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“It’s in the Game” and Above the Game: An Analysis of the Users of Sports  
Videogames

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### Abstract

This paper is a participant-observer case study of a group of sports videogame players. The game played, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008*, belongs to the author-designated 'televisual' sub-genre, remediating (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) aspects of televisual coverage such as the broadcast angle, action replays and commentary teams. We investigate the use of these games and their position within both gaming and sport culture. To do so we approach the player from four perspectives: dress, body language, argot (slang, group-specific dialect), and proxemics (examining how people spatially situate themselves in regards to one another within the social environment). These categories then combine to formulate the last section, 'Social Play', where we discuss the social meta-game being enacted between participants to barter social status, capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and specific gamer capital (Consalvo, 2007).

Keywords: Videogame, Sport, Play, Social, Football

## Introduction

The experience of playing a digital game does not simply take place upon the screen, in the gamer's mind, or in many cases even just between player and display. It can also be, and often is (Lin & Sun, 2008; Sall & Grinter, 2007; Schott & Kambouri, 2006; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004) as much about the setting, social scenario, control interface and group dynamic as it is concerning the relationship between gamer and technology. This article will investigate the social role of the player as onlooker, advisor, competitor, friend, and participant, as being a crucial aspect of the culture and community surrounding videogames as Schott and Kambouri describe:

The culture surrounding the games is an important means of establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationships - from the swapping of games, advice and 'cheats', through to participation in the more public culture of games shops, arcades, magazines and TV shows. The culture of gameplaying involves the ongoing social construction of an 'interpretive community' (cf. Radway, 1984) - and in this respect, as Jessen (1999) argues, it may be better suited to the pattern of children's play than older media such as books, which one is alone consuming."

(2006: p121-122)

This notion of lone consumption, noted above as being so regular within other mediums, is singularly attacked in the realm of computer games as something unequivocally anti-social, alienating and unhealthy (Berger, 2002), yet as this analysis will show, the videogame console often acts as a site of social contact, bonding and

networking; similarly to Jansz and Martens' exploratory survey (2005), it seems the primary use of certain videogames (especially first-person shooters and televisual sports games) is first and foremost social, whether offline or online.

This study will draw on Goffman's work (1973, 1986), describing social relations as forms of symbolic interaction, as a person presenting a version of themselves they find most appropriate or advantageous within the current social context. This conception developed into what Goffman would later call *Frame Analysis*, describing the individual's comprehension of the social order and organization as dynamic and dependent upon context, that is to say the individual will act differently dependent upon the location, circumstance, and group dynamic they find themselves within; something Goffman articulated quite suitably as a collection of frames that adapt, interchange and overlap throughout day-to-day social interactions. The suitability of this theory to Games Studies is articulated well by Fine when discussing Role-Playing Games (RPGs):

Games seem particularly appropriate to the application of frame analysis because they represent a bounded set of social conventions, namely a social world... frames of experience may be conscious. Unlike dreams or madness, these worlds have a logical structure, recognizable as parallel to the mundane world. Games are quintessential examples for frame analysis because of their capacity for inducing engrossment. That is, voluntarily cutting oneself off from other realms of experience distinguishes this world of meanings from those primary frameworks (or the paramount reality) that individuals "naturally" inhabit.

(1983: p.182)

In other words, games (and consequently the gamers) maintain the potential to create such distinctive, alternative realities away from the “natural” reality of everyday life that the participant’s behaviour within this frame creates a contrast that is suitably unique, allowing for a productive examination. Though often seen as standing in opposition to the symbolic interactionist perspective, the important observation within social exchange theory (especially Homans, 1961) to perceive social interaction as also an economic exchange of often immaterial goods (notably social status), is a notion that has provided an enlightening influence upon the proceeding discussion (though I hold similar reservations to Ekeh (1974) concerning social exchange theory as a viable sociological perspective in and of itself), as it is clear there exists a ‘meta-game’ above the game being played, where social status is wagered, earned and lost using numerous strategies and tactics by opposing players.

In line with this, I will also utilize Huizinga’s (1949) concept of the ‘magic circle’, itself a ‘meta-frame’ if you will, introducing the idea of a psychological barrier between those involved in a specific activity together (football, poker et cetera) and those outside this activity, creating a separate set of rules, behaviours, and local norms (Smith, 2004). This is not to say that play is completely disconnected from “ordinary” life, as a formal reading of Huizinga (1949: p.8) would suggest, but that the magic circle is “a robust and knowing, socially collaborative, cultural construct that affects and is affected by material reality” (Jones, 2008: p.15).

In doing so I hope to highlight the dynamic, multifaceted and situated nature of the gamer persona, illustrating how setting, control interface, social party, and even game genre have an immediate and important affect upon the both the way the game is played, and the experience the player takes from it, as Crawford and Gosling argue:

We advocate adopting an audience research approach, which allows for a consideration of how gaming is located within patterns of everyday life, and how gaming is frequently drawn on as a resource in social interactions, identities and performances... how sports-themed games facilitate the development of gamer narratives, and also often act as a resource in social narratives constructed around both video games and wider sports-related themes... video games, for many, are an important component of their everyday lives, narrative identities and social interactions, and in particular sports-themed video games provide an important resource and cross-over with associated sports fan interests and narratives.

(Crawford & Gosling, 2009: p.63)

As opposed to other mediums such as literature and film, videogames require a level of interaction above reading, watching and interpreting; they are inherently ergodic, requiring extranoematic effort (Aarseth, 1997), as Galloway succinctly phrases it:

If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then *video games are actions*. Let this be word one for video game theory. Without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book. Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code.

(italics in original, 2006: p.2)

Thus, for any full analysis of the videogame medium, it is essential to not only examine the text, but also how the text is *enacted* through play by the user.

### Methodology

The principal method of data collection for this chapter was participant observation (as outlined by Giddens, 1993) within domestic spaces, supplemented by interviews and discussions both offline and online (forums, email, fan websites) with both the members of the participant observation group and wider members of the relevant game's fan community; during interview excerpts the author will be referred to as S. The locations for the participant observation studies were varyingly S, C and P's home living rooms. The group size varied between two and six, whilst the number of players varied between two and four (1vs1 and 2vs2 being the only acceptable mode of participation agreed upon by the group), whilst play times averaged at approximately 2 hours (each match lasting roughly 20 minutes); the total time for observation was in the region of 50 hours. The group was uniformly male, and between the ages of 16-31.

In regards to the lack of female representation, it is informative here to consider Dovey and Kennedy's concept of technicity (2006); an amalgamation of technology and ethnicity. This perspective on identity is heavily influenced by cybernetic and cybercultural theory, postulating that there is, in contemporary Western culture, an inherent symbiotic relation between identity and technology, so much so that a person is now partly defined by the technology they own and operate.

Dovey and Kennedy describe the dominant technicity of videogames as 'deeply gendered' (p.75), as technology that is associated with masculinity from an early period, and the continuation of this masculine connotation renders the other (in



this instance, females) often invisible within the gaming landscape, as Dovey and Kennedy describe in their experience with female *Quake* players:

These female players who take pleasure in the mastery of game, which is seen as requiring skills that are clearly demarcated as masculine, are aware of the transgressive nature of their pleasure. Respondents will describe themselves as having always ‘been tomboys’ or never liking ‘girly stuff’. They demonstrate a full awareness of the fact that playing these games is not something ‘good girls’ should do and also resolutely reject the discourse of appropriate feminine behaviour, simultaneously aware of a discourse that positions them as abnormal whilst also insisting that they *are* normal.

(2006: p.119)

During my research I was able to locate two women, acquaintances of T and P, who were by all accounts regular game players. Yet upon enquiring as to whether they would like to participate, both attempted to render themselves invisible by downplaying their involvement in games culture, as not taking games ‘seriously’ and “not really playing them” with any frequency; this was contrary to my own and others observations yet provided a clear example of how, in identifying themselves as incompatible with the dominant technicity, they attempted to conform by belittling their own involvement in what they considered a masculine culture. This is of course not always the case, and many groups offer staunch resistance to the dominant technicity, most visibly in the aggressive ‘grrl gamerz’ movement (Schott & Horrell, 2000) and the increased marketing towards a female audience with the Nintendo Wii. Yet in this research, perhaps due to its specific location in not only the culture of

videogames, dominated socially by males (Janz & Martens, 2005), but also within the highly-gendered world of sport (Whannel, 2002; Schott & Horrell, 2000), I was unable to find willing female participants.

The game, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* (Konami, 2007) hereafter referred to as *PES2008*, was chosen for a variety of reasons, chief among them being the availability of hardware and software, the ease of using a multiplayer mode (multiplayer is very complicated for games in the management genre), the familiarity and popularity of the series for the players, and also the conviction held by those interviewed that Konami's series was the most 'elite' football simulation; 'elite' being qualified by the players as needing specialised knowledge (of the sport, the game, and the control interface), providing ample opportunity to also situate my research in relation to concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), fan progression (Crawford, 2004) and behavioural setting theories (Blanchard, 2004).

The outcome of this research was to spawn five categories of examination, here labelled as Dress, Custom (routine actions, conventions and rules set by the group), Body Language and Proxemics (proxemics being an analysis of the distances between actors, first introduced by Edward Hall (1966)), Argot (specialised language used by a certain group), and Social Play (an emergent meta-game of social contestation between the group).

### Dress

The dress code amongst participants was uniformly casual, informal, and often sport-related. For example, on regular occasion there would be one or more members of the group wearing a football jersey. This would serve two primary purposes, firstly to separate and distinguish themselves as part of a particular group, as Crawford

(2004: p.42) notes, such apparel separates the ‘general public’ from the ‘devoted’, and secondly this also conveyed the user’s game-based team selection and favouritism, for example one player wore an AC Milan ‘Kaka’ shirt to signify his specialised and (in terms of the social group) notorious use of the Real Madrid playmaker in *PES2008*.

There was also evidence of attendants wearing shirts to either gain or conspicuously illustrate their symbolic capital vis-à-vis football culture in general. This is what Zahavi would call an “investment in the advertisement” (1977: p.603); whereas a conventional signal, such as a participant remarking “I am an authority on anything to do with football” could be distrusted, the speaker could *invest* in their signal by proving their expertise materially, in the form of an obscure team shirt and/or having a foreign star player’s name printed on the back, as Jonas Heide Smith elucidates, “Merely telling someone “I’m rich” would be a conventional signal.- as opposed to an assessment signal, a proof of truth, i.e., showing the amount of money in his pocket” (Smith, 2007: online).

Thus players would routinely wear the shirts of teams in Spain’s *Primera Divison*, Italy’s *Serie A*, or international teams (normally South American; Brazil and Argentina being most fashionable) with names such as Messi and Zidane printed on the back; an added caveat was the additional cultural capital accorded to those wearing older shirts with now retired superstar’s names, e.g. as above the Juventus shirt with the name of French star Zidane printed upon the back was worn by one member in particular, who was then regarded as knowledgeable concerning Italian football. This tendency to eulogize and mythologize past players as almost supernatural beings (it would seem akin to the ancient Greeks discussing the past exploits of heroes such as Theseus, Perseus and Odysseus *et al*) is also supported by the game’s inclusion of these former champions as powerful relics of a utopian past;

through winning certain matches these hidden superstars are ‘unlocked’ for use in the game, and the one factor they share in common is that their accorded attributes and special abilities are all extraordinarily high in comparison to the modern footballers included in the product.

This form of attire and general attitude also illustrates how closely related the participants consider the football videogame to the wider football culture. For example, during an interview T explained how *PES2008* is considered more ‘football’ than ‘videogame’:

S: So you don’t wear a World War 2 helmet when playing *Call of Duty*, why do you think [members of the group] wear football shirts?

T: (laughs) Well it’s, I think when you play Pro Evo it’s like playing football, more than other videogames.

S: What do you mean?

T: Well when I play *Mass Effect* or *Call of Duty*, I do get carried away a bit in the moment, but I always know it’s... fiction, if that makes sense (laughs).

With Pro Evo it doesn’t feel like fiction, it feels serious.

S: Right ok. I think you’re saying that it feels like an authentic sporting experience, like watching football on TV?

T: Yeah definitely. It feels serious, like the results matter, and you get the usual stuff being shouted, and it feels like a real football match.

This ‘reality’ seems to initially stem from the representational aspects of the televisual genre; the broadcast camera angle, action replays, slow-motion edits, highlight reels, lens flare and commentary teams. Such verisimilitudinous visual

stylistics appears to give the game greater gravitas in relation to the sports fan community, as more ‘real’ than the extreme genre (*FIFA Street 3* (EA Sports BIG, 2008) etc). This claim to some higher form of authenticity is also seen in the players’ discussion of the gameplay mechanics, detailed further below.

### Customs

There were numerous rituals involved in both the playing and spectating of *PES2008*. The first and most important rule for a spectator was simply not to cross the gamers’ line of sight with the television screen. Doing so was considered a grave faux pas and indicative of a non-serious attitude or amateur experience with videogames; it was a fundamental breakage of the magic circle.

At the beginning of every match there would be a certain amount of time allocated to the ‘formation screen’, where the team configuration could be manipulated, alongside numerous tactical options and swapping of members of the starting eleven players. Though time was always allowed for these changes to be made, moaning would be incurred if a user was deemed to be taking above the time allowed, or being too meticulous in their preparations. This scenario had many intriguing parallels with the social norms and general etiquette of the schoolyard:

S: Why do people moan about the time taken in the formations screen?

C: Well some people don’t take it seriously.

S: To me it seems like everyone seems to at least pretend they don’t take it seriously, even if you can see they do.

C: [laughs] That is true. It’s kind of similar to being back in school, you know like how it’s not “cool” to be seen reading a book, or to take a class seriously.

S: [laughs] Right yeah. So you feel that maybe people will think you're a geek or a nerd the longer you take on the formations screen?

C: [laughs] Yeah pretty much! So you pretend that you don't care to fit in!  
[laughs again]

Interestingly, the less experienced players would always be the first to complain, as they were also the first to be finished, with self-confessed amateur P explaining that he did not think the formation screen “really mattered”. Again, this mirrors the stereotype of the bully belittling the smart student to compensate for not understanding the material to the same degree (Lowenstein, 1977).

Yet, between more experienced players, time taken in the formation screen would instead be a forum for discussion, as tips were exchanged, settings were explained, player statistics were scrutinized, and tactics were noted for their advantages and disadvantages. In this manner they were reflective of Blanchard's (2004: online) notion of the ‘Information Leader’, a “provider of expertise and knowledge about a topic”, gaining social standing by providing advice and guidance on subjects pertaining to the text.

Another ritual was the half-time discussion. At the end of a half, the *Pro Evo* series displays a panel of information noting score, shots on target, disciplinary cards received, and ball possession. Such data would normally be used as material for banter amongst the group, as the relative merits of each statistic would be used to prove one player's superiority over the other, discussed in common football slang (usually aggressive metaphors for physically dominating your opponent), e.g., “60% possession, I'm all over you!” and “10 shots on target, I should be battering you!”

Again, the emphasis of the televisual genre's status as 'football' more than 'videogame' to the players explains this form of evaluation and subsequent banter, as similar discussions can be observed watching pundits provide their professional views at half-time or listening to regular pub repartee.

Also evident were local norms; an "'implicit rule' ... dependent on players reaching a mutual understanding on how the game should be played" (Smith, 2004: p.5-6). Rules such as these are not algorithmic but social, and thus have the potential to be highly variable between groups. Within the group studied, there were two cardinal local norms, the first being if a player wins three games in a row he/she must pass the controller over to a new player (explained as keeping things fair and making sure everyone gets to play), and secondly that pausing (pressing the 'START' button to freeze the game) during play is not permitted unless absolutely necessary, this was explained to be disallowed both as an anti-cheating measure (repeated pausing can disrupt an attacking move), and as a method of keeping the magic circle coherent (pausing breaks the 'flow' of the game).

The first cardinal rule (passing the pad after three wins) seemed to emerge particularly from a requirement of the game to act as social lubricant; if people were not given opportunity to be involved in the game, they were not seen as part of the group, and thus allowances were made. This contrasted starkly with an online group met, to whom giving up playing privileges in the name of fairness was absurd. Seeing themselves as accomplished players, this community believed in setting a minimum skill level as criteria for entry above any kind of social factor. This is reminiscent of Crawford's findings (2004) in studying football fans:

However, it is likely that some of the more 'dedicated' supporters (*i.e. devoted and professional*) are more willing to attribute their understanding of their sport or enthusiasm, and position at the very centre of the supporter base, to their 'experience' and 'expert' knowledge - rather than as the result of a process of tuition and development... In many respects, the attitudes of *devoted* and *professional* supporters reflect those of elitist opinions towards art and high culture as considered by Bourdieu (1984) - where individuals are more willing to attribute their 'expertise' to an almost 'natural' ability, rather than as a result of tuition and learning. In this way, *devoted* and *professional* supporters often seek to assert their legitimacy and position (and distinguish themselves from other supporters), on the basis of either their 'natural' understanding of the game, or superior knowledge and experience.

(p.48)

Thus this group of players willingly ostracize themselves from any casual or more beginner-friendly communities, creating a more elitist, dedicated collection of users to whom expertise and knowledge of the game were paramount. It was also evident in discussion that most players (especially those seen as leaders of the group) believed their skill at the game, and the videogame milieu in general, to be an innate, natural capability, as something felt but not learned, as something not to be taught but to be born with, a specific genetic coding that gave an apparent preternatural aptitude to playing videogames. In a way it seemed to be an attempt at legitimization, as if the advanced players were declaring their specialty as a gift that not everyone is capable of, creating their own source of social capital. This is clearly illustrated in a forum conversation where a new player is asking for advice but the better players, believing



their ability to be natural and thus not transferable as knowledge, dismiss the player outright:

PT (new forum member): He has faster players in Manchester [sic] than I have in Barcelona. He plays defend and counter attack [sic]. We have different game styles. We have been playing for 5 years and in the total ranking he is 4 games ahead. The issue is that in PES 2009, Manchester United seems to be unbeatable [sic]. That is why I am asking for some help and advice.

SG (old forum member): I stick with your friend being better at the game than you. Doesn't matter what players he has. I can play my friend as any random team against Man U and 9 times out of 10 I will win.....  
why?.....because I'm a better player.

Within the offline group, there was a hierarchy to the local norms witnessed, and though they were never spoken of whilst playing, seemingly being taken for granted amongst the users, all participants would seem to be in complete agreement as to what rule breaks were the most severe:

S: So is breaking one rule worse than breaking any other? So for example, would walking in front of the television be the same as turning off someone's controller?

M: Yeah. You would never turn someone else's controller off would you.

T: Not unless you were joking about. I've had it done before as a joke when I left the room before the game started. If it was being serious, like he turned my controller off and carried on playing when I had to answer the phone or

whatever... It's never happened because that's taking it too far if you're being serious. You'd probably get everyone shouting at you.

M: Yeah you'd be spoiling the game. I mean, it's not like it would cause a fight or anything [laughs], but you would definitely get on everyone's nerves.

L: When you walk past the screen it's not meant anyway.

S: So the intention of the person has a bearing on how bad it is?

M: Yeah. If someone *really* is trying to get away with cheating. Like one time [person] took a few of my best players off when I left the room, then started the match. I clocked on of course, and he was laughing, so it wasn't that serious because he was messing about. But if someone did that seriously, and tried to keep it secret if I wouldn't have noticed, then that's probably the worst kind of cheat.

S: Right, so someone intentionally trying to ruin the game, that's the worst?

All: [Gesture in agreement]

Again as noted by Smith (2004), there are two forms of conflict in multiplayer games, intra-mechanic conflict (arising from the rules of the game) and extra-mechanic conflict (the consequence of games being played in social spaces). Whilst the intra-mechanic conflict described earlier (in terms of referee decisions and player statistics) was regular, it was, to borrow a term from history, a 'cold' conflict. In other words, the conflict never actually became a cause for disruption amongst the group. This is simply because the player is offered no form of recourse against decisions made by the computer-controlled referee, and thus the user must simply accept refereeing decisions or stop playing; of course, again mirroring modern football culture, the user would still shout and debate with the unflinching virtual referee on

many occasions, this would serve as both cathartic release and social ploy, to externalize the blame as the game's fault, thus minimizing the damage done to the player's reputation; this was observed many times in online matches where the losing gamer would blame a slow Internet connection rather than their skill with the game.

It naturally follows that the context within which these gamers find themselves playing the game vastly influences their behaviour, a consistency Goffman (1986) would perhaps describe in terms of separate frames, between private and public, offline and online, competitive or casual, and so on. Though something of a cliché, it seems the primary explanation for the differing conventions of acceptable behaviour in offline and online play remains the problem of identification and communication when online. As T explained when asked in an online interview how he would react to blatant attempts at cheating, "My reactions feed off of how the person committing the act reacts". Hence without the ability to read the other person through face-to-face communication, a hostile environment is easily created and then perhaps perpetuated through misunderstandings in translating each player's/group's local norms, and then the continued lack of communication throughout the match serves to heighten and crystallize these mistakes and hostilities. Added to this are numerous technical deficiencies engendered by the network code, including lag,<sup>1</sup> ghosting<sup>2</sup> and disconnections; all-in-all the online experience's asocial design is predisposed to creating antagonistic and suspicious encounters to a degree unseen in offline encounters.

The majority of conflict, as illuminated by the earlier excerpt discussing the hierarchy of local norms, arose from discussion on the extra-mechanic conflicts, categorized by Smith (2004) as cheating, local norm violation and grief play.

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<sup>1</sup> A delay in time between input and output, caused by poor network code/connections.

<sup>2</sup> Generally a symptom of lag, this is where avatars seemingly disappear and then reappear at separate locations due to the network being unable to keep pace with the gamestate.

The debating of these 'cheats' seemed in essence a debate on whether or not they were local norm violations, as some local norms (passing the controller over after three straight victories) were agreed upon by everyone, whilst others such as purposefully injuring the opposition's star player were debated. There was also consternation evident concerning a form of grief play, known as voiding the match. This basically occurred when one gamer, being on the losing team, would deliberately perform dangerous fouls to have their avatars sent off by the referee, as once the gamer has less than 6 players on the pitch the match is automatically voided. This is performed in a much more efficient manner online, where the losing player, not needing to explain his or herself to the opposition in the same room, simply pulls the plug on the network connection or turns off their console, aptly giving them the nickname of 'pluggers' within player communities (such tactics are now tracked by in-game statistics, so online players can avoid known pluggers).

These forms of severing were seen as grief play as it both robbed the winning user of their victory and also cut short the autotelic enjoyment of playing the game. This is perhaps what Stebbins described as 'self-gratification' and 'self-renewal' (1992: p.94), the pure enjoyment of the game (in the former) and using the product as a diversion from other problems (in the latter, and as we will see this finds a corroborator in Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (2002)); in a basic sense, the group's revulsion at such tactics seemed in part due to the spoil-sport shattering the magic circle, as Huizinga describes:

The spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion - a

pregnant word which means literally “in-play” (from inclusion, illudere or inclusion). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community... A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over... the feelings of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.

(1949: p.11-12)

The fragility of the magic circle is no better emphasized than in the anxiety experienced during the continued maintenance and enforcement of these extra-mechanic rules. As decidedly local customs, these anxieties and tensions are amplified in the placelessness of online play, where local customs and etiquette are negotiated, resisted, or simply broken.

The concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) is also applicable to a unique practise utilized amongst the group when playing certain games; this being the playing of music (the television would be muted in such instances). This was not observed during video recordings of the group as the audio would be overwhelmed by the music played to the degree that individual voices could not be heard, but often the group would play music alongside their games before or after the recording session. This seems to tie into the notion of flow, as it was explained that the presence of music would help concentrate and relax the participant:

S: So what’s the reason for playing music when you’re playing *Pro Evo*?

C: It helps relax you.

M: Yeah and it blends well with the game. After a bit it just feels natural and you enjoy playing along to the music.

T: You even start... Playing in rhythm a bit I think?

M: Definitely, you find yourself kind of playing to the beat like you're playing *Guitar Hero* or something.

C: It's much more enjoyable than the shitty commentary, because it's so bad it can be distracting. With the music you can get in the zone.

T: Yeah the commentary is just awful sometimes.

This mention of "the zone" was often used identifiably as a synonym for flow, and is labelled as such quite often by sports stars, as mentioned in an article from The Sunday Times:

Michael Phelps could not have made Olympic history without Lil "Weezy"

Wayne: "Every time I walked to the pool, I was blasting my music to put me in the zone, listening to artists like Jay-Z, Young Jeezy and that giant they call Lil Wayne"... In the age of the iPod, music has become almost as important as the huddle in the pregame build-up.

(The Sunday Times, 2009: online)

It seemed that the custom of playing music alongside the game would help the user reach the flow state in an accelerated time, and also would improve the duration, as the commentary (the *Pro Evo* series' commentary is renowned for being of a poor and often bizarre quality) would be muted, removing any distraction or the breaking

of the suspension of disbelief through completely inaccurate reporting of the gamestate that sometimes occurred.

### Body Language and Proxemics

To firstly clarify, this section will often merge observations of body language with the concept of proxemics, being, in Edward T. Hall's words, "the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture" (1966: p.1). Thus in observing the group, I not only took note of how they used their body's posture to communicate, but also how they positioned their bodies *in relation to one another*, as such decision-making to is clearly an act of communication in itself.

The body language of participants during play sessions was extremely distinctive depending upon the member's role. For example, a seated spectator would normally sit relaxed, backwards on the furniture, eyes wandering around the room at regular junctures. For those actively playing this posture was reversed; leaning very much forwards towards the screen, the entire upper body tensed with the eyes completely focused upon the television. The game controllers were also held in a distinctly forward manner, as the user seemed to consistently hold their pad as far in front of their body as comfortably possible, resting their elbows upon their thighs with the gamepad the closest object to the visual display. This was discussed with T:

S: Have you got any idea why you sit forward when playing *Pro Evo*?

T: I feel it helps with my concentration. If I am laying back I am too relaxed to play properly.

S: I see. Do you feel more or less, it's an awkward way to put this, but immersed in the game?

T: I feel a better connection with the game. More in control, if you like.

In aid of this players would often take primary position in relation to the television, 'primary' position qualifying as directly facing the screen so as there was no (or at least minimal) distortion of the image, and no obstructions. If all such seating was occupied, then any spectator located within the primary location would often give way or swap seats, as the view provided to spectators was seen as irrelevant by the group. In this way it became easy to identify players and spectators separately without even looking at whether or not they held a gamepad in their hands; players would normally be seated centrally in front of the television, with the spectators gathered along the periphery, at sometimes uncomfortably acute angles.

It seems as if this method of optimal positioning, combined with the distinctive posture noted above, allowed the player to more readily enter the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), where his or her autotelic experience and concentration on the task at hand reach their peak levels, concluding in benefits Csikszentmihalyi categorizes as, "A sense of ecstasy... Great inner clarity... A sense of serenity" (2004: online). These psychological states were corroborated by my interviews, for example with C:

S: [explaining the concept of Flow] So if I just ask you about these kind of categories, you can let me know whether that sounds close to your own experience.

C: Right.



S: Ok so do you feel a sense of ecstasy? By that I mean do you feel a sense of total involvement with the game? As if there is no separation?

C: Yeah definitely. I kind of, well yeah I completely forget that the pad is in my hands, or that I'm looking at a television. It's just like it's me.

S: Yeah, yeah I see what you're saying. So do you feel a sense of clarity? Kind of a clear knowledge about what you need to do and how to do it?

C: Yeah I guess. I mean I don't get anything from that but yeah.

S: Yeah it's not for enjoyment, it's more that you feel completely comfortable and assured in what you're doing.

C: Definitely.

S: Do you feel a sense of serenity? Basically do you stop worrying about things outside the game, for example work, paying off the car or whatever.

C: Yeah yeah. Well... Maybe not at first, but if not straight away then after a minute or two I'm completely lost in the game. Like a good film... Or being drunk.

This mention of other mediums and forms of experience illustrates how the flow state can be present in all forms of practice, independent of the object, as Csikszentmihalyi extrapolates (2004: online), if the person's skill is perfectly met by the challenge, regardless of context, the optimal scenario for the possibility of entering the flow state is achieved.

Opposing players would, if sitting on the same couch or sofa, often unknowingly move away from one another (upon questioning no user ever seemed conscious of this movement), creating a space that symbolically communicated their oppositional status. Conversely, a conscious effort was made to sit alongside the

partner if in a team situation (2vs2), so much so that people would verbally agitate and negotiate until each pair were seated together. This served no functional purpose, as the players were all still seated so closely that the slightest whisper was still perfectly audible to the entire group, yet it served an important social and symbolic role.

Again the rivalry between pairs was figuratively invoked by the use of space (it is no coincidence that sports teams are often referred to as “sides”), whilst socially this helped encourage a sense of camaraderie, with the usual dual sense of inclusion and exclusion. Often each pairing would invent its own specialized celebratory gesture to increase this sense of solidarity (and to ostentatiously flaunt it to the opponent), such as unique ‘high five’ celebrations (one pair became famous for using only two fingers, making it technically a ‘high two’) or long-winded “secret” handshakes (enacted in an ironic manner). All rehearsed celebrations had an obvious comedic nature and seemingly served as satirical commentary on sports fandom, yet there were also spontaneous celebrations (most often performed upon the scoring of a crucial or unexpected goal) that displayed a genuine sharing of euphoric emotion; these would normally take the form of hugs or un-ironic high fives and handshakes, directly comparable to observing the sports fan celebrating their team’s goal.

When engaged in conversation, the users would often refuse to redirect their eye line in the direction of the conversant, instead remaining staunchly centred upon the television. In talking, the users would appear distracted and brief with their input, utilizing *argot* that functioned as shorthand for the message they would otherwise have to long-windedly convey. This of course highlights the importance placed upon playing the product; everything else is secondary to the requirements of the videogame.

The spectator would also engage with other media whilst watching the match, mobile phones, laptops, personal computers and so forth, normally in pursuit of or in relation to a subject of discussion they had started. They would also eat snacks or take a drink much more frequently than those involved in playing, who only ever performed such actions when there was a pause in play, the reason for which is explained by P, who was clearly bemused by the question:

S: I noticed no one eats or drinks whilst playing, why is that?

P: Why would you? Wait til after the game for a drink! (laughs)

S: Why not have one during?

P: Because you have to take your hand off the pad!

S: Can't you pause?

P: (laughs) You could but people would get pretty pissed off.

S: Why?

P: It interrupts the flow of the game; everyone would say you're cheating.

Again, any diversion from the game playing experience is seen to be irrational and, perhaps worse, to initiate such distractions is to be seen as a spoil-sport.

The only notable changes in body language by the users come when, as mentioned above, there is a break in the game (pause, half-time, game over et cetera), or when a pivotal event occurs, such as a close chance, a one-on-one situation (goalkeeper versus striker for example), a refereeing decision, or a goal. Such situations regularly incite flurries of motion, as gestures are made to express relief, frustration or joy. This is most evident when matches end in a draw and must go to penalties, taken in alternating turns until five have been taken by each side; if both

sides are still even then sudden death penalties are taken. During these periods there would be frequent movements, taken it would seem as both precaution against the opponent cheating and because of the player's anxiety; again both users/teams would distance themselves from one another spatially.

A strange custom would be for the gamers to place a cushion over their hands if available, obfuscating the controller from view so that each player could not spy on the other; the cushions would also serve an incidental secondary purpose of allowing the penalty-taker to bury their heads if they missed a shot. Much like the fan observing their team in a televised penalty shootout, the players would nervously chatter, cheer on their avatar to hold his nerve, or express hopelessness over a particular avatar's renowned real-world aversion to penalties e.g. "Oh not Saha, he's crap at penalties!"

The scoring of a goal is particularly notable for two reasons. Firstly the extreme and often referential nature of the celebration is revealing, by loud shouting and cheering, banging of nearby furniture, or even invoking a number of famous football celebrations of the past (pulling the shirt over the head, various parodies of the 'Klinsmann dive' and so on). As mentioned earlier, whilst it was often normal for the gamers to celebrate as typical sports spectators if playing on the same team (high fives, handshakes et cetera), playing as individuals (1vs1) allowed the player to assume the role of sports participant in their celebration, as the need to negotiate a celebration with their fellow team-mate was gone.

Sometimes amongst veteran players a lack of celebration was evident, an absence of any overt expression, as they instead sought to communicate their expertise of the game: 'Scoring is nothing special for me'. Also the form of

celebration is a reflection of the player's introverted or conversely extroverted social persona; this is touched upon by T:

S: When scoring it seems some people like to celebrate, whilst others remain quiet, or at least don't show emotion?

T: That is down to the personality of the person. As I am quite shy and timid I tend not to rub peoples face in it for fear of repercussion; I don't want it to be a big deal. Unless it is P, then I feel I have to rub his face in it.

S: A bit of tit-for-tat? You do it to counter his big celebrations?

T: Yes.

So whilst there is visible in the user's celebration a demonstration of their reserved or outgoing personality, this can change depending upon the numerous variables of context; opponent, setting, group, format, and so on. For example, as P was infamous within the group for his theatrical celebrations, it seemed that anyone who played him would rise to a similar level of celebration, to match this form of masculine contestation, similar to opposing sports fans attempting to out-cheer one another; in this way social status within the group is also challenged.

Conversely, if playing in an unfamiliar group or against people of a skill level clearly unequal to their own, celebrations would appear relatively muted. In fact when watching veteran users play a match against new users, sometimes their body language and tone would seem almost embarrassed and apologetic upon scoring, this was explained by M as a fear of "taking it too seriously or being a bully", as if their unequalled prowess at the game would make them a spoil-sport for the lesser players, as T expanded upon:

S: When you play someone you think is worse than you at *Pro Evo*, do you celebrate as usual when scoring?

T: No I don't.

S: Interesting. Why not?

T: Because I don't want to deter the person from playing it just because I have had more time on the game.

S: Ah right, you'd feel like a bully?

T: Yes certainly.

S: So why do you think you're ok with making fun of someone and celebrating when they're of a similar level?

T: They can take it. And I think I assume that if they've played the game long enough they're used to the banter, and they won't get discouraged. I have to know them too; I wouldn't ever rub it in the face of someone I don't know.

As is obvious, there are a plethora of criteria involved in the decision-making process of how to behave during the social playing of the game, and each opponent, location, format and setting can illuminate (and conversely cast a shadow) over certain aspects of the gamer's behaviour; there was never simply one stable, predictable user identity, but multiple depending upon circumstance and the subject's understanding of the current frame.

The second notable feature of scoring is that it is the only occasion where all players will be seen to relax, sit backwards and engage in discussion, as interaction during the replay sequence of the goal is optional and inconsequential. This pattern shows similarities to Barthes' (1975) notion of *jouissance*, as optimal pleasure is

reached within the text upon scoring, the ‘orgasm’ of the game in a manner of speaking (not only extra-textually for the user’s psychological state, within the text itself the representational form explodes in a cornucopia of colourful visuals and sounds), and afterwards relaxation and relief is felt as the gamestate recedes back to equilibrium (denoted in-game by the sombre, unheralded relocation back to the centre spot for kick-off).

Another interesting dimension to the ‘beginner versus veteran’ matches was how the veteran would often take it upon his or herself to tutor the beginner in the most effective ways of playing the game. Whilst this advice was sometimes shared between veteran players as a flaunting of gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007), the advice given to the beginner seemed to be motivated by an altogether different objective, seemingly related to the concept of the flow state mentioned above (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), requiring a perfect matching of skill with challenge to be achieved; too high a skill for a challenge concludes in boredom, too low a skill for a challenge results in frustration.

Therefore, it seems in these instances of veterans versus beginners, the veterans would attempt to offer advice and guidance as a way to increase the challenge the beginner presented to them, so that they would not become bored, and conversely, so that the beginner would not become frustrated, and thus both are more able to readily enter the flow state; this perhaps also serves as an explanation for the existence of the handicap rule in Golf.

### Argot

The specialised language of the group was very informal, masculine and jocular. There was an abundance of quotes used from both film and television media

that would appear mystifying to anyone on the outside of the group or without knowing the context. As mentioned previously, the continuous use of quotes would act as a communicative shorthand between the participants to exchange the maximum amount of information in the briefest time possible, a crucial utility in avoiding distractions whenever possible in playing the game, and thus the quotes were employed most extensively by those currently engaged in playing, being hesitant to talk for anything more than a few seconds at a time, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

T: (attempting to foul player one-on-one with goalkeeper) Wildcard bitches!

(quote from television sitcom *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia*)

P: (laughing) Hooch is crazy! (quote from television sitcom *Scrubs*)

Such use of film and television catchphrases and characters is an example of the postmodern audience as identified by Jim Collins (2009): the *knowing bricoleur* who derives pleasure from their agency within the postmodern text, for example intertextual recognition and other kinds of bricolage based upon functional and stylistic conventions. A main source of the group's social cohesion and enjoyment came from a sharing of this intertextual recognition; it was sometimes a competition amongst them to see who would first recognize and identify the obscure film/television reference quoted by another. This also served the secondary purpose of ostracising anyone not familiar with this esoteric use of idioms, and helped cement the boundaries of the magic circle as limited to those who could comprehend this use of slang.



Whilst this use of argot aided in further bonding the group, it was also crucial to initiating new members, who would occasionally ask where such phrases originated; these shows would then be discussed and re-narrativized as a highlight reel of the group's favourite quotes and moments, a montage of various comedies condensed and reformulated into a linguistic guide to the community argot. Intriguingly a fundamental part of this use of jargon, especially in humorous comments, was the employment of a separate accent to denote the jovial nature of the statement, usually an exaggerated American accent, taking on a predominantly Southern slant for self-deprecating, consciously idiotic comments, for example after C used his avatar to accidentally dribble the ball off the pitch:

M: Haha why didn't you shoot?!

C: (in a heavy Southern USA accent) I jus' kep' on runnin'!

Again, the *knowing bricoleur* is evident in this schizophrenic adoption of fictional personas (imitating *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994)) and a continuous play with cultural stereotypes, as Collins notes, 'This foregrounded, hyperconscious intertextuality reflects changes in terms of audience competence and narrative technique, as well as a fundamental shift in what constitutes both entertainment and cultural literacy in [post-modern culture]' (2009: p.460).

Also of note is the varying usage of subjective pronouns by the group, moving between first, second and third person in certain contexts. For example, in positive moments, such as upon the scoring of a goal, it was common to observe a predominantly first person use of pronouns, "I dribbled it through the defence and

slammed it!” whilst negative moments would cause the player to frequently employ second and third person pronouns, e.g., “You idiot!”, “He’s so slow!” et cetera.

What this seems to indicate is that the gamer uses a fluid form of identification to maximize their status within the group as proficient videogame player; when something goes right, the gamer takes the accolades, when something goes wrong, it is the avatar’s fault. The player’s shifting identity in such situations acts as a semi-permeable barrier, allowing the good moments of play to be attributed to the self, whilst the bad moments are externalized as being the fault of the virtual footballer.

The use of masculine, agonistic language reached its peak at the most tense moments of the match, most obviously illustrated in a penalty situation, especially a penalty shoot-out at the end of a draw. During shoot-outs, it was ordinary for one or both of the players to begin chanting “big balls”, a metaphor used to question the opposition’s bravery. This was used as both shorthand for needing the traditional ‘nerves of steel’ required for a penalty shootout (‘Have you got what it takes?’), and also the in-game tactic of shooting the ball straight down the middle of the goal, thereby humiliating the player who dives the wrong way; if the gamer does indeed shoot down the middle and scores, the chant would culminate in a loud cheer of the catchphrase. Of course, the vulgarity of the mantra would also often have the desired effect of causing laughter, helping to diffuse the tension felt.

### Social Play

The negotiation of such social risks invested in playing against one another are examples of an interesting meta-game involving its own strategies and tactics; the meta-game being based upon gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007) and prowess, and its relation to the social standing of each member of the group. Such forms of meta-game

can be found across many social groups in one's life, a "stratification system, mostly along the dimension of prestige", as Polsky (1967: p.70) terms his discovery of a similar organization of group status established amongst pool hustlers. It is a game based upon the demonstration of expected skill, *expected skill* as the capital exchanged in this competition is reputation and standing within the community, one that all participants will be fully aware of; everyone involved will know who the veteran is, who the beginner is, who is supposedly the best and worst, thus certain expectations are pre-installed and expected to be met.

This form of social agonism can be observed within many groups; from the lawyer performing in court alongside observing colleagues, to the freestyle rap battles common within American hip-hop (popularized by films such as *8 Mile* (Hanson, 2002)), to students challenging each other to drinking games. Numerous phrases, strategies and tactics are applicable, and perhaps spawned from this interaction; "saving" or "losing face", decrying one's performance before others have the chance to criticize (thus lessening the weight of their criticism), explicit demonstrations of disinterest or distraction ("I was not trying my hardest and therefore cannot be judged"), and so on.

In terms of the videogame, the contest normally proceeded as such: the best player of the group would have the highest social standing, with the beginner having the least. Visualizing the standing as a form of tangible capital, it is fair to always assume the veteran has the largest amount of capital, whilst the beginner has little. If the beginner played the veteran, the veteran would risk a large amount of their status within the group, whilst the beginner would risk none and have the opportunity to gain a large amount if they somehow triumphed. This economy is actually digitized when playing the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series online: veteran players, having played

and won many matches, are at the top of the online scoreboards and have many points, whilst beginners have none. If a beginner plays a veteran, they take many more points for winning than a beginner versus beginner match would extract, whilst the veteran, even if they win, is awarded a minimal amount at best. Thus veteran versus beginner games are extremely rare online, as the veteran sees a rather large, risk-laden investment as unsatisfactory against relatively small potential recompense.

Offline, the avoidance of beginners by veterans, and vice-versa, was often impossible, and to refuse playing was seen as unsportsmanlike or disruptive to the social experience. Thus, when forced to play a beginner, the veteran would often initiate conspicuous actions to illustrate how they either did not take the game seriously, or were purposely not playing to their full ability; this would limit their investment and reduce the risk to their social standing.

For example the advanced player would turn around and talk to others whilst playing ('I am not focused'), or they would attempt novel play strategies, such as using the goalkeeper to try and dribble the ball from one end of the pitch to the other and score, or try audacious skills or goals in the knowledge that this is the only way they would impress their fellow veteran players and onlookers (who, through their knowledge of the veteran's expected skill, would already be requiring triumph as a minimum outcome). Yet the veteran, acting as representative for the entire group of veterans, would be encouraged to push above and beyond normal victory conditions with the abovementioned 'showboating', as it was termed by the participants, to fully illustrate the gap of prowess between advanced user and novice.

In a separate analysis of gamers in collaboration with the LGI (Learning Games Initiative) using the 'Game Night' mode of inquiry (McAllister, 2004), it was noted how newcomers to the gaming group would sometimes 'fake' or minimize their

proficiency at videogames so that the investment of their capital was lessened, with the added (and no doubt planned) effect that upon beating the well-known, better players of the group, their small investment reaped larger rewards in terms of social status; as every football manager knows, though you lose the same amount of points either way, it is much more damaging to lose to an unknown minnow than it is to Manchester United. In this manner certain players can be considered, and indeed used many techniques comparable to the aforementioned hustlers focused upon within Polsky's work (1967), though the capital gained in this instance is social status, as opposed to the material or financial gains commonly won by Polsky's pool players.

### Conclusion

The playing of the televisual genre is a highly social, intertextual and immersive experience for the user. Whether alone or in a group, public or private, online or offline, the game-playing event is defined not only through what happens in-game, between teams, but also in what happens between the players, the spectators, the wider games-playing community, and the culture of sport. The game console itself acts first and foremost as a point of socialization, as Thornham (2009) outlines:

The technology is brought into the realm of functionality where it offers a useful service that men can utilize... as an important public and social service... When gamers insist on social gaming as normal gaming, they are also, it seems, positioning the technology within the social... within the temporal structures of the social in terms of the way gamers narrate gaming as a social activity – they understand and position it within the same ideological and temporal structures through which they understand the social.

(p.154-155)

Whether conspicuously demonstrating their prowess, their lack of ability (or feigning deficiency), their knowledge of the videogame, or their knowledge of the sport, each action speaks as a socially-motivated communiqué (“I should be respected”, “I am not taking this seriously therefore I should not be judged”, “I am an authority in the group”, “I am an authority on sport”) that allows the user to accumulate social status or conversely to subtract another’s; a meta-game existing above the videogame itself that spawns numerous strategies in approaching play as a site of social contestation.

Often the mode of dress can reflect this, the wearing of team shirts, especially older shirts, those of famous players, rare players and up-and-coming stars can allow the wearer instant access to symbolic currency within the group through an invested signal (Zahavi, 1977), a tangible expression of their knowledge.

The customs of the group examined were, on reflection, mostly tailored towards one end; providing everyone with access to the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002), epitomized by the ‘three wins then pass the pad’ rule, whilst all other rules (e.g. no walking in front of the television, no pausing) were observed to extend the flow state for as long a period as possible. Other customs, such as the half-time discussion, exchanging of tactics and player tips, berating of the referee et cetera, were all intertextual, extracted from the gamers’ wider experience of consuming football, utilised for cathartic ends or as tactics for blame-avoidance when knowing their prowess was being monitored by their peers.

The body language of the user supported this immersion in the game, as the player’s posture was oriented to be as close to the television screen as possible, to be

‘in’ the game as opposed to ‘watching’ the game. The spectators, much like those who attend real football matches, would illustrate lively behaviour, initiate discussion, offer advice (much like the fan who shouts down to the players on the pitch, or manager on the touchline). Those who had just finished the transition from player to spectator would display distracted behaviour at first, using other technologies, taking in refreshments, much like a half-time break, before morphing back into the focused, purposeful countenance of the gamer when match time was again upon them.

The *argot*, appropriately enough as a form of play (Huizinga, 1949), would imitate the dominant features of videogame engagement, being socially-inclusive (whilst of course being simultaneously exclusive) and highly intertextual, referencing film, television and print media continuously in numerous adaptable, contextual ways. The continued use of particularly humorous phrases and quotes acted both as social lubricant and also to defuse any tense situations arising from competition and/if perceived cheating was to occur. The masculine, aggressive nature of statements concerning the gamestate further closed off the magic circle against the ‘other’ of football culture (Giulianotti, 1999: p.155) whilst concordantly strengthening the bond between those present, as ‘being “apart together”’ (Huizinga, 1949: p.12).

Discussions amongst the group would usually centre upon football culture, whether this was current transfer speculation, player performance or general cultural trends. Throughout the discussions monitored the group would exhibit a distinctly ‘post-fan’ attitude to the sport and surrounding culture, as described by Giulianotti, following from John Urry’s (1990) classification of the ironic, reflexive identity of the emerging ‘post-tourist’:

Football's 'post-fans' share this reflexivity, irony and participatory outlook. They represent an epistemic break from older forms of fandom, in particular the passivity of the 'supporter'. Post-fans are cognizant of the constructed nature of fan reputations, and the vagaries of the media in exaggeration or inventing such identities. They adopt a reflexive approach in interpreting the relative power positions of their players and club within the political structures of domestic and international football. They maintain an ironic and critical stance towards the apologetic propaganda emanating from their board of directors, and against the generally sympathetic relationship that exists between the latter and the mass media. The comments of post-fans on their favoured club and players often slip into parody or hostility... post-fans recognize their influence remains very limited within football's corridors of power.

(Giulianotti, 1999: p.148)

Though perhaps unanticipated by Giulianotti, the football videogame supports this participatory, reflexive, and critical stance of the post-fan perfectly, allowing them to take control, constantly reinterpret and reinvent, and of course criticize. The constant discussion surrounding game tactics, formations and avatars allowed the group to give, exchange and absorb knowledge concerning the text whilst also improving their own status as 'information leader' (Blanchard, 2004) within the social group. The comparisons between the real-life player and their digital counterpart highlights the televisual genre's status as more than simply a videogame to be played and experienced; it is seen as an authentic extension of football culture. This perspective is solidified by the regular conversations observed concerning footballer's



lives, current team news (normally intrigues and disruptions), the analysis of statistics, and other topical sporting issues.

In conclusion the football videogame acts not only as a point of socialization for the player, but more specifically as a nexus for the merging of various cultural, social and psychological interests and pleasures; game culture, sport culture, social interaction, bonding and contestation, catharsis, gratification, and escapism. Through engaging with the text, the user enriches their cultural, social and gaming capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Consalvo, 2007), improves their confidence through self-actualization and conception (Stebbins, 1992: p.94), indulges in catharsis, and takes pleasure, finding ample distraction from their problems through entering the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

Speaking to the sociological community involved in Game Studies, one lesson apparent from this case study is that we must attend to the varied, trans-medial and recreational nature of the videogame; it does not exist in a cultural vacuum, as is evident in analyses such as Taylor's sometimes myopic discussion of online game culture (2006). Rather, the videogame exists parallel to and in relation with various other media and cultural experiences, increasingly accentuated by social interactions either built into the game or created separately by an enthusiastic fan community.

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