Video Gaming: The Sociology of a Lifeworld

Submitted by Victor Christos Gazis to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in September 2012

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to contemporary sociological debates about video games and video gaming by building upon the works of game theorists such as Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003), Juul (2001), Taylor (2006) and Thornham (2011) that explore the interactive and participatory nature of the pursuit. The data within, derived from an empirical study involving focus groups, interviews, observation and analyses of games and gaming practices and participant observation amongst communities of video gamers is analysed using theories and theoretical frameworks from film and audience studies, classical sociology (in particular Durkheim) and the sociology of sport. Emanating from the data video gaming is revealed to be an ‘organised sport played in a domestic environment’ in terms of embodied practice, conduct and sentiment. The prioritising of agency over structure in data analysis reveals multiple multisensory social practices that encourage engagement with the medium and create, maintain and develop a vibrant and constantly evolving video game lifeworld. Using the ‘career’ of the video gamer, as a conceptual framework, this thesis brings to the fore the masculinity and masculine social practices central to the video gaming lifeworld, and the multisensory social practices through which heterogeneous video gamers (from occasional lone gamers to fully immersed MMORPG enthusiasts) actively immerse themselves into, build, maintain and develop the video game lifeworld. A lifeworld wherein gamers develop their motivations to play and keep playing video games consequent to rewarding performances and interactions with other participants.

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