The Radical Productivity of Play

Adam Nash, RMIT University
Thomas Penney, RMIT University

Abstract.

In the 20th Century, foundational philosophers of play Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois contributed to the idea that play is unproductive. More recently, theorists of play Brian Sutton-Smith and Mary Flanagan have questioned this assertion, pointing to cultural formation and subversion as products of play. From a more instrumental standpoint, theorists such as Julian Kücklich and others have identified 'playbour', the material production process among digital game consumers engaged in modding and other fan activities. Positivist thinkers and game design practitioners like Jesse Schell have identified the production of subjectivation, via a heightened sense of self-esteem as a result of the achievement of goals within games.

Using a philosophical framework of transcendental empiricism that aims to identify the conditions of creative production, we use concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon and the play theorists mentioned above to examine the nature and history of the concept of production in play and propose several additional ways in which play may be considered productive. These are the production of percepts and affects; the production of transductive individuations; the production of social individuals and identity; the production of anxiety; the production of culture; the production of subversion; the production of global corporate profit and the production of memory.

We arrive at these assertions by discussing three key topics: play, production and identity. Firstly we account for how play operates within culture in excess of its relationship to digital games, contrasting contemporary views with much older and less institutionalised ideas of what play may be in the works of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. These help set out an agenda for play that is socially involved and opens the individual to the radical production of selves within a social sphere. We discuss how, if play participates in a system of real production, the notion of a magic circle, where play is separated from the 'real' world and produces nothing for or in that world, is eroded because culture is produced at the same time as it is received.

We then move to discuss production in terms of what play can deliver in addition to instrumental gain, and how play can complement, mirror and support the social and technical structures of digital capitalism, as well as its subversion. We talk here not only of an economic or cultural production, but of a Guattarian conception of production, where new kinds of subjectivation are produced from desire. An important contemporary mode of this

production is anxiety, and this leads us to take Simondonian readings of the role of play in individuation, specifically play in the context of digitally networked games. We find that such global networks facilitate an impulse towards the transindividual, an impulse that is constantly thwarted by a subsumption within a restrictive, self-producing subjectivity whose currency is anxiety and whose domain is memory. In place of the transindividual, in Simondon's terms, we are confronted with a global network of anxiety produced by play. This is because play, in a global system, renders an infinite number of possible individuations consistent and consumable by its players. When harnessed, play could, as with other artistic methods, therefore produce subversion just as readily as it could reproduce structures of capital.

That play, in light of this, inevitably alters any individuals that come to participate in it is key to our use of the term 'identity'. Deleuze and Simondon here assist us in locating how individuals operate and change in a system of play that involves communities or networks of commerce and labour. Affects and percepts in play operate to form or change identities. We refer to these constantly forming and changing states as individuations, using Simondon's concept of transduction, where operations occur across disparate domains, but are grounded in the structure of these domains.

Therefore, we might more broadly refer to play as the radical production of states of the becoming-individual, a self-production of selves, in the digital-social milieu.

Introduction

Play is a word that is seemingly encountered everywhere today, but what it actually implies is not always clear. In the digital age, "play" is often associated with digital gameplay but, as everyone knows, its history is much older. In the 20th Century, foundational philosophers of play Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois contributed to the idea that play is unproductive. More recently, theorists of play Brian Sutton-Smith and Mary Flanagan have questioned this assertion, pointing to cultural formation and subversion as products of play. From a more instrumental standpoint, theorists such as Julian Kücklich and others have identified 'playbour', the material production process among digital game consumers engaged in modding and other fan activities. Positivist thinkers and game design practitioners like Jesse Schell have identified the production of subjectivation, via a heightened sense of self-esteem as a result of the achievement of goals within games.

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We then move to discuss production in terms of what play can deliver in addition to instrumental gain, and how play can complement, mirror and support the social and technical structures of digital capitalism, as well as its subversion. We talk here not only of an economic or cultural production, but of a Guattarian conception of production, where new kinds of subjectivation are produced from desire. An important contemporary mode of this production is anxiety, and this leads us to take Simondonian readings of the role of play in individuation, specifically play in the context of digitally networked games. We find that such global networks facilitate an impulse towards the transindividual, an impulse that is constantly thwarted by a subsumption within a restrictive, self-producing subjectivity whose currency is anxiety and whose domain is memory. In place of the transindividual, in Simondon's terms, we are confronted with a global network of anxiety produced by play. This is because play, in a global system, renders an infinite number of possible individuations consistent and consumable by its players. When harnessed, play could, as with other artistic methods, therefore produce subversion just as readily as it could reproduce structures of capital.

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Play

Theories of play trace back from contemporary thinkers of games like Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, through Brian Sutton Smith, Roger Caillois and Johan Huizinga, and finally into the early aesthetics of Friedrich Schiller and Immanuel Kant. Kant's contribution to one of the first major theories of art, via the concept of beauty, primarily involves "A freeform

play of the senses" which is "…conceived by Kant to be a product of the mind's mental freedom and autonomy in assigning normative structures in the world, such as harmony, perfection and function." (Sageng, 2014). As such, Kant's loose definition of play as it pertains to beauty is that it involves at once a subjective, personal, noumenal freedom and an appreciation of the objective world as it "ought to be" (Sageng, 2014). The ongoing flavour permeating theories of play today echoes this "freedom in structure" or "freedom versus structure" or "at once free, yet also bound" type of conception. Schiller's response to Kant's account of play and beauty in his letters "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" (1795) involves a play-based society where activities and identities within such a society evolve and change in a playful, freeform way:

> Schiller famously held that one must posit a "play drive" which mediates between the timeless demands of subjective identity the one hand, and the givenness and situatedness provided the sensuous drive. (Meier and Schiller 2004, 400)

Schiller's definition of play thus involves mediation between subjectivity and external reality (or, in his words the "sense" and "form" drives) in a similar manner to Kant's, but Schiller extends the notion of freeform play ideologically into the concept of "aesthetic education" with the aim of helping society to achieve political freedom through the interplay of many binaries like passivity and activity, infinity and matter, sense and form. In these instances play comes to illustrate playfulness in culture rather than the concept of play as an organised practice centred on the experience of games. It is this fixation on gaming and perhaps even the development of games studies and cultures of gamers that can distract us from the universal nature of play, where games perhaps become the limiting of play to specific forms of consumption. This gives play an exchange value both in terms of its consumption as an activity and as a form of knowledge.

Play as commodified consumption is a difficult proposition. Roger Caillois, in "Man, Play and Games" (1961) informs us that concepts of play require a broader plane from which to offer perspective: "Huizinga seemed to ignore or minimise the diversified forms of play and the many needs served by play activity in various cultural contexts" (Caillois, ix) and Caillois affirms that similar types of binaries as present in Kant and Schiller are present in conceptions of play in the 20th Century:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. (Caillois, 1961)

The "intense" and "utter absorption" of play means that it has a real-world impact, at least insofar as play affects our lives, our minds and our relationships to others, yet Caillois goes on to try and distance the outcome of play from the world, defining play as "free, separate, uncertain and…" most importantly to our discussion "...unproductive":

> It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Caillois, 1961)

We, however, strongly agree with play theorist Mary Flanagan, that play can be thought of as entirely productive and very integrated with what is commonly called reality. Play has some real impact to bear on reality which, to Flanagan and the creativity theorist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, is "not an invariant external structure" and is therefore very much affected by what play produces (Flanagan, 2009). Csikszentmihalyi asks "How is it possible for play to be both divorced from reality and yet so rife with real-life consequences?" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979).

This has implications for the widely debated notion of Huizinga's *magic circle*. As theorist of synthetic worlds, Edward Castronova (2005), has pointed out, a synthetic world "cannot be sealed completely; people are crossing it all the time in both directions, carrying their behavioral assumptions and attitudes with them." When it comes to the boundary between synthetic play worlds and reality, for Castronova "the distinction is increasingly difficult to see." (ibid). In this sense, play worlds will always be assessed in terms of the sense we can make of them, given our existing reality, and therefore at the very least construct a meaningful and lasting connection.

While we may then think of a play scenario as being born of an existing reality and existing on that reality's terms, play scenarios can also render alternative realities on their own terms. Flanagan's assertion that artists' play is subversive is here relevant, as play not only reflects "reality" but also produces something when it is critical of it. Important to Flanagan's argument is that artists (in her case, particularly visual artists, but we acknowledge that many types of artist can participate in this claim) have long known this, and through the study and deployment of *representations* artists play with realities by making copies of them which are slightly different (Flanagan uses here Freud's "uncanny"), tweaked through a subjective lens, or subverted entirely. By understanding a play world in relation to our existing world, we are equipped to find subversion or critique by picking up on changes and manipulations that have been selected by a creator subjectively. This subjective influence alters its logic (of representation and operation) through its status a simulation, which as we know is an "imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time." (Banks, 1999). This change, or subversion, influences the reception of its original, by understanding it in a new light, by having had control over systems one otherwise might not have (particularly concerning, in Flanagan's writing, the power of young women), or by having the space to discover new possibilities in the simulation that one might not have had the chance to in the real otherwise.

Below, by focusing on the notion of a production that occurs between the play world and the so-called real world, we argue on a Simondonian-Deleuzian trajectory that play is entirely

productive. This is not a value-imbued proposition, rather that play is, as Kostas Axelos (1979) calls it, "a system of systems" and as such cannot but be productive. In the contemporary era of global capitalism, play has, perhaps inevitably, been recruited into the pervasive contemporary program of individuals producing, reproducing and consuming their subjectivity on digital platforms. We examine this notion in detail in the final section, but first we need to define multiple methods by which play can be seen as *radically productive.*

Production

In this section, we examine what philosophical concepts exist to help us conceptualise production in play, before moving on to more instrumental examples.

The two philosophical tools that we rely on in this paper to think about production are Simondon's concept of *transduction* and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *production of percepts and affects*. Applying concepts to scenarios unanticipated by the originating philosopher is a fraught business and - especially in the case of Deleuze and Guattari - can result in nonsense at best. We remain especially attendant to this danger throughout.

Supplementing these purely philosophical concepts are some play-specific concepts, including Schell's concept of the *production of self-esteem* and Flanagan's concept of *producing subversion*, which itself expands on a concept of Sutton-Smith's. We also contest Caillois' and Huizinga's concept that play is always voluntarily entered into.

In their 1991 work (published in English translation in 1994), *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari try to understand how a work of art can persist external to its material, its creation and its experience or reception. They conclude that what persists in the world, what we call an artwork, is "*a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.*" (p.164, emphasis in original) They are careful to distinguish these *percepts* and *affects* as independent beings, separate from the perceptions and affections that bear them within both creator, experiencer and material. We can think of these *percepts* and *affects* as *productions* of the interaction between creator, material, experiencer and world. This is an interaction that is especially useful in understanding the processual nature of a digital game being played. We will say, in this context, that the game has been created by the designers, that its material is the computer running the game, and that it is experienced by the player, but there is no point at which we can say *this* is the game. And yet the game exists, and it exists independently of any of its components.

Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, in the larger agenda of *What Is Philosophy?*, with discovering the relationship between the virtual and the domains of art, science and philosophy. I have shown elsewhere (Nash, 2013) the relationship between Deleuze's concept of the virtual and the contemporary digital concept of the virtual, such as is commonly used in relation to games. This is key not only to their idea of producing affects and percepts that exist independently, but to their whole vitalist project of *transcendental empiricism*. We have shown above the importance of play to art, and it should be clear by

now that we consider games to be an artform that is created cooperatively between designer, machine and player. The game creates affects and percepts just as any other artform might. The difference, which is a *post-convergent* (Nash, 2013) difference is what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'material' of the artwork. Playing a digital game to produce percepts and affects is perhaps materially closest to Deleuze and Guattari's characterisation of music as artform, with an added dimension of productive purposefulness on the part of the game player. Disappointingly restricted by an unnecessarily narrow definition of music inherited from the European tradition, Deleuze and Guattari do not mention improvisation, such as practised in 20th Century jazz, but we suggest that their definition of *composition* as "the sole definition of art" (p.191) can and must be expanded to include the notion of realtime composition such as encountered in improvisational art like music and game playing.

This is part of the *radical productivity* we are proposing. Much as with improvisational music, a player of games creates, in realitme and in concert with the designer and the machine, percepts and affects that stand on their own, beyond the instance of their being played. These products of play are composed in realtime, on the fly, anew at each play.

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) show that this is not a situation unique to digital games, but a quality of all art. In fact, the production of this "*bloc of sensations*" (p.164) is facilitated by cycles of production methodically interacting with each other while executing different methodologies. In this sense, we might speculate that *play* itself would qualify as what Deleuze and Guattari (1994) call a *chaoid*, , since it cuts a plane through chaos in order to produce a reality, even though in their essay they only admit three such "daughters of chaos" (p.208), i.e., art, science and philosophy. Whether we subsume *play* under one of these chaoids or promote it to its own, what is important in relation to our study of productivity is that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) insist that such chaoids are "realities" (p.208) that are "produced." (p.208) But exactly how does such production of realities and affects work? How are disparate fields like the designer, the game console and the player knitted together to create realities? This is the domain of Simondon's *transduction*.

It is well known that Deleuze's concept of becoming was heavily influenced by Simondon's concept of transduction, (Iliadis 2013; Bowden 2012) which lies at the heart of Simondon's thinking of individuation. For Simondon there is no individual, only a perpetually ongoing process of individuation. This process of individuation always involves the interaction of disparate fields that inform each other. For Simondon, the notion of *form* is replaced by that of *information*. In many ways the inverse of the cyberneticists' life-as-machine trope, Simondon saw machines as a kind of life - indeed he recognised no distinction between the organic and the vital, seeing them as magnitudes of the same continuum. This is important in relation to our concept of production, because it explains how an assemblage of designer, machine and player can produce new entities. It shows us we must think not in terms of individual subjects, static and separate, rather ongoing dynamic networks participating in the production of individuation within and without a metastable preindividual which continues to inform the disparate fields and their resolution. Because this process is perpetual and incessant, neither these fields nor their resolution is ever in a resolved state, rather they are all

in a constant ongoing production process. Thus, there is no individual, rather a constantly renewing production and reproduction of an individual, or *individuation* in Simondon's terms.

The relevant element that distinguishes Simondonian transduction from the philosophical notion of the dialectic is *time*. Time is the dimension that ensures a constant production of information, rather than the loss that is presumed in systems of deduction or induction. With transduction, nothing ever is lost to the world, in fact we could say that loss is impossible in the context of Simondon's metastable preindividual. This is the radical productivity of which we speak. Now, we take a further step and suggest that we see play itself as a dimension of time. This ensures that we remain aware of the ongoing, interlinking chains of transduction that incessantly produce at the micro, macro and meta levels. These transductive chains are the play of, for example, the designer with the concept; of the programmer with the coding language; of the producer with the distribution logistics; of the designer with the players' expectations; of the player with the controller; of the controller with the machine; of the machine with the display; of the LED pixels with electricity, and on and on, inwards and outwards, on all levels, throughout time. Seen like this, there is nothing but the play of production.

We see from this that play produces excess upon excess, which allows us to assert that the productivity of play is radical, especially in relation to the understanding of productivity that inheres in the ideology of global capitalism. In such an ideology, productivity is strongly identified with efficiency. Play has no particular interest in efficiency, although games may.

So, we use these two philosophical concepts - Simondon's *transduction* and Deleuze and Guattari's *production of precepts and affects* - to frame and define the concept of production as it relates to play.

Now we examine some instrumental examples of play as production where we see these philosophical concepts *played out* in the ostensibly real world of contemporary digital games and their playing.

The game designer and game design instruction manual author Jesse Schell maintains that the playing of contemporary games produces self-esteem in the game player as global capitalist subject. Schell sees Csikszentmihalyi's *flow* state of deep concentration as a meditation-like escape from subjectivity where the player is able to forget themselves, as it were, by concentrating on the challenges within a game. These challenges are met and goals are attained, which facilitates an increase in the player's self-esteem once they return to their everyday subjective state. In other words, Schell explicitly holds that a more self-assured subject is produced as a result of achieving goals within a game. If we accept this as true, which our assertion of the productivity of play requires us to do, then we must seriously consider the implications, especially as they relate to the notion of simulation. The production of self-esteem is very clearly related to Huizinga and others' claims for the socialising function of children's play. It is extended in the design rationale of education and so-called 'brain training' games. Indeed, it is evident in all games broadly classified under the rubric of

simulation, from realtime or turn-based strategy games to emergency response training games and military simulators. Adhering to this logic makes it difficult to refute moralising claims of the influence of violent or actively sexist games on players. More serious and careful consideration of this point is therefore called for amongst game designers, production companies and scholars.

In this vein, Sutton-Smith (1997) complicates the claim of the socialising role of play in children, by contesting what he calls "the rhetoric of progress" (p. 123) in favour of a nuanced concept of the production of identity and power. In the process he describes, play produces individual subjects through identity tussles and power struggles. (P.124) While he describes a subtly detailed structure and purpose of children's play that refuses any simplistic adult-oriented rationalisation by embracing irrationality, there is no doubt that this play process is a production process. We will examine the implications of the social individual, identity and power in the last section, but for now we simply wish to identify the productivity inherent in this reading of play.

Mary Flanagan builds on this concept of Sutton-Smith's to suggest that the production of individual identities from play leads to large-scale cultural formation. In other words, that play produces culture. As mentioned earlier, Flanagan is interested in the radical subversion of such cultural production in the pursuit of a more equitable culture. Such a laudable pursuit is built on a total acceptance of the concept that play is a production process, and Flanagan uses the productions of artists as exemplars of this process.

Because of the culturally productive nature of play, it is difficult to understand why Caillois and Huizinga hold that play is always voluntarily entered into. This seems a particularly naive assertion, one that is perhaps necessary for maintaining the concept that play produces no material gain. In any society, all sorts of cultural pressures - gender, social, economic, fashion - come to bear on any individual's choice to play a particular game at a particular time. This is especially true in our contemporary era, where global digital franchises - themselves imprisoned in an economically determined production process - positively demand to be played by certain demographics at certain times. In the context of global capitalism, the very production processes that we assert are associated with digital play produce a kind of cultural determinism in the form of subjective individuals producing and re-producing their subjectivity.

Crucial to the construction and maintenance of subjective, individual identity are memories. This is the final element we wish to identify that play produces. If play produces culture and subjects of that culture, then it stands to reason that it also produces memories. This undoubtedly has always been true, but it is particularly evident in the era of digital games, many of which are explicitly designed along architectural lines to evoke a sense of location and experience. While Deleuze and Guattari (1996, p.168) maintain that memory is too tied up in affections, perceptions and the past to properly participate in the production of independent entities, we see no reason why the play of memory cannot. Deleuze and Guattari are mistaken in identifying memory with the past. In fact, memories are only played in the

present and into the future. Memory, inextricable from the subject, is constantly produced and reproduced, and the memory of any given production is itself a new production. This is a properly Simondonian understanding of the transductive chains of productive play that constitute and constantly renew the individual subject.

Identity

> Play can […] function as a tool to understand the self. Many anthropologists like Sutton-Smith have argued that play is the way children work out social and cultural norms (Flanagan, 2009)

If play is indeed a productive activity, then an individual both produces play, and is being produced by play. Play is key to the psychological development of humans not only in children, but in adult life as well. As such it is a tool for shaping and understanding the self. Play does not function in its own unproductive or separate reality but at the site of change, or affect, between individuals, simulated states (of play), and events in the world. Here we discuss how play is an activity that facilitates the production of identity, through the testing of simulated identities against play scenarios. It helps to render some consistency to the chaos of self-identification by providing fixed roles or "mirror objects" that propose possibilities for selves to become, for a time, in a play scenario. These can either be assimilated into an identity or kept as a distanced state but they will always have some influence over individuation however infinitely small or large. *Identity play* has been discussed by psychologist Sherry Turkle as when:

> the person is testing and exploring the limits of what he or she is like as a person, including moral standards, values and preferences, behavioural patterns, skills and knowledge (Turkle, 1995)

Identity play here features a testing of what a self can be, against scenarios represented by play activity, but this does not have to be a game necessarily. Normally, defining who or what our "selves" are is a difficult and turbulent exercise where we risk sounding either too rigid or too vague depending on self-image. In play we have the opportunity to conceive of ourselves in a simulated role, to take a break from the immediate terror of the question "what am I?". Through play, we place the hard-to-navigate infinities of self-definition on hold by conceiving of ourselves as a representation such as a player character, pieces on a chessboard, or a role marked by a special costume. We often evoke the period of being a teenager, or specific life-changing events, as the times that our selves are resolved or re-defined, but in reality this is never the only period. As we see in Simondon, an identity is a dynamic construct in progress, something that is different at every moment, as forces both small and large interact with it at every moment through time. If play were to be a "chaoid", as we suggested above, its function would include giving consistency to the chaos of a subject that is never fixed, and is perpetually changing, by symbolising possibilities for the self within play roles. These roles frame the subject who *might* be.

Just as time takes on great importance in the Simondonian ideas of transduction and individuation, time has always played a part in identity politics. Judith Butler asserts that masculinity relies on the performance of acts deemed masculine over time, and that identities are based in the fixation of ritualised performativity (Butler, 1990). We could say that games are performative in this sense, as they require the deployment of various patterns of role-play over time. Take two examples; playing *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004-present), and playing *The Sims* (Maxis, The Sims Studio, 2000-present). In both of these games players have an opportunity to create roles for themselves based on a series of options that are selected and packaged into one or more playable characters. In *World of Warcraft*, these roles take the appearance of classic fantasy role-playing archetypes (a thief, a mage, a warrior, a cleric) but a player can dress and tweak their character for personal preference. In *The Sims* a player may construct a character that reflects a contemporary suburban or domestic reality. In either case, we can render a specific role consistent over time; "I always play as a caster (mage)" in *World of Warcraft* or "I always make a character that is close to myself and my own home in *The Sims*", for example, or we can test different ones over time; "I have eight different alt (alternative) toons (characters) on *WOW* that I play" or "I have made a whole neighbourhood of different Sims that I like to play one after the other". Through the former approach, players may tend towards consuming play roles that are assimilated into fairly fixed patterns of self-representation, while in the latter, play is an opportunity to become or test one's self against many different roles that are subsequently drawn into an individual. Through this activity, one is producing an identity in tandem with the game either by consuming a pattern in relation to themselves or producing variance in order to incorporate difference into one's experience.

We see further evidence of identity play at work in art. Mark Amerika (2008), for example, refers to his digital media arts practice as being "technomadic", a process of constantly resolving his "self" against his "not self" through the constant play of the self on different territories. By "territories" he generally means artistic media, but acknowledges that an artistic medium in the digital age could be anything. This constitutes an interrogative practice that facilitates a rapid testing of how the self can be applied when delivering different concepts, in disregard of an identity becoming fixated on specific media. It is a form of identity play for artists to be able to "…step into the fold and 'play themselves' – even if that means having to reinvent their artistic personas over and over again" (Amerika, 2008). The "playing of oneself" refers to the ability for an artist to test whether it is possible to incorporate a different perspective into their identity, and to push the capacity for ones self to further incorporate multiple perspectives. This belies a clear influence of the Deleuzean term "becoming", and Amerika's use of the term "nomadism" here clearly riffs on its Deleuzian provenance.

Both terms bear relation to Deleuze's use of the term "schizophrenia", where "schizophrenia" elicits a mode of resistance towards identity formation in a normative system of language. In the performative photography practice of Cindy Sherman, for example, this might appear as a self-testing. Sherman, in the 1970s, generally photographed herself in the role of many

media-based female subjects such as pin-up girls and movie stars. While Sherman's work was originally critiqued for appearing "narcissistic", Sherman herself has stated "I feel I'm anonymous in my work… When I look at the pictures, I never see myself; they aren't self-portraits. Sometimes I disappear." (Sherman, in Collins, 1990). In this light, like the schizoid, Sherman cannot identify a fixed identity, and perhaps uses her work in order to try and find one that eludes definition. In this case, each photograph, each "frame", becomes a possibility for what Sherman might be, as if she is seeking, testing, and trying to discover what her "self" is in relation to them. Through this process Sherman's identity play functions to produce identities, even if they are not permanently assigned or recognisable. We see parallels here with the player of games as collaborative artist.

Finally, we see that this kind of identity construction not only applies to games and art, but to a general tendency in the capitalist world that tailors digital products in an appeal to identity formation. This constantly produces, but subsequently breaks down, identities in order to maintain them as precarious constructions. Games inevitably exacerbate the claim made by Jonah Peretti (1996), that "the increasingly rapid rate at which images are distributed and consumed in late capitalism necessitates a corresponding increase in the rate that individuals assume and shed identities." Peretti here discusses Deleuzian schizophrenia and its application to consumer culture through a Lacanian lens. We extend his framing of late capitalist culture, and of the way we understand ourselves in relation to media images, to those of games through the notion of the Lacanian mirror, beause "Lacan's concept of the mirror stage describes the process by which the schizoid […] first gains a sense of having a unified identity." (Peretti, 1996). This would be a similar unity to that proposed earlier, conceived when a subject (as chaotic entity) encounters consistency through the consumption of role-playing patterns. While Deleuze champions the schizoid as subverting capitalism's encouragement towards the fixation of normative subjects, Deleuze's conception of capitalism is that, regardless of this, it itself operates through schizophrenic logic (Peretti, 1996). According to Peretti, capitalism needs schizophrenia; "[a] rhythm defined by the capitalist media [that] continually renews the process of identity formation and dissolution" in order to have us consume. This works by associating media images (advertised products) with our ego, and having us subsequently disavow them (disconnect them from the ego), in order to move to the next object of consumption. The process of identity production in play is similar to the process of identity production in contemporary digital capitalism because both can form disparate transductive fields with the subject by testing their relation to alternate digital selves as Lacanian mirror objects.

Lazzarato (2014) sees this incessant production of subjectivity as a weak point in capitalism, a locus of potential dissent that can force the dissolution of corporate control through the production of collective subjectivities. For Lazzarato, since global capitalism is in a constant state of crisis and so-called 'disruption', it is possible for individuals to collectively intervene and appropriate control mechanisms by producing alternative subjectivities that work toward the transindividual rather than endlessly reiterating and reinforcing the hopelessly confused neoliberal hegemony of digital capital. This is because subjectivation occurs, in a Guattarian sense, at the intersection of the social and the machinic. We explicitly identify global digital

networks (both data networks that enable the playing of digital games, and their more conventional controlling networks of corporate capital) as significant elements of this machinic aspect of the subject production process. In this context, Kücklich (2005) is correct to frame his concept of *playbour* as an exploitation of the global precarious class masquerading as an empowering tool for egalitarian creativity.

As in identity play, one has the opportunity to either consume a pattern based on themselves, or produce variance in relation to themselves. The production of these roles more generally is driven by the production of digital anxiety (Nash, forthcoming) set up by all-encompassing digital platforms and marketing strategies such as those evident in Facebook, Google and Massively Multiplayer Online games companies, which encourage us to 'express ourselves', 'be ourselves', see ourselves as heros, discover who we want to be, or find information relevant to us. In fact, these systems produce anxiety by denying the ever-chaotic subject access to the transindividual in favour of a paradoxical subjective consistency that produces credit card carrying individuals whose only role is to produce more anxiety on which to use credit cards. This is the final productive capacity of global digital capitalism, the production of global anxiety, but since we have written of this extensively elsewhere, we will simply mark it and conclude our paper.

To briefly conclude, we have identified play as a radically productive activity, *contra* Huizinga and Caillois. We used Simondon's concept of transduction and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the production of precepts and affects as our primary philosophical tools to examine more instrumental examples of the productivity of play. These included Schell's production of self-esteem, Sutton-Smith's production of cultural individuals, Flanagan's production of subversion and our own concept of the production of memories. We then moved to examine the role of play in the production of identity in subjects of global digital capitalism, ending with the assertion that its ultimate product is anxiety.

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