

The Body under the Mask: Unveiling the corporeal practice of gamers

Preface: Corporeal coincidences

In reality, I should be doing something else. I should be analyzing the discourse and communication of *World of Warcraft* gamers playing together in groups and guilds. I should be doing conversational analysis and writing papers on the syntactical structure, semantic meaning, and pragmatic use of gamers' communication while they raid, quest, and hang out. Instead, I find myself consistently writing and talking about the bodily experience of gaming, the fingers sensuous 'feel' of the game, the quality and meaning of locomotion, the rhythm of gaming, and the deeply meaningful corporeal practice of gamers. How did this come to pass?

It began by observing my brother partake in high end raiding with his guild in *World of Warcraft*. I was logging the group's textual and verbal communication when I realized that the communication taking place wasn't much about make-believe, identity-construction, visual meaning-making, or social structures. Days later, while chewing on this, I was passing my 6 year old daughter's room while she was playing the bull running Flash-game *Power Pamplona*, concentrating on making her avatar jump obstacles and staying ahead of the stampeding bull. My attention was caught by a rhythmic, chanting murmuring. I poked my head into the room and saw her tightened body, intently focused but at the same time hypnotic distant eyes, and her moving lips chanting: "and...now...and...now...and...now" while pressing the spacebar in concordance with the games pulse (and pulsating music), rocking her body back and forth to stay in the rhythm. Was there a deeper meaning hiding here? – This certainly wasn't conversation but more like a sensuous corporeal dance. It unexpectedly reminded me of the raid-communication of my brother's *World of Warcraft* guild. I suddenly envisaged the entire group sitting at their material interfaces, their fingers dancing on the keyboard while moving their mice in figure skating patterns, rhythmic waves of key-taps and mouse-clicks ascended as a kind of corporeal music. Suddenly I saw their communication in a new light, not as 'conversation' or 'discourse,' but as a symphonic coordination of corporeal acts as the gamers simultaneously played their own idiorhythmic part and flowed with the polyrhythm of the group. This vision was additionally strengthened when I woke up one night as my brother and my husband were playing *Left 4 Dead 2* above my head (on the first floor). I could hear them screaming for help, cursing, banging their fists in the table, jumping around in their chairs, cheering and laughing. – This definitely wasn't conversation either, more like bursts and waves of corporeal thrills and adrenaline rushes.

All this was only reinforced as I began to play *World of Warcraft* in my working hours and *Rock Band* with my daughter and mother in my spare time. When I went to bed my body echoed with my fingers dance on keyboards, mice, and guitars while my head echoed with calls for assistance, instructions for proper corporeal interaction, cheers in joy and cries in alarm. But nothing stayed imprinted so powerfully on my mind as my first group-instance in *World of Warcraft*: My dry mouth, shaking hands, nervous outbursts, throbbing heart, adrenaline rushed body, and narrowing visual field. Afterwards, I was unable to sleep for several hours, laying in the dark, as I tried to calm my racing heart and jittering body. And profoundly startled, when I realized that my corporeal sensations were identical to the first time I was in a kumite-fight at a karate tournament.

As time passed, these corporeal coincidences began to fall into place and I become conscious about the fact that in order to understand the communication and virtual interaction *in the game*, I needed to understand the corporeal interaction *with the game* and the communication *about* the corporeal interaction *with* the game. Only then would I be able to faithfully describe the *World of Warcraft* gamers' communication and interaction as a whole. But as my prior game research was on the ontology of games and on communication *in* games I began extensively and intensively to traverse the research literature on gamers and gaming for theoretical, analytical, and methodological frameworks.

Games research: “The Gamer Game”



Fig 1: Screenshot from an in-game video capture of World of Warcraft containing gamer’s the virtual interaction of the avatar as well as the other group members’ avatars. Focus is here typically on culture, sociality, in-game embodiment and interaction alone and in groups.



Fig 2: Still from a video recording of a gamer playing World of Warcraft containing the cognitive, communicative, and perceptual dimensions in gaming as well as the gamer’s identity negotiation processes. Focus is here typically on learning, meaning-making, communication, discourse, perception, visibility, identity construction, cultural and social situatedness.



Fig. 3: Still from a video recording of a gamer playing World of Warcraft containing the corporeal, locomotive, and material dimensions in gaming. Focus is here on the gamer as tool-wielding, handcrafting, moving body.

Thus, this paper will begin its ‘unveiling’ of the corporeal practice of gamers by outlining the central, dominating views or framings of the gamer I found to currently permeate games research – or what could be labeled “The Gamer Game” in games research. When examining the research literature which in one way or another is concerned with the nature of the gamer, six recurrent views surfaces. What these six views have in common is that they are all focused on the first two of the above frames (fig. 1 & fig. 2) while generally being ignorant of the third (fig. 3). Hence, the gamer is within game research framed as an in-game entity, as culturally or socially situated (inside or outside the game), as a thinking, communicating, or perceiving recipient, or as someone involved in identity construction and negotiation.

Frame one: The gamer as community member



The gamer as cultural and social entity:
‘World of Communitycraft’

Within this framework gaming is viewed as most prominently being a cultural and social activity and gamers are accordingly characterized by their cultural and social processes. Here, research encapsulate the gamer as someone involved in a process of enculturation, picking up the norms, values, and practices of the in-game community, accruing or losing social and cultural capital, and as someone who most importantly needs social skills in order to be a successful gamer. An example of this framing of the gamer is Mark Chen (2009), who claims that: “Ultimately, if the gamers I played with wanted to succeed in their endgame or stage two endeavors, the importance of social networks and social capital far outweighed game-content knowledge.” (Chen, 2009:4) and: “Expertise development within WoW, then, is tied inextricably to a player’s ability to learn social skills.” (Chen, 2009:13). Other examples is Constance Steinkuehler & Dimitri Williams’: “Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as “Third Places”” (2006) and Nick Yee’s: “Befriending Ogres and Wood-Elves: Relationship Formation and The Social Architecture of Norrath” (2009).

Summed up and boiled down, this stance views gaming as a prominently cultural and social activity, gamers as most significantly being cultural and social entities, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers’ ability to display social skills and accrue social capital. Thus, gamers are first and foremost involved in a “World of Communitycraft.”

Frame two: The gamer as in-game avatar



The gamer as virtual, in-game entity:
'World of Gamecraft'

Here, gaming is viewed as most notably being a virtual, in-game activity and gamers are analogously characterized by their virtual embodiment and in-game practices. Research encapsulate the gamer as comprised of virtual embodiment in the form of an avatar involved in the process of picking up the game's virtual affordances and engaged in virtual interaction in the gameworld, and as someone who needs in-game skills to be a successful gamer. Recent examples of equating gamers with in-game avatars are Jonas Linderoth & Ulrika Bennerstedt: "The everyday gaming practices we have investigated concerns gamers planning and execution of actions by means of their avatars [...] as computer gaming is about making sense of an interactive structure [...] The studied sequences make visible that a major object of knowledge in team gameplay is that of being skilled in *seeing events* in the game interface and being able to communicate and direct attention to phenomena of game mechanics in the course of action." (Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2009:410-11) or Miroslaw Filiciak who claims that: "...when I play I am more my own avatar than the person sitting by the console/computer." (Filiciak, 2003:92) and later that: "...since our actions are visible on a television or computer screen, it is here we actually act" (Filiciak, 2003:100). In the same vein is James Paul Gee's: "Video Games and Embodiment" (2008).

Summed up and boiled down this stance views gaming as a distinctively virtual, in-game activity, gamers as most significantly being virtual embodied avatars, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers' ability to display in-game skills and pick up the game's virtual affordances. Thus, gamers are first and foremost involved in a "World of Gamecraft."

Frame three: The gamer as cognitive learner



The gamer as cognitive, learning entity:
'World of Mindcraft'

Within this framework gaming is viewed as a cognitive, learning-oriented activity and gamers are in accordance with this characterized by their cognitive, interpretative and learning practices. Consequently, research encapsulates the gamer as someone comprised of cognitive meaning-making, problem solving, or as part of distributed cognition and cooperative learning, and as someone who needs literacy skills and learning competencies to be a successful gamer. An apparent example of equating gamers with cognitive learners are Constance Steinkuehler & Sean Duncan who assert that: "Recent studies indicate that the intellectual activities that constitute successful gameplay are nontrivial, including the construction of new identities, collaborative problem solving, literacy practices that exceed our national standards, systemic thinking, and, as one might expect, computer literacy." (Steinkuehler & Duncan, 2008:2). Other examples which frames the gamer as first and foremost a cognitive and learning entity is Constance Steinkuehler's: "Massively Multiplayer Online Games as an Educational Technology: An outline for research" (2008) and Marc Prensky's "Digital Game-Based Learning" (2003).

Summed up and boiled down, gaming is defined as chiefly a cognitive and learning activity, gamers as essentially cognitive, learning thinkers, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers' ability to display cognitive skills and acquire knowledge. Thus, gamers are first and foremost involved in a "World of Mindcraft."

Frame four: The gamer as communicator



The gamer as communicative entity: 'World of Warcraft'

This framework places gaming as essentially being a communicative activity and gamers are likewise viewed as essentially characterized by their practices of communication and discourse. Here, research reduces the gamer to someone involved in narration, communication, and discourse, someone who is gaming and displaying knowledge, culture, power, identity, sociality and suchlike through his communicative practices, and who needs communicative skills in order to be a successful gamer. Representatives of this stance are Bonnie A. Nardi, Stella Ly & Justin Harris (2007) who investigates "...the way players learn this complex game through chat conversations with peers. [...] Chat conversation is a key means of learning in World of Warcraft but not the only means. Players also make use of player-created content on the Internet in forums, FAQs, guides, and commentaries." (Nardi et al., 2007:1) and Constance Steinkuehler who "...argues that forms of video game play such as those entailed in MMOGs are not replacing literacy practices but rather *are* literacy activities." (Steinkuehler, 2007:298).

Summed up and boiled down, this stance views gaming as a prominently communicative activity, gamers as most significantly involved in practices of communication and discourse, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers' ability to partake in communication and discourse inside and outside the game. Thus, gamers are first and foremost involved in a "World of Warcraft."

Frame five: The gamer as receiver/perceiver



The gamer as perceiving/receiving entity: 'World of Eyecraft'

Here, gaming is viewed as a perceptual activity and gamers are accordingly characterized by their processes of reception and perception. Thus, the gamer is here framed as someone picking up visual affordances and gaining professional vision through receiving, scanning, and decoding the visual representation or simulation, and as someone who most importantly needs visual skills to be successful in the activity of gaming. A characteristic example of this scholarly stance is Jonas Linderoth & Ulrika Bennerstedt who defines gamers thus: "In accordance to an ecological perspective they become *fine-tuned* to *discriminate* among different visual variations between game characters. [...] This is a process of discrimination where the gamer learns to make more and more complex distinctions in his/her perceptual field. The gamer's perception is shaped through the gaming practice so she/he develops a form of *professional vision*. [...] To become a skilled player is therefore a process where the gamer develops a more and more fine-tuned perception" (Linderoth & Bennerstedt 2007:606-08). Other examples are Barry Atkins' *More than a Game: The computer game as fictional form* (2003) which frames the gamer as a reader/viewer of fiction and Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000) which frames video games as remediating television or cinema and gamers as perceiving receivers.

Summed up and boiled down, gaming is condensed to an activity of reception and perception, gamers are accordingly viewed as receiving and perceiving entities, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers' ability to "read" the interface, interpret the output, and gain professional vision. Thus gamers are first and foremost involved in a "World of Eyecraft."

Frame six: The gamer as person



The gamer as person/individual: 'World of Identitycraft'

Within this framework gaming is viewed as an identity constructing and negotiating activity and gamers are accordingly characterized as socially and culturally situated individuals involved in processes of managing, construing, and constructing their off-line and on-line identities. Here, research establishes the gamer as someone embodying inter alia a certain gender, race, age, culture, class off-line and on-line, as someone reflecting and constructing their identity-traits, and as someone who needs cultural and identity constructing and construing skills in order to be successful in gaming. Representative within this stance are T.L. Taylor who "Confronted with the exciting daunting, task of looking at how the online body (typically conceived of as a decidedly nondigital thing) is produced, constructed, and experience." (Taylor, 1999:4) and Miroslaw Filiciak who claims that: "...the player loses his identity, projecting himself inward, becoming the "other," and identifies with the character in the game. During the game, the player's identity ends in disintegration, and the merger of user's and character's consciousness ensues." (Filiciak, 2003:91). Another example of this framing is Hilde G. Corneliusen's "World of Warcraft as a Playground for Feminism" (2008).

Summed up and boiled down, this stance frames gaming as a significantly identity-constructing and -negotiating activity, gamers as focused on facework and presentation of self, and gaming as something revolving around the gamers' ability to juggle a range of identities and skills in managing and manipulating identity on one hand and the configuration of identity by culture, sociality, gender, race etc. Thus, gamers are first and foremost involved in a "World of Identitycraft"

Combinatorics: Research stances in action

The above six framings of the gamer is not boxed off in relation to each other, but functions more as various combinations in the actual research papers where different researchers have different preferences. Jonas Linderoth usually combines the gamer as in-game avatar and the gamer as perceiver when framing the gamer, Mark Chen uses a combination of the gamer as community member, cognitive learner, and communicator, while T.L. Taylor combines the gamer as community member, in-game avatar, and person. Hence, how the individual researchers combines the six stances and frames the gamer varies, but they all generally share the trait of defining and ascribing the gamer to (a combination of) the first two of the three 'gamer-pictures' presented in the beginning of the paper.

Frame seven: The gamer as tool-wielding moving body?



The gamer as moving body/tool-wielder: 'World of Handicraft'

When it comes to the third 'gamer-picture' in the beginning of the paper – namely the framing of the gamer as a tool-wielding, handicrafting, and moving body – it is most persistently present as a framework of absence. This is according to Maxine Sheet-Jonstone a prevailing trait regarding corporeality and locomotion in general: "Because this significance has been largely ignored in contemporary Western science and philosophy, because perception – most especially visual perception – language, information-processing, computational modeling, and other such topics are at

the focal point of contemporary attention, the primacy of movement has in fact gone unrecognized and unexamined.” (Sheet-Johnstone, 1999:132). Thus, there is no research in games research that primarily concerns itself with the gamers’ corporeality or locomotion as qualitatively dimensions in and of themselves. Instead these dimensions are (if touched upon at all) persistently recast as sub-dimensions of culture, sociality, virtuality, cognition, communication, perception, or identity. The outcome of this common tendency is to simultaneously recast corporeality and locomotion as *something else* and eliminate ‘gamers as actually moving bodies’ as it is *nothing in itself* – The result being an absence of core terms, research on, and guiding frameworks for the self-moving corporeal gamer. Thus, there is no “World of Handicraft” in games research.

However, this absence of theoretical, analytical, and methodological frameworks for the stylistic, qualitative, and experiential dimensions of gamers as tool-wielding, handcrafting, and moving bodies are strikingly, given that the much debated concepts of ‘interactivity’ and ‘agency’ often are put forward as the hallmarks of gaming and computer games. But one could easily get the impression that gamers are stillborn, or read more favorably, that they possess a trivial, irrelevant, and uninteresting mechanical, robotic, programmable body which they control and steer in order to game. One needs only to consult the archive of e.g. *Game Studies – The international journal of computer game research* to get a clear idea of just how all-encompassing the absence of corporeality and locomotion is: There are numerous papers like “Living a Virtual Life: Social Dynamics of Online Gaming,” “Girlish Counter-Playing Tactics,” “Moral Decision Making in Fallout,” or “Computer Games have words, Too: Dialogue Conventions in Final Fantasy,” but not a single paper (out of 99 papers) focused on the stylistic, qualitative, or experiential dimensions of gamers’ corporeality, locomotion, or tool-use in computer games. The third picture reflecting the gamer as a tool-wielding, moving body thus lives an invisible, neglected life in game research as it is brushed aside as a ‘purely mechanical/physical/ergonomic’ matter.

Tool-wielder and handcrafter

This tendency to flout, distort, dismiss, or overlook the tool-wielding, handcrafting aspects of the gamer has partly its natural explanation in the prevailing views on the nature of the gamer’s corporeal interaction with the material interface. When scrutinizing game research for *any* treatment of gamers’ tool-use three common stances emerge:

Tool-use in traditional computer games is trivial

The tool-wielding interactions of the gamer (the gamer’s actions with material input-devices) are commonly classified as ‘simple,’ ‘uninteresting,’ or ‘trivial.’ Overall, tool-use is viewed as insignificant aspects of gaming concerning only the mechanistic encoding of the tools functionality into the gamer’s body: Tool-use is a matter of neuromuscular encoding (memorizing and internalizing the keyboard and mouse commands and patterns) and development of hand-eye coordination, reflexes, and manual dexterity.

Even the most promising of papers like Rambusch, Jakobsson & Pargman’s article “Exploring E-sports: A Case Study of Gameplay in Counter Strike” never amounts to more than the stated fact that: “[*Counter-Strike*] affords competitive play by rewarding fast reflexes, good manual dexterity and excellent hand-eye co-ordination.” (2007: 159). Regardless of the fact that they only a page earlier proclaimed: “... the handling of the game has an impact of the players’ understanding of the game and vice versa [...]The idea of both elements [the actual (physical and motorical) activity and the meaning-making activities] being closely related is strongly supported by theories of embodied and situated cognition [...] Moreover, *gameplay is a situated social-cultural activity, spanning brain, body, and game environment*” (2007:158).

Thus, the handling of the game as meaningful, qualitative, and experiential is on the following page watered down to a purely physical and mechanistic dimension and then abandoned, leaving no trace on the subsequent pages. This represents a stereotypical approach to tool-use in traditional computer games: Even when the tool-wielding gamer is acknowledged, the experiential dimension of tool-use is neglected – Instead tool-use is framed as a purely ergonomically, automatically, and trivially concern, carrying no meaning and quality in itself.

Corporeality in traditional computer games is transcendable

Closely related to viewing the gamer’s corporeal tool-use as trivial, is the view that the gamer is capable of transcending the handcrafting dimension of gaming (the actual, physical gaming actions). This is basically a gradual process of overcoming initial learning difficulties and gaining skill proficiencies as the material tool-use is mastered and internalized and the gamer’s body successfully neuromuscularly encoded. Hence, when the gamer has ‘incorporated’ the material interface and ‘automated’ the body, he is capable of leaving the material, physical, and corporeal dimensions of gaming behind as he becomes ‘immersed’ in the gameworld and ‘embodied’ in the avatar. In this way,

the gamer transcends the body, which is left to its own mechanical, robotic devices. It is precisely the framings of corporeality as transcendable and tool-use as trivial, that enables the rulings of the domineering stances within game research.

Only by subduing the tool-wielding body under the hegemony of sociality, virtuality, cognition, communication, perception, or identity is it possible to define gaming as “a three-way interaction among the virtual character’s mind/body (the player’s surrogate), the character’s goals and the player’s goals, and the design features of the virtual world in terms of affordances for effective action” (Gee, 2008:260), or treat “Massively Multiplayer Online Gaming as a Constellation of Literacy Practices” (Steinkuehler, 2007).

Thus, the corporeality of gaming is something to be overcome and transcended as the gamers body is merely a robotic automaton grinding meaninglessly away behind the screen. The body is either left as an empty shell (communitycraft, gamecraft), robotically controlled by the gamer as an unavoidable obstacle (minecraft, wordcraft, eyecraft) or as something heavily inscribed with culture, gender, race and suchlike (identitycraft). As a result, the ‘naked’ acting body contains no quality or meaning in itself.

Tools in traditional computer games are unnatural

Finally, the tools of the game are framed as fundamentally ‘unbodily,’ ‘unnatural,’ ‘abstract,’ or even outright ‘harmful’. The tendency within this stance is to view traditional gaming tools, like keyboard and mouse, as something that deprives the gamer of potential experiential aspects of quality and meaning and instead forces him to become a button-pressing machine. The tools stand in no ‘meaningful’ relation to the gamer’s body but are abstract devices, incapable of providing any corporeal gratification.

As Tanenbaum and Bizzocchi clearly states: “Beyond concerns of winning and losing, there is a physical pleasure associated with engaging in Rock Band with the entire body. Traditional video game interactions take the player outside of an awareness of the body. A player using a control pad is often only aware of her body when something happens to disrupt the experience, such as when she contracts the repetitive stress injury known colloquially as “Gamer’s Thumb.”” (2009:3). And the position is stated even more clearly by Griffin: “The dependency of video game control on the button reflects a disregard for the body’s abilities. By relying on this artifact of automation, the video game medium must adopt a cognition-centric approach to interaction – giving up the pleasures and benefits of physical involvement.” (2008:3). Or clearer yet by Parker: “The fact that a pressing motion is not in any way connected to typical game activities makes a button inappropriate, and damage may have been done to playability and to user expectations in the long term.” (2008:1).

Thus, the material tools the gamer uses when gaming is dismissed as abstract, unbodily, problematic, or harmful without allowing them the possibility of providing the gamer with any aspects of corporeal meaningfulness, gratification, or quality. Instead the tools are framed as forcing the gamer’s interaction to become mechanical, robotic, or automatically, as the tools carries no meaning or quality in themselves.

Read as a whole, the presentation of the hegemony of game research as authoritatively framing the gamer as cultural, social, virtual, cognitive, communicative, perceiving, and/or identity-constructing entity while neglecting and rejecting the perspective on the gamer as tool-wielding, moving body and deeming the gamer’s tools, tool-use, and corporeality trivial, mechanical, physical, or harmful is off course a provocative, aggressive, and coarse reading of game research. None the less, this reading is justifiable, as the exaggeration helps expound and unveil existing currents within game research. The bodily and material neglect within game research is not necessarily performed with overt intent, but is closely related to our tools’ and bodies’ own foundational structure of withdrawal and self-effacement. This structure of withdrawal and self-effacement is so powerful, that even in obviously corporeal practices like e.g. sport. Or as Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson puts it: “Whilst in recent years sports studies have addressed the calls ‘to bring the body back in’ to theorisations of sport and physical activity [...] Relatively few accounts are grounded in the ‘flesh’ of the lived sporting body” (Allen-Collinson, 2009:279). Thus, game research is in no way alone in its neglect of the corporeal dimensions.

Corporeal dis-appearance and dys-appearance

In the philosophical-phenomenological work *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder presents an explanatory framework for the body’s natural propensity for withdrawal and submersion when we (skillfully) act (with tools) in the world. Hence, what could also serve as a telling title for corporeality in game research, can possible provide a more friendly and forgiving explanation for ‘the absent body.’

Concisely put, in order to act successfully and effortlessly in the world we have to direct our attention and actions away *from* our corporeal base *toward* the (game)world: “My being-in-the-world depends upon my body’s self-effacing transitivity.” (Leder, 1990:15). In this way, our body and its movements become like a transparent pane through which we engage the game while simultaneously being oblivious to our bodily movements and actions with the material input-devices – As gamers we are naturally focusing upon the goal of the gaming activity not our corporeal means of accomplishment (Leder, 1990:20). This disappearance not only encompasses our bodily actions and movements but also the tools involved, like keyboard and mouse, which are the core of the activity but absent from our gaming as well as our researcher attention. The gaming body serves as a neutral background, away from explicit awareness: “This is the principle of focal disappearance. The intentional arc has a telos that carries attention outward, away from the bodily points of origin.” (Leder, 1990:53). And when we as researchers build our observations and theories on e.g. interviewing gamers and being gamers ourselves, this corporeal disappearance will also have a propensity to encompass our scholarly stance: Because the body is a (necessarily) tacit and self-concealing structure, the gamer can all too easily be framed as a disembodied entity and any leftover corporeal traces framed as devoid of higher meaning and quality (See Leder, 1990: 119-26). A duality is thus naturally introduced: We cannot deny the existence of the gamer’s body in gaming, but we can deny the existence of any quality, meaning, or experiential value residing in the body. Those attributes and aspects are withheld from corporeality and granted to e.g. cognition, perception, or virtual embodiment. Hence, the structure of corporeal disappearance can be said to be its own natural explanation for the neglect and unawareness of corporeality and locomotion in games research.

The renunciation within game research of tools as unbodily or harmful, tool-use as trivial and mechanical, and the body as something to be controlled or transcended is likewise motivated by an inherent corporeal structure, namely the structure of corporeal ‘dys-appearance.’ Dys-appearance concerns the fact that in times of problematic performance or dysfunction the disappeared corporeality and materiality of the activity will re-appear in our gaming and researching attentional field. But corporeality rematerializes as something problematic, as something dysfunctional preventing us from focusing upon the gameworld. Consequently, it will inevitably be regarded as something negative, undesirable, or uninteresting – as an undesired state that must be controlled and transcended. And therefore, body movements, tool wielding and tools becomes something functioning mechanically under the surface in order for us to research and play the game ‘for real’ – not something containing quality and meaning, but something signifying potential trouble and crisis that will keep us ‘outside’ the game. Hence, our notion of body and locomotion becomes rooted in phenomena of dys-appearance and an ethic of transcending or controlling the body (as well as depriving it of quality and significance) becomes a natural consequence.

But even though Drew Leder’s excellent work on corporeality provides us with explanatory frameworks for the ‘natural neglect’ of corporeality tools, tool-use, and corporeality within game research, it does not give us the tools to perform qualitative accounts of the gamer’s corporeality and locomotion.

Moving to the East: The gamer as corporeal artist

If we want to move away from disregarding the corporeal practice of gaming, and move *from* an understanding of the scholarly neglect of corporeal practice in gaming *to* an ability to observe, acknowledge, and capture the corporeal practice of gamers in a qualitative and meaningful way, we must also move forward theoretically and analytically. We must progress *from* dividing and reducing *to* uniting and fusing, if we are to see that there is something *under the mask*. And most importantly, acknowledge that there *is something* and that this something *is something* in and of itself. We must transform this something from being trivial and mechanistic to becoming qualitatively and meaningful. But how can we succeed, when our current frameworks are not able to capture this something unaltered and unwounded? When we are inevitably recasting the tool-wielding moving gamer as *something else* or *nothing in itself* in order to make it fit into our theories and methodologies.

In order to give the gamer back his body, to capture the corporeal art of gaming, to acknowledge the aesthetic of the kinesthetic, to observe the tacit and tactile, we may have to turn to novel frameworks that on the one hand, *automatically* and *naturally* revolve around corporeality, self-movement, and tool-use as something qualitatively and meaningful in and of itself and on the other hand, *automatically* and *naturally* treats the present divided framings of the gamer’s body, mind, and spirit as a holistic whole. Such a fresh framework could possibly be found in Eastern philosophy, more specifically in Japanese ‘budo’ (martial arts) or ‘geido’ (artistic ways such as flower arranging, swordsmanship, or flower arranging) philosophy. Turning to e.g. ‘budo,’ a subcategory of ‘geido,’ has furthermore the advantage of being an unfamiliar and estranging framework which by its very ‘otherness’ and ‘strangeness’ *forces* us to frame the gamer anew. Subsequently, the framework presents a possibility for game research to escape the ‘theoretical imperialism’ Espen Aarseth warns us about (Aarseth, 1997:16) and the ‘hegemony of occularcentrism’ Bryan G. Behrenshausen talks against (Behrenshausen, 2007:335).

In the following, I will try to make a first attempt to characterize the corporeal practice of gamers in the light of Japanese martial arts philosophy in an attempt to make a provisory sketch of the gamer as a ‘corporeal artist.’ Within the framework of ‘budo,’ body and movement is viewed as something containing quality, aesthetics, dynamics, and experiential value: “Martial arts texts are replete with terms emphasizing that the realization of the meaning of the techniques is a nonintellectual process, that total bodily understanding can only be experienced. The texts include such terms as “to obtain with the body” (‘taitoku’) and “to experience with the body” (‘taikan’) and to “understand with the body” (‘tainin’).” (Hurst, 1998:191). In the light of this, the gamer can be framed as someone thinking with and through his body, someone who is making meaning of the game through his corporeal actions, and as someone whose perceptions is *informed* by his corporeality and locomotion. Even more crucial is the fact that body, mind and spirit isn’t framed as distinct, separated spheres, but as a unified whole. It is impossible and meaningless within ‘budo’ philosophy to try and understand them separately: “the concept [body] goes far beyond pure physicality, the existence of flesh and bones. The body is always meant to be regarded as an entity which houses the mind, or spirit. [...] Training or education involving physical activity (‘shintai katsudo’) makes no distinction between bodily training and mental understanding, but instead assumes a unified body-mind approach.” (Hurst, 1998:191). Such a framework thus forces us to dissolve our own theoretical preferences, stances and habitually divisions of the gamer and instead certify the tool-wielding, moving gamer as the ground for mindful knowledge where the practices and processes of gaming revolves around the gamer as someone who mindfully experiences and understands with the body.

What happens, if we deploy thoughts like these to our understanding of gaming and the gamer? Will it enable us to see something new or anew? And what will it look like? Below is a provisory attempt in the form of an entry in my field diary from the very first time I played *World of Warcraft*:

I take a deep breath and press the W-key making my avatar leap forward in an awkward, uncontrolled fashion. I alternately press A and D as I aim for the staircase and try to stay clear of the walls. But it looks more like a pinball ricocheting off the walls than a graceful priest ascending a staircase. I try to combine my perceptions with my actions, concentrating on making my movements more fluently both on the keyboard and in the gameworld. All of a sudden I find myself outside the cavern and instinctively lift my hands making my avatar come to an abrupt halt. I stand still and take in the vast and beautiful landscape by moving my mouse while simultaneously being on the lookout for possible enemies. My other hand hovers nervously over the keyboard, painfully aware of my inadequacy to perform decisive actions. Everything seems safe and I gently press the W-key, making my avatar move toward the distant city. I am concurrently preoccupied with handling the input-devices and fully aware that if something in my perceptual field all of a sudden requires me to do something (more than avoiding obstacles) I will fail miserably – I am as defenseless and gracelessly inept as a newborn child – which is off course kind of what I am in this new world.

My corporeal dealings with the game are what constitute my understanding and perception of the game, and my understanding and my perceptions underpins and guides my actions. There is an intermingling of acting, sensing, and thinking in my gaming practice, it has a ‘fleshy’ as well as a sensuous, perceptive, and cognitive dimension which must be united if my gaming practice shall become successful. My movements are not just reflex movements but a locomotive practice that entails a spirited, mindful, moving body. It is sedimentation of meaning within a corporeal practice.

Forming a whole: Gamers as spirited, mindful, moving, bodies

We all have in common, that as gamers we are movementborn, not stillborn or as Maxine Sheet-Johnstone aptly puts it: “In sum, whatever our differences, movement is our mother tongue” (Sheet-Johnstone, 1999:226). Our tool-wielding, moving bodies in a quite literal sense creates the game and our identity as gamers for us: We experience the game as we move. But this may be difficult to grasp both theoretically, analytically and methodologically as it is pre-cognitive, pre-perceptual, pre-linguistic, pre-cultural and pre-personal as well as self-effacing. Furthermore, we haven’t developed traditions, theories or established well-known analytical or methodological frameworks that will enable us to gain a more holistic view on gamers as the kinetically grow into their gaming bodies. We are still very much lacking a corporeal ‘enfleshed’ and ‘locomotive’ epistemology or phenomenology of the gamer.

By deploying the frameworks of corporeal philosophy and martial arts, the PhD-project aims at elucidating how gamers make sense of themselves and the gameworld in the course of moving. It aspires to explore the qualitative nature of corporeal movement in gaming by investigating gamers unfolding kinesthetic consciousness, how their movements in its rhythmic complexities creates the qualities of gaming, and how gamers make sense of the game through their self-movement. The project seeks, in a beginning way, to make explicit how the qualitative nature of corporeality and movement can be framed as meaningful dimensions of gaming. Or declared through the framework of

martial arts philosophy: The project attempts to move the corporeal practice of gamers from the sphere of 'undo' ('physical activity') to the sphere of 'geido' ('artistic ways' or 'the process of creation').

As a concluding remark, the present paper is not to be taken as a 'harassment' of game researchers or game research, as it is just as much a 'harassment' of myself as researcher and my own research history. The call for an 'enfleshed' and 'locomotive' epistemology or phenomenology in game research is just as much a call for an 'enfleshed' and 'locomotive' development in my own research. In the past ten years, I have thus moved through domineering research stances and alternately framed the gamer under the paradigms of 'community', 'communication', 'identity', 'perception' and 'virtuality.' The critical revision of the current state of game research is just as much a critical revision of my own research practice as I try to make a forward-looking decision in relation to giving the tool-wielding, moving gamer its due in my current project as I investigate the relations between bodily interaction, digital interaction, and communication.

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