The Game Culture Reader

Edited by

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This volume is dedicated to all of the people who have presented their work on game culture at the Southwest/Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association conference. What began under the subject area "Computer Culture" has now grown into its own subject area, "Game Studies, Culture, Play, and Practice"; we honor the community of academic scholars and industry professionals whose intellectual curiosity, labor, and generosity inform, challenge, question, define, and celebrate the serious work of studying games.

But the man skilled in all ways of contending,
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
like a musician, like a harper, when
with quiet hand upon his instrument
he draws between his thumb and forefinger
a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
a swallow's note.
In the hushed hall it smote the suitors and all their faces changed.

—Homer, *The Odyssey*

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CHAPTER TWO

BOURDIEU'S FORMS OF CAPITAL AND VIDEO GAME PRODUCTION

RANDY NICHOLS

The struggle to define the impact and meaning of video games has been one of the central challenges in the field of game studies. Yet a survey of the field would suggest that both areas are defined primarily in terms of ludology and narratology. The question of agency has centered on cultural questions and has primarily been given to some combination of players and software developers. However, even those groups have been defined in too limited a manner: 'players' gets restricted to the hardcore gamer who fits the stereotypes of the media, and 'game designers' reduced to up-and-coming information workers making their way up the ranks of a for-profit industry. Just as both groups are really only subsets of what's happening in relation to games, the struggle over the meaning of video games is a wider one. One doesn't have to look far to see that not only is the meaning and impact of video games a contested terrain but also the stakeholders extend well beyond hardcore gamers, on the one hand, and software designers on the other. Consider two examples: a factory worker in a southeast China console manufacturing plant and a film critic with limited gaming experience defending one medium's merit over another. Both have a substantial stake in what video games mean for society, but neither is easily accounted for by a majority of game theory and research. Worse, they are only two examples. Game marketers, politicians attempting to make sense of the game industry, and parents are just a few of the others shaping the meaning of video games. This chapter examines this idea—that video games represent a battle over meaning, bounded by economic consideration and the notions of play.

With more than a decade of study under its belt, the study of video games has both yielded a number of useful discoveries even as it has coalesced into a fairly narrow schema: there are audiences to be engaged and impacted, and there are software developers who attempt to craft stories and provoke reactions. Much of the field of game studies has

revolved around two poles: meaning through play and experimentation with rules and transgression (ludology) or meaning through the construction of and interaction with story (narratology). The former draws on Johan Huizinga's "magic circle," in which players of (video) games are able to enter a sort of liminal space where learning and experimentation are made safe by the evocation of play, while the latter emphasizes narrative structures and the ways in which creators—both game designers and audiences—engage with video games as textual objects (Huizinga 1949; Jenkins 2006; Aarseth 1997).

These explorations have made great strides in demystifying video games as toys played by violent, anti-social, adolescent boys, showing just how complex video games can be and how varied, engaged, and complex game audiences are. But these poles have, at best, paid lip service to one of the essential truths about video games: that they emerge, almost exclusively, as industrial commodities. What recognition is given comes typically in the form of sales figures waved like a banner at the beginning of a study to demonstrate via dollar signs just how worthwhile of study video games are; by the start of the next paragraph, the recognition gets obscured, abandoned, and forgotten. Doing so, however, ignores the impact industrial creation and commodification has on video games and, therefore, on game meaning. This system of production has tended to glorify the "creative work" of software developers even as it renders entire portions of the production process and the commodities represented invisible. The over-emphasis on creative labor implicitly suggests that the workers in other areas—such as the production of consoles or game sales—are irrelevant or unworthy of consideration in the quest for video game meaning. Expanding the understanding of the industrial nature of video games is vital for the field's advancement. As Eileen Meehan noted about the film industry, "Profit, not culture, drives show business: no business means no show" (Meehan 1991). Video games, which bear considerable ties to Hollywood show business, are no different (Nichols 2008; Brookey 2010).

While it is not always the case, the vast majority of video games we as researchers study and audiences play emerge from such an industrial context. Here, every video game becomes not just a site of play, but also a site of struggle over power and profit, one hidden under the guise of play. After all, most of us do not create our own video games, and so how video games allow us to play and to transgress are always in relation to rules of someone else's devising. While this shouldn't suggest that players cannot transgress the rules a game sets before them, to do so requires players to navigate a wide range of challenges including technical ability, familiarity

with the genre, and even the time required to understand a game and to transgress its rules. Emerging from a capitalist industrial norm thus renders the magic circle into a highly contested space that is all too often just a banal corral.

Viewing video games as industrially created cultural commodities opens up a host of questions that change the implications of play and of interaction. As products of an industry focused on profits, video game production is forced to follow particular sets of logics in hopes of catching audience attention and dollars. The rules and narratives coded into video games typically seek to reinforce these tendencies and attitudes by limiting the experiences offered in video games to ones that are seen by creators as socially acceptable and economically viable. The problem we are presented with, then, is one in which we must consider value even as we consider cultural impact and meaning. To do this, an understanding of the economics—and more importantly, the political economics—of video games is necessary.

The Economic and Political Economic Examination of Video Games

The logical starting point for an economic understanding of video games has been to understand the industry that creates them. The structure of the video game industry was first detailed by Dmitri Williams and then elaborated on by Aphra Kerr. The industrial production of games can be divided into software developers, software publishers, hardware manufacturers, and retailers (Williams 2003, 2002; Kerr 2006; Kerr and Flynn 2002). Williams' work demonstrates that video games function as an economically distinct industry that has actively cultivated itself in response to a number of social factors and cultural criticisms, while Kerr reveals the cultural impact and emphasizes the range of cultural work that is needed to create them as commodities. Later work shows that the video games industry emerged by combining elements of Hollywood film production, toy production and distribution, and computer hardware manufacture into something unique (Nichols 2008). The industry also exhibits a particular set of labor practices that rely on the work of consumers. Most notable of these is the concept of "modding" or the creation of game expansions by fans, which tends to occur particularly in the action and role-playing game (RPG) areas. Initial studies of this suggest the way in which fandom takes on the peculiar function of labor in the industry (Postigo 2003). Game modding allows games themselves to become more profitable, with players contributing valuable content for

free. Moreover, modding represents an extension of a game's narrative, allowing players to impact game meaning via transmedia practices (Jenkins 2006). Along similar lines, Klang examines the struggles of ownership between fans and the industry. Drawing on ideas raised by Edward Castronova, Klang examines the ways in which "avatars"—or the representations of players in games, particularly role-playing games (RPGs) and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs)—become contested zones of intellectual property (Klang 2004).

Both the idea of modding and of avatars represent struggle for game meaning with economic considerations, driven by the industrial structure of video game production. It also suggests that there is an important linkage to be made about game meaning from both the macro- and micro-economic levels. An understanding of the technological implications and of the industrial structure that produces them has been the key contribution of economics to the field of game studies. In contrast, political economy, which seeks to understand power relations, has emphasized the impact of technology and raised vital questions about labor practices, even those of game players. Examining video games as technologies allows us to recognize what Vincent Mosco notes is an ability to "[open] up social potentialities," which in turn allows for both positive and negative changes (Mosco 1988). This is useful for video games because their forms and narratives represent codified, embodied power relationships in society. But cultural commodities "conceal the secret of their production, and present themselves as magical objects, endowed [. . .] with the power to change lives," making the issue of the power relations they embody both more difficult to get at and more important to understand (Murdock 2011). Perhaps most importantly, these studies emphasize the range of technologies the industry produces, each emerging from a capitalist framework that can be resisted and co-opted but never ignored, each a commodity with implications for meaning and power.

Perhaps the clearest example of this research strand can be found in the work of Nick Dyer-Witheford, who has offered a consistently critical view of the industry's labor practices. He has demonstrated the industry's push to take advantage of transnational labor and its highly gendered labor practices (Dyer-Witheford 1999). His later work begins to suggest a class structure within the industry that tends to fall along income and educational lines in addition to gender and nationality (Dyer-Witheford 2002). Similarly, Toby Miller has argued that the video games industry is a compelling example of the new international division of cultural labor (Miller 2008). Such a division of labor suggests, in fact, that games and

their meanings are ideal tools of Western hegemony, a theme taken up by Dyer-Witheford elsewhere (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009). Much of this system of production, in fact, represents a globalized system of inequality in which not only is the labor distribution problematic but also one in which the products themselves are consumed only by a small minority. Such a system leaves a sizable portion of the world scrambling to gain access to video games (Aslinger 2010).

Both economic and political economic examinations have focused on macro- level questions, particularly industrial structure and practice. Where both have failed is in linking these macro questions with more micro-economic concerns, including how audiences use and relate to video games and how industrial practices impact the question of meaning. Video games are significant in part because they represent a cultural commodity wrestling with what and who define their cultural legitimacy. Like other forms of cultural production, economists' descriptions have focused on a fixed system of production that the range of cultural capital involved. In so doing, only limited attention has been paid to play-testing, audience repurposing, and formal and informal forms of game education. The application of Bourdieu's forms of capital, however, shows a much more complex cultural process. Indeed, the production of video games displays considerable nuance, involving a wide number of actors with varying levels of access to both the commodities being produced and the capital needed to produce them. Perhaps more clearly than in art, video games draw on a wide network of cultural production for creation, reproduction of cultural capital, and legitimacy of the forms taken.

Bourdieu and the Production of Culture

It should be noted from the outset, that most of Bourdieu's work has focused on art and literature rather than on mass media (Hesmondhalgh 2006). Similarly—and understandably—his work has tended to emphasize the French case, and as such, needs to be rethought in terms of other cultures or, as with video games, globalized combinations (Murdock 1989). It is also worth noting that Bourdieu—and many applications of his ideas by others—have tended to emphasize the relation of cultural production directly to the perceived dominant groups in society. For example, much of Bourdieu's work relies on the active production of cultural value through the educational system. Such a system, he believes, directly transmits a system of belief that emphasizes legitimate culture that favors the cultural elite (e.g., high art and classical music) as aspirational. But cultural production occurs in all groups in society, often in similar

ways (but not always) and usually to the benefit of those dominant groups. Thus, Bourdieu's theorization of ideologies—as bodies of thought and of symbolic power (which works in a less coherent manner than in other bodies of theory)—complicates typical notions of cultural production (Garnham and Williams 1980).

One example exploring the ways in which ideology is made less coherent can be found in the study of gamer practice. In her work on the function of cheating in video games, Mia Consalvo introduced the idea of gaming capital (Consalvo 2007). Recognizing that there are a variety of game audiences that function as their own subcultures, gaming capital was designed to explain their fluency in the various forms of knowledge and practice needed to successfully navigate and communicate within those communities. While Bourdieu's work tends to emphasize cultural elites, Consalvo uses his theories to demonstrate the ways subcultures interact with and reposition the ideologies. Her formulation of gaming capital also attempts to address the ways members of a particular subculture might be influenced by outside forces like marketers, critics, and technologies. However, by focusing on the question of practices related specifically to game play, gaming capital loses some of the nuance made possible with the full range of Bourdieu's theories.

In 'The Forms of Capital," Pierre Bourdieu offers an expansion of the ways in which we think about value in relation to culture. Mainstream economic theory, he argued, is content to focus on forms of valuation that represent relatively straightforward exchanges (Bourdieu 1986). Doing so, however, not only misses a considerable range of more subtle economic exchange but also reinforces a simplified process of creation. Thus, cultural production serves to both legitimize and perpetuate particular relationships with and valuations of a variety of capital forms while hiding or ignoring others. While Bourdieu's focus was on the production of art and education, the questions his work raises are equally revealing when applied to the relatively new field of video game studies.

Bourdieu frames cultural production in terms of a particular "field," which is made up of the range of actors and their relationships towards the production and reproduction of cultural meaning. Negotiation over meaning becomes a process among groups, institutions, and individuals based on their relative amounts of a variety of capital: economic, symbolic, and cultural. These contestations produce both the value and the meaning of a particular cultural good. Economic capital is a relatively straightforward concept: anything that may be invested in the production of goods and services. Economic capital's value is created in the process of exchange, through the relationship between individuals or social

structures. The other forms of capital, however, are more complex and emerge from—and may be converted back to—economic capital.

Symbolic and cultural capital develop out of the idea of social capital, expanding the ways in which participants in a given field might express power and status as well as to exchange it for economic prosperity. Like economic capital, social capital's value is produced out of the relationship between social structures. Likewise, it is useful in production, allowing certain actions while disallowing others. Unlike most economic capital though, its value tends to be situational, meaning that while it might help action under some circumstances, it can hinder action under others (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1977). For example, an Ivy League education is useful in many situations but conceivably a hindrance in some situations. Bourdieu eventually unpacks social capital into symbolic capital and cultural capital. Symbolic capital might be thought of reputational capital, which gives its owner power and authority within a particular field of cultural production. Holding a position as a game designer, game tester, games scholar, or even holding a record at a game, are all examples of social capital.

However, cultural capital represents one's ability to navigate a particular field in socially approved ways. In Bourdieu's analysis, cultural capital makes up those symbolic products and understandings that are deemed valuable in a particular social group. This means that different groups in a given field represent different levels of cultural capital and give different values and meanings to particular cultural works. Bourdieu provides examples of cultural capital including knowledge of the context of a painting's creation or knowledge of when to applaud during a classical recital (Bourdieu 2007; Murdock 1989; Throsby 1999). Crucially, cultural capital, like more traditional forms, is unevenly distributed through society and serves, sometimes through indirect means, to reinforce the power of dominant groups in society. Members of the cultural elite are best positioned to recognize and reinforce the value of a particular cultural practice because they have the best access to it. Within the field of video games understanding the norms of a genre or the hidden codes and language of games and gamers are both examples of cultural capital.

The valuation of these cultural goods itself is a complex process. The value of a particular cultural commodity involves considerable ideological misdirection. On one hand, the value of a good is thought to be introduced through the work of the creator; on the other hand, this value must be confirmed (and in some cases, imbued) by some sort of cultural authority such as a publisher or an artistic distributor. In fact, the debate about authentic creation often serves as a distraction from the legitimization

process. For those outside of this loop—those without the necessary cultural capital—value is assumed based on these previous conditions (Bourdieu 1980). Under this system of belief, authors and auteurs are easily conflated, a notion that can be problematic in a field like video games, where the range of participants in creation is considerably more varied than any single creator.

Adding to this complexity is the notion of *habitus*. Perhaps the most debated concept of Bourdieu's theories, *habitus* is seen as a means of both ordering understanding and helping to determine the range of acceptable actions we might take. It attempts to explain the nature of the relationship between individuals and social groups, as well as the variety of choices offered so that neither culture nor individual choice are given too much weight. Rather both society and individual choice are related and influence each other (Swartz 1997). It functions in some ways like ideologies but moves beyond the realm of ideas to actions and processes. Each of us is conditioned to understand the world via conceptual categories and responses taught to us as children that helps us order the world and onto which our education—both formal and less so—are grafted on later in life. *Habitus* serves a sort of cultural starting point, which would seem to be class-determined, that impacts how we react to social situations. One's *habitus* is influenced by the resources available to culture—the time and the money—as well as the competencies to make use of cultural products (Murdock 1989). All other things being equal, a member of the bourgeoisie addresses a cultural product with a different set of categories and practices than a member of the dominant class. Class also determines what access they have to means of building on *habitus*, such as better education, access to cultural events, and so forth (Dyer-Witheford 2002). For example, the MMORPG is likely to draw not just different classes of players, but in the process to reveal different experiences and practices. Similarly, when problematic player behavior emerges, there is a range of ways to deal with it. Depending on one's relation to the product itself—the cultural and symbolic capital one has—what counts as problematic behavior and what counts as its appropriate correction will vary considerably.

According to Bourdieu, then, any *habitus* must be made sense of in relation to a particular field: *habitus* is only invoked within a particular set of social circumstances and only makes sense in relation to particular power positions. In other words, as Swartz notes, fields function as "structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital" (Swatrz 1997). In the example of cheating, Consalvo (2007) describes the relationships one subculture of gamers has

to a variety of structures. Their responses—cheating, modding, and so forth—must be thought of as a negotiation between their position in the field of power and other actors. Thus, the way in which structures are organized influences the way in which an individual draws on *habitus*. Fields may be institutions, such as higher education institutions, or they may be more focused on particular cultural activities and commodities, such as the field of literature.

Based on these concepts, Bourdieu is able to build a complex map of not only cultural relations but also of a sort of hierarchy of fluency within them (see figure 1). Those with the most competency in a particular society's symbolic culture tend to sit in positions of power. Bourdieu calls these individuals the "cultural nobility," and they have the most influence in determining what constitutes "legitimate culture" and how one should best relate to it. Legitimate culture should not be confused with the notion of high culture, though typically high culture tends to form the foundation of what becomes legitimate culture (Bourdieu 2007). To make the hierarchy more complex, Bourdieu also factors in economic capital, making it possible to imagine someone who has high cultural capital but little economic (such as teachers in higher education) among other formations (Bourdieu 1998).

Of course, one potential danger of such a hierarchy is the temptation to assume that occupying a lower position in one portion of the hierarchy may result in a desire to rise to another, higher one. This is particularly true when looking at cultural capital. Care must be taken with the assumption that recognition of one's lack of competency in the dominant culture's symbolic system results in a need to become more fluent in it. There is also, as Bourdieu himself points out when he undertakes his critiques of objectivity and subjectivism, a tendency to subsume the value system being examined into the examination. Here, there is a tendency to take for granted that cultural products should in fact be dominant, and thus, fluencies should be studied in relation to them. Such an idea would take for granted that a lack of knowledge about the context of a painting or its interpretations is, in fact, a deficiency (Bourdieu 1998, 1990).

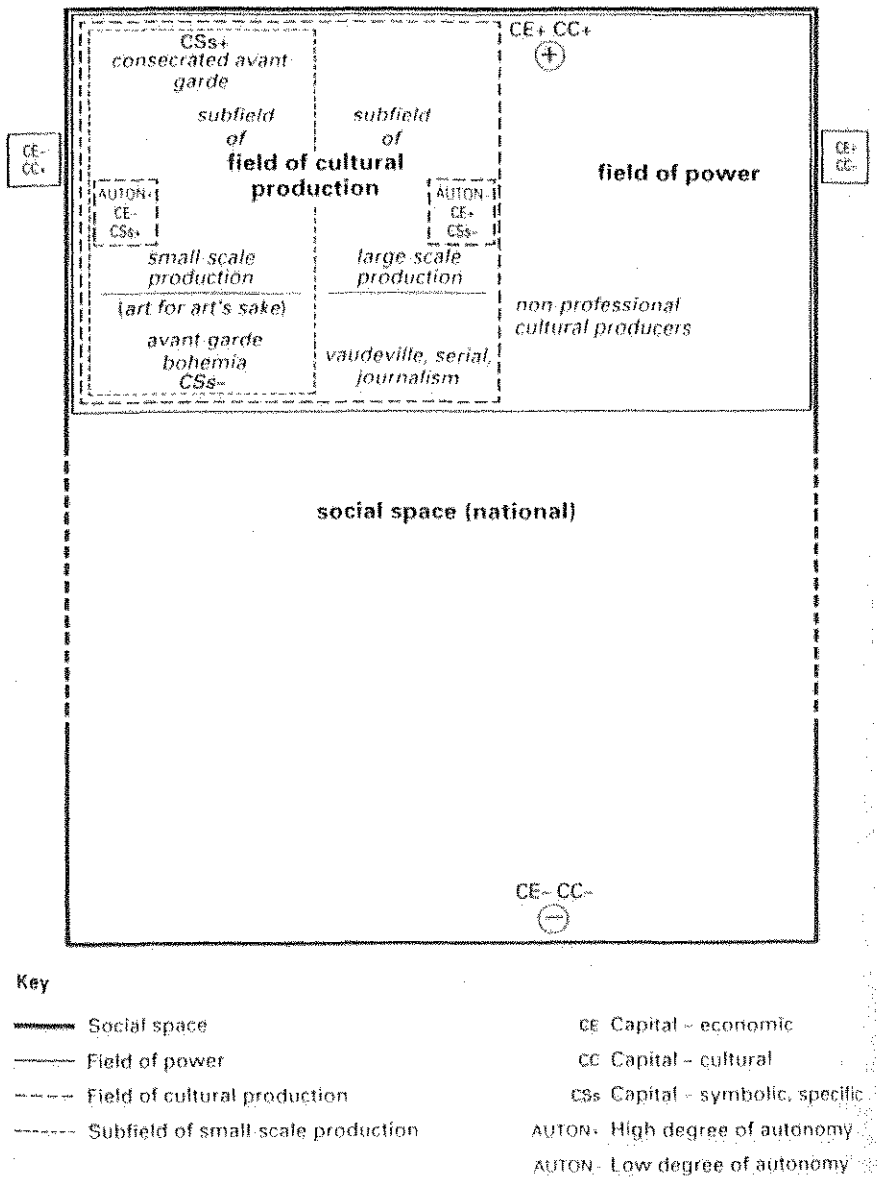


Figure 1: The Field of Cultural Production in the Field of Power and in Social Space Source: (Bourdieu 1996).

As noted earlier, for much of the work done with Bourdieu, the focus has been on comparing the conceptual frameworks of one group with that of the perceived dominant group rather than focusing on the specific practices and frameworks as systems in and of themselves. In contrast, a study of video games largely represents a bourgeois practice that relies on competence in the production and codes of meaning in mass media texts. Here, the cultural goods not only rely on a different *habitus*—and on a relationship to a different type of cultural product than Bourdieu is typically concerned with—but also a different relationship to the creator/auteur question. Similarly, the culturally coveted positions, as seen from within the class most inclined to interacting with video games, are different than those Bourdieu sees in his analysis of the relationships and fluencies to dominant French culture as discussed in *Distinction*. Rather, there are a variety of fields of power that come into play, only some of which directly interact with video game software. Cultural critics from other fields, for example, as well as media pundits and policy makers might all serve as examples of this. Finally, if Bourdieu is to be used to bridge macro-and micro-economic concerns, it must be noted that the idea of a "field of power" could be constructed as international in scope as well as national or industrial. Such a construction is particularly important because it forces questions of production into the discussion of meaning. Video games, like many cultural commodities, involve both globalized consumption and production, and these realities must be factored into the question of game meaning. With these caveats, it becomes possible to expand the range of economic examination of video games.

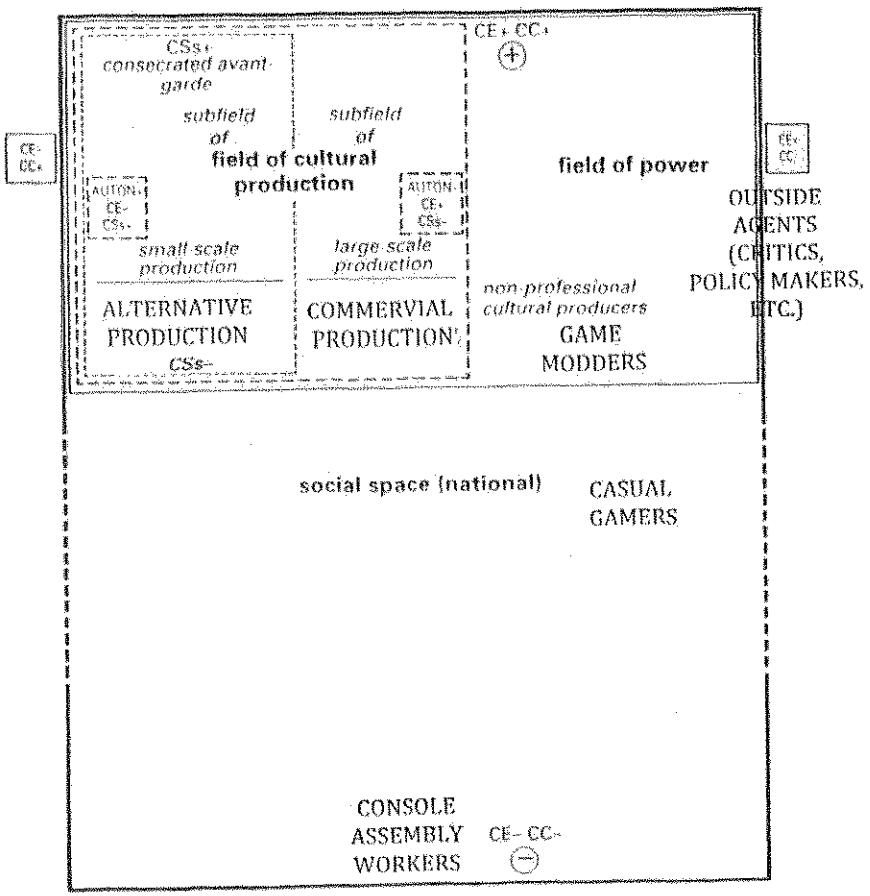
Cultural Capital and Video Games

While it can be useful to imagine the field of game power as one limited to a particular form of cultural capital that is unique to video games—as with gaming capital—to do so misses the degree of interconnection and contestation video games face from outside forces. While there are certainly examples of high and low gaming capital, such measures are most useful when discussing a particular genre or subculture. For the larger field of video game meaning, what counts as gaming capital will differ across the range of groups and subcultures participating. Instead, game meaning must be seen as a broader field of power, in order to acknowledge that video games do not exist in a vacuum. Their impact extends beyond gamers to a range of individuals and institutions. Some of those groups want to be actively involved and increase their gaming capital, but some do not. Much of the current study of games has

foregrounded questions around those with a perceived universally high gaming capital to the near exclusion of those with less. This has resulted in the study of particular groups of players and producers while delegitimizing others, even when that meant ignoring groups directly involved with the production of video game commodities. For this reason, it is worth starting with this application of Bourdieu's theories with an internationalized field of power, rather than the particular national focus seen in Bourdieu's formulation or a subcultural one as seen in Consalvo's work.

Using Bourdieu's categories, CE+ or CE- for high or low levels of economic capita, CS+ or CS- for levels of social capital, and CC+ and CC- for cultural capital, we can begin to map the field of video game power. Figure 2 attempts to reconfigure Bourdieu's map, seen earlier, into an international field that takes into account the range of actors involved in questions of video game meaning. Both figures rely on seeing questions of cultural, social, and economic capital as representing continua. As such, the positions in which particular actors are placed may be seen as both relative and debatable. For example, we can imagine a range of participants in the field of video game power involved in the creation of video game commodities. Game programmers, for example, would likely be CE+ CC+ CS+, but play testers would likely have lower levels, though not as low as assembly line workers making consoles. Electronic Arts would have high levels of all of those but might be tough to place in relation to something like MIT's Gambit Game Lab. Critics from outside the field of video games—regulators, watchdog groups, and so forth—would sit in the upper right, with low levels of symbolic capital but high levels of both economic and cultural capital. A casual game player might sit somewhere very near the middle of the chart. Most importantly, the view from one position would influence the perception of symbolic and cultural capital of another position. To a hard core gamer, the casual gamer might appear a heathen. To the quality assurance tester hoping to make it to a better position in the industry, the Chinese factory worker might not seem to have a job worth considering. To a dedicated AAA game manufacturer, an artist's intervention using games might appear pointless. Still, each operates under a system of game meaning deserving of exploration and consideration.

Seen this way, there are a number of crucial points worth examining. First, this map forces us to consider all actions about game meaning as bounded by economic considerations. While most game production is designed to produce for-profit commodities, this is not true of all game



Key

Social space
Field of power
Field of cultural production
Subfield of small scale production

CE Capital – economic
CC Capital – cultural
CSs Capital – symbolic, specific
AUTON. High degree of autonomy
AUTON Low degree of autonomy

Figure 2: The Field of Video Game Cultural Production in the International Field of Power and Space.

commodities. But even those commodities that explicitly avoid commercial valuation function within the dominant economic model of video game production. Moreover, any practice that falls into the field of power, whether industrial, subcultural, or resistant, represents an opportunity for commodification and monetization. While subcultures may have an affinity for particular game types and practices—even acts of resistance to the dominant industrial structure—the nature of economic capital and valuation is such that it always seeks out new ways to profit and exploit relationships to a commodity. This is not meant to devalue the question of practice, but forces the acknowledgement that those practices do not happen in a vacuum and can be made to serve multiple sets of needs.

A second implication of cultural capital within video games is that it helps to bridge the macro-level focus of those studying the industry with the more cultural focus common in both narratology and ludology strands of study without dismissing the importance of either. Players may come together and craft their own meanings, and in fact be encouraged to do so by the industry or other groups. Certain forms of modding and of cheating are examples of this. Creating new content via mods or taking advantage of sanctioned forms of cheating such as Easter Eggs and communicating with other players about them would be seen as expressing, and potentially generating, new cultural and social capital by creating or extending the cultures and subcultures around a particular game. At the same time, the emergence or extension of these capital forms provides an opportunity for the industry to refine its own processes in order to profit from a new or more refined audience. After all, mods suggest to the industry how players would like game content to work. For this reason, many games or the institutions producing them may sanction such behaviors. In such cases, the magic circle goes unbroken; the fan experience is validated. Both become opportunities for exploitation and appropriation by industrial interests. On the other hand there are moments in which player intervention into a particular game commodity may be resisted or seen as a violation. In such moments, there is a clash about the meaning of video games. It occurs between actors, and offers the potential to disrupt the magic circle or to make its boundaries seem both too visible and too binding.

Similarly, it helps to explain differences in audiences that the industry knows exist but that theorists have struggled to navigate. Perhaps the best examples of this are players who identify as "gamers" rather than casual game players (or players of casual games). Each represents the extreme of a continuum of player experience, but the difference between the two is a matter of perceived social and cultural capital: the "gamer" has accrued

high levels of experience with a game or games and can parlay this into status within game communities. Similarly, they may use this experience to marginalize new gamers or to demonstrate their gaming superiority in play. In contrast, a truly casual gamer may be much less concerned with status and mastery, even eschewing participation in the larger subculture or looking down on inclusion within it. The gamer seeks to accrue these forms of capital with the unspoken objective of becoming directly implicated in the process of industrial production: an expert player whose voice is heard, a play tester, or even a designer. The casual gamer may not even admit to playing video games, let alone wanting to be a part of the design process. The decision of whether to admit to game play becomes particularly complex when someone with a high level of cultural capital in another field—one in which the player is also interested—comes into play. Because video games are not seen as having anything approaching a universally agreed-upon social value, the field of power they operate intersects and conflicts with other fields of power.

For a field that is contested in the way video games are—where they are seen by many as toys with little or no cultural value, or perhaps worse, as items that have a negative impact on culture—the combination of cultural capital and social capital can also explain the example of a relative outsider having profound influence over the question of game meaning and impact. Consider the earlier example of a movie critic. Even with limited experience with video games, a critic could exhibit considerable impact by virtue of the social capital he has earned critiquing other, different media commodities. Of course, this example isn't truly hypothetical, as this is exactly what transpired with film critic Roger Ebert's public dismissal of the artistic potential of video games (Ebert 2010). Roger Ebert's dismissal of games as art is less important for the questions it raises than for authority he commands. For many within the field of game studies, Ebert's dismissal was easy to sweep aside because of his relative lack of gaming capital. But his dismissal does, in fact matter. Not because video games are or are not art, but because it represents an intervention, unwelcome as it may be, into the question of game meaning. Rather than dismissing his views, individuals and institutions must see them for what they are—a battle over which social capital will be valued in a broader field of power—in order make their own influence known. This isn't done by providing lists of art video games but by extending the understanding and influence of how we think about video games themselves. Such influence would seem best countered by the emergence of a critic from within the field of games with similar social capital as well as fluency with games themselves. Other examples of

people with low gaming capital but high social and/or cultural capital in other areas who have valid claims to video game meaning include parents or regulators. These groups have valid claims to the question of cultural meaning and value of video games, even as they may not have any in-depth knowledge about games themselves.

The question of cultural capital also allows a deeper exploration of the invisible voices of video game production. One of the recent turns in game studies has been the exploration of games on a global scale. A global view shows that there is an international division in both the economic capital of game production but also of cultural capital. This leads to the realization that not only are there considerable populations with little to no access to video game commodities but also that the commodities themselves represent particular views about whose participation matters. In part, this is because of limited infrastructure allowing the use of games and systems that have been the emphasis of much of game studies. An emphasis in asking questions such as those raised over the Zeebo console is one of the necessary interventions the field of game studies must make. Failure to factor such questions into discussions of game meaning relegates both workers and citizens—or any other group actively seeking to impact game production and consumption—to a status of non-agency and inconsequence in the field of game power. Such a lapse is unfortunate; there are examples of people struggling to gain enough economic capital to purchase gaming devices, possession of which would likely confer social status (Matyszczyk 2011). Furthermore, factory workers who make the consoles game players enjoy have been largely left out of the picture of our understanding of video games. Working under conditions that are both hazardous and arduous, few if any can afford the products so easily consumed elsewhere (Byster and Smith 2006; Ho, Pöyhönen, and Simola 2009). The emphasis on creative labor has left these groups marginalized, even as the industry's emphasis on sales in particular regions has pushed huge swathes of the world's population out of the discussion about what games are and what they might be. These questions will be important touchstones for the development of both the next expansion of video game commodities and of the ways we make sense of those interactions.

Just as differing levels of economic capital necessitate different industrial tactics, varying levels of cultural and social capital in the field of video game power will also necessitate different tactics by games institutions. One's level of cultural capital might dictate the types of games marketed towards them, their inclusion focus groups, their invitation to and recognition at events, and even the way in which policies are crafted. Seen in this light, ratings systems, evocations of genre, design choices,

uses of intertextuality, and even game criticism can be seen as attempts at translation between individuals and institutions with varying levels of cultural and social capital. Their success or failure might be read not just as an indication of potential rupture but also a reification of a perceived power relationship between groups. They must be read not just in terms of how they work but also for whom. Such moments are not merely negotiations but also exclusions.

Bourdieu's ideas of *habitus* and of a variety of capital forms expand the ways in which we can think about the economic and policy questions raised by video games. In a number of cases, it seems to provide a system of hemming in meaning and practice, a system with which the field has yet to grapple. Ultimately, what the addition of cultural capital does for video game studies is to force the question of how play, appropriation and reappropriation of game meaning, and the construction of meaning might be channeled, obstructed, or marketed by an industrial system. Attempting to apply cultural capital to national settings in the vein of Bourdieu's own inquiries seems certain to suggest a very different take on what video games mean to society. Similarly, the idea of "gamer capital"—as something that particular types of players might exhibit and something that inhibits the ability of others to enter particular conversations, games, and parts of the industry—warrants its own examination and definition.

CHAPTER THREE

GAY FOR PLAY: THEORIZING LGBTQ CHARACTERS IN GAME STUDIES

MARC A. OUELLETTE

Despite, and perhaps because of, popular press reactions to stereotypical depictions of beefy boys and busty babes in video games, the realm of gender, sex, and sexuality remains a lacuna in the emerging field of game studies. Of particular interest is the notion of performance and the ways this impacts both on gender and on game play. The combination might be expected to offer a very interesting way of approaching LGBTQ characters in digital games, especially given the recent inclusion of such characters in some popular and well-studied game franchises, including *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar 1997-present), *Jade Empire* (BioWare 2005-08) and *Mass Effect* (Electronic Arts 2007-present). In addition, there is a well-documented history, complete with the authority of a Wikipedia page, of characters who are gay, who might be gay, who could be gay, and who are ambiguously gendered, which is more than gay enough for the people who leave messages on YouTube and on Xbox LIVE. However, this enumeration highlights the mass conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality—that is, the performance of a conventionalized set of behaviours, the chromosomal assignment of XX or XY, and the locus of erotic desire, respectively (Sedgwick 1997)—in contemporary popular culture. For Richard Dyer (1978, 2002, 2005) this situation means the continued depiction of LGBTQ characters according to the rubric of the dominant culture. As Dyer (1978, 2002, 2005) explains, these constructions rely on stereotypes that attribute queerness to a very reduced set of features as opposed to recognizing even the barest physical, emotional, and libidinal differences entailed in LGBTQ identities. Indeed, the approach taken by game makers and by game players confirms Dyer's position insofar as game designers so far have left characters such as *Mass Effect*'s

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