard, the triolog ponders, among other things, abstract issues such as the difference between conceiving the network (*Netz*) as a tool (*Werkzeug*) or as a critical communications medium. But it also delves into more concrete topics as it tries to assess the gravity of the digital divide as a social and economic problem. The triolog immediately engages the reader about the plight of those without connectivity as it puts the issue of a digital divide into a proper perspective.

This introduction or triolog is the first part of the book and it is followed by five sections which follow in a logical progression. The second part ("Was Trennt Der Digital Divide") deals with the various ways in which the Internet-haves and have-nots are divided. One essay focuses on "cybergeography," presenting comprehensive data about the severity

and scope of the problem. Various studies are cited from both the private and public sectors that have attempted to measure the extent of the digital divide along different dimensions. One such study, for example, finds that households with incomes of \$75,000 and over are twenty times more likely to have Internet access than those at lower income levels, and 9 times more likely to have computer access. Even in the midst of prosperous and well-educated communities in countries like the United States, the disparity between the information "haves" and "have nots" is glaring. A second essay in Part II examines the various forms of exclusion from cyberspace such as the difference between active and passive exclusion.

With the nature of the problem well-defined, the third part of this book focuses on why it is essential to overcome the digital divide with essays on "culture versus globalization" and "information asceticism." The fourth part concerns the basic reasons for overcoming this divide. In the essays that comprise this section several key themes are orchestrated including "information justice" (*Informationsgerechtigkeit*), deliberative democracy, and an "emancipation Aesthetic." The fifth part, called "Ways to Overcome the Digital Divide," presents some possible practical solutions. One essay in this section on open source software and the "gift economy" explains why the open source movement may soon help mitigate the digital divide dynamic. Another essay illustrates the implementation of the "Get Us Connected" program in Africa, while a third considers the topic of "digital empowerment," a look at the "hole in the wall project" and efforts to deal with technological illiteracy. Finally, Part Six, called "Manifests and Agendas," looks at innovative projects like MISTICA, "a Latin America answer to the digital divide."

Evaluation

The book's editors and its contributors rightly regard the digital divide as an acute matter of social justice. They are not alone in reaching this conclusion. The United Nations, for example, certainly sees the digital divide, "the uneven distribution and use of new information and communication technologies," as a moral problem, since it impedes people and countries from entering the information age and perpetuates their impoverished condition ('The Real Digital Divide,' 2005). Without such access and connectivity, these people will continue to be marginalized since they cannot take advantage of the Internet's remarkable potential for communication

as represented by new technologies such as Internet Protocol (IP) telephony.

Of course, as the trialog makes clear, the world is beset by many "divides," some of which are surely more serious than this one. We cannot address this matter of global poverty or inequities in more depth, but suffice it to say that the lack of computers and telephones is not the most pressing problem confronting developing countries. Hence, it is important to keep this particular inequity of a "digital divide" in proper perspective. As the editors of *Vernetzt Gespalten* observe in the opening trialog, "If [we] found ourselves in a southern town of the Sahara, our first thought would not be: 'there are no computers and connections here'. . . but we [would] say instead 'there are no adults here.' In southern Africa we find that the city of Darfur is inhabited almost exclusively by children, because the adults have all died of Aids."ⁱ In this environment the need for health care and pharmaceuticals is far more urgent than the need for computers and telecommunications. Thus, while the book calls attention to the lack of computers and connectivity in countries such as Africa, it does not exaggerate the issue or blow it all out of proportion.

I am not so sure that all of the solutions proposed in this book for the closing of this great divide will necessarily succeed. For example, the advent of open source software or the emergence of a new "gift economy" (*Geschenkökonomie*) may help to some extent, since it will make some kinds of software more readily available in developing countries. But open source software is unlikely to be any panacea. Stallman (1998) has insisted that "there are other ways to encourage [software] development" besides reliance on a patent or a long copyright. But appealing to a software developer's powerful self-interest with the promise of a big reward for success, still stands out as the most viable means of stimulating the production of software products demanded by consumers. Thus, the future success of open source software and its potential to address the problem of information disparities depends upon the resolution of this critical incentive issue.

In summary, this book is a rich resource for anyone interested in understanding the scope of the immense digital divide problem along with some possible solutions. The selection and arrangement of the material enhances the book's attractiveness. The exposition of complex issues presented in those essays is lucid and provocative. *Vernetzt gespalten's* usefulness is severely limited, however, since the

book is only available in German. Perhaps an English translation will appear and help solve this problem. But for those in the Anglo-Saxon world or in other communities who can read German, this book is well worth the effort.

References

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ⁱ All of the translations in this essay are the author's.