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# Play Studies. Experience and socialization in popular culture.

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## Abstract

"Game Studies" is a label for a growing field of research (Rueff 2008; Simon, Zabban 2012), studying mostly "Video Games", and centered around two genera, MMOGs (Massive Multi-player Online Games) and FPSs (First Person Shooters) (Coavoux, Zabban, Boutet 2014). As a result, games are mostly seen as formal structures of "rules" and players as driven by their "motivations". In order to break the abstract distinction between the object of the game and the subject of the player, we propose a pragmatist approach to "play studies". On the basis of an inquiry conducted in the past three years during the ANR project LUDESPACE, we show the gains of a comprehensive and processual view of the experience of play.

This approach allows to describe ways of playing video games which had never or rarely be accounted for in the literature, and these descriptions are also different from the common descriptions produced by the players – one interesting feature of games is to be pleasure-oriented distractions that are built as goal-oriented actions and accounted for as the latest.

The analytical gains of our descriptions can be demonstrated at two levels.

Firstly, in the study of situations of play, we are able to demonstrate the role of the environment of play, and the key importance of rhythms - eg gestures and temporality. Those are the elements of a study of experience as property of activity, as subjectivity-in-activity or, more precisely, personal commitment to activity.

Secondly, studying experience of play as a situated accomplishment allows then to question the socialisation not only with a finer grain but also with a broader scope. Rather than following the past origin of present individual traits, we search for the elusive "active lines of interest", the words are from J. Dewey, in order to explicit theirs mechanisms of activation. We distinguish between two different ways by which the experience of play can contribute to the identity – "careers" and "occasions".

"Careers" are a description of the activity of play when it becomes a practice, a path of decision and reflexivity, when the player experiment games and search for moments and adequate partners to do so. The player develop tastes and abilities, this activity of play is become a part of his identity and, typically, he then represents himself as "a gamer" – or as somebody who has been "a gamer" in the past.

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"Occasions" can exist for gamers or non-gamers. The play activity does not lead to a "career" – "game at hospital" is a typical figure of it, the conditions and justifications of play being so specific that the person never reproduce them again. It's not integrated to the identity. Nonetheless, the memory can resurface years later, the person rediscovering there a potential source of pleasure and affinity, a part of herself outside her integrated identity – what G. Simondon proposed to call "pre-individual", what we could call in the bourdieusian vocabulary a "disposition" outside the "habitus".

**Keywords:** experience situation play socialization career taste