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Les mondes du jeu

Introduction

Game Worlds

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The game: a Social Sciences and Humanities object

1   Following, in a more or less critical way, Johan Huizinga (1980 [1949])'s steps, few authors successfully demonstrated the legitimacy of studies of play practices in the Social Sciences. Exceptions are Roger Caillois – beyond the usual limits, particularly empirical ones, of his approach to the game object - with his call to make a "sociology based on Games" (2001 [1961]), or Clifford Geertz (1973), who hypothesized that the game is a significant cultural trait and key element in the construction of collective identities. Research on sport activities and play motor skills, which is focused on more visible objects and as such has progressively been tackled by sociologists, has confirmed the correctness of these founding intuitions, by showing in particular how the evolution of games is a pertinent clue to identify changes in Western societies (Elias & Dunning, 1986). Games and play activities reveal much about the societies in which they fit: the socialization of children (Piaget, 1978), marker of a "leisure civilization" (Dumazedier, 1974) or simply a sociability engine (Simmel, 1991).

2   For two decades, studies of play and games have been considerably revived by the development of video games, and particularly online videogame practices. The intrusion of digital and electronic technologies into daily life – from arcade machines in public places to consoles in family rooms - has allowed for the rediscovery of an object that, between the few researchers mentioned above and the 1990s, had finally remained very marginal within social sciences, with a few notable exceptions (Calvet, 1976; Bruno, 1993; Henriot, 1969, 1989; Trémel 2001; Brougère, 2005). In the English speaking world, however, the then-emerging research field of Game Studies, reflects its name poorly: far from being interested in games or in play in general, they have limited their interest, from the start, to a particular type of game, arising along with these technologies: video games.

3   Not only are "traditional" games, existing before video games, hardly considered, but they are also absent from the history of video games, which free this history from the play culture to attach it to its own technical and political emergence context: that of electronics, computers, the first network technologies, and the Cold War (Kline *et al.*, 2003). However, a comparative analysis with other playthings allows one to remove videogame practices from a purely technical and contemporary view. An "archeology of video games" (Huhtamo, 2005) indeed highlights the continuity with the play culture that precedes it: tops or totons of antiquity, hoops or yoyos of the Middle Ages, "slot machines" of the nineteenth century, fortune telling machines, strength testers, automated shooting or boxing games, etc. This type of approach emphasizes, moreover, the long evolution of forms of play during the twentieth century (Huhtamo, 2005), such as, for example, the invention of the pinball machine, adapting the game of bagatelle. The relationship that video games have with the world of toys and board games is just as important (Berry, 2011; Sidre, 2014), with regards, in particular, to the prominence of distributors and toy manufacturers, such as Mattel or Nintendo, be it in the promotion of video games, in their modes of distribution or in their contents. Video games, far from being a purely technological object, are part of a history of games, objects, equipment, and play culture, much older than computers or electronics. This play culture is recycled into new objects, new spaces, new media, including the Internet.

4   The economic and media weight of some video games thus masks the reinvestments of this play culture into the Internet, in favor of a few games with an appearance of radical innovations. Social science studies are then centered on the analysis of formal systems of rules, and tend to ignore the players and their practices. Where are, then, those chess players who measure themselves among each other in cyber clubs, sometimes hosting tens of thousands of members, and who can follow and comment live on major international competitions, those poker players who discover a new form of game through the web, with different strategies and possibilities compared to the game in co-presence, or the role playing gamers that dematerialize their dice and figurines?

5   This issue of the journal *RESET* therefore proposes to reverse the dominant scientific perspective, to study traditional forms of play, their audience, their content, their modalities, in the Internet age. The intention of this issue is to analyze online games in their social, historical and cultural dimensions, refusing to consider them, as is often done in the field of Game Studies, as a decontextualized object, ahistorical, devoid of background. Particular attention is thus paid to contemporary practices and on the Internet, while seeking to understand the historical and sociological links with previous forms of games and the modes of organization that gave rise to them.

From "art worlds" to "game worlds"

6   To capture these dimensions theoretically, the concept of "game worlds", the title of this issue, in this sense seems heuristic. Referring to the interactionist tradition of English speaking sociology and especially the work of Howard Becker on "Art Worlds" (2008 [1986]), it allows one to grasp both the singularity and the organization of a cultural practice and to inscribe it into a long history. Originally developed as part of a sociological analysis of art, the concept of "art world" puts forth a model for analyzing artistic environments and performances in which the practices are less defined by structures determining the actors or by technical devices or even by single individuals

than by the sum of the activities of those involved. The concept of "art world" indeed highlights the importance of the interactions between various actors and pays particular attention to modes of organization and "divisions of labor" to produce a work of art in the large sense. It thus seeks to analyze the modes of "cooperation" between "users" and "designers" and, in an original way, it takes into account all the actors, present or past, which participate in the production of a work and all the objects necessary to the production of an artistic performance.

7   If we think for example of the performance of a symphony orchestra, it requires musicians and an audience of course, able to appreciate (or not) the concert, but also ticket vendors, advertising, people to set up chairs, assemble a stage, put up posters, etc. Moreover, according to Becker, there is a need to invent the instruments, store them, create music theory, develop a rating system, teach people to play, publish the sheet music, etc. An entire material culture participates, alongside the actors, in the production of a cultural work. In short, this concept, which is more of a sociological view of art as a social space that is historically constituted than an aesthetic and romantic vision of creative genius, highlights "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (Becker, 2008: 24).

8   Thus, the central idea is that of a necessary cooperation between actors for an activity or an artistic work to take on meaning. It implies a division of labor and material culture of its own. Poems need to have their layout developed and places to be recited, paintings need to be exposed and reproduced, etc. An art world is thus composed "of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art." (*ibidem*: 34). To justly qualify the 'secondary' actors, who are often overlooked in the hierarchy of prestige in an art world, Becker thus speaks of "support personnel".

9   From this point of view, an art world comes both from a history of the techniques and from what its actors (creators, producers, technicians, audience, critics, etc.) make of it. Each art world is based on traditions but can see itself transformed by new tools, new actors and new modes of production (the appearance of the record or the radio for example imposes on musicians a duration time for songs and accustoms listeners to this format). This perspective thus articulates the dynamics of rupture and continuity with the concept of conventions. Every art world is based on a set of historically constituted procedures, techniques and meanings which the actors inherit and on which they rely to create, consume, enjoy a work of art. They "provide the basis on which art world participants can act together efficiently to produce works characteristic of those worlds" (*ibid.*: 42). A designer bases his or her work on rules, and sometimes surpasses them. The audience, for its part, mobilizes categories, patterns, discourses which allow them to identify, classify and appreciate and judge the works. In the case of music, for example, it "uses many technical devices sufficiently well known to all well-socialized members of a society to be usable resources for artists. Composers can, for instance, take for granted that audiences will understand and respond, as expected, to a minor key as "sad"" (*ibid.*: 45).

10   Though Becker's work is initially centered on art (Benghozi & Paris, 2013), the analysis model was quickly transferred to other domains[1]. Indeed, this idea of cooperation between different actors to produce meaningful universes is not unique to the artistic field, as the author states: "What I have said about art worlds can be said about any kind

of social world, when put more generally; ways of talking about art, generalized, are ways of talking about society and social process generally (...) If we focus on a specific art work, we can usefully think of social organization as the network of people who cooperate to produce that work" (Becker, 2008: 369).

11   This invitation to transfer this model to other areas, including games, seems to have been heard. Indeed, the concept of "game worlds" is mobilized in the scientific literature, through various perspectives and with greater or lesser reference and fidelity and explicitness to Becker's work depending on the case[2]. We offer here a quick review of its uses to understand the issues and the theoretical and epistemological foundations of this expression, the title of this issue: what does one call a game world?

Interactions, cooperation and chains of relationships

12   At a general level, the use in the literature of the concept of "game world" allows one to evoke the chain of agents involved in the production of a play activity and a specific cultural universe. Thus, in the work of Laurent Trémel on the practice of "role playing gamers", the concept of "role-playing game world" refers at the same time to the publishers and the players, the fanzines and the clubs, "the whole thing being constitutive of a 'micro-environment' where production takes on 'artisanal' dimensions - most publishing companies being small structures" (Trémel, 2002: 49). To talk of a play activity in terms of "game world" thus allows one to pay specific attention to the diversity of the actors that contribute to its existence. For some researchers, this concept is mainly about analyzing the division of labor and modes of interaction and cooperation between these actors. As analyzed by Vinciane Zabban in her study of the interactions between "designs, techniques and uses of MMOs", it is through regular interactions between the actors of various kinds that an agreement on the nature of the activity is negotiated, that conventions are established, such that it appears to everyone, designers and users that "this is a world" (Zabban, 2011).

13   These interactions do not necessarily mean harmony or agreement: they are not "equal in value and weight in the negotiation by the players of a common definition of the game universe" (*ibidem*: 290). These may be a place of conflicts and tensions after which the game worlds, as in the case of Zabban's investigation, may disappear. Conversely, it is also through regular and simultaneous forms of cooperation that shared worlds are constituted and in which, as in the case of the massively multiplayer video game *Mankind*, a large part of the world and its contents is manufactured and provided by the players: "the designers have (...) gotten on board with the players and the scenario has been redesigned according to the unexpected situation that the latter had created" (Schmoll, 2008: 71).

14   In certain areas of play culture, these collaborative dimensions are at the heart of the constitution of a "game world". In his study of Live Action Role-Playing Game (LARP) practices, Sébastien Kapp, mobilizing Becker's theory, highlights the importance of the interactions between different actors in the production of a specific play practice. He thus emphasizes the nature and mode of organization of the activity, its division of labor, one of whose characteristics is the alternation of the roles of designers and consumers. LARP practice, according to him, "does not necessarily call into question the distinction of roles between "those who produce" and "those who consume" (*i.e.* the manufacturers and the users of the representations by H. Becker). Clearly, there are the organizers who write

rules and scenarios, but in the overwhelming majority of cases, they are not the players who will use them. Instead, the distinction is made in what these groups of actors do in the process, if they do it at the same time, and to what degree one can think that they collaborate in the overall production of the event" (Kapp, 2013: 230).

Material culture and usage contexts

15   Though speaking of a game world thus allows one to emphasize the diversity of actors and the importance of interaction in the construction of conventions and standardization of a play practice, the concept also calls for special attention to the material culture specific to the play practice studied. Each game world, like all art worlds for Becker, contains its objects, its routines that make the practice possible and symbolically mark the boundaries of the territory. It is in this sense that, according to Kapp, the use of the concept "world" is heuristic. It highlights "the division of creative work between the different actors involved in an activity, which in the case of Becker, most often results in the creation of a work. The work does not really exist in the case of LARP, but the concept of world (a game world in this case) is not less valid, just as the importance to be given to the material (costumes, fake weapons) or immaterial culture (scenarios, backgrounds of the characters) produced in this world" (Kapp, 2013: 28).

16   Be it the practice of LARP, chess, board games, collectible card games, every game world implies a materiality that participates in its uniqueness. By bringing together and comparing different leisure practices – from Dungeons and Dragons players to mushroomers - Gary Alan Fine (1989) thus notes that "All leisure worlds are material worlds". They imply a set of concrete objects which are as much supports for the practice as "symbols of identity" for its users. In the field of role playing games, owning a collection of dice, of various forms, is both a tool for the game and a marker of belonging to the role playing culture. Less commercial in appearance, mushrooming nonetheless possesses a number of specific objects: books, buckets, knives, postcards, conferences, stickers: "Who but a mushroomer would put a bumper sticker, "I Brake For Fungi," on his car? Who but a mushroomer would wear a T-shirt with a pair of large morels on her chest?" (Fine, 1989). Even in videogame practices, commonly called "virtual" to characterize their apparent immateriality, Manuel Boutet recalls, regarding the online game Mountyhall, the importance of material culture: T-Shirts, "Paper Trolls", figurines, etc. All of these are elements fully constitutive of these game worlds: "This is the case of a t-shirt, poster, stuffed toy or any other object in the colors of the game. They point out an absence: the material objects remind the player that he or she is in reality and not in the game. With time, they become a reminder, a tribute, and nostalgia. They are then like ghosts of the lost virtual objects, that linger in reality. They point out a presence: as soon as his or her eyes fall on the objects, the player feels his or her commitment to the game. They feel like they are there and want to be there. It materializes of the desire to return, but can also make one able to wait. The object embodies a stream of belonging and desire." (Boutet, 2012 : 199)

17   To speak of a "game world" therefore proves to be a way, in the literature, to remove the play activity from a groundless vision, ethereal or heroic stories made of geniuses, of inventors and precursors for the benefit of an empirical analysis of the diversity of actors, of usage contexts, of objects and networks of relationships that it mobilizes. Whether practiced in a professional or amateur way, daily or occasionally, the game involves a

social world and a material culture which, like art for Becker, organizes it and makes its practice possible. Regarding illegal poker practices, Dylan Feyrs mobilizes the concept of "game worlds" to explicitly challenge the "individualistic, even romantic, visions of illegal games and the world of players" in favor of a concrete and ethnographic analysis of "interaction phenomena through which players engage in illicit practices" (Feyrs, 2002: 235). Inscribing her work in Becker's issue, with the central question of "how does one become a player?" her study aims "to emphasize the collective nature of the interactions" (*ibidem*: 235). The world of illegal poker is first of all, according to the researcher, a set of practices, of usage contexts and concrete relations between different actors. In her point of view, there isn't a world but "game worlds referring to different levels of reality: the game corresponds to the cultural and social practices, it is also a way of life and a source of income" (*ibid.*: 234).

Magic circle and (relative) autonomy

18 Behind this interest given to the interactions between actors, to relationship networks, to the division of labor, to material culture and to the contexts of the practice, often appears the idea of the autonomy of the game worlds. Like Huizinga's "magic circle", rules, conventions, individual practices, discussions, objects, specific rites circumscribe the space of practices and distinguish "those who are in it" from others: "The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the court of justice, are all in form and in function play-grounds, that is to say, forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules apply. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart." (Huizinga, 1980 [1949]: 10)

19 Canonical metaphor of studies on games, the concept of magic circle, paradoxically little-developed by the Dutch historian, assumes a separation of the play activity from other forms of social activities which is also reflected by the use of the term "game world". In his ethnology of chess players, Thierry Wendling evokes the "chess world" to emphasize the unique character of the practices of (competition) players as well as the common repertoire, material and symbolic, specific to those involved: "The knowledge, techniques, beliefs, stories and anecdotes, aesthetic feelings, forms of sociability, customs, etc., shared by competition players [who] form a coherent whole, in other words a particular way of thinking about the world, of defining relations between humans, and jointly to act and interact in this world" (Wendling, 2002: 49).

20 However, around this question of uniqueness, of specificity and autonomy appears a significant divergence in the use of the concept of "game world", with on the one hand analyses closer to Pierre Bourdieu's, on the other hand works more faithful to the interactionist conception. Traditionally, one distinguishes in cultural sociology these two models, that of field theory and that of art worlds (Pasquier, 2005). The opposition is largely derived from Pierre Bourdieu: "Without entering into a methodical expose of everything that separates this vision of the 'world of art' from the theory of the literary or artistic field, I will merely remark that the latter is not reducible to a population, that is to say, to the sum of individual agents linked by simple relations of interaction or, more precisely, of cooperation: what is lacking, among other things, from this purely descriptive and enumerative evocation are the objective relations which are constitutive of the structure of the field and orient the struggles aiming to conserve or transform it" (Bourdieu, 1996: 205). One can only regret that Pierre Bourdieu did not take here (and

nowhere else to our knowledge) the time to explain in detail his disagreement. Nevertheless, let us retain that in field theory 1) greater importance is given to power and domination struggles between individuals in the same field 2) less interest is paid to the material culture, 3) sharper attention is paid to inter-field relationships, in other words to the balance of power that one field exerts on another field, such as the journalistic field on the scientific field (Bourdieu, 1998).

21   Around the concept of game worlds, this same tension is emerging. Thus, in the analysis developed by Samuel Coavoux (2011) on *World of Warcraft* (WoW) practices, special attention is paid to intra-field domination logics. Indeed, the authoremphasizes those power struggles, within the game world, that impose and legitimize certain practices over others. "The game world forms a relatively autonomous social space which is the place of symbolic struggles between actors, aiming to define the legitimate practice. In this sense, an internal cultural hierarchy has formed, similar in many ways to the general cultural order, which opposes legitimate versus popular culture"(*ibidem*: 166). The autonomy of the game world appears to Coavoux as "relative", contrary to what the metaphor of the "magic circle" by Huizinga suggests: "The game space is not inherently autonomous, but is so only relatively and above all only becomes so through a long process of empowerment, never completed (...) The game world is not by definition a space closed to external social forces, but a space constructed as such" (*ibid.*: 167).

22   In a different perspective but one just as attentive to the social dynamics external to the game world, Laurent Trémel (2002) highlights the way in which the logics of social (and educational) status explain and structure the investment of players in the roleplaying practice, since these players can acquire "greatness" there, in a logic of social compensation: "an individual can flourish in several worlds, or even claim to belong to several worlds, especially when he or she is placed in a problematic situation, where reference to greatness established in one world may overcome a state of "smallness" in another (an employee delegitimized at work can highlight the fact that he is a good father to his family)" (Trémel, 2002: 159). Similarly, in his study on "the private worlds of Poker", *i.e.* practices at home, Aymeric Brody mobilizes the expression to emphasize the local character of the practices studied but whose interactions and commitments are sufficiently continual to produce "social micro-worlds": sometimes enclosed in a "relatively small 'among-peers', centered around elective affinities", the game circle often "intersects, joins, becomes allied with, and eventually merges with other social worlds or micro-worlds." (Brody, 2011: 54). Here and elsewhere one sees appear a noticeable difference in the use of the concept of game world: on the one hand researchers sensitive to that which distinguishes, singles out and autonomizes play from other social practices, on the other hand, work more attentive to the way game worlds are heteronymous, crossed and structured by external variables, at the crossroads of other social worlds.

Player careers

23   Finally, one can identify a final form of use of the expression "game world" in the scientific literature that, in line with Becker's analysis, examines the modes of participation and commitment of the actors, in other words the concept of "career" understood as the different stages, roles, skills, tastes, appreciation and interpretation patterns that imply and develop belonging to a group and a cultural practice. How does

one become a player? And what kind of player? Initially mobilized in the field of work (Tréanton, 1960), the concept of career quickly involved other domains (*cf.* Darmon, 2008). For Becker particularly, becoming a Marijuana smoker is a matter of career (Becker, 1973): this involves stages and ways of trying on, of interpreting, of "tripping" specific to the reference group, which do not come from a natural state at all but from social learning.

24 Thus, applied to game worlds, the concept of career evokesthe way in which, through his or her participation and interactions, a player gets into different stages and roles related to his or her play practice. Thus, in his analysis of illegal Poker practices, Feyrs highlights the different "definitions of player identities within a group" (Feyrs, 2002: 235) and distinguishes several roles: "schemers", "pigeon-player", "plucked pigeon", "sponsored-pigeon", "cheaters", "racketeers", etc. These roles are not necessarily fixed but may, over the course of the practice, evolve. Rites of passage and guided participation mark the shift from one career to another.

25 In his study on LARP practices, Sébastien Kapp distinguishes two careers: that of the designer and that of the player. Though passage from one to the other is possible and occurs often, these are however two distinct paths within this world: "The creation of a group is not subject to a substantial gaming experience, and puts into perspective the hypothesis of a player's career evolving towards organizer functions. In reality, some LARPers remain players all their lives, others organize but play little or not at all" (Kapp, 2013, 398). We find this same dichotomy between player and designer in the field of role playing games. Although the concept of career is mobilized to describe a player's trajectory, it is used in a less internalist sense - specific to that world - only to emphasize the possible transfers from amateur skills to professional ones: "Some players even create their own game hoping to see it published one day. There is thus here the possibility of a player career where the skills acquired in the game can be reinvested in the social world in order to provide an identity that creates peer recognition" (Trémel, 2002: 52).

26 As part of MMO practices, Samuel Coavoux likewise mobilizes this concept but is less interested in the diversity of roles than in the stages in the development of specific careers, the so-called competitive careers, analyzed by the author, as "the most legitimate" ones: introduction to the game, learning the technique, acceptance of the rules, integration into a group of competitive players. Thus allowing one to emerge from a practical approach of "motivations", dominant in the field of Game Studies (Bartle, 2004; Yee, 2007), the concept of career allows one to understand the process of stopping, of exits and transformations but also "to observe the genesis of the various practices of the game" (Coavoux, 2010: 45). Here, as elsewhere, the concept of career does not refer to fixed paths that players gradually follow, but emphasizes, longitudinally, the course of life and influence of the social world on the game world: "Though the concept of career has the great advantage of emphasizing the progression, the levels of commitment in competitive practice, it should not give the illusion of stages that are strictly compartmentalized and whose logic are radically different" (*ibidem*: 48).

Presentation of the issue

27 Thus mobilized in the literature on games, the concept of "game world" pays special attention to the interactions between different actors, the diversity of commitments, to careers, to the division of labor, to material and symbolic resources, past or present, to

the contexts of practice allowing individuals to coordinate themselves and collectively consider that "this is a game." Whether one thinks of the world of chess, of video games, of board games or of role playing games, all the properties analyzed by Becker regarding art are present: cooperation between designers, users and "reinforcements personnel" (e.g. the press), but also rules, standards, material and symbolic resources that allow the actors to coordinate themselves around an activity called "game" and recognized as such.

28   Without their references explicitly referring to Becker or to interactionist sociology, the articles in this issue address the question of game worlds and examine the transformations of previous worlds by digital devices: how, for example, do ancient and new practices connect, exclude each other or hybridize through the global network? In this perspective, Enrico Gandolfi studies the way in which, through the Vassal software - free software for game creation - "old" play practices are adapted. Indeed, be it figurine games like *Warhammer 40,000*, or *Space Hulk*, board games such as *Descent* or card games like *Netrunner* or *Magic*, many play practices and products are brought to a digital version in a logic that is most often "amateur", outside publisher agreements.

29   This translation of a previous practice to the Internet, he notes, is characterized by a concern for fidelity to the original work. It is not only a matter of transcribing the rules, the material, the device (game), but of also reproducing the original experience as closely as possible: "the main intent is to reproduce the original experience." On the forums, players discuss the respect of the initial rules (their possible evolution over the development of the original series) and, collectively, define the ideal-typical experience of the practice. The challenge therefore is to maintain old conventions, to discuss them but also to negotiate the device in terms of the semiotic and technical constraints and limits imposed by the software. Far from being a place of radical novelty, the Internet appears therefore as a conservation space of previous game worlds. The players define themselves in turn as former players of card games or figurine games, now adults, seeking to resurrect, through the global network, lost play experiences.

30   Though, in Gandolfi's article, the play practices studied allow to observe the reactivation, via the network, of old player careers, Aymeric Brody's ethnographic investigation of "amateur" poker players more specifically highlights logics of simultaneous articulation between online play practices and "live" practices. The tournaments he studies are a testament to "the participation of players in a social world which exceeds the narrow boundaries of the real and virtual worlds." By analyzing the multiplicity of past or present game places and practices, Brody questions the permeability of the borders of the "poker world" and calls into question the traditional separation of the practice by location: at a club, online, at a casino, at home. Amateur players, he points out, "do not just bet money online and exchange their experiences of the game on community forums, they seize the opportunity to meet to play and learn to play together". The differences in forms of poker are therefore based less, according to the author, on the places of practice than on the relationship that the players maintain with the so called "professional" world. By combining the concept of "community of practice" with that of world, Aymeric Brody highlights the existence of a "complete community" within the poker world, that of amateurs, "with its own repertoire of practices and its own spaces for learning the game", sharing similar game experiences and paths and a "certain desire to learn."

31   This interest in the intensity of the commitment of players as well as the relationship between amateur practices and professional practices is at the heart of the article by David Gerber. By focusing on the "play careers" of video game players, the researcher

analyzes the dynamics of entry into, quitting, starting again or reduction of videogame practices. Based on an analysis of 28 biographical interviews, the article highlights the social, family, and educational tensions that structure modes of commitment and the development (or not) of a video game player career within a world. Close in this sense to the bourdieusian perspective, he shows how variables external to the game world configure the practice. More than just a logic of adjustment between social, family, and professional life and the career of players, the video game is set against its social acceptability, which is both a constraint the players must face but also work they must do to justify, or even trivialize, their practice. The ability to legitimize their career appears as fundamentally linked to the social status of the player and his or her environment. Players, the author points out, "are not equal in terms of the conditions of legitimacy and means of legitimization. The life stage in which they find themselves seems important in this respect: it consists of social roles (child, adult, parent, etc.) giving rise to specific expectations in terms of management of leisure time and choice of activities, as well as resources in terms of status, autonomy, economic resources etc."

32 By focusing less on practices than on content, the question of commitment, of its modalities and its vague relationship between the world of amateurs and professionals is likewise questioned by Fanny Barnabé in her analysis of four modes of "détournement on the Internet": the speedrun, modding, fanfictions and machinimas. Based on the study of "fan" productions, she notices the lack of clear distinction between designers and users. At the heart of these practices, she shows, the concept of participation structures the commitments and trajectories of players: "the détournement of a video game, like the music score, has little meaning outside its perception by an audience". Thus, she studies how, in these practices related to the game, develop conventions, modes, procedures, standards, specific to these worlds and which imply through the reading or comments, an active interpretation. She thus highlights writing and creation rules, learning devices that drive the emergence of a new figure: that of the "pro-am". Indeed, for the author, they "do not all seem to try to replace the true professionals: a gap remains, whose explanation is not to be found in a difference of skills but instead in "another form of commitment in the social practices" (Flichy, 2010: 12)."

33 Be it the speedrunners described by Fanny Barnabé, Aymeric Brody's amateur poker players, or even users of the Vassal software by Gandolfi, the game worlds described in this issue often appear to be caught in tension between the local nature of practices (hundreds of users around a singular activity) and the global dimension of the technical systems on which they take place. As an important actor in economic and cultural globalization, the Internet network potentially connects a large number of actors, here players. Thus, for the most enthusiastic observers as of the early 2000s, the network announced the end of borders and the emergence of a global village. Today, not only has the prophecy not (yet) been fulfilled but the opposite seems particularly true in case of game worlds. Indeed, studying the "private servers" of World of Warcraft, which bring together players in small numbers, and in a more or less illegal way and parallel to the official servers of the publisher, Vinciane Zabban highlights the declared concern by users to "stand apart" within these global devices: "Playing with the scale of the world", she notes, "promotes the formation of 'among-peers' which develops in local technical spaces, but remaining rooted in the global infrastructure of the game." Thus, by analyzing this complex articulation between the local nature of play practices and their belonging to a technical form of globalization, the sociologist highlights not only the

necessary cooperation between players (and moderators) to build a "world" but also the importance of the scales of interactions in the production of a play experience: "The small world effect," she underlines, "seems particularly effective because it leaves room for the development of an experience that - although situated within the experience shared by several million players of World of Warcraft - can develop as specific for a group."

34 As diverse as they are in their objects of study and their theoretical perspectives, the articles in this issue share the willingness to question the issue of play, less so by being interested in a definition of what play is in its essence, than in the empirical understanding of what it means to play, what play makes one do and say. Far from considering online play practices as pure technological artifacts, each contribution emphasizes the ways in which game worlds are built on the Internet, by updating old practices, careers or conventions, and by requiring regular interactions, cooperative or conflictual, between different actors. By focusing on "small" objects and "small" practices on the Internet, on the sidelines of the productions that are the most economically significant and the most studied in the scientific field, it is a matter of, to paraphrase Becker, focusing the analysis "on social organization, not on aesthetics." (2008: XXV). To talk of the game world is a way of bringing the issue of play to its social conditions of existence, considering both those who produce them and those who practice them. This issue may reclaim, applying it to games, Becker's remark: "Remember that the object of our analysis is not the art work as isolated object or event, but the entire process through which it is made and remade whenever someone experiences or appreciates it. That gives a special importance to the audience's contribution. From this viewpoint, any work has only those characteristics its observers notice and respond to on any particular occasion. Whatever its physical properties, they do not exist in the experience of people who do not know or care about them. They appear and disappear, depending on what the audience knows how to perceive (Bourdieu, 1968)" (Becker, 2008: 24).

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NOTES

1. One can mention, in France, the works of Dominique Pasquier who puts Becker's model to the test in his study of the series *Hélène et les garçons* [Hélène and the boys] and more specifically by analyzing the "fans" (mainly young girls) of the series. A whole set of networks is constituted around the series *Hélène et les garçons* that cooperate, exchange, contribute to making the series exist both in certain family units and at the level of groups of "peers", networks of friends, other groups of fans, in the press, concerts, etc. In these different collectives, the cultural practice is (re)negotiated, discussed, developed. These "audiences" contribute to make the work live or to make it die when their numbers decrease, thus anouncing the decline of this art world. Dominique Pasquier, *La culture des sentiments, l'expérience télévisuelle des adolescents* [The culture of feelings, the televisual experience of adolescents], Paris : *La Maison des sciences de l'homme*, 1999.
2. The term "Gaming" or "Game World" is also used in the English-speaking literature. We have limited our work here to the literature available in French.

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