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Socialization of Teenagers Playing The Sims®

The Paradoxical Use of Video Games to Re-enchant Life

Pascaline Lorentz, PhD

Abstract

In order to scrutinize what video games can bring more into individuals' life; a doctoral research had been undertaken on the teenage audience of *The Sims*®[1], a game simulating life. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods drove to design what I called the journey of self-discovery of the gamer and development of the video-ludological socialization concept (Lorentz, 2013).
Adopting an overall angle, this paper apprehends video games as the manifestation of the re-enchantment of the world. To begin with the recall of the rationalization process presented by Max Weber (2001/1905), whose explained the recoil of religious institutions in our societies at his time by saying that science had replaced religion for explaining life and the world, called the disenchantment. To a certain extend I claim here that video games are the perfect product of this rationalization movement (Caillois, 1967/1958). Paradoxically, video games allow their enthusiasts to live fantastic lives and dreamed situations. Individuals find eventually a way to believe again in the so-called impossible and therefore re-enchant their rationalized world.

Keywords

video gaming, *The Sims*®, socialization, re-enchantment, religious institutions

1. Introduction

When my social media network received information about Andy Robertson's[1] speech[2] on video games as the next big religion on the first of August 2013, I thought that my paper abstract could

1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9u1zMCos8w
1 Andy Robertson is a journalist expert on video games working for the magazine *Wired* in the UK.
2 http://kotaku.com/video-games-are-the-next-big-religion-991525452

not have been so popular so quickly. In fact, we both developed the same argument at the same time as he delivered his speech on TED Talk in April 2012[3] when I was finishing writing my doctoral dissertation. This coincidence demonstrates how contexts impact on the emergence of ideas. Evidently our two speeches start from the same point without coexisting on the long term. Indeed we shared the same belief, at least at the beginning.

As Emile Durkheim stated: "religions are unified systems of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called church, all those who adhere to them" in his last work (Durkheim, [1915] 1965, p.62).

This paper aims to demonstrate how video games respond to this definition of religions. In addition, we postulate that beliefs are products of social experience, here video gaming.

For narrowing the scope, this article concentrates on western societies of today. Based mainly on western and mostly European history and facts, I aim to suggest paths to explain reasons why video games took up so largely in the last few years. Thus, how do video games can be sociologically assimilated to religions? And if they do, what are social functions they fulfill?

Using data collected during the doctoral research on teenagers playing *The Sims*® (EA, 2000-2009)[4], this article provides arguments supporting the amalgamation of video games and religions by presenting how video gaming worlds coalesce with Durkheim's definition of religions. The principle of *The Sims*® is to reproduce life of an individual[5], a *Sim*, to whom the gamer must find a job to get money on his/her bank account as to buy food and furniture. At first sight, this video game seemed very simplistic, and "it's not fun to simulate life problems", as some specialists from industry claimed (Ichbiah, 2004/1998). This claim is done without looking at the game in a deeper fashion, and especially without giving voice to gamers and paying attention to their experiences of the game.

In this paper, practices of gamers scrutinized along with other gaming activities support the idea that video gaming is a meaningful activity that fosters beliefs. Then, as a result, the attention will be dedicated to the share of these beliefs and practices by gamers forming a community. Their devotion and dedication to this activity drive the argumentation to the explanation of the sacralised functionality of video gaming.

Video gaming had been a controversial activity and its way to be legitimized among other leisure was a long and tiresome journey (Bogost&Mauco, 2008; Donnat, 2009; Lorentz, 2012b). The first part of this paper deals with aspects of video gaming that makes it meaningful and also

3 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTJUrJ44kew
4 Trailers from the first to the fourth : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1N2h3M6uj4
5 Trailer of The Sims 1 : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxRBqD-85Es

controversial on some points. Presenting the system of beliefs and practices that the game forms besides showing how online communities of gamers serve social functions will lead us to understand why video gaming can be called a sacred activity.

In the second part of this paper adopting a perspective to look at the bigger picture will allow us to scrutinize this practice with a different angle. The recoil of religious explanations of the world accompanied by the increasing importance of science drive us to the production of video games and what they allow individuals to believe in. All these conditions gathered leads to the emergence of video games as a paradoxical tool and its consequences for social functions.

2. Methodology

The doctoral research carried out on the teenage audience of *The Sims*® is composed of two parts. First, 180 students of French schools located in Strasbourg, Moscow and Abu Dhabi, aged from 12 to 16 years old, answered to a series of 67 questions about their play activity and its nature when playing *The Sims*® (EA, 2000-2009). This video game is one of the most popular games, and even if the first opus was released in 2000, its success is still paramount.

Second, 18 focused interviews enabled us to go deeper in quantitative findings by asking more developed explanations to players. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods drove to design the journey of self-discovery of the gamer (Lorentz, 2013). Analysing these data required to adopt a larger point of view in order to understand the role of video gaming in individual's life today, which is when a paradox emerged.

3. Meaningful and Controversial Practice

A system of beliefs and practices

Video games attract individuals who want to dream when doing. Loaded with beliefs, gamers go to the game with ideas about what they can do and cannot. There, they test out, consciously or not, these ideas and beliefs. All gaming practices constitute the experience of gaming and take part of the construction of gamers' identity (Craib, 1994, p.1).

The video game *The Sims*® (EA, 2000-2009) had been under many critics for its so-like capitalistic gameplay. This misunderstanding of the game led to several papers claiming that the game encouraged a capitalistic ideology (Frasca, 2001; Flanagan, 2003; Lignon, 2007). As I

experienced the game myself, I could not adhere to such a point of view and felt the need to look further. Put asides these critics, I gave voice to gamers so as to reach a better understanding of the game play as other game scholars do too (McGonigal, 2011; Taylor, 2006/2009).

The game environment of *The Sims*® had been thought and designed by game designers, Will Wright at the beginning in 2000. The reality of gameplay experience has changed over the years due to game designers and production managers' strategies to drive gaming activity and emphasis on some parts of the game. For instance, the second opus of the game gives more important focus on money than on social life in climbing the social ladder, whereas the third version requires being very efficient in life-planning strategy. These parameters can be changed according to gamer wishes though. Yet, the game proffers a frame for experimentation that gamers confess largely enjoying.

In this matter, the richness of the game is huge as its gameplay allows gamers to reproduce manifold social interactions and situations. Teenagers interrogated for this research affirmed that they created their dreamed life in the game as much as they could. Testing their ideas about adult life and family life is the main activity of teenagers playing *The Sims*® (EA, 2000-2009). Hence, they can put ideas into action in the game. In fact, they formulated clear ideas about the definition of a happy life related to the potential success in the game. According to the narrative of the game, the happier the Sim is, the easier it is to make him fulfilling his/her commitments. Starting with their own ideas about adult life and how enjoyable it would be to be free of parental control, they experienced the adulthood through their Sims.

From an outsider point of view, the main objective of the game seems to be making the more money you can (Schadler, 2007). However, the gamer quickly realises while playing that the main objective is, at least at the beginning, to stay alive. Managing and coping with different challenges generate stressful situations for the gamer. For instance, death can occur and then appears as a failure. In fact, failure plays a huge role in gaming experience driving gamers to self-reflect on their actions and capacities (Juul, 2013). The chock accompanying this event in the game channels an awareness of survival skills needed for the next try. Believing in a life full of enjoyment with no regards to basic needs had driven the gamer to failure.

The system of beliefs and practices that teenager-gamers test when playing the offline game *The Sims*® evolves and changes during the social experience of simulating life. Teenagers reshape thereby their beliefs about adulthood and go back to the game for another testing session.

According to gamer speeches, playing *The Sims*® is composed of two different steps. First, the creation of the Sim and his/her family keeps the gamer busy for a long time. The level of precision of creation in the game is very high, and teenager-gamers reveal appreciating this aspect extensively.

The Sims® is a sort of a sandbox game as gamers can produce a wide range of behaviours even extreme such as torture and murder. Moral norms are defined in a specific way that a gamer needs to figure out when playing. Teenagers admitted loving experimenting in the game what they cannot do out of the game to see what happens to their avatar. This try out process is very enjoyable, and the limits of the game allow teenagers to largely experiment. When they present a case of torture or even murder of their Sim, laughing was very helpful to keep the unbearable aspect of their acts at distance and be able to talk freely about it (Michon, 2010) just like surgeons operating (Goffman, 2002/3). Teenagers loved adding to the situation by making things up, but I did play the game extensively and know very well what is possible or not. Pushing back the frontiers, doing the forbidden just for checking what could happen, testing the system without being harmed compose teenager-gamers experience in *The Sims*®.

Nevertheless, their main interest is, as they acknowledged, concentrated on relationships and their management. The social life of their Sim is the most appealing aspect of the game for teenagers. This is how I could understand that the point of the game for these teenager-gamers is not getting as many things as they can. They concretely love exploring flirting relationships and then couple and family life. Nonetheless, their ideal view on family was shaken up when their couple got babies and therefore their avatars had to look after them. Suddenly, teenager-gamers discourses changed emphasizing on the non-enjoyable experience of parenthood. Reflecting on their previous beliefs about family, they genuinely confessed that adult life is more difficult than child life. A real disillusion took place in teenager-gamers speeches when bringing the topic of babies. When sharing their experiences in group, teenagers avowed their findings regarding life and its intricacies while keeping the topic at distance with an extensive use of jokes and laughter.

This specific sharing of beliefs and practices around the game is strongly related to the game experience and could thus only last when playing. As a result, the sense of community emanating from playing experience can be, therefore, contested here. In that matter, Internet connection and its improvement brought constant occasion of sharing beliefs and practices for video gamers and then fostering a stronger sense of community.

A Community of enthusiasts

Internet drove a real revolution in daily individual's practices and gaming did not make an exception to the rule. Indeed, a complete category of video games exploded on the Internet creating consequently groups of gamers meeting online to enjoy the same game altogether (Taylor, 2002; Pearce, 2009).

Basically, gamers enjoy living the same experience in groups. During focus group interviews, we noticed this. Even in an offline gaming context, gamers savoured the opportunity to talk about the game with others and to share their feelings and impressions. The first death, as a common

experience gamers shared, is pretty choking. Witnessing the death by burn of your first avatar due to a lack of cooking skills is a moving experience leading the gamer on the way of consciousness of consequences of choices he/she made. They confessed being touched by the death of their avatar they had spent so much time creating and designing.

This sharing of experiences goes beyond the game frame, and cosplay is certainly one of its utmost manifestations. Cosplaying, short for costume play is briefly defined as dressing-up like a favourite character, here from a game. This behaviour interests us as it partakes creation of a specific culture. When enthusiasts of cosplay gather, they give the impression that they try to stay in their gaming world. In fact, this behaviour is a physical display of inclination for gaming worlds out of the gaming world. The sense of community experienced in the game is then publicly presented and claimed. Game culture started to be studied recently. Scholars often use findings from fan culture scholarship (Hellekson & Busse, 2006).

Evidently, experiences from the game spill over the world of experiences out of the game. Interaction goes beyond the avatar-gamer relationship as the gamer also interacts with the game environment, and his/her avatar engages with other avatars. Ways of behaving adopted by gamers rely on an ideological frame amalgamated by the individual playing according to the rule system of the game he/she is taking part of. Like any games, *The Sims*® is shaped with a group of rules (Caillois, 1967) which are quite open as a wide range of options is available. *The Sims*® is well-known for the large number of cheating codes available for its enthusiasts (Consalvo, 2008). Sometimes, game designers expect gamers to cheat (Consalvo, 2009). However, here, the proliferation of cheating codes was unexpected. As a result, for the second opus, game designers encouraged gamers to create content and codes that were very appreciated by the gaming community (Wirman, 2011). Among our sample of teenagers, I naturally asked if they used cheating codes or not and if yes in which circumstances. They repeatedly said using cheating code for generating big income at the beginning of the game in order to create a comfy house full of fancy items otherwise it would not have been fun playing with the bare minimum. This use of cheating code later in the game was condemned by teenager-gamers as it would pervert the rules of the game they said. Hence, the common norms such as the statement that cheating for more than getting money at the beginning when building the house is unacceptable has emerged.

Two Finnish researchers (Sihvonen, 2009; Wirman, 2011) studied “modding” in the game and showed that gamers like creating personal and national items, making them available to other gamers, and embedding them in the game (Wirman, 2011). By creating artefacts and making them available to other players on Internet, they generate a culture around this gaming experience.

At the beginning of online gaming MUDs[6] and then MMOs[7] orchestrated the life of online gamers, sometimes leading already to some excess. The exciting opportunity that online games represented, and still do, lies in the constant connection of other potential gamers with whom a gamer can interact (Lorentz, 2012a). Gathering around a common goal objective, groups of gamers find lasting enjoyment in these team gaming activities thanks to their strong social aspect. Knowledge and skills developed around this activity reinforced their belonging feeling to a specific group of Internet users. These behaviours bolster gamer's attachment to their world and gaming culture. Consequently, social cohesion formed around gaming culture gets tighter and tighter.

Then, like any offline social community, online gamers felt more and more obliged toward their group, called guild in some cases like *World of Warcraft*® (Blizzard, 2004). This feeling of obligation had been seen as a withdrawal from social life of the flesh world by non-gamers up to a point when non-gamers clearly looked down on social commitment of gamers toward their community. Being labelled as deviants escaping one world to go to another, online gamers had to unite to face this external aggression and therefore stiffened their bounds. Shortly afterwards new comers to online gaming communities had been bullied, and sometimes harshly, strengthening the inclusive feeling of these communities to outsiders.

Video gaming as a practice set apart and forbidden

From an external point of view gamers gathering in groups for spending important amount of time fighting fictional enemies and monsters instead of interacting with family members and maintaining a close relationship appears to be very unusual. Non gamers reporting discourses about their own observation of this specific behaviour supported the apparent abnormality of their relatives' attitudes. However, the definition of pathological behaviours is hardly made with a simple observation without any further understanding of the reasons motivating this attitude (Bachelard, 2000/1937). As Emile Durkheim underscored in his time (Durkheim, 2007/1893), normality as well as pathology is a constructed concept namely encompassing a noticeable subjective part.

As a result of these surfacing fears, political action was required. Regulation institutions were thus composed, and established in different countries to watch closely these unknown and suspect behaviours. In fact, in the United States, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) was created in 1994. The same year, in Oceania, two countries took up this topic very seriously as well, Australia with the Classification Board started applying rating to video games in 1994, and New-Zealand with the Office for Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) founded in 1994, replacing former institutions of censorship. Later in Europe, the PEGI classification rating adapted to video games was established in 2003 by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE).

6 Multi User Dungeon
7 Massively Multiplayer Online Games

Besides these institutions, much research had been undertaken on video gaming online and its related pathologies. Addiction due to video gaming abundantly fed media discourse about video gaming. Consequently, many research institutions launched scientific project for studying and scrutinizing addiction to video gaming. All these actions led to the definition of a certain amount of hours played online that would be over a so-called normal use, framing thus the entrance to a pathological use. Then, gaming time had to be limited and controlled (Anderson, 2007; Millie, 2008). This watching regulation of online gaming channelled the definition of societal pathology. Time spent playing is socially accepted for kids and teenagers as they enjoy large span of time free of school or other commitments. On the opposite, time spent gaming is much less tolerate for adults as it means they do not devote their time to more valuable activities such as working or taking part of life of the society. Thereby a social norm emerged helping people to point out the ones who give too much of their time to gaming and, as a result, adopt pathological attitudes. Authorities relied not only on legal actions but also on families to watch potential addicts (Ipsos, 2009; Ulicsak & Cranmer, 2010; Steinberg, 2012). Monitoring and controlling online gamers became a massive concern in many societies. Recurrently, mass killing were connected to gaming for unproved reasons supporting the common idea that video games teach players to kill. In regard to the amount of people playing games and the very few amount of massive killing, even if there are highly regretful and shameful acts, this assumption would equal to claim that learning to drive is learning to kill with a car. Briefly mention that the main goal of first person shooter games is not killing others but staying alive. This makes a tremendous difference as staying alive requires to protect yourself from hostile enemy fire, and that is how you are about to fire on the opponent. Despite all actions led and organized to watch online video gamers in the past decade, their ranks kept on growing to reach breathtaking numbers (Defosse O'Donnell, 2008). Knowing that they are under threat to be envisioned as excluded from the society for social misconduct, online video gamers did not stop playing, gathering and enjoying their time in synthetic worlds they like so much. Dedicating a noticeable part of their time, online adult gamers were pointed out to be deviants. They were labelled as individuals adopting pathological attitudes and behaving in a way that hurts social life of others. From that moment on, online video gaming was recognized like the snake seducing weak individuals when offering a too juicy apple to bite.

On one hand, online video gamers started to feel offended and threatened as a result of being labelled as deviants. On the other hand, more and more gamers tried to enrol to these online gaming groups. In order to regulate the access to their community, a sort of initiation, sometimes called hazing, took place. Then, new comers, or "newbies", have been treated as the weakest link calling for a destruction up to a point to insults and harassing words were thrown to newbies ears giving birth to cyberbullying. It is not so much the behaviour itself that is questionable than the context of its emergence. In this respect, these harsh and inexcusable attitudes arise in response to the constant

watching under which online video gamers had been for years. Going beyond these attacks resonate as being accepted by the community. These behaviours along with cheating are condemned by the majority of gamers and thus gamers' community can be called a moral community. Practically these behaviours reinforced the bad perception of non-gamers toward these online video gaming communities. Henceforth proofs of condemnable and evil attitudes have been provided by online video gamers themselves. Then this activity was accused to mystify people and therefore set apart from society and even forbidden to some extent. This paradox is classically related to the labelling theory.

According to the labelling theory of sociological trend - Symbolic Interactionism - the labelling process is composed of three different steps (Becker, 1985/1963). First, there is a social norm recognized by the majority of the population, such as here "adult free time can't be devoted to a childish activity that is to say video gaming". Second, individuals have to transgress this social norm; here when online video gamers sparkly increased their group. Last, these individuals have to be recognized by others as deviant, to be labeled. This is the work accomplished by institutions in charge of watching people playing online games and delivering recommendations and advices to handle this behaviour envisioned as abnormal or pathological.

These conditions and events clothe practice of online video gaming as set apart, uniting individuals in one special community in which they share beliefs and practices and therefore adhere to this group. Back to Durkheim definition of religions, it is found out that online video gaming can be regarded as a "sacred thing" (Brent Plate, 2010, pp.217-218). As a matter of fact, Johan Huizinga (1951/1938) himself already claimed that games are sacred in his classical book about gaming, *Homo Ludens*. Here, this claim is extended to online video gaming. This is the point this section examined by first presenting that video gamers have been labeled and therefore taken apart from the society for a while. Consequently video gaming had been presented to people as a harmful activity for manifold reasons.

At this point, we acknowledge that video gaming is a "system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community", exactly how Durkheim (1965/1915, p.62) defined religions.

So, it is still unclear why so many people are eager to invest their time on video gaming although they are more and more aware of its so-called dangers.

4. Video Games: A Paradoxical Tool

Video games allow individuals to believe in the unbelievable

Video gamers look in gaming worlds what they cannot find in the flesh world (Rigby and Ryan, 2011). Blessed with technological improvements, video games become enriched at many levels and then embellish gaming experience. Environments created appear to come out of a dream sometimes. This could be a manifestation of divine presence as Patrick Sherry brought it in his paper when he underlined that for Gerard Manley Hopkins beauty would even give a sacramental meaning (Sherry, 2009, p.379). Then, anything become possible in video gaming worlds thanks to an incredible weaponry of technical tools enabling the gamer to experience a wide range of actions through his relationship with his/her avatar. For instance, a man can be a woman and vice versa, a good person can behave badly, disabled people can do actions they usually cannot. In this way, players 'sacralize their self' (Sherry, 2009, p.375).

Gamers interrogated relate that they do appreciate being someone they cannot be in the flesh world. These features allow gamers to live manifold experiences which support their quest as people are "meaning-seeking animals" (Lee, 2010, p.190). Gamers love embodying a character in charge of an important mission, and they feel empowered by the narrative and the role they play in it (Lorentz, 2012a). These characteristics make possible in-game actions to be meaningful for the player. In effect, gamers create a universe of meaning and video games convey the transcendence of their biological nature. This is how video gaming comes close to religion as Luckmann presented religion in *The Invisible Religion* (1967, p.49).

Gamers can practice magical acts when it seems the rational thing to do as magic takes form pragmatically (Lee, 2010, p.187). Analyse of interviews showed that individuals gaming project their expectations to their avatar (Klevjer, 2006; Yee, 2007) and benefit from their avatar achievement in the game (McGonigal, 2011). This interaction is extremely rich and evolves through time. In an offline environment, the relationship between the player and its avatar is not less valuable. In this respect, the doctoral research demonstrated that individual gaming go on a journey through various identities (Lorentz, 2013). This awareness of no boundaries to what is imaginably possible channels the powerful expression of imagination of identity. The player can become anyone anytime, even God in some games (Brent Plate, 2010). This widely opens the possibilities offered to the individual for social experiences. Not only the gamer interacts with others but he establishes a dialogue with him/herself, as well. Above all, the fact that this is only about a game, that is to say nothing 'serious', unlocks the extent of experimentations that individuals do in the game and with the game.

Besides this wide range of actions and situations available in gaming worlds, the relationship toward rules and norms is pushed back by gamers. Cheating commonly causes the end of the game (Caillois, 1967/1958), but this is not the case in video games. Sometimes cheating is even expected by game designers (Consalvo, 2008) as said earlier. Impacting the game with gamer's actions and creations is called modding (Sihvonen, 2009; Wirman, 2011) and can take different shapes. Among our gamers interviewed, many of them confessed enjoying creating their own artefacts and items and then making them available for the entire community of enthusiasts. Sharing their creation allows them to feel more embedded in the community as they contribute. Their action is thus valued and recognized among the members of the community thanking the gamer for his/her work and input. This exchange fosters a sense of social cohesion (Durkheim, 2008/1893; Brent Plate, 2010, p.217; Graeme, 2013, p.144) emphasizing on self-esteem of gamers as they feel more useful (Seligman, 2011) and become more committed.

Like religions, video gaming worlds provide a window to look at the world (Brent Plate, 2010, pp.220-221). This world view is, according to Luckmann: "an encompassing system of meaning in which socially relevant categories of time, space, causality and purpose are superordinated to more specific schemes in which reality is segmented and the segments are related to one another" (1967, p.53).

Enjoyable and fun this window does attract many people that can stay glued to it. When giving a priority in their life to this window, gamers are rapidly accused to withdraw themselves from the material world. In this regard, their eagerness for spending time in these worlds had been named as escapism. Gordon Calleja (2011) astutely argued in his book, *In-Game*, that there is no escapism in the like for being embodied in synthetical world for two reasons. First, when a gamer is dedicating his time to playing online games, he remains in the same world, that is to say he does not cross any boundary or frontier and in consequence cannot escape from some place to go to another. The synthetic world is, in fact, part of the material world (Brent Plate, 2010, p.228). Second, Calleja underscores that experiences lived in gaming worlds have an impact on gamers' life in the non-gaming world. This impact is concrete when gamers relate to the knowledge acquired in the game. Then, they reuse this knowledge in the material world (Brent Plate, 2010, p.227). This knowledge is mostly composed of social skills. This is exactly where we jump to the point saying that gamers re-enchant their life with video gaming. Indeed, they bring the input and outcome of their gaming experience into their out of the game life. Plus, all our research confirmed this fact and this is one aspect of gaming shared by most, if it is not the entire, community of game researchers. Feeling empowered by a gaming experience, gamers are subsequently more about to take actions in the material world that is to say go outside meeting people, go back to a difficult working environment, try to face difficulties instead of avoiding them. A research on extreme cases of gamers living threatening situations or living on the edge between life and death confessing how a game or a

gaming experience tremendously helped them to overcome their fear and move to the point when thinking genuinely about changing their situation. Suddenly things fall into place; the gamer takes action to improve his/her situation (Lorentz, in progress). Video games are responsible for embellishing people life and by doing so, they re-enchant individuals' life. Just like religions provide a juxtaposed world (Brent Plate, 2010, p.220), video games remain part of our daily life. Hence remains the question about re-enchantment on a theoretical aspect interrogating a back and forth process from enchantment, disenchantment to re-enchantment. Explanation of this process and its evolution will attract our present attention.

Rationalization and the recoil of religious institutions

History is composed of a cycle of events repeating themselves on a regular basis and technical revolutions had rhymed people life. Revolutions happen to follow crisis (Kuhn, 1996/1962). In the 19th century, the Western world had seen a technical revolution called the Industrial Revolution that turned ways of working upside down moving population from the country to city impacting urban life dramatically. The second Industrial Revolution happened later in the century bringing its technical breakthrough and evolutions in ways of working. Placing science as a channel for explaining the world and its intricacies had began as an idea in the 18th century with the philosophical movement called Enlightenment mainly led by European thinkers. This scientific oculus to look at reality searching for truth had replaced time after time the religious interpretation that had in a hegemonic way provided interpretations for centuries. This shift implemented conflicts and contests among layers of societies as views to look at reality competed.

Briefly, the spread of principles of Enlightenment emphasizing on rationality as an ideology led to extension and empowerment of the capitalistic economy. Without retracing the very complex historical process but extremely fascinating too, I wish first to linger on the supremacy of one way of envisioning the world and the reality attended to on. Second, the absence of meaning of the action resulting from the disappearance of belief in magic reinforces the need to re-enchant the world (Lee, 2010, p.186).

The German sociologist, Max Weber, proposed his view on changes on the society consequent of this philosophical and economic shift that occurred progressively from the 18th till the 20th century. Basically and briefly, Weber (2001/1905) explained that the taking off of capitalism is due to the spread of Lutheran religion over space. Many critics attacked quite harshly sometimes Weber's theory raising counter argument fuelling the point saying that catholic places had been also very prolific and flourished with capitalistic ways of doing even earlier so to quote Genes in the 15th century (Braudel, 1995/1962). However, the point made by Weber that attracts our attention here is more the movement in beliefs from religion to science. In fact, Weber underlined the recoil of religious institutions in people's life replaced by scientific institutions.

Concretely, credit had moved from one kind of social institutions to another, from religions to sciences. Setting the context, even grossly and briefly, helps to join the movement of influences that are the cornerstone of argumentation deployed here. Weber explained that the loss of magic, the loss of an illusion plus the loss of sense were consequences of the disenchantment process. He pointed out that the capitalist economy and bureaucratization were guilty in that case. He offered art as a rescuer from the previously cited devils (Sherry, 2009, p.370). In this respect, video games have become cultural products as a result of a legitimation process (Lorentz, 2012b) including being topic of displays in museums such as Le Grand Palais[8] in Paris in 2011, Smithsonian[9] museum in Washington, MOMA[10] in New York in 2012, The Computerspielemuseum[11] in Berlin in 2011, Musee de la civilisation[12] in Quebec, in 2013 and so forth.

Besides the emergence of this capitalistic view of the world, another ideological system put up on weight at the beginning of the 20th century and later on widely spread due to consequences of decisions made in Yalta conference in 1945. Soviet system spread from Russia through Eastern Europe, with more or less freedom, settling in most of the central Europe countries, in the Balkans and Baltic countries too. This is more the collapse of the Soviet Union that focuses our attention here than the existence of this ideological influence, imposed by one winner of the Second World War. The death of the Soviet Union and subsequently soviet influence generated the death of an ideological alternative to capitalism as an ideology dictating ways of living. These fashions of telling the reality and the truth are particularities of the postmodernism (Sherry, 2009, p.377). Indeed, main storylines have been deposed leaving then a vacuum ready to be fulfilled.

By providing another way to look at the world, video gaming worlds offer an alternative to the main and predominant model of living our current societies. In these worlds, gamers find what they think/feel not finding in the flesh world. Variety of individualities struggle to echo their beliefs in their daily actions. Feeling stocked in their desires and more importantly, in their aspirations to be, individuals seek for shelters wherein they could unfold their wings to take off (Lorentz, in progress). Video gaming worlds do answer to their prayers, and as soon as gamers are aware of this, they cannot stop expressing their taste for being in these worlds, whatever happens around.

In the actual dominant paradigm science occupies the entire space as a window to look at the world and life. Questions are answered thanks to good services of science and its army of experts. Emphasized by the Enlightenment, Science as a way to explain life extend to such a point that none explainable thing or concept is simply rejected out of the scope. As a result, religions do not fulfil

8 http://www.grandpalais.fr/fr/evenement/game-story
9 http://www.si.edu/Exhibitions/Details/The-Art-of-Video-Games-840
10 http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/
11 http://www.fastcompany.com/1721468/worlds-largest-video-game-exhibition-opens-berlin
12 http://www.mcq.org/en/mcq/expositions.php?idEx=w3760

this social function anymore, at least on the surface. Consequently, some research investigated young people in order to scrutinize if they have a religious culture and how they put it up. In real, teenagers do have a religious culture resulting from manifold sources of information (Michon, 2011). Video games are part of their source of information that they rely on as video games are the common medium they use frequently (Octobre, 2009). The point here is that individuals utilize a current channel of information to seek for an explanation. Before religious institutions were the communication channel, then it has been scientific institutions, and now it is informational institutions among them video gaming worlds. Moreover, video gaming worlds not only provide information to gamers but also a field for experimentation. Putting ideas into actions with low risk is largely enabled by video gaming worlds. Characterized by a meritocratic philosophy (McGonigal, 2011), video games channel the main idea supporting that the more you train, the better you get. Rewarding system of games is intrinsic and highly used by educational experts (Gee, 2003) but also therapeutical scientists (McGonigal, *Superbetter*, 2012). In addition, disenchantment is marked by the lack of moral principles and meaningless actions in the world (Sherry, 2009, p.374) that are two significant inputs particular to video gaming worlds.

As video games are replacing scientific and religious institutions as information providers, we wonder how this product reached this point.

Where the paradox lies: video games are a product of capitalism

Only few decades old video games are a recent product. According to research on games, video games are simply a result of the technological evolution (Flanagan, 2007; Lorentz, 2011). With the increase of technical performances games and toys have changed and evolved for becoming electronic and computer games. For instance, many basic card or board games had been duplicated into video games. Solitaire is one of the favourite games of players (Brand 2013). Then games such *Mah-Jong* or *Poker* are also very popular among online gamers (Brand, 2013). Very classic games, *Scrabble*, *Monopoly*, *Trivial Pursuit*, are available in video games version too. Even puzzles are now displayed into a digital version[13]. Different historical paths had been taken in many countries in order to create video games.

In Japan, electronic and video games were created by expert from the toy industry as a natural evolution of the range of products offered to the consumer (Gorges, 2008). In contrast to the United States wherein computer engineers designed games to have fun and enjoy their free time (Donovan, 2010). In France, first video games were invented by artists desiring to express their creativity with the latest tool available (Ichbiah, 2008). Video games emerged from this techno culture within technology is predominant. Video games paradoxically propose a fantasy and unreal

13 http://www.amazon.com/Ravensburger-Puzzles-PC/dp/B004S3ZHQ2/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1381325173&sr=8-3&keywords=Ravensburger+Puzzles+-+PC

environment to people. The story around *Tetris*, the most popular game of all times, is a sharp example of the subtleties surrounding the emergence of video games. In fact, *Tetris* was created by Alexei Pajitnov at the Academy of Science in Moscow on his free time in 1984. When he showed the game to his colleagues, they were all very enthusiastic and started playing. The frenzy resulting from the game played in every department of the Academy generated a noticeable change in its employees' work quality. This is how superior in the Party realized that something was going on. The vivid interest of employees did not find any echo in the head of the soviet party, and anything had been done with it. Russians even sold rights of the game for nearly nothing to Americans asking. It was nothing; it was just a game. This illustrates how games came out of different environments just because some people felt the need and crave to create them.

Here lies the paradox of the emergence of video games and their impact on our societies. In fact, video games are a pure product of mathematics as they are created by the assistance of computer whose language is maths. Technological era is characterized by the wish to control nature and every of its aspects. This leads to lose touch with humanity (Lee, 2010, p.183). However, video games brought unbelievable and unnatural to a world wherein science is the only activity recognized for bringing true explanations. Not only video games re-enchant the world, but there are also meaning providers although there should be ‘just games’.

This is about the product as a cultural item, but video games go beyond as they also provide a world in which gamers can take action. In real, through this paper we notice that what gamers can do and do in the game matters for them. In addition, we realize that the meaning behind actions taken in the game is leading gamers to experience manifold social experiences. This is how video gaming worlds supply meaning to gamers’ life.

As Lee argued recalling Weber’s work (2010, p.185), charisma is one of the irrational characteristic still recognized as a force in our societies. Nonetheless, charisma is a subjective quality hardly comprehended. In online games, guilds are led by charismatic avatars whose actions are supposed to be directed by the good. Charisma can be taken on any gamer in the gaming worlds; it is an opportunity to grasp. Embodying a charismatic avatar in the game enables players to act accordingly with their beliefs when actions of the avatar rely on genuine charisma.

To this end, this paper claims that video gaming worlds thanks to what they provide can supplement other classical social institutions and take part of the socialization process (Lorentz, 2013) besides family, school and church. Of course, the recoil of religious institutions in daily life of individuals lets a vacuum that video gaming worlds can unwittingly fill in. The reality of the disenchantment process is questioned, admittedly, but video games could nevertheless compose one of the aesthetic responses people have found (Sherry, 2009, p.384). Exactly as Luckmann (1967) pointed out in his work, *the Invisible religion*, and the scope of sociology of religion goes beyond

church. Questions asked to that matter can be answered in other arenas of the society such as mass communications, and leisure. In addition, Luckmann stressed that religious aspects are first satisfied in the private sphere. Based on Simmel (2013/1908) idea of overlapping of social worlds of individuals, we argue that the self of the gamer is constructed through experiences lived in many social situations and even more importantly during overlapping time of social spheres. For instance, the video gamer has to justify his wish to play video games instead of watching TV with his family. Frictions resulting from these overlapping moments convey the affirmation of gamers taking part of their socialization.

The video-ludological socialization has been described somewhere else (Lorentz, 2013) pointing out that gamers design, define, and express their self as a result of their experiences lived in gaming worlds. The variety of experiences lived in different worlds and social institutions improve social skills of individuals (Cooley, 2011/1902). Muriel Darmon (2011/2006) brought the idea of the occasion for socialization to take place. This is where video gaming worlds bring something into the table not only for teenagers but also for adults as the socialization process is a life-long process (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). The diagram presents the overlap between different social institutions in young time and video games are now part of it as a leisure activity. It remains that the individual is at the kernel of all these institutions without whom they would not exist. The more diverse and varied the experiences lived by individuals are the wider and larger their social skills are. And social skills drive to a common understanding and mutual respect (Cooley, 2011/1902) for a harmonious life.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we claimed that video gaming worlds present occasion for socialization to take place. By providing environments in which gamers feel secure and like joining and committing, video gaming worlds partake to the overall process of socialization of individuals in today's societies. Retractors of Weber argued that religions may not have disappeared, on the opposite they take another form (Seguy quoted by Sherry, 2009, p.373), which could be video games. In effect, individuals need to create meaning around actions they take whether it is in the material world or the synthetical world. Thereupon Lee insisted on the relationship between enchantment and meaningfulness saying: "meaningfulness may be considered equivalent to the idea of enchantment in which the interdependence of nature and humanity formed the cornerstone of self-authenticity." (2010, p.183).

Notwithstanding, this meaningfulness of actions taken in-game is not smoothly acknowledged as being related to religious matters. The topic of religions and video games is not easy to tackle down as they represent two different paradigms per see. Unlike the mainstream belief that the two topics can be intertwined, actual researchers on video games start to be interested in question the place or sometimes absence of religions in games. For example, production team of Penny Arcade led by James Portnow decided to dedicate an episode to religions in games[14]. They had to face several comments harshly questioning their scientific bases[15]. As soon as the topic of religion had been brought up, gamers flew away and grumbled. However, these two works clearly claimed and demonstrated scientifically that faith is required for doing science too and in consequence that faith is not disconnected from scientific work.

It may be a chance that video gamers are not always aware of the self-reflexive work they are doing when playing. Otherwise they would give up on playing, and thus, they would cut themselves from the implicit socialization process at stakes in video gaming. As long as video games are "just" a game, their huge importance is allowed by tenants of scientific truth as they do not compete for providing explanations of the world. However, the world may not be that disenchanted as Sherry argued saying that fashions of looking orient ways of seeing (Sherry, 2009, p.369).

Animosity from one community toward another reveals underlying fear, anger and jealousy. Yet there is no need to point out one world to another or one group – non-gamers to another – gamers. It is more about a misunderstanding of common interests related to the use of a tool, video games, than anything else. Not everyone has to play video games in order to accept video gaming, but everyone must be open-minded and respectful to live harmoniously on the same planet whatever their religion and beliefs are.

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14 http://www.penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/religion-in-games-part-1
15 http://www.penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/god-does-not-play-dice

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Biography

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