# GAME CULTURES

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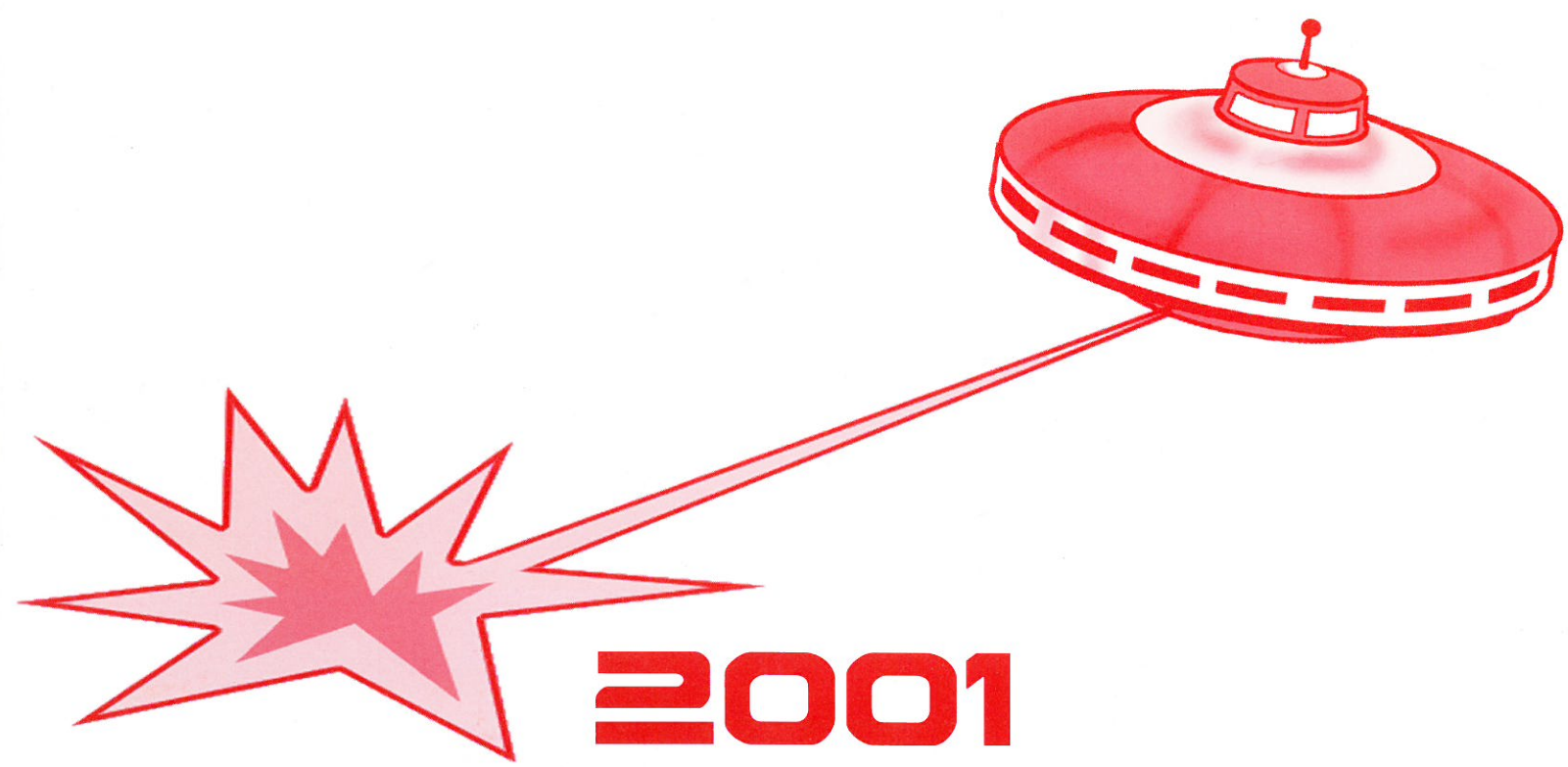
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# GAME CULTURES ABSTRACTS

Abstracts are arranged in alphabetical order.

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**Keynote:** 'Computer Game Aesthetics : Some Thoughts on the Future of Gaming'
Espen Aarseth, University of Bergen
Author of **Cybertext:  Perspectives on Ergodic Literature**, John Hopkins University Press, 1997.
Introduction available @
http://www.hf.uib.no/cybertext/Ergodic.html

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**The Social Construction of On-Line Identities in FPS Games:  Cooperation, Competition, and Conflict in Combat**

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This is a practice oriented study which examines how on-line players of first person shooting games (FPS) (ex. Counterstrike, Team Fortress Classic) "make meaning" via in-game talk with one another, the type of talk, and how such talk supports or contests traditional power arrangements of gender, sexual, racial/ethnic, or class identities. We examined how players talked to each other through their team and general chat functions, and how that talk was gendered, race or class oriented, and in particular the degree of cooperation or competition evidenced through such talk. In particular, we examined the responses of other on-line team players to cooperative, competitive and conflict talk as it arises in the game. We argue that on-line social identities created through FPS games exhibit a high degree of social complexity and conflict resolution, including "policing" skills not acknowledged in the literature or in the popular press. Adopting the cultural studies model of mediated discourse and the anthropological concepts of ritual play and "liminal space" we treat virtual representations of violence not as literal, but as mediated by the gaming experience, the meanings imparted by game developers, media/political pundits, and gamer peer culture. Data was collected with the assistance of server administrators who made their game logs available for coding.

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GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

**Pedagogy and interactivity in children's media culture**
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Institute of Education, University of London
And
Julian Sefton-Green
WAC Performing Arts and Media College, London

David Buckingham is Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, London University, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media (www.ccsonline.org.uk/mediacentre). He has published widely on children's relationships with media, and on media education. His most recent books include AFTER THE DEATH OF CHILDHOOD (Polity, 2000) and THE MAKING OF CITIZENS (Routledge, 2000).

This paper will draw upon some of the UK research conducted as part of a global project on the Pokemon phenomenon. It will situate an analysis of the computer game within the broader multi-platform delivery of children's culture; and it will argue that, despite its similarities with earlier 'crazes', Pokemon represents a new form of interactive culture for children.

The first part of the paper will contrast the claims of analyses that emphasise agency (and hence the activity of audiences) with those that emphasise structure (and hence the economic power of media industries). It will argue that each of these perspectives is inadequate in itself; and it will assess the potential of theories of structuration and of pedagogy as a means of resolving the tensions between them. This part of the paper will therefore range across different aspects of the Pokemon phenomenon, emphasising the interrelationships between production, texts and audiences.

The second part of the paper will exemplify some of these general arguments through reference to a detailed ethnographic study of one child's engagement with playing the Pokemon game (on the Gameboy platform). There are very few studies of computer game playing in general, and this study offers a comparatively rare kind of data about the day-to-day experimentation with a computer game. The account will focus on the pedagogic aspects of the Pokemon phenomenon, such as the salience of knowledge and the quality and nature of the learning it affords. It will also consider how magazines, TV and other Pokemon texts may be used by children in creating 'communities of practice', as well as how media culture can act to support learning in other domains, especially conventional literacy.

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**Rubicite Breastplate Priced to Move, Cheap:**
**Economic Behavior and Regimes of Value in Digital Worlds**
Timothy Burke, Swarthmore College

Timothy Burke is Associate Professor of History at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA, USA. He is the author of Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe (Duke University Press, 1996) and the co-author of Saturday Morning Fever: Growing Up With Cartoon Culture (St Martin's Press, 1999). He is presently at work on several manuscripts, including an edited volume of essays on computer games.

In this paper, I describe the evolution of economic practices and structures within three current multiplayer games (Ultima Online, Everquest and Asheron's Call). I discuss several issues in the paper, drawing on ethnographic and historical scholarship about commodification and exchange, works on the social psychology of choice, and scholarship and popular writing on cyberculture.

1) I examine the evolution of practices within the gameworlds designed to maximize the accumulation of resources, both within and outside the constraints of the rules of the game. I also want to examine the tension between such utility-maximizing practices (both "legal" and "illegal")

and a population of players whose practices can be characterized as asserting the need for a "moral economy". In this paper I argue that these practices and conflicts suggest on one hand that the foundational arguments of neoclassical economics about human behavior appear to be profoundly correct: utility-maximizing behaviors have emerged rapidly, seemingly automatically, within all three games. On the other hand, the rapid segregation of the players into groups which argue for or against utility-maximizing (as well as a group which obeys the rules in doing so and another which does not) suggests that economic practice is also philosophically and socially contingent.

2) I discuss how the design of the games and the beliefs of the designers have affected the evolution of these economic practices, and how designers and players interact over time. I examine how players and administrators collaborate and struggle over the maintenance of stable hierarchies of commodity value within game environment and against the related forces that tend to destabilize systems of virtual exchange and accumulation.

3) I discuss how value within these games is increasingly leading to forms of real-world exchange and the creation of financial value in the real world, and the impact this has on the internal economy of the games. Players have long created and exchanged artifacts external to the games themselves, but usually these exchanges have been on a gift basis. As the computer gaming industry rises in economic importance generally and in cultural significance, what will the intersection of the virtual economies of multiplayer games and the real-life economic world of the players entail?


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**A Small Study into Girl Gamers' Relationship with the Gaming Culture.**
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An investigation was conducted into the current accessibility and allure of gaming platforms for females. In order to investigate one of the most developed areas of new media, a traditional feminist approach of explaining factors that exclude females from new media technologies was avoided in favour of a focus upon the experiences and attitudes of females who already regard themselves as 'gamers'. The term 'girl gamer' was therefore used to describe females (children or adults) who already possess an aptitude for the games that currently define the contours of gaming culture. In-depth interviews and novel game-play observations were conducted in order to examine the factors that cause and sustain girl gamers' interest in what has traditionally been defined as a male encoded culture. In doing so, the study addressed the need for further understanding of the motivation of females who engage in the gaming culture without 'transforming the direction of technological development' (Gill & Grint, 1995, p. 2).
Findings from the study revealed that the sample of girl gamers' possessed an alternative playing orientation, style of play, and the importance of cultural competency in their game preferences. The findings also uncovered gamers' attitudes towards highly gendered game-protagonists (such as Lara Croft), a need for greater flexibility in terms of game characterisation, examples of the ways in which gaming is embedded in household dynamics, as well as the impact of male gamers upon girl gamers' playing practices.

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**Computer Games as Spatial Toys**
Aki Jarvinen
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Aki Järvinen, MA, has co-edited a textbook on digital culture in Finnish and worked as a researcher at the Hypermedia laboratory in the University of Tampere.  Järvinen is currently employed as a concept designer at IconMedialab Finland.  He is also working on his PhD entitled "Games without frontiers. The aesthetics and poetics of computer and video games".

The study of computer games is trying to find its course. At one side, we have academic disciplines such as film and cultural studies trying to grasp the gaming phenomenon in order to situate it into historical and cultural contexts. This includes the on-going efforts to theorise games' relation to narrative, fiction and media. On the other side, we have the more practical orientation towards game design, i.e. innovating game concepts and adapting them to different technological platforms (the console, PC, web, and mobile gaming markets).

As with, e.g., film studies, there is the danger of these two approaches shifting too far from each other. The result: we end up in a situation where theory does not inform practice, and vice versa. Having experience in both sides of the coin - academic theorising and designing game concepts, I will first point out some shortcomings of certain approaches (the 'text' approach, the 'games as narrative' approach) to games.

As an alternative to the above, my suggestion is the following: if we are to 1) understand the nature of computer games better, 2) learn to design them in more innovative ways, and 3) create critical vocabulary and theoretical framework in order to analyse games, we should also look at them in relation to toys. From this perspective Tetris, e.g., is seen as a toy; a digitally enhanced version of Rubik's cube.

Moreover, with digital technology, space has become a media form. This is very much true for virtual online worlds, Quicktime panoramas, and of course, computer games. So, how does this relate to games as toys? My argument goes that in, e.g., amusement parks (Disneyland etc.) we have complex 'spatial toys'. Computer games transform the spaces, mazes, puzzles, and attractions found in amusement parks into playable, toy-like media forms and environments. Or, to give another example, games mediate the events and arenas of different sports in forms of playable entertainment which can literally be 'toyed with'. In my presentation, I will elaborate on these arguments and give examples of how they can be used both in practical game design, and function as a theoretical framework for studying games from an aesthetic point of view.

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Keynote:        **Games as Object of Study**
Professor Henry Jenkins, MIT


Co editor of <u>**From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games**</u>, (MIT Press 1998) and leading international Cultural Studies Scholar, Henry Jenkins will report on two recent areas of research activity. The process of giving evidence to the Senate committee established in the aftermath of the Littleton massacre in relation to the debate about violent effects of computer games and more recent work on the *The Sims* which he will argue, suggest that new interactive media requires us to rethink traditional audience research in cultural studies


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**Gameplay :-What are (computer) games really?**
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PhD candidate at the IT University in Copenhagen.
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M.A. in Nordic literature from the University of Copenhagen, dissertation on interactive fiction (http://www.jesperjuul.dk/thesis).
Produces and programs chat systems and multi player computer games in his company http://www.soup.dk.
Research interests: Computer game aesthetics.
Practical interests: Chat systems, multi player games, art installations.

This paper discusses the current state of game theories, and proposes some general thoughts and observations on computer games. I will both briefly demonstrate the steps in the creation of an actual game, and more theoretically sketch some of the basic differences between computer games and narratives, to explain why we must disentangle ourselves from the theories of other media, and rather start almost from scratch, creating a new theory of games.

A brief history of game theories
Games have been studied before, but the existing theories are widely scattered in time and focus. I'd like to provide a comparison of the theories and observations of Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Chris Crawford, and Stephen Poole, and compare them to the way games are being discussed in industry magazines, websites and so on. This will then provide the background for some general thoughts on games.

Drawing from existing theories, my basic point is that games (in the computer-game sense, children's games not included) are a quite distinct phenomenon with three main characteristics:
1) Games are rule-based.
2) Games have criteria for success.
3) Games are marked as "unreal" or as separate from the rest of the world.

These basic properties of games define what game types can be readily created. Simply put, the rule-based nature of games leads directly to the commonly perceived shallowness of computer games: The themes of novels and movies are not easily put into rules. Additionally, temporality and identification in games work quite unlike in other media.

Creating a game in four steps
To show how the above characteristics work in practice, I will demonstrate four steps in the creation a simple Pac Man-style game. The point of the exercise is to show the movement from a blank canvas, through rules, through pointless wandering about a labyrinth, to an actual interesting game. I will also demonstrate how simple changes in the basic rules have strong repercussions on a higher level.

## Conclusion

The computer game is probably the most developed and interesting digital cultural phenomenon, but it has largely been ignored in academic circles. This paper tries to provide a summation of previous theory, and sketches a starting point for future work.

## Literature

Roger Caillois: *Man, Play, and Games*. Schocken Books, New York 1979 (1958).
Chris Crawford: *The Art of Computer Game Design*. 1982.
Johan Huizinga: *Homo Ludens*. The Beacon Press, Boston 1950 (1944).
Stephen Poole: *Trigger Happy*. Fourth Estate, London 2000.

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## Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?

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Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education
MA :                         Pat Cadigan & Feminist Cyberpunk
Currently studying for PhD:         Female gaming identities
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This paper offers a feminist analysis of Lara Croft as a phenomenon, relating this to other representations of action heroines such as Tank Girl and Ripley. What kinds of identification and desire does Lara invite – is she *solely* a masturbatory fantasy figure, or is she further evidence of the emergence of "girlpower"? How successfully could Lara the "icon" be appropriated within a feminist framework?

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## 'Environments, Strategies and Characters in the Gaming Industry
## - patterns of industry growth in Ireland'

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During November, 2000, the Irish Times carried front-page stories on the launch of PlayStation2 in Ireland. With headlines like 'Big Queues forecast for Launch of PlayStation2 games console' (Brennan 2000) and 'Hype to the power of PS2' (Roe 2000) the general public were alerted to the consumer frenzy likely to accompany the launch of this new gaming console. For the general public in Ireland it was their first introduction to an industry more associated with teenage boys, vagrancy and violent content. But the general public can hardly be blamed for failing to notice the growth of the computer games industry when the main media and communications journals have been strangely mute on the topic apart from scattered articles on the health and psychological impact of game playing.

While the gaming industry may be in the early stages of its development, akin to the 'silent film era' according to some (Courtnell 2000), it nevertheless earned more than video rentals and nearly twice as much as cinema box offices in Europe in 1999 (Screen Digest 1999) and has been called the 'fastest growing industry of the latter 20th century (The Nerve Centre 1999). Play Station Two took five years and $300m to develop and Sony anticipates selling almost 45,000 units in Ireland between Nov. and March 2001 at a cost of £380 IRL pounds each. The launch of Sony's PS2 this year and the imminent launch of Microsoft's X-Box next year signals the maturation of the gaming industry as its hardware moves from seedy arcade to the heart of the living room. The Irish industrial development organisation is increasingly looking at the 'leisure software industry '

as an important, if risky, new growth area within the Celtic Tiger's information economy. As traditional media corporations struggle to address the challenges and opportunities presented by deregulation, digitalisation and globalisation this paper will argue that the emergent computer games industry offers useful insights into future media developments.

Drawing upon social shaping and political economic theories (Bijker 1995) (Winston 1996) (Kerr 1999) (Garnham 1990) this paper will examine the growth of the gaming industry internationally; national and international strategies of regulation; and cultures of innovation within gaming companies in Ireland. Drawing upon the early stages of a new research project and company case studies this paper will examine political economic as well as cultural factors affecting computer game development. It will also assess the opportunities and challenges presented for a small country like Ireland which has to date has been more of a consumer than a producer of computer games.

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## Die Hard / Try Harder: From Hollywood to Videogame

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*Geoff King is a lecturer in Film and TV studies at Brunel University, London. He the author of Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster (London: I.B.Tauris, 2000) and New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction (London: I.B.Tauris, forthcoming, late 2001) and, with Tanya Krzywinska, Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace (London: Wallflower Press, 2000) co-editor of ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces (London: Wallflower Press, forthcoming 2002).*

Videogames have become an increasingly important addition to the revenue streams of the Hollywood blockbuster franchise, despite the skepticism with many movie-based titles are received by the gaming community. For the Hollywood studios, the videogame has become another in a line of potentially profitable spin-off products that help to extend the lifetime of a particular brand. *Star Wars* games, for example—the top performers—have earned a total of more than $450 million in the past ten years. For many gamers and reviewers, however, the result of a film tie-in is often disappointing. Games based on blockbuster films are often accused of failing to make appropriate use of the resources of either medium. What, though, does the move from film to videogame highlight about the textual strategies and experiences involved in the two formats?

The structure of some film-based video games is modeled closely on sequences from the movies themselves, providing a good opportunity to explore the specific qualities offered by the two forms. This paper will focus primarily on the experiences offered to the viewer/participant by the PlayStation game *Die Hard Trilogy* (1996) and the three *Die Hard* films (1988, 1990, 1995). A key issue to be examined will be the differences in the gaming experience resulting from the player's control of the actions of the on-screen avatar: a central distinguishing characteristic of the videogame or other forms of interactive screen entertainment. In the movies, the viewer can enjoy the sufferings of a hero such as John McClane in the safe knowledge that he will prevail. This is not true of the game, in which the hero ends up dead: repeatedly. Classical Hollywood decoupage offers a careful balance of apparent objectivity and access to the subjectivity of the hero. Games such as those based on the *Die Hard* films offer immersion, participation and, it will be argued, potentially, a strong measure of nervous anxiety. Film narrative, and structures of viewpoint, seem to offer more reassurance, while also—another important marker of difference—requiring a good deal less obvious 'work' on the part of the viewer.

This paper will examine these differences, and the appeals of the two experiences, through close analysis of game and film texts, arguing that the issues raised have significant implications for the future potential of new generations of interactive film/game hybrids.

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*Corpses, Demons and Zombies: Hands-on-horror and the new interactive home for horror.*

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*Tanya Krzywinska lectures in Film at Brunel University. She is the author of A Skin for Dancing In: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in film (Flicks Books, 2000) and co-author of 'Science Fiction Cinema' (Wallflower Press, 2000) with Geoff King. She has a PhD and MA from University of North London.*

Quake, Medieval, Tomb Raider, Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Soul Reaver, Clive Barker's Undying each in their different ways draw on the baroque and urban gothic iconography of the horror film. While computer marketing has done its best to make computer technology seem 'user-friendly' to help lure in new users, some computer and video games have taken a divergent tactic, choosing instead to cloak interaction with cyber constructs in creepiness, frights and danger.

Zombies, mummies, flesh eating beetles, vampires and other drooling monsters, previously most at home in horror films, have become legion in the video game. The visceral experience aimed for by traditional horror cinema is, arguably, enhanced in games by the fact that the player's actions are directly responsible for keeping their avatar from the jaws of death, an effect increased in some games by the use of a first person format. Do games simply replicate the different sub-genres of the horror film, or is a new dimension added through qualities such as interactivity? Might the definition of horror films according to their intention to create a heightened emotional effect become even more applicable to video games. Or does repetition and lack of proficiency with the controls dilute the experience? Perhaps it is the case that frustration is essential to the eventual production of a sense of mastery. These and other affective dynamics of horror-based PlayStation games will be explored.

Using close analysis of the dynamics of a selected number of games - Dracula: Resurrection; Resident Evil; Medieval; Soul Reaver; Clive Barker's Undying - this paper seeks to account for the success of the horror video game. It will be argued that the horror genre has found a new and well-suited home in interactive video games, and will include consideration of how horror-based video-games deal with the effect of expanded playing time and repetition on narrative, tension and pace.

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## The Video Game Industry in Latin America: From the Banana Republic to Donkey Kong

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The announcement of Microsoft that its Xbox will be manufactured in Mexico, is the most important signal that in the years to come the emergent computer games industry will try to create a second pole of development far from the Far East and more near the West, specifically near to the US market. With the increasingly process of globalisation going on in Latin America, many video games companies are trying to take advantage of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Latin America offers for these companies low wages; low taxes; little regulation and a relative well educated labour force. The question is, what do this companies offer to Latin America.

In this paper the authors explore the video game industry in Latin America and what impact can have in its economy and technology. The paper includes two Focus Groups with entrepreneurs in both sides of the Atlantic, interviews and an important bibliographical research. The paper *"The Video Game Industry in Latin America: From the Banana Republic to Donkey Kong"* describes a current research based on cross-national comparative analysis.

The research also defines how do economic and technical perimeters determine the nature of games in the Latin America market and what impact will the NAFTA have on the video game industry in the region.

The paper contains an extensive amount of data related to the characteristics of the Video Game market in the Americas and the principal patterns of use in that region. The idea is to present a complete picture of this industry in Latin America and its perspectives for the future under the NAFTA.

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## Towards a textual analysis of computer games.
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Computer games present themselves as unusual media 'texts.' They challenge presuppositions and do not conform to other forms of 'reading' related media 'texts' (television, literary, cinematic) dictate. Most obvious to this is the positioning and role of the user of computer games, and his/her involvement in the creation of narrative within the game as text. This paper examines some of the challenges and possibilities textual analysis of computer games hold, with a focus on my own current research into the artificial life game worlds of the *Creatures* series.

The first area is the directionality of the text. Computer games challenge a unidirectional positioning of the reader/user as the receiver and decoder of media messages. Users not only create narratives and game text through play, but can also, as demonstrated in *Creatures*, add programming, game elements and influence later iterations of the game. Moving towards a complex understanding of the producer/receiver relationship, the next challenge lies in understanding how computer games create common sense and hegemony between users. Games demand a level of involvement and common understandings from users if they are to make sense and be playable. This formation is examined through the use of 'structures of feeling,' how the games create 'intuition' through the use of interface, initial (and 'fore-') play, and through the creation of mythic possibilities and narrative scaffolding. The last challenge examined is the creation of narrative, how the user is able to create a meaningful narrative from game play. Drawing from *Creatures*, memory work is examined in the production of history and life narrative within the game.

Drawing from these strands it is then possible to incorporate a textual analysis of computer games that problematises the encoding/decoding directionality of traditional media 'texts' whilst acknowledging and examining an ideological reading of games through the development of common sense, myth, and finally the possibilities of narrative(s) that computer games hold.

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**The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Interactive Fiction:  The Case of the SIMS**

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*Dr. Alison McMahan is the Director of the English-language M.A. Program in Film and Television Studies at the University of Amsterdam (www.hum.uva.nl/~ftv/Faculty/Alison), where she teaches new media and cinema studies.  She has more  than fifteen years of film production and multimedia production experience, including production administrator for the three million dollar NYCTA interactive HAZMAT training project, writer-producer for HandsOn™ interactive, and currently CCO of Hyperserial Intl., a Dutch- based multinational that produces interactive television serials (www.hyperserial.net). She has written many articles on technical film and multimedia issues for industry trade journals such as Millimeter (post-production), Interiors (software and ergonomic reviews) and most recently a series on interactive architecture for Archis A series of articles about interactive spaces for Archis ( bilingual  -English and Dutch- architectural trade journal -- search new media at www.archis.org).  Her book, Branching Characters, Branching Plots: A Narratology of Interactive Fiction,  is forthcoming from MIT Press.*

In this paper I will analyze simulation games such as *Civilization* and especially *The Sims* in order to clarify the narrative role played by artificial intelligence in interactive narrative.  I will begin by looking at the development of AI characters such as *Eliza* (the on-line Rogerian therapist) and *Huge Harry* (an AI character that controls the face of a human, see www.iaaa.nl), and intelligent characters such as the tribes and peoples of *Civilization* and the characters of *The Sims*.  Each of these examples reflects a different type of  AI role in narrative.  *Eliza* builds on the responses of the user, incorporating the users intelligence in order to give a semblance of intelligence herself; *Huge Harry* has his own political agenda and treats the user as an avatar; and in simulation games like *Civilization* the player is designing the environment more than the "people", though the virtual characters are programmed to respond to certain stimuli and to generate other actions "randomly" in order to simulate intelligence.  *The Sims* is a development of these trends.  Will Wright originally called the game "Dollhouse" because the emphasis for him was on designing the home environment, using the same software engine that was  used for his *SimCity*.  This emphasis on environment is still there, but *The Sims* also represents a shift in AI design.  In this game, it is not only the characters (and the user) who are intelligent but also the environment.  The characters have personality needs and traits (set to some extent by the user) and objects in the environment such as chairs, refrigerators, and bathtubs are programmed to "advertise" their ability and the degree to which they can satisfy those needs, thus acting as a magnet drawing the needy character.

I will apply theories of narrative, such as Edward Branigan's theory of levels of narration and theories of mise-en-scene used in cinema studies to these games, a step in larger project to develop a narratology of interactive fiction.

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**"Meet new people and kill them": Interactivity, identity and pleasure in online multiplayer computer gaming.**

Sue Morris
University of Queensland, Australia.

*Sue Morris is a postgraduate in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland and is currently completing a PhD thesis examining online multiplayer computer game culture. Her specific areas of interest include the construction and negotiation of identity in gaming environments, gender and gaming, and the current moral panic over game violence and addiction. She co-edited the recent "Game" edition of M/C - A Journal of Media and Culture (http://www.api-network.com/mc/archive.html#game) and publishes the Game Culture website (http://www.game-culture.com). In a dim, distant past life when she still had time to actually play computer games she was an avid player of first-person shooter and strategy games and founded Australia's first all-female Quake II clan.*

Multiplayer gaming has been possible and popular on the PC platform since late in the last century. With console manufacturers now joining the fray with the next generation of Internet-enabled gaming systems such as the Dreamcast, PS2 and XBox, many more players will be joining the world of online multiplayer gaming, with its own intricate and evolved social orders, and distinct yet (mostly) unwritten rules of communication and conduct.

While analysis of the operations of interactivity and subjectivity in single-player games has begun, so far few commentators have made the distinction between single and multiplayer versions of the same game in their analyses. Single player and multiplayer gaming are as different as hitting a tennis ball against a practice board and playing a doubles match in front of an audience; in the move from single to multiplayer gaming, there is a highly significant shift from playing against a computer, to entering an alternate reality - a virtual environment in which people from around the world meet to play, compete, cooperate, socialise, teach and learn.

This paper examines the culture of one of the two most popular multiplayer genres currently played online, the first-person shooter games (eg *Quake III Arena* and *Half-Life Counter-Strike*), looking at how interactivity, the construction of gaming subjectivity and socialisation of the gaming subject (through both the game itself and associated media) combine to make the multiplayer gaming experience a distinct form of recreation and socialisation, and one in which the divisions between the roles of media producers and consumers are being rapidly eroded. Identification of the distinct operations of multiplayer gaming culture also has significant implications for many of the current concerns regarding computer games, such as issues of violence, 'addiction' and gender, which will be explored.

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Reconfiguring the videogame player
Investigating the interactive videogame experience

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While the products of the videogames industry have gained incredible cultural penetration, it is surprising that the academic world has paid scant regard to the medium. The few extant scholarly investigations display little if any sensitivity to or understanding of the experience of interactive play seeming hamstrung by the popular discourses of violent effects and the iniquities of representation. This paper seeks to challenge some of the presuppositions that underpin these investigations and problematises the simple transference of film/television/textual analysis models and audience relationships to interactive videogame play experience. By drawing on empirical field research findings derived from two longitudinal studies of interactive videogame play, it seeks to draw attention to the composition of the interactive player *experience* and the unique complex of relationships that exist between player, interface, screen and gameworld.

Fundamental to the model offered by this paper is the observation that interactive videogames do not offer a singular experience of interactivity but are structured as a series of interactive, non-interactive and partially-interactive sequences. The 'interactive continuum' presented in this paper seeks to mark the experiential and relational distinction between the polar extremes of 'On-Line' interaction (full interactivity) and 'Off-Line' (passive, detached observation with no registered control input from the player). As a consequence of the complexity and even simultaneity of interactive states of engagement with the gameworld, it is also necessary to consider videogame 'characters' as having at least two distinct spheres of existence equating with their presence both On- and Off-Line, on- and off-screen. On-Line, player relationships with on-screen 'characters' are not critically detached or based on empathy or identification, as other screen theorists have proposed. Rather, the On-Line player occupies and embodies the 'character' which exists effectively as a set of capacities and potential capabilities. On-Line interaction and engagement is characterised not by vicarious remote control but by presence in the gameworld.

This paper seeks in no way to justify or validate any sexism, racism, or ageism that may be identified in the advertising and marketing of videogames. By offering a new model of player-gameworld interaction based not on empathy or identification but vehicular embodiment, it suggests the comparative insignificance of representational traits in videogame characters during interactive play and the potential futility of such marketing techniques.


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The Final Fantasy of Games: Combining Interactive Play and Cinema

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The Holy Grail of gaming seems to be a blend of the immersive excitement of games with the narrative complexity of film. Although role-playing games (RPGs) often provide visceral experiences that cannot be matched by film or television, they rarely are described as having comparably complex protagonists and stories. In many games, characters are little more than the sum of their weapons and powers, while the plots is a simple quest for objects.

Final Fantasy VII, on the other hand, has been praised as one of the best RPGs of all time partly because it presents characters with deep backstories and has a "cinematic" plot. This paper investigates the aesthetic strategies this game uses to integrate complex story and character within the structure of the RPG. How does Final Fantasy VII balance the nonlinear interactivity of game play with the linear progression of narrative? How does the game make transitions from game mode to video presentation without annoying the player?

In my book On a Silver Platter: CD-ROMs and the Promises of a New Technology (New York University Press, 1999) I argue that academics spend too much time speculating on the "potential" of new media and too little time closely examining actual, currently existing examples of multimedia. Our expectations fr what interactivity is are being shaped in the present moment as we interact with existing multimedia works. Our understanding of what computer games should be is defined by influential games we play today. My close analysis of Final Fantasy VII will articulate the assumptions that underlie the game's highly praised "cinematic" quality as a way to envision how cinema and games may interact in the future.

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**Druids Come In All Shapes: Women and Massive Multiplayer Games**
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It was recently estimated that women now make up 51% of gamers online (PC Data, 2001). While a large proportion are playing traditional games like Hearts or Mahjong, there is a growing number involved in massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG). These worlds, like Everquest and Asheron's Call, have come to be some of the largest multiuser environments around and more are slated for development. Most of these spaces are notable in that they mix traditional gaming of the hack-n-slash variety with often complex social forms and explorations into identity.

I am currently examining the experience of women gamers in MMORPGs. Though typically thought of as traditionally masculine spaces, I have been researching the growing use of these sometimes violent, sometimes playful, and generally always fascinating worlds by women. In particular, this presentation will focus on the variety of reasons women come to be involved with these games, including socializing, mastery/status, identity play, and exploration. The pleasures of these types of games are clearly a draw for some and I am interested in exploring ways to think beyond "pink games" to provide a more interesting and accurate representation of the nuanced intersections between gender and play.

In addition, a consideration will be given to the ways game design is simultaneously facilitating and constraining a diverse player population. While attempts are being made to create "women-friendly" gaming spaces, it often falls along stereotypical gender constructions that don't fully reflect the range of experiences desired by actual users. While most women gamers "push back" on these systems, fashioning playful and often meaningful experience out of them, serious critical consideration needs to be given to the underlying construction of this emerging genre.

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**Emerging Business Models for Computer Game Development**
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This paper will look at the impact of business organisation on computer games. It will focus on the effect of 'Super Publishers' on game development, business models, game design and technology development. The paper will also address the possible roles for academic institutions in this process.