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Petry, Arlete dos Santos
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Playing in Minecraft: an exploratory study¹

Jogando em Minecraft: um estudo exploratório

Arlete dos Santos Petry

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN)

<arletepetry@gmail.com>

ABSTRACT

Departing from a review of literature, this article discusses, grounded on critical theory, the overlap and the boundaries between play/entertainment and work/learning concerning to digital games. In addition, it tries to find what is core in the distinction between play as entertainment and play as work. The review shows a dissent, understanding the phenomenon either as a sort of work, or as a voluntary choice for entertainment, or as a phenomenon on which the boundaries between work and entertainment are blurred. Differently from the mentioned studies, whose data were obtained with adults and young people, this empirical study was carried out with children, being also a unique work with such young people in this very complex issue. Being a first approach and occurring with a small number of children, the research was set up as an exploratory study using participant observation and interviewing for data collection, and discourse analysis and Likert scale for the discussion of outcomes.

Keywords: Video Games. Immaterial labour. Entertainment.

RESUMO

Partindo de uma revisão da literatura, este artigo discute, com base na teoria crítica, a sobreposição e os limites entre jogo/entretenimento e trabalho/aprendizagem no que diz respeito aos jogos digitais, tentando responder o que é fundamental na distinção entre jogar como entretenimento e jogar como trabalho. A revisão aponta para um dissenso, compreendendo o fenômeno ora como um tipo de trabalho, ora como uma escolha voluntária pelo entretenimento, ou ainda como um fenômeno no qual os limites entre trabalho e entretenimento estão borrados. Diferentemente das investigações citadas, cujos dados foram obtidos com adultos e jovens, o estudo empírico que empreendemos foi realizado com crianças, tratando-se, ainda, de um trabalho único conduzido com jogadores tão jovens, nessa tão complexa questão. Sendo uma primeira abordagem e que ocorreu com um pequeno número de crianças, a pesquisa foi configurada como um estudo exploratório, embora utilize-se de observação participante e entrevista para a recolha dos dados, e de análise de discurso e escala de Likert para a discussão dos resultados.

Palavras-chave: Jogos digitais. Trabalho imaterial. Entretenimento.

INTRODUCTION

Western culture has been characterized as a society that divides play and labour (Yee, 2006). Play and games are often understood as entertainment, while work, labour and learning are considered serious activities.

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Although this is a strong idea in our society, in a previous study which discussed grounds of gaming, I drew attention to the close interaction between play and work (Petry, 2010). In a research on the history of video games, Wells (2013) also found a positive correlation between play and programmers working in video games.

In an environment which approaches play and work, digital games have been since the 1980s considered capable of teaching and making children smarter, holding the promise made by Rousseau in "Emile" in 1762 when he suggested that game and learning should come together. According to him, being let free to explore and avoiding adult interference, children would know - given their good nature - the best thing to do.

Regarding the fusion between education and labor with entertainment, Negroponete (1995) suggested that the fact that these activities had been enabled by the same object (Personal Computer) would lead us to a future where leisure and work would occur without differentiation.

Studies on online players of MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online) have also been heading to the understanding that the borders between them and the offline world can no longer be perceived as protected, separate and far from the day by day world. Works such as Consalvo's (2009) problematize the concept of magic circle, positing that it no longer applies insofar as there is a junction between the inside and the outside of the game in MMOs.

Regarding digital work in general, Canclini, Cruces and Pozo (2012) suggested in a major and recent survey in Spain and Mexico that the euphoria from the freelance work of young producers in digital communication begins to decrease when adulthood plans require professional stability. Moreover, job satisfaction finds barriers in a creative digital culture always on the move, when associated with large companies interested in quick and easy profit. In addition, Jaron Rowan's study on entrepreneurs in Spain pointed out that a creative economy entails some self-exploration and self-denial on the part of its protagonists (Canclini, Cruces and Pozo, 2012).

On the other hand, movements of collaboration and free use of digital productions are encouraged by the Free Software Foundation founded by Richard Stallman, and also by the Creative Commons proposed by Lawrence Lessig, whose work addresses public copyright licenses. In the specific topic of video games, practices such as the open-source release of *Doom*, have "been contributing to the digital game development cycle" (Grimes & Feenberg, 2009) showing us how the players' effort add benefits to video game companies.

Yee (2006) has shown how many hours are necessary to create content in these virtual worlds. His research highlights the fact that in order to advance

to high levels in the game, players need to spend months or years and invest enormous effort. In his research, he found that MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) players spend 22 hours a week managing their characters in these virtual worlds, and added that what they do is a lot of work. According to Yee, for many players their games have become more like work than fun. In fact, both adult and youth videogame players often work as players, paying their bills with this immaterial labour.

However, there is no agreement about whether the time and effort invested in the creation of, and interaction with these virtual worlds should be considered entertainment or work and labour. Internet companies often claim that it is entertainment, because players choose to play voluntarily (Scholz, 2012), but some researchers adopting a critical position argue that this kind of investment should be understood as an emerging form of unpaid labour (Nakamura, 2009), particularly because the owners of the game often gain economic benefits from players' contributions. A third group, including Yee (2006), demonstrates the blurring of these boundaries between play and work/labour, arguing that in order to succeed in some games the player often has to perform work without being aware of its dual nature. Yee further claims that, in fact, the purpose of all video games is "to train a player to work harder while still enjoying it" (p. 70). For example, some videogame players tend to argue that pleasure and enjoyment are the main motivations for investing large amounts of time in creating game experiences (Poor, 2013). However, other researchers have found that for some video game players this high level of investment is self-reported as an intense form of work/labour, and they describe their game play as obligation, tedium, and more like a second job than entertainment (Yee, 2006).

Based on what many researchers have noted, I can say that entertainment/labour is a complex issue concerning video games, and is relevant to be investigated in order to advance our understanding of an important emerging phenomenon. In this sense, according to Poor (2013), fan production is an important area of academic work, engaging issues of play, work, unpaid labour, and ownership. Skalski (2011, cited by Poor, 2013) affirms that a certain sense of achievement, control, and self-efficacy is associated with playing computer games.

Although researchers have already offered some discussions and data about this question where it concerns adults and youth (e.g., Castronova, 2005; Dibbell, 2006; Nakamura, 2009; Pearce, 2006; Taylor, 2006), we have very little research focusing on children. Grimes (2013) has been working on this issue, approaching it from the perspective of creating and sharing content in virtual worlds. For her, "kids' participation in digital games can be understood as a form of 'immaterial labour'. It takes time, effort, skill and knowledge, generates

meaning, and has value”, including transforming video game characters and objects (Grimes, 2013). However, empiric research on this specific topic (play/leisure and work/labour) as it involves children has not yet been carried forth.

To understand what exactly occurs when children play this genre of game we have to start asking ourselves about the difference between work, labour and leisure.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

On this topic I will discuss some grounds to situate this new and difficult issue. I will develop some questions starting with Marx; then I will touch some points of Adorno’s approach to economy and mass culture, concerning the bases of critical theory; then I will turn to Feenberg and Grimes to argue about technology. These two last points of my critique are constitutive of current media studies.

In *Value, Price and Profit*,² Marx presents a first draft of what later would come to be the work of his life (*The Capital*). In this text, Marx lays down the nature of the exploitation of the working class performed by the bourgeoisie. The reality of such exploitation makes it urgent, for him, to investigate the origins, the limits and the characteristics of the capitalist’s power.

In this text, Marx distinguished the work that results in a product from that one that results in commodities, saying that: “A man who produces an article for his own immediate use, to consume it himself, creates a product, but not a commodity” (p. 13). This distinction was a very clear one at his time. Currently, and especially with what many scholars situate as the participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) coming about with WEB 2.0, we find many cases in which, in a digital culture, people make products which become commodities. This observation leads us to think that indeed the coming to be of digital society has put in question many of the fundamental conceptual distinctions of our modern way of understanding what work is. As wrote Huws (2014) “online labor is particularly difficult to conceptualize”(p.150).

Following this idea, it is important to remember that Marx considered every commodity as a result of social labour, what implies that “it must be subordinate to the division of labour within society” (p. 14). He also added that “It is nothing without the other divisions of labour, and on its part is required to integrate them”. In this sense each commodity has a value based on units of labour, usually related to the time spent or to the necessary knowledge to make

2 This text was written between end of May and June 27, 1865 and was firstly published in 1898. Available online through: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/value-price-profit.pdf>

it. These data make us think, on the other hand, that some of the concepts of Marx can also be of some help in the understanding of many phenomena of the digital world. I am thereby suggesting that this relation between the production of commodities and its necessary relation with social labour can easily be found, for instance, in transmedia situations, very common within the video game and the online worlds. But I can also say that nowadays there is a strong and dependent relation between players' production and video game companies specially related to gaming content.

With these appointments I can say that the question of labour in a digital economy is not so easy to dismiss in view of the recent developments of the logic of capitalist exploitation (Terranova, 2000). In this sense, with digital production, the names were only changed. Instead of saying "surplus value" now we can perhaps say "free labor", to mention an expression coined by Terranova and used by some scholars. Children, young adults and adults who spend hours of their free time only amusing themselves in video games, are at the same time producing value for major conglomerates.

Nowadays the common exceeding labour may be seen as a consequence of the integration between work and fun on the computer. Many people spend in the computer "hours of surplus labour, which surplus labour will later realize itself in a surplus value and a surplus produce," to quote Marx.³ So these many hours of fun/work on the computer end up in the production of some value which generates, later, profit for the capitalist.

In the words of Marx: "It is this sort of exchange between capital and labour upon which capitalistic production, or the wages system, is founded, and which must constantly result in reproducing the working man as a working man, and the capitalist as a capitalist" (p.19), and "The more capital succeeds in prolonging the working day, the greater the amount of other peoples' labour it will appropriate" (p.25)

However, the digital culture does not turn every user into an active producer, and every worker into a creative subject as we could see, for instance, in Buckingham (2012). Although free labour is usually associated with the overlapping between production and consumption, it is necessary to carefully evaluate how this process works out.

In conclusion, one is allowed to ask, just as Marx asked himself: "What is necessary and unavoidable with a given system of production?" (p.18), i.e., what is impossible to dismiss in a capitalist system? Marx believed in the revolution of the working classes; only they would be able to give freedom for the capitalist

3 Chapter VIII. Production of Surplus Value

himself. But after the collapse of the communist system, nobody seems to believe in that anymore. (nota do revisor: sugiro rever esta frase, linguagem muito coloquial)

If it is impossible to dismiss this issue, what should we do about it? From this point on we follow with the critical theory.

Adorno was a deep thinker from the Frankfurt School who gave a great contribution to all scholars that have studied popular culture and its incorporation by the cultural industry. Morrell (2008) reminded us that what the cultural industry wants is to promote the dominant ideology. Video games being very important as cultural artifacts in our contemporary culture, they have been naturally incorporated into this kind of strategy processes.

In *Minima Moralia: reflections on a damaged life*, Adorno claims that the idea of “work while you work, play while you play [...] is a basic rule of repressive self-discipline” (paragraph 84). For him labour and pleasure should be close and not dissociated. That is, work should be pleasant. According to him, while labour and leisure are becoming more similar in their structure, they have been at the same time split by invisible lines. Besides that, nowadays pleasure seems to have been excluded from both in equal measure.

For Adorno, when the leisure hours have become so well planned and administered, so that one may extract from them the greatest quantity of profit or benefit, just as one does with the working hours, then we have the triumph of massification, where the equivalence between working and leisure hours is promoted. In that case, Adorno would say that: “The whole of life must look like a job” (paragraph 91).

As for childhood itself, a life stage protected from the tasks of a job, Narine & Grimes (2009), having examined films and television advertisements portraying children’s digital gaming, suggested that uncompromised leisure seems to have no chance in the social discourse about communication and information technologies (ICTs), especially in digital games. If children’s leisure, as soon as they are historically perceived as having this right, is linked to a utility tied to their professional future, it seems that it has been difficult to support the view that childhood is today (has been since Modernity) perceived as free time to play.

Maybe the job-like character of many gaming activities, or, e.g. the building of worlds just as in Minecraft, are not in fact a counterexample to Adorno’s thesis about the repressive nature of the polarization of work and leisure. But these activities partake equally in both sides of the polarity – toil and distraction – affecting nonetheless a merely external mixture of the two: like oil mixed with water. On the other hand, Adorno’s utopia seems a mobile entwinement of work with play, of concentration with enjoyment, or of the intellectual with the

sensual. I found this inclination previously in Schiller's ideas concerning play drive, for him a way in which the sensuous and formal drives act at the same time in reciprocal relation without ever reaching a perfect equilibrium.

Departing from the perspective of technology, Feenberg reaffirms that technology is not neutral. In spite of the fact that it is impossible to operate workers or consumers such as it is the case with machines, it is possible to influence them to make what they probably would not choose to make.

In this sense, grounded on "Feenberg's critical theory of technology, applying his concepts of instrumentalization and social rationality", Grimes and Feenberg (2009, p.106) proposed a theory of rationality play that they called "ludification theory". This theory provides criteria for evaluating rationalized games using an approach that considers "the ways in which a game is engaged in types of rational practice" such as market and bureaucratic organizations. With this idea the authors opened a "debate around the impact and significance of rationalization on the parameters, practices, and experiences of play."

On the other hand, in *Transforming Technology: a critical theory revisited*, Feenberg said that "Technology is in large measure a cultural product, and thus any given technological order is a potential starting point for divergent developments depending on the cultural environment that shapes it"⁴. With this I want to claim that, even if technology is not neutral, that is, even if the design of digital games induces the player to behave in certain forms while playing, I claim there is still the possibility of choice. In this sense, we can talk about two types of choices: the first refers to the choice of playing or not-playing a determinate game – what may be related to a certain critical positioning, be it conscious or not; the second type of choice refers to the already acknowledged situation of the different and particular meanings that players give to the games they are playing departing on the reconstitution of the player's own experience – some call this *emergent narrative* (Sale & Zimmermann, 2011). As these authors claimed, this emergent narrative is possible because digital games are a complex system and are interactive, that is: "actions in a game are linked to one another, one change in the system can create another change, giving rise to narrative patterns over the entire course of the game" (chapter 26, p.8). They also added that this kind of narrative is often developed in unexpected ways, as I confirmed in a previous research interviewing game-design students (coming publication).

4 Since I was reading this book through a kindle-version, it became impossible to quote it appropriately according to the published edition. The quotation at hand refers to the first paragraph of part III – The Dialects of Technology.

At this point we have to ask what means to be critical? According to Morrell (2008) means to become aware of the various social, ideological, cultural, and political contexts in which languages of power operate is one of the primary intention of the critical theory.

That would be a ground for what Narine and Grimes (2009) demonstrated as a Romantic view on technologies and children, under which even computer games were marketed as a way to develop the skills required for success in the "Computer Age" (Herz, 1997 cited by Narine & Grimes, 2009) as I mentioned above.

FROM DIY MOVEMENTS TO PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

This issue becomes a little more complex when we look at another point of view: the do-it-yourself movement and the amateur culture.

In *DIY: the rise of lo-fi culture*, Amy Spencer demonstrated how do-it-yourself culture crosses the boundaries between who consumes and who creates. Furthermore, members of DIY interviewed by Spencer have claimed that they "aren't 'fixated with the promise of money, they are people who want to do something just to see it happen'" (p.11).

Despite the fact that DIY movements already have a long history, the computer technology had a huge impact on DIY culture because it is easier to do-it-yourself now than it was before.

An interesting connection to her book, a connection grounded on psychology, shows why people engage so fast in creating so many things, spending their money and time. In *The World of Fanzines*, by Fredric Wertham, a New York psychiatrist (Spencer, 2005), listed the reasons why people decided to produce zines: the relief from a sense of boredom or loneliness; to feel part of a wider community; to discuss their personal obsessions; validate their lives and make people understand their way of thinking; distribute information and resources to others. In sum, their motivations were to be in touch with others, to be recognized, and to share ideas, skills and information as a way to help creators to feel free to be self-represented.

According to Terranova (2000, p. 36-37), contemporary amateur Web designers "are acting out a desire for affective and cultural production that is nonetheless real just because it is socially shaped".

In another research it was found that *modders* have a strong sense of community, and enjoy helping others, usually by co-authorizing *mods*. Beside the fact that the research showed that they hoped to get jobs in the gaming industry, this aim was not in general the first motivator for most respondents (Poor, 2013). Money was rarely a motivation to start writing a zine, affirmed Spencer (2005), adding that it seems odd that they were willing to invest the

time and money into these projects. Departing from her discussion, I could ask if the pleasure of putting together the finished product would be also a strong motivation to be involved in this type of activity. This would be a way to escape from the many forms of Fordism that rule our everyday life.

Consequently, I would like to mention again what is in the core of the game idea, i.e. the not-so-clear boundaries between play and work/labour. It happens in fact because games have challengers, and players want to work hard to be well succeeded when playing (Juul, 2013).

Even though several players feel happy to participate and collaborate in many cultural productions and are thankful to the companies for the opportunity, we cannot deny that they have been working “to the expansion of the cultural industries and are part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value” (Terranova, 2000, p.38).

In some sense, do-it-yourself movements, which started as a subcultural group fighting against the *status-quo*, also have taught the digital economy with its history of experimentation how to get even more profit.

In the same way as seen on video games and virtual worlds, zine history shows that the process of starting a zine can become addictive for some.

Understanding that labour does not have equivalence with employment is essential to the awareness of how important free affective and cultural labour is to the media industry. To Terranova (2000, p. 37) “Free labour is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited”.

Another usual concept that relates to this theme is immaterial labour. This can be explained as a series of activities that are not usually recognized as work and refer to the different kinds of skills involving cybernetics and computer control. For Lazzarato (cited by Terranova, 2000) it is not necessarily related to highly skilled workers, but with every productive activity within postindustrial societies.

In this sense, some recent cyberactivism movements studied by Castells (2012) as means of empowerment for ordinary citizens also encountered, at least in the Brazilian case, an attempt of appropriation by politic parties. Similar to this optimistic view of these movements is the participatory culture studied by Jenkins, which shifts the focus from individual expression to community involvement.

What I hereby want to focus on is the fact that the same power used to empower ordinary citizens, turning them into content-producers, has also been used by companies to add economic value to their products.

Of course, the available tools in each culture matter a great deal, because each embedded design leads to different meanings and proposals, as put by

Feenberg. But what matters the most is which technology is chosen by each culture, and how and why each culture decides to do something with it.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

My empirical research was about the relationship between work/labour and leisure in game playing. It sought to examine how children situate their action in the game; for example, is it from a position of players having fun (consumers), or of workers building environments (game producers)? Or, put in another way: what is taking place when work/fun is presented as a game?

To study this issue I chose to focus on Minecraft, one of the most popular video games among children and a growing means of engaging children into participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009). The game is an open-ended world that was published as a full release version and as an independent game on November 18, 2011. It is now the centre of a large community of players worldwide who build their own virtual worlds and share content through interactions in single-player and multi-player online environments.

Development on Minecraft is still ongoing as the game's player base continues to grow, and today it is one of the best-selling video games of all time, having amassed more than 100 million sales across platforms (including personal computers; Apple, Android, and Microsoft mobile platforms; Microsoft's Xbox consoles; and Sony's Playstation consoles).

As a computer-based game, Minecraft has been called a "building block game" (Lastowka, 2012). Also many game designers have agreed a couple of years ago that Minecraft really might be emblematic of the most important emerging trends in games and of what is about to come in the game industry, because it is both procedural content generation and creative online space (Miller, Gamasutra, 2013).

My questioning was focused on: *Is Minecraft breaking the barriers between play/entertainment and work/labour? If so, what are the specific factors providing evidence of this? How do children view their activity when they are playing: a kind of leisure, a work/labour activity, or learning? How does this video game affect children's lives?*

To answer these questions the research implied direct contact with children and was conducted under an ethics-protocol approved by the University of Toronto's Ethic-board. I have interviewed and recorded play sessions of 5 children between 6 and 12 years old, who consider themselves Minecraft fans. Three of them were made in English and two in Portuguese.

The research design consisted in semi-structured and open-ended questions for interviews, participant observation, and play session. In the last

block of interview questions I also used a Likert scale with 3 points to measure children's opinion. The data was collected through video and audio recording, and field notes. After transcription of the interviews, I used discourse analysis to examine every data.

All those observations and interviews were made without parent's presence, so that the privacy of the children could be guaranteed, and they lasted about 1 hour and a half each. Every child name that will be used in this article is a nickname chosen from the list of most common English names. My data came from: Laura (6 years old); Sarah (10); Linda (12); Brian (7) e David (11).

They played on their own devices: Laura and David on laptops; Sarah and Brian on a tablet, and Linda on her smartphone.

All children from this study had been playing Minecraft for at least a year. The older children from my study (Linda and David) had been playing it for 2 years and a half and 3 years respectively. The ones who were able to answer questions about time more accurately (three of the five were) said that they usually played every two days during twenty minutes to an hour per session. They played Minecraft "a little bit more for longer time periods" when on vacation or on weekends. All of them told me that they played after finishing their homework.

Siblings, friends and YouTube are the sources of information from where they first heard about Minecraft.

In the interviews, all children said that what made them continue playing Minecraft was the possibility to do anything they wanted to do. "You could do anything, basically"; "[...] you can create what you want"; "I could make so much things". Also the fact that "[...] you don't even have to really do anything sometimes" was added by the one that had said "you can build what they say or other things" (Sarah).

For one of the younger children, Minecraft seemed like Lego, and that was a good reason to continue playing.

These are the reasons why they prefer to play in Creative mode, despite the fact that they also had worlds in Survival mode. Linda told me that she chooses to play in Survival mode when she wants a more challenging experience. David likes to play standalone when he is trying out some new trick he has learned in YouTube, such as using Redstone to make machines. Most of the time, he plays online with friends he does not know personally.

Playing in "open space" is what seems to be so attractive for many players nowadays, adults included. Recently, Valve announced that their next video game project would be an open-ended world.

Two kids cited YouTube as the website from where they got ideas for playing and for building in Minecraft. Linda also said that sometimes she starts building without a specific objective until an idea came to her.

Two children told me that another way to get ideas was by reading special books about Minecraft published by Notch Development AB trade mark, or even about specific issues such as Mythology. Harry Potter and Percy Jackson were also cited, suggesting that literature for kids and youngsters also seems to be a good source of ideas.

Undergoing events such as the World Cup 2014 and the places that they visited, such as cities and museums, have also served them as inspiration to create in Minecraft. Sarah also said that the things that she was seeing during the play session also helped her to get ideas.

Respondents also manifested that they shared their worlds with siblings and, sometimes, with their best friends. They normally taught siblings and friends how to make stuff in Minecraft, and also learned with them. Beck and Wade (2004, cited by Jenkins, 2009) conclude that gamers are open to collaborating with others.

All children said that Minecraft is fun, "even when there is pressure," claimed Linda.

On a Likert scale, sixty percent of children responded that "Minecraft" and "learn" match very well. For those that said that they just match, the commentary was that "some people learn but not all people learn" (Sarah). Nobody said that "learning" does not have anything to do with Minecraft. Besides that, in a former question about this topic, two children said that they learned creativity playing Minecraft. One of these had responded that he also learned about computing because he had to know how to operate with Redstone. Three of them said that they didn't learn anything playing Minecraft, despite the fact that "I know that building things is hard and that you have to plan before building" (Sarah). At this point it would be interesting to understand what is the meaning of "learning" for those kids: maybe a structured schooling content. One of the children told me about a peculiar Elementary School in Toronto⁵ that receives assignments inside this game.

To scholars such as Jenkins (2009) and Gee (2004), children learn different things by playing video games, but they are aware there is resistance about whether or not schools should or could teach young people how to play. According to Jenkins, "this resistance reflects the confusion between play as a source of fun

5 She made a reference to Delta School which has been target of a research project about Minecraft and learning, developed by the OISE at the University of Toronto.

and play as a form of engagement" (p. 40). He argues about the importance of play as an active mode of engagement, and excludes from his discussion the experience of fun - what reveals the still-existing division between fun and learning content.

The word "labour" was understood by 2 out of the 3 English Canadian speakers children. Brian said that he had never heard that word. For Sarah "people don't say this word when are playing Minecraft ever". The same answer level was given by David and Linda, i.e. "the word doesn't mean anything when they are talking about Minecraft". Immediately after this answer, Linda explained what "labour" meant, saying that it is what "you have to do to sustain yourself" and that, in some cases, it happens in Minecraft. In these situations the word "play" was not so good to use when in Minecraft, she said.

Despite the fact that I only have one answer to this point, it may already be seen as pointing out to what I discussed previously, i.e. the division between labour and play. When a work involves what someone has to do to sustain herself/himself, it becomes labour, and indeed social labour (Marx). And when a product was made into a commodity, this was done in virtue of the sustenance of oneself, not in virtue of play.

This example is suggesting us that the same activity can change its meaning, depending on the intention behind it. As put by Quiring (2015, p. 8): "For many on the server Minecraft is a career, and their regular interactions are supported by online communities that view their commentated gameplay videos on YouTube and Twitch.tv as well as by another fan server open to the public". So it is clear that a simple game can be, for some, just amusement, but for others, a career.

A different answer was given about the word "work": almost all children affirmed that "work" was a nice word to use when they were talking about Minecraft. One of them said that "there is a lot of work ... a kind of work in the game" (Linda).

The only one that answered that "work" is not such a good to use related with Minecraft was Laura. She told me about the effort and time she had to spend to build things in the game, saying, for example: "some worlds that I was making, I had a lot of work to make them", and "There was a house that lasted five hours to build". Also, "I was really sad [for losing some worlds] because I spent so much time making my own garden...". With these examples I could say that for her the word "work" really matched well with Minecraft.

These answers may suggest that the same activity changes its meaning according to the intention involved. In this way, it is neither the effort nor the time spent what will distinguish a fun work from a free or immaterial exploited labour.

For the children interviewed in our study, the category “work,” meaning the employment of effort, time and skills, is not opposed to the category “play.” However, the comprehension of work as labour, as an activity economically regulated by a surplus-value principle, has very little to do with the idea of “fun”, what suggests that the determining principle of the relationship between work in general (which includes labour) and play finds itself in the type of gratification involved. When the effort and the time spent aim mainly at the individual’s sustenance, then we find ourselves in the sphere of labour. When it aims at the desired satisfaction and entertainment, then it is the sphere of work. However, what many players experience as a satisfactory effort aiming at the desired entertainment and acknowledgment ends up in a commodity, abused by a certain few who own capital. It seems to be imperative that we rethink the work categories.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analytic philosophy of Wittgenstein and his theory of language games, I can say that different meanings are circumscribed for different audiences. We can observe the issue: “play versus work and labour in virtual worlds and video games” from different points of view.

At the same time that a strong capitalist logic has been trying to control digital productions, we can see on the Internet also elements of a gift economy. Barbrook (cited by Terranova, 2000) affirms that the digital economy is mixed with a public element (who controls and makes decisions about the culture of internet); a market-driven element (that tries to rule over the digital production by re-introducing commodification, re-imposing a property regime); and the gift economy element, very usual, as discussed previously, among digital amateur producers engaged with the bases of DIY culture.

From a critical point of view, even the well-intentioned gift-economy that exists around many players is used to benefit millionaire companies. This was the case of Minecraft, brought about by an independent company (Mojang), created in 2009 to develop this very open-ended game. No longer than a few years after its creation the company was bought by Microsoft in 2014 for \$2.5 billion (Hill, 2014 cited by Quiring, 2015). Without the effort and the time spent of thousands of players that had fun working and also labouring in Minecraft, producing value to Mojang, that acquisition would not have taken place.

As put by Terranova (2000, p. 36), the free labour “is a fundamental moment in the creation of value in the digital economies”. It is, therefore, a mutation of a widespread cultural and economic logic totally immanent to the late form of capitalism. Yet we cannot deny that the free and volunteer labour

embraces some contradictions, i.e. the human desire to share with others and to be recognized independent of any payment.

With this contradiction of technology in view, we ask ourselves: How should we situate these children that have been playing and working in video games and virtual worlds? As the cultural elite that will work in the best companies as creative and smart young adults, or as a new form of proletarianized labourers that will be still supporting the ever growing production of value within capital itself? As friendly people open to give and receive products and information, or as unaware children and parents that have to be alerted about this strongly capitalist structure?

To further the discussion we have to attempt to answer the following question: who are these children that have been participating in the digital economy? Are they the avant-garde that is building another way to learn, really integrating play and work, having fun and learning, just as suggested by Rousseau in the *Emile*, or is there an incompatibility of intentionality between both activities as claimed by Kant? If they have high skills, they will probably end up managing the power in informed societies, according to the well-known promise of a few decades ago, which stated that kids who were well-versed in technology would be the master of the future. But maybe we still have a more or less occult system of categorization where virtual worlds are a battlefield to class struggles and racism as realized by Nakamura (2012). But they can also be seen as in a battlefield where those who engage themselves in the capitalisation of things, of their time and effort, are confronted by those who believe in the gift economy.

On the one hand, our society has been approaching play and labour so as to be able to offer more pleasure in the labour life through more interesting and creative jobs in digital cultures. On the other, the capitalist system using an ethic of "labour as play" has been incorporating, without any payment, the collaborative work force from game players.

Based on my research about this theme, I claim that what is essential in order to distinguish play and labour is the intention involved in each specific activity. As claimed by some philosophers since Aristoteles, that to which game must aim is only itself, and not something else. When a game has something else as its aim he loses what is fundamental to it. This does not mean that playing would not involve some kind of effort and work – and in general it involves a lot of work. The point is that playing a game essentially involves a certain *state of mind* acknowledged as *having fun*. When this state of mind disappears, we lose the very game at hand, as Heidegger would put it.

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Dados da autora:



Arlete dos Santos Petry | arletepetry@gmail.com

Doutora em Comunicação e Semiótica pela PUC-SP (2010), é professora adjunta do Departamento de Artes da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte-UFRN e professora permanente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inovação em Tecnologias Educacionais no Instituto Metrópole Digital-UFRN.

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN)

Av. Senador Salgado Filho, 3000 – Lagoa Nova

59-078970 – Natal (RN) – Brasil