PART TWO

Reasons to play

6

The sociality of asynchronous gameplay: Social network games, dead-time and family bonding

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Introduction

Popular images of multiplayer digital games are diverse and dynamic, often showing us friends or siblings playing a *FIFA* or Madden game in their living room, a family engaged in multiple sports games with their Wii, or a guild gathering together via remote locations to fight through dangerous dungeons in *World of Warcraft*. Alternately that multiplayer image can be quite negative, presenting profanity, misogyny and homophobic slurs rising up from player vs player (PvP) style games such as *League of Legends*, where players will denigrate and abuse not just their opponents, but their own teammates as well. Yet sociality of all types is not just a feature of synchronous gameplay – it is also a key (but understudied) component of asynchronous multiplayer gameplay. Even when players are not engaged together in a persistent game-space at the same time, sociality is possible and can become an important part of not just the gameplay but the larger online networked experience. Rather

than seeing it merely as a design limitation, the element of asynchronicity can instead be viewed as an affordance for fostering different and rewarding types of social interaction not offered by simply synchronous play. This chapter will explore the concept of asynchronicity, particularly as it relates to social network game (SNG) design as well as how families play such games 'together' and how the concept can be better theorized as an important component of sociality in digital games.

In comparison to other multiplayer computer and video games, SNGs are unique in that they are designed to be played with the people in a player's online social network(s), and players do not normally play them at the same time. Early research on SNGs focused on their limited social affordances, where sociality was defined merely as instrumental: in order to progress, players often needed a certain number of 'friends' or 'neighbours' to advance, players had to request items from others to complete quests and challenges, and visiting the game-spaces of their friends offered no real chance for meaningful interaction (Rossi 2009; Wohn et al. 2011). In this sense, players 'used their network' (Consalvo 2011) more than they played *with* their network. Yet the limited social interaction was often blamed on one common feature of such games – their asynchronous design.[1] Although players relied on each other for progression, they did not play in the same game-space at the same time (Järvinen 2009; Bogost 2004). This particular design element is still present and prevalent, but deserves a more careful examination. Asynchronicity influences the types of sociality possible, and so it is suggested that players learn to negotiate the different types of sociality that are possible through asynchronous gameplay (Stenros, Paavilainen and Mäyrä 2009). For many, the asynchronicity of SNGs allows players to engage in a leisure activity with members of their social network without a direct commitment.[2]

Social media sites have become a staple in maintaining social and familial bonds (Vitak, Ellison and Steinfield 2011). Sites such as Facebook allow users to post status updates, upload pictures and share online content. But family ties are developed through more than just the exchange of personal information and direct interaction. Families also bond through repetitive and often mundane activities on a daily basis; watching television or cooking dinner can strengthen a familial bond as it enables them to 'be' together without having to exchange meaningful information. With the increased popularity of online SNGs, families that are separated by distance now have a space to engage in leisure activities that have the ability to bring family members together yet do not necessarily rely on a 'meaningful' exchange of information. Social network sites and SNGs more specifically, provide families with a space of leisure where they can engage with each other in a way that allows them to

feel connected without the obligation of direct, purposive interaction (Wen, Kow and Chen 2011).

This chapter will look at the affordances and limitations of the design of SNGs, the impact of asynchronistic gameplay on forms of sociality, the importance of dead-time and, drawing on our previous research on families and Facebook games (Boudreau and Consalvo 2013; 2014), how asynchronous social network gameplay enables family members to interact with each other in a less direct, purposive, yet still meaningful way.

The design affordances and limitations of sociality in SNGs

In defining social games, Consalvo explains that 'Social games typically feature a single player component, coupled with basic forms of multi-player interaction embedded in the design' (2010, 189). In order to address the ways in which SNGs foster different types of sociability, the following section looks at a few design elements that either afford or limit social interaction in and around SNGs.

Combining design theories from Rao (2008) and Bogost (2004), Järvinen (2009) explains five design drivers for designing SNGs: symbolic physicality, spontaneity, inherent sociability, narrative and asynchronicity (Järvinen 2009, 97). Together, these drivers create what Järvinen calls 'interaction design for social playfulness' (98) where SNG design is aimed at creating 'story- or community-based justifications for the resolutions of events in their games' as compared to more traditional video game design which is primarily concerned with creating 'skill-based justifications for resolution of events' (99). The following section addresses the aspects of *inherent sociability* and *asynchronicity* by looking at the different ways current SNGs structure gameplay and sociality.

SNGs are designed specifically to be played on and with one's online social network. With the specificities of the platform the games are being played on and the asynchronous conditions of play, SNGs are played not only within the designed boundaries of the game-space, but are also intended to extend into the player's social network space. This includes request notifications sent to other players that show up in their social network site's news feed and notification tabs as well as wall posts that announce one's attained achievements for the player's network to see. Gameplay also tends to extend far beyond the boundaries of the digital space of social network sites into the everyday lives of players as the game becomes a point of conversation in

telephone calls or face-to-face interactions, much like the weather or current events (Wen, Kow and Chen 2011; Boudreau and Consalvo 2014).

Excluding turn-based games played over social networks such as *Texas Hold Em*, *Scrabble* and *Lexolous*, most SNGs are inherently single-player in that the active gameplay within the game-space is performed by one person (typically the person whose social network profile is logged in). While SNGs are designed to encourage players to draw on friends within their social network in order to advance in a game (Rossi 2009), the extent to which players need their friends varies depending on the game. For example, in match-three games such as *Candy Crush Saga*, gameplay is not dependant on the player's network in that they can play and advance without the help of their friends, though friends can give each other extra lives or share bonuses with each other that make gameplay easier, and can compete 'against' each other via in-game scores and leaderboards. In contrast, a game such as *Pioneer Trail* pushes players to ask their friends for items in order to complete quests that make up gameplay progression. When a player asks for help, the 'friend' is sent a notification of the request. Interestingly, this does not occur inside the game-space, but in the friend's social network space, separating the request from the player's gameplay. In this context, sociality occurs during the asking and reciprocating phases of play that mediate the player's game, rather than within the game itself.

Although players do not play within the same game-space, in some games it is possible for players to see the avatar of other 'friends', for example, watering crops in *Farmville* or as a customer in *Café World*. However, these friends' avatars are not actively played by their owners in these moments. In this way, it could be argued that players are reminded of their friends' contribution to their advancement within the play-context, making them part of the play experience. Added to this is the fact that there are often no in-game means to communicate with other players when they do actively visit each other's games. The inability to interact with other players during gameplay (within the game) removes any ability for direct social interaction. Of course, some games offered different forms of in-game asynchronous communication. For example, in *Farmville* it was possible to leave sign posts with messages to be read by the farm's owner; however, these were still read asynchronously (messages left while players were actively in the game-space did not show up until the player re-logged into the game). Nonetheless, direct forms of functional and social interaction in SNGs are rare and most interactions are designed to occur primarily outside of the boundaries of the game.

Another element relatively unique to the design of SNGs that shapes how players 'play together' is that helping others does not directly impact one's own gameplay. Although players can help each other by sending extra lives

or items, depending on the game, each player's game-space is separate from other's spaces and has no real bearing on their own progress.[3] But in considering the *inherent sociality* of SNGs in that they obligate players to draw on their network for help, by helping others, it has been argued that players are building social capital (Wohn et al. 2011). So while helping others may not directly impact one's own game, the social capital gained in helping others results in those players potentially reciprocating item and gift requests. Along with an increased sense of obligation for players to help members of their social network with whom the player is close to (Boudreau and Consalvo 2014), this capital in turn results in a virtuous cycle where other players become more willing to help those who help them leading to the reciprocal nature of social networked gameplay.

Finally, we should note that although SNGs originated as browser-based games played primarily through social network sites such as Facebook, they have now expanded to standalone game apps on tablets and smartphones as well. This has challenged how SNGs are both designed and played since different platforms have different technical and social affordances. From offering different level limits (and tweaks in level design as can be seen in *Candy Crush*) to removing the player from the social network site completely, players who play together across platforms have fundamentally different gameplay experiences which influences the degree of asynchronicity and the types of sociality afforded not only by the game but by the platform and play-context. In this chapter we concentrate on players' experience of SNGs on social network site, but acknowledge that more work must be done examining how play experiences change as players access the games via different devices.

(Re)defining asynchronous gameplay and its impact on sociality

Bogost outlines four features of asynchronous gameplay: (1) it 'supports multiple players playing in sequence, not in tandem'; (2) 'it requires some kind of persistent state which all players affect, and which affects all players'; (3) 'breaks between players are the organizing principle of asynchronous play'; and (4) 'asynchronous play need not be the defining characteristic of a game' (2004, 2–3). Bogost's goal is not to define all possible types of asynchronous gameplay across types or genres of games, but when considering SNGs specifically, asynchronous gameplay exhibits some of these features to varying degrees while challenging others wholly.

In considering the first feature listed, that asynchronous gameplay supports play that occurs in sequence rather than in tandem, we argue that for SNGs play occurs both sequentially and in tandem, in that each player can play in their own game at the same time, yet the parts of gameplay that require the player to draw on their network occur in tandem. So while asynchronicity is an important part of the gameplay, not all social network gameplay is asynchronous. Similarly, the second characteristic – a persistent state that all players affect and which affects all players – is not a necessary feature for asynchronous gameplay in SNGs. While van Meurs states that the most important of Bogost's characteristics is the 'persistence of game state' (2011, 5), we would argue that it is not a fundamental feature of asynchronous gameplay in the case of SNGs in that a player's actions may not often (if at all) change the status of another player's game, even if they are playing within the same game 'space' of a city, farm or puzzle. Likewise although players can sometimes help one another advance in certain ways, players can experience smaller and larger gaps in time between their play sessions, and their different experiences of asynchronicity will do little to affect the play of others, particularly if they also continue to 'help' other players with actions taken 'outside' of the game-space.

To say it another way, players are never in the same game at the same time therefore negating the need for persistence as a defining characteristic of asynchronous gameplay. Rather, the asynchronous element of social network gameplay is better identified during the 'down-time', or periods between active play, whether it is the player requesting help with a quest item or the player who sends the requested item. While it is true that both players must have the same game installed in order to help each other, and that the game world that each player is playing in must be persistent so that progression can be tracked, what each one does in their own game often has no impact on other players' game-world or progression. As such, social network gameplay does not necessarily require persistence of a shared game-world in as much as it requires the persistence of the reciprocal exchange of items between players. There are always exceptions of course, as some requests for quest items or gifts may also benefit the reciprocator as well (Tyni, Sotamaa and Toivonen 2011), but those gifting their friends do not necessarily always need (or use) the reciprocal gift and this has no consequence on the requesting friend's gameplay.

Of the four characteristics, we would argue that the most important one for SNGs is the third feature which iterates that 'breaks between players are the organizing principle of asynchronous play'. In thinking about the reciprocal nature of social network gameplay, the breaks in play that exist in the time between the player asking a friend for a quest item, the time that it takes

the friend to send the item, and the time it takes the player to log back in and use the requested item creates a multifaceted timeline of gameplay with several breaks between each step of active play; whether it's the requesting, sending or using of the game item. Fundamentally, it is in these breaks that opportunities for sociality occur in social network gameplay. Two important aspects emerge from the breaks between players (and play) in SNGs that influence sociality: the different types of play that occur within these breaks, and the notion (and importance) of dead-time (van Meurs 2011) in the process of gameplay, sociality and bonding.

Beyond the in-game mechanics that shape the intended types of interactions between players necessary for gameplay to occur (adding 'neighbours', item requests, etc.), 'dead-time' does not constrain the types of sociability that occur 'around' the game. Van Meurs notion of dead-time expands on research in game studies on time and temporality in gameplay.[4] In the case of SNGs, van Meurs explains that the notion of 'waiting' is built into the gameplay of SNGs. From waiting for cranberries to grow (7) to waiting for a neighbour to send you a quest item, dead-time is the breaks in between moments of active gameplay – whether on part of the player, the game's mechanics or friends who help along the way. As van Meurs questions 'can we consider this kind of this waiting time as a form of dead-time? And if so, what would be the benefits of doing so? Waiting is definitely unchallenging from a gamer's perspective' (7). To this we would answer yes, this form of waiting could be considered a form of dead-time in that although players may navigate away from the game while they wait, their waiting is still framed by the game's design. The benefits of viewing dead-time in this manner would be to consider the spaces in between gameplay where no alleged action occurs as instead *fundamental to* opportunities for sociality that are shaped in part by the game even in its absence. According to van Meurs, dead-time 'accounts for both the halting of player time as well as the persistence of the engine/server times during a player's absence. Yet it is sufficiently flexible to also account for the waiting times when a player *is* present' (7). In this respect, dead-time becomes an important contributing element to sociality in that it is in these moments that players may contact each other to ask if they received their item request or to talk about other aspects of the game while waiting on the game to progress.

Of course there are other types of sociability that occur within this 'dead-time' beyond the waiting and active discussion about the game between players. Tyni, Sotamaa and Toivonen (2011) describe spamming (posting game-related messages to a player soliciting friends' help with an item or announcing that they have progressed in the game) as a form of sociability in stating that 'seeing friends' game posts and clicking on them maintains

the relation to the game even when the player is not "truly" playing' (26). These wall posts communicate information about the game to other players (and often to people who do not play the game as well). In the case of SNGs, communication between individuals within and about the shared experience of the game creates the potential for social bonds to form. As such, interactions that occur in moments of dead-time clearly delineate different types of sociability that are mediated by the game while not being in the immediate presence of the game itself. They also raise questions concerning if and how play persists in such moments outside of what is formally considered 'active' gameplay.

Whether it is in being reminded that a friend or family member is playing a game through wall notifications or through offline discussions about SNG quests, there is no question that gameplay continues to occur in dead-time. It is in these moments of extended gameplay, beyond the confines of the game-space, and through the shared experience of play, the opportunity for social and familial bonding occurs.

Families, asynchronous gameplay and social bonding

Fundamentally, sociality can be defined as a shared or collective experience (Fiske 1992). In this sense, players do not need to be actively playing together to share the collective experience of playing SNGs. For those who play the same game, whether actively or not, the shared experience of playing SNGs can create social and familial bonds by simply knowing that another person plays the same game even if they are not 'neighbours' in your game. As Tyni, Sotamaa and Toivonen explain 'instead of playing simultaneously, the feeling of sociability and shared experience is mainly based on being aware that others play the same game as well' (2011, 27). Thus knowing that others have similar experiences with and within the game creates a bond between players.

When considering players who already have an existing bond prior to gameplay such as family members or close friends and who are already connected through social network sites, the ability to play games together can potentially add an extra dimension to their leisure time, especially for those who are geographically dispersed (Boudreau and Consalvo 2014). As our previous research found (2013; 2014), family members who played SNGs together often felt a sense of closeness without feeling obligated to engage in more active forms of sociality. From visiting each other's farms to tend

to a crop, to leaving messages on signs in each other's games to sending decorative gifts to one another, there are multiple ways for family members to communicate with each other without engaging in discussion. By sending item requests or sending gifts to each other, family members could signal that they were thinking of one another without needing to interact directly, much like sending annual holiday cards through the mail. The asynchronous nature of gameplay and the types of sociality it affords offers families (or close friends) a playful, interactive leisure space that allows them to feel connected without the more direct pressures of social interaction in synchronous digital gameplay or face-to-face, turn-based play. For family members, the existence of dead-time in SNGs extends the game-space beyond both the game and the social networking site itself.

Yet even if players do actively use a SNG's dead-time as a way to continue playing in particular ways, that activity is often carefully focused. So although as Fiske writes, '. . . people are fundamentally sociable . . . they generally organize their social life in terms of their relations with other people' (1992, 689), we found that family members who play SNGs have more of a tendency to organize their SNG play around the needs of their family members and close friends as compared to strangers, more distant friends or colleagues that they were not exceptionally close to or with whom had a pre-existing bond. In our previous research that looked at the practices of social network gameplay between family members (Boudreau and Consalvo 2013; 2014), some family members interviewed stated that they started playing SNGs solely through a sense of familial (or social) obligation, they also expressed a sense of shared experiences that they otherwise would not have had. For those who had stopped actively pursuing progress in a particular game due to a loss of interest, they often still continued to help other family members with that game by responding to help requests. Importantly, it was partly this sense of obligation and shared sociality that prevented players from deleting/uninstalling such games from their Facebook account completely and that ultimately contributed to strengthen social and familial bonding over time.

This sense of obligation and bonding can be explained through Fiske's work on different forms of sociality (1992). Addressing communal sharing (CS) specifically, he writes that 'people in a CS relationship often think of themselves as sharing some common substance (e.g. "blood"), and hence think that it is natural to be relatively kind and altruistic to people of their own kind. Close kinship ties usually involve a major CS component . . .' (Fiske 1992, 691). This could explain why family members – even those who have never met face-to-face but who share bloodlines – may feel more obligated to help other family members when they are sought out to do so. Over time, the act of CS through social network gameplay could lead to a deeper sense

of belonging between family members even if the interactions shared never occurred in synchronous time.

Furthermore, 'in the context of a Communal Sharing relationship, people treat material objects as things that they have in common' (Fiske 1992, 693). As families become geographically dispersed and turn to the tools found in an increasingly digitally mediated world for interaction with one another, we can thus consider the objects shared through SNGs as *symbolic physicality* (Järvinen 2009, 97) that further bind family members together. Although grounded in the physicality of familial bloodlines, shared leisure experiences mediated by the asynchronous gameplay of SNGs enable family members to expand the ways in which they socialize both actively and in dead-time in ways that were not previously possible online.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored how asynchronicity can function as a beneficial component of gameplay, particularly in the context of social/familial bonding found in social network gameplay. Although its name is unfortunate, the concept of 'dead-time' or the time between acts of gameplay is a useful one for understanding complex dynamics of player activities. So although the time may be 'dead' in that a player is not actively within a game-space, players are still using that time productively to advance in the game, help others advance and manage familial and other social relationships through the context of the game. Thus SNGs and their requirement of dead-time provide families with tools to interact with one another, to feel connected on their own terms, in low-stake, leisurely and informal ways. In doing so games contribute to familial social bonds, not through creating a multiplayer synchronous environment in which to interact, but through the sending of requests, the sharing of advancement and creative acts, talk about games in other environments and a common topic of interest among potentially disparate individuals.

In sum, asynchronous gameplay can be considered as a potential booster to social interactions, even if the tools offered by games themselves for sociality (item requests and boast posts) are rightfully critiqued as socially deficient. This activity 'outside' of the game-space also raises questions about how best to classify it – is it still a part of play surrounding the game or is it something different? If players are actively using the tools provided – the paratexts of requests and wall posts – how then can we define the game-space, and its potential boundaries? Clearly early definitions of 'game' do not apply here, but more work on SNGs would be useful in exploring these questions.

Notes

1 There are SNGs that rely on synchronous gameplay, including strategy games as well as poker and other gambling games that have emerged, but the majority of the most popular SNGs are still asynchronous-play in their design. As of March 2014, the top Facebook game apps included *Candy Crush Saga* (#1), *Farm Heroes Saga* (#2) and *Pet Rescue Saga* (#5), none of which rely on synchronous gameplay with friends (Lafferty 2014).

2 For a detailed description of gameplay in SNGs, see Wohn, Lampe, Wash, Ellison and Vitak 2011.

3 Zynga's *Cityville* did attempt to link players' progress in some ways such as the inclusion of one player's 'franchise' in another player's city and their strategy themed *Empires & Allies*, which allowed players to gain strength from attacking friends. However, such elements are rare and non-existent in the currently popular *Saga* games.

4 For list of authors cited and theories explained, see pages 2–4. Available online http://www.digra.org/digital library/publications/and-then-you-wait-the-issue-of-dead-time-in-social-network-games/.

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7

Digital affection games: Cultural lens and critical reflection

Lindsay Grace

Affection games are a unique genre that requires players to flirt, hug, kiss or make love to meet their objectives. In a world that has an increasing number of human–computer-mediated interactions, affection games are a sociological novelty worth investigating. Affection games share more thematic and structural elements with adolescent play such as kissing games than they do with the traditional human computer interaction to which digital games are normally associated. Affection games have been studied by noted play theorist Brian Sutton Smith (1959) and anthropologists for decades, yet this new space of digital affection games has been the subject of very little research. Affection games represent an important departure from the simulation and computer graphics history often ascribed to digital games (Uriccho 2005).

It is easy to misunderstand affection games as a version of role-play or dating simulation. Affection games employ four key game verbs: flirting, hugging, kissing and sexual expression. Both dating simulation and role-playing games (RPGs) use a wider set of game verbs for which flirting, hugging, kissing or making love are secondary acts. Hugs and kisses in a typical dating

simulation are earned affections. A player is rewarded with the ability to kiss after appropriately courting a non-player character. A typical dating simulation requires players to navigate the complexities of a relationship with a variety of game verbs which may include joking, complimenting, purchasing, comforting, wooing and more.

In contrast, affection games place affection as the primary action in the game. Affection games involve interactions focused on one or more affections, whereas simulations are rich environments that emulate the complexity of the real world. A dating simulation does just as it states – it attempts to simulate. Affection games are much simpler. Digital affection games have more to do with a round of Spin the Bottle than a year of mating ritual.

The more than 1,000 recognized digital affection games are provided as web-based or mobile casual games. They are not designed for use on game consoles and they have rarely been considered for an arcade. Ostensibly they are marketed for young girls and women, as they abound on websites such as girlgames.com. They are small games with social features that are limited to sharing scores and commenting on their game experience.

This chapter provides an overview of the affection games genre, providing data about the design and implementation of such games. In particular, it examines the ways in which these casual games have been implemented and how they can be interpreted. In short, they stand both as record of a distinct affection fantasy purveyed through play and as an opportunity for critical reflection on cultural norms and values depicted in games. The goal of this writing is to provide a topographical overview of affection games which helps to explain their mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004). Such study should inform game studies, game design and researchers seeking to understand how these unique games work.

Although affection games are largely constructed for simple entertainment, their designs demonstrate a unique and important departure from traditional digital games. This departure may be a harbinger for new modes of play among wider demographics. They may also be an indication of an emerging, social-emotional play modality. It is also reasonable to understand them as a temporary cultural oddity preceding an evolution of alternative play.

At the very least, affection games offer an interesting counterpoint to the many critics of video game violence. Such games resound as a kind of antithesis, championing hugs and kisses, instead of bullets and swords. Problems in these games are solved with affection. Affection games are more about spreading love than spreading blood.

The multiple histories of affection games

No history of affection games has been written. Instead, historical trajectories help illuminate the path that delivered the modern digital affection game. The clearest of these historical paths mirrors the growth of post-industrial-revolution leisure society. In some ways, the carnival midway (Brouws and Caron 2001) is the progenitor of affection games between humans and non-humans. In such environments, kissing booths and love testers were as common as feats of strength. These predecessors to arcade games were once commonplace among the dating culture of the midway (Kent 2001). The mechanical love tester eventually gave way to the mechanical pinball machines and digital arcade, becoming an almost forgettable artefact of the evolution of arcades (Kent 2001). Love testing and its related play moved to the pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in the form of quizzes that rate prowess, adventurousness and related attributes. These leisure activities were later substituted by web-based quizzes, evolving into the flash-based affection games which preceded the contemporary mobile affection game.

An alternative history places affection games more recently. This alternate history originates on the pages of racy pulp fiction and harlequin novels. As disposable medium, ripe with sexual fantasy, the covers of these stories promised more than their relatively tame internal pages delivered. Pulp fiction characters found their way into digital games for personal computers. The most notable of these was the progenitor of the successful franchise of *Leisure Suit Larry* (Sierra Online 1987). Online System's *Softporn Adventure* (1981), which provides the foundation for the later *Leisure Suit Larry* Series, provided the player with one goal – to earn the affections of several women. Each of the successive games offered a more comical take on the pulp fiction predecessors. Admittedly, Larry did less worrying about affectionate expression than meeting carnal needs as conquest. Larry did, however, validate such play by making it mainstream. The sexually explicit content of more underground titles for personal computers also provide subsequent developers legitimate examples to emulate. Such games include *Interlude, the Ultimate Experience* (Hogan 1981), a self-described game for the Apple II and TRS-80 computers users released in 1979. The game interviewed players and subsequently provided them with stimulating scenarios for fictive or real sexy scenarios.

Importantly, this lineage of affection games was never ported to the arcade. They shared the same experience as today's affection game, an at-home, somewhat personal experience. The fundamental problem with this second

history is that it can be argued that this is more clearly the history of dating simulations than affection games.

Yet a third historical origin can be understood in the varied affection games of varied cultures. Affection games have been the subject of some anthropological study, of which Brian Sutton Smith is most noteworthy (1959). Sutton Smith's study of affection games and plays helped frame cultural understanding in varied communities. However, their jump to digital experiences is harder to link, other than to note that some types of analog play are converted to digital play as a matter of convenience or marketing. The pre-digital affection games are commonly played in familiar groups allowing players to negotiate the bounds of play. This third origin explains some of the cultural demand for digital affection games, but does not clearly link the evolution from non-digital to digital.

These histories do demonstrate the duplicity of affection games. Where one history posits a very public and competitive affection, the other demonstrates the private, personal experience of affection games. One trajectory views affection as declarative, demonstrative and quantifiable (i.e. a score). The other is a personal, at-home adventure to be experienced in private. These are characteristics of the contemporary affection game. Players experience their games personally, with some allowing personalization, and all supporting the somewhat private playing afforded by mobile and web play. An e-sports tournament of affection games is an unlikely event.

It can be theorized that affection games may indicate a desire for computer games to fill the space once occupied by daily interactions with people: the human–computer interaction substitutes for the human–human interaction. Contemporary media has voiced this theory of affection space between human–computer interactions, making it the centrepiece of the Hollywood film *Her* (Jonze 2013) and flirting with this tension via varied science fiction plots such as Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (2001). Whether the product of growing affections towards the digital tools with which we interact daily or the indication of some human–human void needing to be mediated by computers, affection games are trending upwards. In March 2013 there were roughly forty affection games available on the Google Play app marketplace. By March 2014 there are more than 200 on that same marketplace.

Understanding affection games

The shorthand definition for digital affection games is that they require players to flirt, hug, kiss or commit sexual acts to meet their goals. In 2013 the author conducted a detailed study of affection games on the web, followed by a

similar analysis in 2014 of affection games for mobile devices. The following section highlights those findings to provide context for the subsequent review of the genre.

There are more than 1,000 games for which affection is a primary thematic or mechanical focus. The largest group of these are of a sexual nature, offered primarily on pornographic repositories or within clearinghouses for dating simulation. The spaces where these games are offered are not stable. Websites shut unexpectedly, games are added and removed without notice. Likewise, the Google Play Store discontinues such games and developers sometimes neglect their listings. Providing exact numbers on affection games is particularly tricky because the games are rarely made by large-scale publishers.

A large-scale analysis of the popular websites and app marketplaces was conducted to understand the catalogue of affection games. The app descriptions and self-reported genres were parsed from the Apple App Store, Google Play, Kongregate and New Grounds. The games were also played and subject to a content analysis. To get a more specialized view, the genre-specific websites GamesforGirlsClub.com, KissingGames.com and SexGamesFun.com were also included in the analysis. User profile data from Quantcast.com indicates that GameforGirlsCLub.com and KissingGames. com are dominated by female users, while the remaining sites were gender neutral or male-dominated. Both Kongregate.com and SexGamesFun.com have male-dominated user populations.

In 2013 the social gaming site Kongregate offered 211 affection games; 198 were kissing games, nine were flirting games and four were hugging games. Kongregate does not allow games with sexual content. NewGrounds. com offered ninety-four affection games; seventy-six of the games required sexual expression, fourteen kissing, three hugging and one flirting. Other affection game distributions for the sites are listed in Table 7.1.

For mobile games, the number of affections games available on Google Play far exceeds the games available for Apple iOS devices. Neither Google Play nor Apple iOS allow for sexually explicit content. Occasionally such content does sneak through filters, but the games do not last long before they are flagged and removed. As such, sexual expression in mobile games cannot be examined accurately through either of these mobile marketplaces.

As shown in Table 7.2, by April 2014, Google Play had 234 affection games. Apple had thirty-eight. There are two factors that contribute to this difference. First, Apple's application review process is more stringent and critical. Second, many of the games on Google Play are conversions of Flash games that were already popular on the web. In some cases, these Android ports are not officially licensed by their original developer.

Table 7.1 Web affection games by primary focus

	Kongregate.com	New Grounds.com	Games forGirlsClub.com	Kissing Games.com	SexGamesFun.com
Flirt	9	1	80	0	9
Hug	4	3	0	0	0
Kiss	198	14	250	96	1
Sexual expression	0	76	0	0	850

Table 7.2 Mobile affection games

	Google Play	Apple App Store
Flirt	7	3
Hug	7	2
Kiss	220	33

Affection games sales and distribution are not reported by the leading statisticians in the industry (e.g. NPD Group). As a genre, affection games are relatively small set of total mobile game sales. It is, however, important to note popular affection games achieve millions of plays. Popular games such as *Kiss Baby* (JiaQing 2013) on Google Play achieved more than 1,500 average daily downloads in a single day over its one-year history. Games in the web space record more than 1,800 comments and boast higher daily play rates than their mobile equivalents.

Categorizing affection games

To understand affection games it is useful to use a few simple categorizations. The primary dichotomy is between intra-game affection and extra-game affection. Intra-game affections are wholly contained within the game's digital world. In these games a player presses a button, taps a screen or other common

action to initiate an affection inside the game-world. The acts of affection are typically between two or more digital surrogates within the game-world. Intra-game affection is most often between player character and non-player characters. *School Flirting* Game (Girls Go Games 2009) and *Princess Kissing* Game (TheSexyApps 2014) demonstrate a typical intra-game affection.

Intra-game affections are more common than extra-game affections. Extra-game affections require players to commit an act of affection from outside the game-world to affect the in-game world. Common actions include players kissing a touch screen (Critical Gameplay 2013) or players hugging a stuffed toy (Critical Gameplay 2012). The four game verbs within the affection genre also serve as a good way to categorize the games. Therefore, affection games can be labelled as hugging games, flirting games, kissing games and games involving sexual affection. Each of these labels can be further clarified by intra- or extra-game-player expression. As demonstrated by the number produced, it is clear that kissing games are the most common mainstream affection game.

Kissing games

The two most common kissing game formats are intra-game sneaking kisses and extra game kiss testers. Of all the kissing games, sneaking kisses is the most common. The scenario is typically two characters who want to kiss, but are hindered by some outside force. Players must sneak kisses when the boss isn't looking in *Office Love Kiss* (MugaGames 2014), the mall security guard looks away (GirlGoGames 2008) or while the birds and bees are distracted in *Will You Marry Me* (Slix Media 2010). Kissing in these games is overwhelmingly romantic and heteronormative (Grace 2013). Even when non-human characters are involved, affection is between a blue unicorn and a pink one in *Unicorn Miracle* (Spil Games 2013) or a jewellery-adorned smaller pink kitten and larger, unadorned blue kitten (*My Kitty's Kiss 2* 2009).

Extra-game kissing games are similar to modern kissing booths and kiss testers. Players place their lips on a mobile device and are scored on the quality of the kiss. The game *Kiss Tester* (2014) is a typical example of such play. As a sub-genre, the kiss tester is in itself dichotomous. The games are either romantic, emphasizing a sensuous kiss or adoring, emphasizing a quantity of kisses. *Stolen Kisses* (Critical Gameplay 2013) is a good example of the sensuous kiss, while *Baby Kissing* (JiaQing 2013) emphasizes the adoring kiss.

No other affection game type has this tension between sensuousness and adoration. No other affection game type has this large a population of extra-game interactions either. The range of kissing games is likely a result of a larger audience. As the largest non-pornographic of affection game genre, kissing have the most diverse play.

Sexual expression games

Sexual expression games are the most diverse in content, depiction, style and theme. They are arguably the largest group of affection games, although defining sexual affection is problematic. Many of the games focus on heightening the non-player character's pleasure. Games such as *A Really Great Night* (Sangwiched 2007) demonstrate the simplest side of sexual affection games. A more sardonic example can be found in MolleIndustria's game *Orgasm Simulator*, designed to help women practice faking orgasm (2004). The games vary from highly graphic to relatively abstracted. They also range from the literal to the more expressive.

Clearly, not all that is sexual is affectionate. There are more than 800 games whose focus is sexual acts. With more than 800 sexual affection games on mobile devices and the web, it is admittedly inappropriate to skip their analysis. It is also important to understand that sexual affection is difficult to study in games. Depiction of sexual activity is complicated by cultural encoding and framing. Censorship and the abstract borders of pornography, make formal analysis even more complicated. For this reason it is tempting, although not particularly academic, to gloss over sex as an act of affection and a subset of the affection games domain.

It is important to understand that much like the pornographic film industry, which may produce many films of varying quality and content, sex games run the gamut from extremely amateur productions to well-funded enterprises. The cultural reference for some of these games is Anime- and Manga-informed. Others are whimsical and sophomoric. Discerning the affection play from within the wide range of sex games is simply too large for the scope of this topographical analysis. The topic is also loaded with cultural complexities that require expansive cross-cultural subject matter experts.

It is also important to note that when these games are provided through pornographic venues, many of them conflate physical and mental violence. In the worst of these games, non-player characters are held at gunpoint and made to do sexual acts. In such games, which represent a kind of rape fantasy, there is no affection. Yet, a close reading or well-played session with such games does provide complication in the definition of affectionate act. Such games may end in a pleased non-player character and hints that the scenario may have been part of a mutually agreed fantasy role-play (e.g. a fuzzy handcuffs scenario).

From the author's perspective, these are largely not affection games. These are violent games full of enactment of deplorable acts. Yet, from another cultural lens these games may be less objectionable than the public display of romantic affection to another culture. As such, the topic of sexual expression

in affection games must be considered carefully. The specific borders for this space vary enough between cultures that their definition would require an additional chapter in the least. It is sufficient to define sexual affection games as games in which sexual acts are explicitly referenced through image or player action and for which affection is the communicated motivation for such acts.

Flirting games

Flirting games are typically about collecting admirers. In these games score is kept by attracting the most people. The games work similarly to shooting games, where players must flirt with the right type of non-player character to win. If a player flirts with the wrong kind of person, typically a geeky male or person of the same sex, they lose points (Girls Go Games 2009).

In the hundreds of affection games reviewed, no game in which extra-game flirting occurs was found. It is also worth noting that while a flirt is a fairly nuanced activity, most flirting games are quite the opposite. Non-player characters are effectively zapped by the alluring wiles of the player character and fall listlessly under the player's control. The games also do not depict a volley between flirters, but instead align flirting with a game of tag. Once a flirt is cast, its spell is only broken by failing to continue to flirt. This model of flirting provides for interesting fodder in cultural analysis. Flirting games often represent the first step in romantic affection. In the implied narrative of many games, kissing games and sexual expression games are preceded by some initial flirt.

Hugging games

Hugging games are the rarest of the affection games. They are especially rare as the primary game mechanic. Games such as *Hug the Sloth* (Proletariat 2013) actually have nothing to do with hugging at all. Instead, hugging is often the achieved result of a job well done. In a matching game *Teddy Bears in Love* (Best Games 2 Girls 2012), a player's secondary verb is a hug, which is only available after players align Cupid's arrows appropriately. In web and mobile games, hugs are noticeably absent. Instead, the most prevalent hugging games exist as art installations and design concepts, as in *Big Huggin* (Critical Gamepaly 2012) and *Hugatron* (Spilt Milk Studios 2013).

It can be speculated that hugging does not translate well in the medium, an argument quickly corrected by a review of kissing games. It could also be argued that the hugging rests uncomfortably between the romantic and the non-romantic. A romantic hug is present in the Western tradition of affection, as is the supportive hug, the familial hug and other variations.

Unlike the other affections, hugs do not hold the romantic aspirations of a great kiss or the power of flirting the world under your spell. The first hug has never made its way into memorable movie moments, but the first kiss has. Likewise, few movies climb to climax with an adoring hug. These are of course speculations. In short, there is no clear reason why hugs are so rarely the subject in affection games.

The cultural lenses of affection games

While there are several perspectives through which affection games can be interpreted, it seems most productive to understand them as a phenomenon of escape and fantasy or as an artefact of play to interpret culture. These games demonstrate specific gender roles and dynamics, perspectives on affection and a cultural mindset about where, how and between whom affection is expressed. These characteristics express themselves in the scenarios and game environments chosen, in the way the games describe themselves and the ways in which they position themselves in relation to other media such as their relationship to film, books and the Internet.

Escape and fantasy

Understanding affection games as fantasy is more complicated than simple escapism. While many games do provide fantastical images of unicorns and hugging teddy bears, the fantasy ends there. The games are often subject to the same real-world pressures. There are authority figures who threaten the instant joy of a kiss. There are people who want to turn the romantic scenarios into a Romeo and Juliet tragedy. It is this dose of external pressure that makes the games compelling and creates their challenge. They are not absolute fantasy, they are real fantasies. They thinly veil the adolescent stresses of conformity, social hierarchy and the desire to convey affection.

This tension is most apparent in the sneak-kiss games. Their settings range from mundane street corners to fantastic spaces. The games themselves are realistically only differentiated by place. *Rainy Big Damn Bridge* (Dressup Games 77 2013) shares the same mechanics with *Kissing on a Ferry* (Girl Games 123 2012) or *Risky Motorcycle Kissing* while it's in motion (DressUp Gal 2012). The fantasy, it seems, is limited to where, not why or how. These are simple situational fantasies. There is little fantasy around who. The escape is the where.

It is also important to note that these are also cliché fantasies, representing a kind of standard. They are shared if not prescribed escapes. Women kiss bad boys on motorcycles, in convertibles or in the stables. The challenge comes from overweight nannies, old crotchety horse owners and bald all-business bosses. The forces that avert these affections are the old guard. They are not peers, they are authority figures who seem to have one aim in their digital lives – to prevent players from scoring. They are never as attractive as the players and never as interesting. They appear when things are getting hottest and disappear once it cools.

Interestingly, even when these antagonist elements are non-human, they are constantly admonishing. The most novel of these is a game called *Will You Marry Me* (Slix Media 2010) in which players need to make sure that birds and frogs do not catch them in a post-proposal embrace. It seems even when the birds and bees are involved, the birds, at least, reign over couples ready to prevent their affections.

But some affection games have a more alarming undertone. *Jennifer Rose Babysitter in Love* (Noname Lab) requires the player to babysit children while still pleasing her boyfriend who interrupts her job. The balancing of boyfriend and baby is not a fantasy at all, but a kind of chore where two non-player characters strive for the player's attention incessantly. It's a small-scale *Diner Dash* with all the challenging feminist conflicts (Chess 2012), which is why it is also beneficial to explore and interpret affection games with a critical lens.

Critical cultural reflection

The ways a culture chooses to play speaks volumes about its values, anxieties and aspirations. Digital games can be 'a reflection of the cultural imagination' (Nakamura 2013, 55). Just as science fiction film and books reflect contemporary anxieties around technologies or social malaise, games encode such elements through designers and for players. Games are a series of problems, imagined by a designer and solved through the game verbs the designer affords.

From a positive perspective, affection games reflect a desire to provide more affection. If games are considered cathartic release, then such games could be understood as the cathartic release of a society yearning for more affection. If the adolescent expresses their pent-up rage through the repeated destruction of a non-player character in a first person shooter, could it not be asserted that the player of an affection game is putting action to their pent-up desires to flirt, hug, kiss and make love? Ferguson et al. have indicated that catharsis-seeking behaviour is linked to stress and innate traits (2010). In

short, if extended to affection games, players may be seeking such play as stress relief from pent-up desires related to expressing affection. Accordingly, affection games are a reflection of a desire to express, if not participate in, more affection.

On the other end of the spectrum on violent play are the researchers who in summary see a link between what players practice in games and what they demonstrate after playing the game (Griffiths 1999). In studying the effect of violence, they find children who play violent games demonstrate more aggressive free play. From this perspective, when applied to affection instead of violence, players are flirting, kissing, hugging or making love as practice for outside of the game or at the least, for future aspiration towards expressing affection. In short, these players are expressing affection in games to someday unleash this pent-up and practised energy on the outside world. Either view is the logical trajectory of extending the aforementioned fantasy play into a sociocultural reflection.

The games also exist as a kind of cultural reflection of value. The play in these games is not a departure from the conventional world; it is an affirmation of it. This is easily translated as aspirational play. In the same way that children play house or war, the players of affection games are practicing affection. The social rules are explicitly encoded in the games and the players of such games are aspiring to meet those rules. The rules aren't opposed to kissing for example, merely getting caught. Clearly the fun is in playing, but importantly, the anxiety and fear of getting caught is also part of the fun. Without the threat of getting caught, there is no challenge.

The notions of aspirational play are further reinforced by the subjects and situations of many affection games. Where human or anthropomorphized creatures are shown, they are sharing their affections with the best candidates. If it is romantic, the player must flirt only with the popular people (Girl Go Games 2009) or kiss towards the greatest recipe (Zet 2014). The game descriptions even return to the love testers of their origins, helping players practice a great kiss (Zet 2014). The games acknowledge their intersection with the non-game world, even when they are fantasy.

What then does it mean to have a game in which a woman player character is always tending to the baby she must care for and the boyfriend who wants nothing but to kiss her? Such games can be read as reflective or prescriptive. They replicate a real-world tension that plays itself out in households daily. But the game also prescribes a limited number of solutions. Players cannot break this cycle. The boyfriend does not bother to help. He only concerns himself with his own needs, while the player character is constantly bound to this unsustainable balancing act (*Jennifer Rose: Babysitter in Love 2*).

Such games then cease to remain mere reflection; they become a kind of practice. This type of productive play, where gender roles are reflected and enforced through incessantly taking care of others, is the heart of Chess's understanding of the gender divide in play (2009). From this perspective, players are not enjoying cathartic release, but instead practicing as training for a future or present. The key questions then become how much of the world of such affection games is imagined, how much of it is affirming existing roles and how much of it feeds a cycle of affirmation that limits the imagined.

Conclusion

Affection games are a growing genre within the diversifying landscape of digital play. These games remain a relatively niche experience, as none of the major game developers have embraced the genre. Independent developers, prone to taking design risks and experimentation have been at the heart of affection game growth. Affection games do provide an engaging view into gender and fantasy from the safe space of play. They also provide a counterpoint to the violent play stereotype that many non-players attribute to games. They are of course full of their own complications and cause for alarm, but their growth seems to indicate either a shift in demographic or a shift in player desires. It is particularly interesting as a new form of human–computer interaction which has its history in the behind closed doors of human–human interactions.

There are several common affectionate acts that are not typically offered in affection games. These include the hand holding, common to some African cultures as well as the Western tradition, and bowing. While it is not clear why such affections are not common to the affection games genre, it's reasonable to recognize that such affections may not offer the high impact experience and visual clarity that kissing or making love may offer.

While the communication of affection varies widely around the world, affection games are largely unified in their depictions. They typically emulate the romantic and sexual affections demonstrated in popular Western media. Their focus is whimsical flirts, friendly hugs, moonlit kisses and passionate sex. They are rarely critical of these acts, instead affirming the sociocultural standards. It is this lack of critical distance that provides new game designers with a clear inroad to new pro-social play. The relative dearth of research into affection games also affords game scholars an opportunity to understand an arguably unique-to-games genre. At the very least, affection games represent a divergence from the simulation era of games to one that is more squarely focused on affection as a solution.

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8

Mobile games and ambient play

Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson

From *Tetris* and *Angry Birds* to location-based service (LBS) multiplayer games such as *Ingress* and gamified apps such as *Foursquare*, mobile gaming has changed dramatically in an age of smartphones. In this chapter we explore the notion of ambient play as a way to critically interpret the complex and diverse practices emerging from our mobile game practices. We suggest that ambient play enables a flexible and open approach to games and playfulness more generally, as it effectively incorporates the various ways we engage with and embody mobile games in our everyday lives, deliberately moves beyond the problematic ascription of the term 'casual' to mobile games, and conveys the way mobile media are part of a lusory sensibility in contemporary culture. In this chapter we consider the way mobile apps, services and games are embedded in our day-to-day lives, and suggest that we might effectively interpret such engagement as a type of ambient play.

Ambience is often used to describe the effects of sound and music, but has also been used in the discourses of computing and science, especially human computer interaction (HCI) (Dourish 2001; Bayliss 2007). As a noun, it specifically refers to a style of music with electronic textures and no consistent beat that is used to create a mood or feeling, but more generally the term describes the diffuse atmosphere of a place. There are many features

of gameplay that are ambient – most explicitly the soundscapes that play a pivotal role in developing the mood, genre and emotional cues for the player. And yet, like ambience, the importance of sound is relatively overlooked in games studies despite its pivotal role in player engagement and embodiment. What constitutes our sensorial involvement with mobile games – especially as they travel across different modes of presence, engagement, distraction, online and offline spaces, while potentially being on the move – indicates that a more robust and expansive understanding of ambience as a mode of gameplay is required.

Ambience is thus not only – or even primarily – an aural experience, but also discloses a game's texture, affect and the embodied modality of the player. As we have argued in other work, interpreting mobile gaming as ambient play 'contextualizes the game within broader processes of sociality and embodied media practices' and defines play as something that takes place both in and out of games, reflecting broader cultural nuances and phenomena (Hjorth and Richardson 2014, 60). Ambience also conveys the way games infiltrate our social and emotional lives, afford particular sense perceptions and impact upon our movement through domestic and urban spaces. All of these things work to diversify our experience of co-presence, of being-with-others; indeed, co-presence in its various forms and combinations is an important part of the ambient texture of gameplay and is what makes online games so compelling.

In order to address the notion of ambient play as central to the motivations and meanings ascribed by players to gamified and lusory media, this chapter examines some key issues at play. First we reflect upon the relationship between place and movement with special consideration for play as part of broader embodied practices (Pink and Hjorth 2013). As we argue, in order to understand ambient play we need to situate it within broader entanglements of location and place that are always in motion. Just as ambient play draws on a sense of embodied practice as part of broader social and sensorial experiences in-the-world, this chapter reflects upon how we might situate ambient play within broader place-making practices and culturally inflected habitudes.

The chapter then explores the idea of plural co-presence as a productive rubric for conceptualizing the various modes of being-with that are manifest within everyday life. Co-presence can be experienced as spatially and temporally dispersed, across online and offline, here and there, now and then. Here we consider co-presence as an important aspect of our perception and negotiation of ambient intimacy and mobile play. In this section we also investigate notions of play beyond the 'game/play' conflation often found in discussions of games. We argue that central to the logic of mobile games has been their degrees of ambient play; that is, the way they enable a reflection of

inner subjectivities, resonate within and around the interstices of the everyday and generate multiple forms of engagement, distraction and reflection. We then consider how the rise of smartphone apps amplifies particular forms of embodied engagement in the form of ambient play.

Ambient places: Locating the mobile

Ambient play reflects and embeds the ambience of place. In other words, ambient play is a term that describes the significant and yet often tacit, unofficial and incidental forms of creativity, play and communication that surround mobile gaming practices in situ. The convergence of mobile-, social- and location-based gaming expands the possibilities for ambient play across a variety of everyday contexts. In a world that is increasingly 'appified' (i.e. mobile apps available for an increasing range of life activities) and gamified (i.e. the interweaving of game principles into non-game contexts) it is important to acknowledge the spaces of unofficial play – often unscripted, fluid and intrinsic to existing social networks – that reside within and around the more formal modes of gaming.

People and things have always been mobile – that is, *in movement*. As theorists within human geography mobility studies have argued, motion is our primary ontological condition. Doreen Massey argues: 'you can never simply "go back", to home or to anywhere else. When you get "there" the place will have moved on, just as you yourself will have changed' (2005, 124). In this sense the concept of movement offers a way of understanding how both our 'being-in-the-world' and the lived environment is fundamentally dynamic and mutable. Anthropologist Tim Ingold has written about movement of this kind using the trope of the line (Ingold 2007), arguing that we need to develop an understanding of place as that which is always in motion. In order to do so, Ingold redefines the notion of 'locations' as a series of places-to-places that are always in movement with trajectories entangled across various modalities of perception and affect. Within mobile communication, theorists such as Amparo Lasén have from the outset articulated the relationship between movement and emotion (2004), pointing to the way mobile media devices operate as repositories for the emotional and intimate. As Lasén notes:

Mobility is part of the original sense of the notion of emotion as it refers to agitated motion, mental agitation or feelings of mental agitation. Emotions are those mental states called 'passions' in the past. An important feature of the affects depicted by the category of passions is the idea that they

entail ways of being acted upon, of being moved by other beings, objects, events, and situations. Nowadays people are moved and acted upon by their mobile phones. Mobile phone uses are the result of a shared agency. (Lasén 2004, n.p)

As both a symbol and set of practices, mobile media are distillations of contemporary forms of intimacy and mobility (Fortunati 2002; Lasén 2004). Leopoldina Fortunati and Jane Vincent have made this important connection between movement and emotion and suggest that this is why mobile phones have been so successful as repositories and vehicles for intimacy and affect (2009). This link – that is, the marriage between movement and emotions – is important when thinking about ambience. Whether through sound or through haptic effect, the ambience of a game is its ability to traverse inside and outside the official game-spaces, weaving emotion and affect through our embodied experience of play.

Placed against this backdrop, where movement and emotion are intrinsically interwoven in mobile media use, we see ambient play as a key modality of mobile gaming through the negotiation and enactment of mobility, play, intimacy and co-presence. The concept of co-presence deliberately conceives of presence as a spectrum of engagement across multiple pathways of connection – and thus goes beyond counter-productive dichotomous models of online and offline, here and there, virtual and actual. The concept also allows us to connect the contemporary with the historical in terms of the evolution of mediated intimacies. In particular, with the rapid rise of the smartphone touchscreen and app-based media ecologies we are seeing a plethora of new ways in which co-presence and the practices of place-making are managed and maintained. Since the emergence of iOS and Android devices, the convergence around social, mobile and locative media has been as rapid as it has been uneven, providing new platforms, contexts and media in which the politics and practices of mobility can be explored.

In order to understand the relation between mobility and play, we need to define place as part of what Massey calls 'stories-so-far' (2005) and see place-making processes as entangled across numerous modalities of presence. Increasingly place – as something lived and imagined, physical and yet psychological – has been further complicated by mobile media practice (Wilken and Goggin 2012). Mobile technologies highlight how domestication processes – especially in the form of 'placing' and various forms of co-presence (Richardson and Wilken 2012) – are increasingly occurring outside the physical locality of the home. They represent new relationships between home and away (Hjorth 2012). In their post-phenomenological discussion of place, Richardson and Wilken define the role of place within movement as a series

of 'placings' across a variety of states of presence: net, co, tele and absent, among others (2012). In this chapter, we reflect specifically upon co-presence and ambient play within the context of the mobile turn.

With the convergence of locative, social and mobile media, mobility and intimacy take on new significance in the negotiation of location and co-presence. In the next section we explore the entanglements of connected presence, ambient intimacy and mobile play. As noted earlier, understanding the complex dimensionalities of presence across various forms of intimacy and mobile play is essential to comprehending the nature of contemporary ambient play.

Co-presence, ambient intimacy and mobile play

Literature concerned with co-presence within mobile communication fields has flourished with the work of Christian Licoppe and Mizuko Ito and is a productive way of rethinking traditional binaries that are no longer adequate descriptors of everyday life. Binaries such as here and there, virtual and actual, online and offline, absent and present have been eschewed through mobile media practices. Moreover, the rubric of co-presence provides a broader context for understanding intimacy and mediation as something that is not only a late twentieth- or twenty-first-century phenomenon, but also an integral part of being social and human (Mantovani and Riva 1998). In this genealogy, intimacy has always been mediated, if not by technologies, then by memories and language. In this context we can see how mobile media co-presence enacts similar practices of 'distant presence' as the nineteenth-century postcard (Hjorth 2005; Milne 2010).

The critical interest in the concept of presence spans various disciplines such as cultural studies, media studies, anthropology and philosophy, among others. With the rise in computer-related disciplines such as HCI, CMC (computer-mediated communication) and mobile media, presence has again taken on a heightened importance to describe various states of embodiment and engagement across multiple platforms, screens and contexts. This has lead new media anthropologist Anne Beaulieu to argue that ethnography should be concerned with co-presence rather than co-location (2010). Broadly defined, in the current context, presence can be understood as referring to,

> the degree to which geographically dispersed agents experience a sense of physical and/or psychological proximity through the use of particular communication technologies. (Milne 2010, 165)

While presence has always involved different types of mediation, with mobile media the plurality of presence becomes key to understanding the ways in which intimacy and a sense of place are negotiated. Previous studies by Richardson and Wilken (2012) apply a post-phenomenological or 'techno-somatic' approach in an exploration of the 'complex and dynamic range of place interactions and differing modalities of presence'. Central to these engagements is the issue of distraction – that is: 'how our attention becomes divided when we speak on the phone, send or receive a text message, or play a game on the mobile' (Hjorth and Richardson 2011, 115). This occurs in ways that involve a canny and subtle form of 'environmental knowing' that is attuned to both the specific requirements of mobile gameplay while retaining a 'crucial peripheral awareness of one's spatial surroundings' (Hjorth and Richardson 2011, 115–16). As Aguado and Martinez (2014) point out, smartphones and tablets are now thoroughly embedded in habits of 'coordinated multi-screen use', further complicating the modes of presence we experience across devices, online and offline contexts, spaces and places. Thus we argue that, at a perceptual level, complex modalities of awareness are at play:

> The 'sensing' of mobile communication and interactive media elicits an intimately audio, visual, sometimes haptic, 'handy' and visceral awareness, a mode of embodiment which demands the ontological coincidence of distance and closeness, presence and telepresence, actual and virtual. (Richardson 2005, n.p)

Yet although the role of mobile devices in amplifying playful moments has been identified by many scholars and, despite the importance of play in many facets of human life, the broader relation between mobile media and play has been relatively under-researched, with much of the attention housed in education (Sutton-Smith 1997), psychology (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) and game studies (Salen and Zimmerman 2004). This has led many to return to 'classic' play texts such as Huizinga ([1939] 1955) and Caillois (1961). However, Sicart's aforementioned text on *Play Matters* identifies the importance of play in all facets of life and thus engages play in a much more rigorous debate that moves across all disciplines (2014). As Sicart notes, while play involves rules, playfulness is about an attitude. And it is the playful attitude which is key to understanding contemporary culture especially with the all-pervasive rise in gamified media. As de Souza e Silva and Hjorth (2009) note in their discussion of location-based mobile games, the creative micro-resistances enacted by mobile media play can reveal complex nuances of presence and intimacy as they become interwoven

into our daily routines and communicative practices. It is this intermingling of quotidian life and playfulness, as it realized in our ongoing embodiment of mobile interfaces, that we call ambient play.

Ambient play, especially when enacted on our intimate and locative mobile interfaces, recontextualizes gameplay as part of our broader embodied experience of being-in-the-world. The concept also indicates the pervasiveness of play in everyday life, and so effectively works to break down other dichotomies, such as the distinction between casual and hardcore gaming (Richardson 2011; Taylor 2012). As Christensen and Prax note in their discussion of *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) mobile apps:

> The traditional/hardcore versus mobile/casual dichotomy was rooted in older technological forms. Moves from desktops to laptops to conventional mobiles and to smartphones for the purposes of gaming have all impacted understandings and definitions of gamers and games. (2012, 732)

Mobile games, epitomizing the logic of ubiquitous computing, mess up neat distinctions between online and offline, official and unofficial play. The magic circle is no longer adequate to describe the permeability of play within the context of mobile media. As Dourish and Bell note, it is important to engage with the intrinsic messiness of ubiquitous technologies (2011). Historically within game studies, the magic circle has frequently been adopted as a way to explicitly demarcate game from non-game elements and play from 'real-life'. Over the past decade, however, game theorists have questioned this overly discrete, deterministic and artificial notion of the magic circle from a number of different angles, arguing that we need a broader, messier and more flexible description of game parameters and practices. Castronova (2005), for example, uses the term 'porous membrane' to illustrate the enmeshing of game and non-game practices, while Taylor (2006) describes online gaming as 'play between worlds'. This boundary collapse is especially evident in mobile games and is in part due to the specific convergent qualities of mobile media. What we might call the ambient effects of mobile smartphones eradicate the notion of the magic circle. As Moore notes, 'magic circle' proponents would argue that:

> . . . the player cannot 'play' *Angry Birds*, or *Tetris*, or *World of Warcraft* outside of the magic circle, and yet mobile media, pervasive web access and the participatory elements of popular culture suggest the boundary between the game world and the real world is not only gossamer thin and permeated in both directions, but practically indistinct. (2011, 376)

The movement and blurring between online and offline spaces enacted by mobile gaming as part of its ambient playfulness, exemplify what Salen and Zimmerman (2004) call games' 'cultural environments'; that is, the context that encompasses both gameplay *and* the paratextuality that surrounds it. In this sense, we can see the erosion of the magic circle in the ubiquity of mobile play as part of a more expansive cultural turn. Together with our shift to mobile and its attendant app ecology, the emergence of user-generated or 'small media' content creation, participatory media and the proliferation of game elements in social media apps and services, have brought about a playful or 'lusory sensibility' en masse. In the following section we focus on the mobile app as an agent of ambient and paratexual play.

App ecology and ambient play

Since 2008, which marked the opening of the App Store, mobile applications have broadened the spectrum of mobile gaming to include playful social media and location-based apps and services. In mid-2013 Apple counted down to the 50 billionth download, while Google Play counted 48 billion; as listed in the App Store, most of the twenty-five top-paid apps are games. Like being 'online', playing games has become normalized, along with numerous other app-based activities. This playfulness is both intrinsic to the consumption of apps and participatory media, but also embedded in the very process of innovation and development; as Goldsmith notes, a global survey of 5,000 mobile game developers 'found that revenue was a goal for only 50%, with creativity or sense of achievement a motivation for 53% and the "fun of building an app" motivating 40%' (Goldsmith 2014, n.p.).

As Aguado and Martinez (2014) note, mobile app ecologies have worked to render the category of media entertainment ambiguous, such that there is a collapse of content categories across images, videos, music and games, and cross-fertilization of modes of engagement, including creative content production, social networking and play. This is evidenced, for example, by ringtone editing apps, photo-sharing apps and services such *Instagram* or *KakaoStory* and the integration of 'game elements' into location-based social networking apps such as *Foursquare* (Frith 2013). The acquisition of *Instagram* by Facebook in April 2012 (Goldsmith 2014) is an indication of this kind of hybrid media environment and the infusion of playful photographic practices and creative applications into social networking activities and services. With the ecology of apps, the consumption of entertainment frequently involves not only the invocation of information, but also the evocative, affective and sociocultural processes of creativity and participation in quotidian life. Thus for example the *N app* is:

> A free app including three songs that allow the user to interact with them changing lyrics, instruments or singers involving direct interaction, GPS location and time of the day. The user can thus create his or her own versions of the songs, exploring a wide number of possible combinations as the songs adapt to the daily routines of the user. (Aguado and Martinez 2014, n.p)

As Aguado and Martinez argue, mobile media – through the growth of applications – lie behind 'a re-definition of the very nature of entertainment content itself'. The integration of mobile apps, the web and traditional media involves a merger of media consumption (conventionally, watching and listening) with both the interactivity of participatory digital media and the personalization and intimacy of social networking services and social media.

Although mobile games are often problematically categorized as casual games, as Keogh notes: 'a casual game does not simply offer an easier or more shallow experience than a traditional video game, but an experience that is more flexible with the player's time, more easily incorporated into the player's everyday life' (Keogh 2014, n.p.). It is this flexibility and ease of incorporation, especially when adapted to mobile social media games or involving the insinuation of game elements into an application or service, which so thoroughly instils mobile games into the routines and habits of our social lives. For Frith, the way that mobile apps interweave digital and physical information to create hybrid spaces impact upon 'spatial legibility' or the way urban environments appear as 'coherent and recognizable' patterns (2013, 250).

In mobile–social–locative services such as *Foursquare* and *Jiepang*, this new spatial legibility takes a playful turn. The playful locative media service *Foursquare* has a purported 30 million users and combines GPS functionality, location tracking, navigational maps and user-generated first-hand recommendations of 'the best places to go' (a palimpsest of personal mini-narratives of place) that can also intersect with friend networks and consumer rewards. In his study of *Foursquare* players, Frith explores the effect of the 'ludic layer' (257) within *Foursquare* and how the service effectively turns 'life into a game' with the incorporation of digital game elements into the physical experience and traversal of place (249). In this way, *Foursquare* can both 'encourage mobility and provide new ways to construct identity through location-sharing' (Frith 2013, 257). The spatial legibility specific to *Foursquare* prioritizes the end destination over the pathway; that is, the ambient sharing of specific sites or places (cafés, bars, libraries) rather than the navigational nuances particular to one's pedestrian or vehicular journey.

And yet, as seen in the case of the LBS *Jiepang* in China, against the networked destination focus of the gamified *Jiepang*, respondents use camera phone photo-taking and sharing to emphasize the importance of movement through different localities and temporalities (Hjorth and Gu 2012). The unofficial role of camera phone images soon became the main motivation for users, so much so that *Jiepang* rebranded itself to address this phenomenon. Through geo-tagging, temporality is highlighted, and through the aesthetics of the images, the ambience and flavour of the locations in movement are depicted. In the case of *Jiepang*, ambient play – that is, the intertwining of co-present intimacies through emotional textures of embodied play – motivates the various unofficial forms of playfulness that 'realize' the game in new ways unintended by the designers. As is typical of mobile media, users often take up applications in ways that are unconceivable for the makers, but it is this unruly creative adaption on behalf of the user that brings culturally specific affectivities and socialities to the interface.

Conclusions: Playing in the background of life

In this chapter we have explored the notion of ambient play as integral to the messy logic of mobile games as they move across physical, geographic, electronic, technological and emotional domains. Moving away from notions of the magic circle towards an idea of ambient play allows us to think through this complex socio-somatic weave within the messy space of ubiquitous technologies. Through the rubric of ambient play as the intrinsic and affective texture of mobile gaming, we have sought to think through a notion of ambient as not simply or primarily aural, but as thoroughly embodied, situated and social. This chapter has sought to develop a flexible apprehension of these multiple forms of engagement and embodiment beyond the inadequate notion of 'casual' play and its conflation with mobile games. Instead we have forwarded the idea of ambient play as a way to articulate the messy logic of games, creativity and play in contemporary mobile and participatory media culture.

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9

Affect and social value in freemium games

Fanny Ramirez

The number of casual players has increased significantly thanks to the growing popularity of social games for mobile devices and social network sites (SNS) (Alha et al. 2014; Wohn 2014). In matters of seconds, games of various genres ranging from puzzle to strategy can now be downloaded onto a device from any location as long as it has Internet access. Casual games are generally set in colourful and pleasant environments, have simple mechanics, provide a lot of positive feedback and don't require extended time commitments (Juul 2010). Casual games are also referred to as social games because they often have built-in structures that allow players to interact in-game with their SNS or mobile phone contacts (Hou 2011). These features make them appealing to a broad audience of players and have forced scholars to reevaluate what it means to be a casual player (Juul 2010).

The freemium model, also known as the free-to-play (F2P) model, after encountering substantial success in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) genre, has become the go-to model for many casual mobile, tablet and SNS gamers (Eldridge and Neal 2015). This chapter analyses the ways in which freemium social games, such as *Tap Fish* and *Candy Crush Saga*, are specifically designed to appeal to casual players and to incite the spending of real money in exchange for virtual goods or

services. Drawing on Juul's (2010) analysis of the game characteristics casual gamers find most attractive, I posit that positive feedback in the form of 'juicy' graphics and stimulating sound effects is used in conjunction with 'free' marketing strategies to produce affect in players and create new subjectivities of consumption. Furthermore, using critical theory about affect and immaterial labour, I explore how players are invited to perform various forms of affective labour in freemium games and how game companies turn these player-generated social values into real-world capital.

The history of the freemium model

Freemium or F2P games can be downloaded online at no cost from application (app) stores or SNS. While there may be no initial acquisition cost with F2P games, in order to access certain game content, players often have to pay a premium fee in the form of real money transactions. This concept is reflected in the name 'freemium' itself. Coined by Jarid Lukin and Fred Wilson, this neologism merges the words and meanings of 'free' and 'premium' to reflect the characteristics particular to its business model (Pujol 2011). Companies that develop freemium games rely on the monetization of virtual items, currencies or services to generate revenue and permit the general free distribution of their product (Wohn 2014). In other words, some players have to spend money so that the system can support non-paying users.

The rise of the freemium model can be traced back to a larger shift in consumer demands caused by the growing popularity of digital distribution and easy access to Internet services. The image-hosting service *Flickr* and its paying version *Flickr Pro* is a well-known example of the freemium model. Non-paying *Flickr* customers get access to a basic version of the photo storing and sharing service while a small number of paying pro-members benefit from additional product features. The few paying customers (around 5%) ensure the availability of the basic free of charge version (Anderson 2009). In freemium games, the ratio of paying users versus free users is somewhat higher. An analysis of the spending patterns in the Korean social game *Puppy Red* for example, revealed that about 26 per cent of the playing population had spent real money in the game (Wohn 2014).

From an economic perspective, free items are alluring because they signify the absence of financial commitment. Digital distribution further adds to the appeal because the free item can be obtained without physical displacement. Anyone with a smartphone can quickly skim through a list of free games, download them and store an abundance of games. Anderson (2009) argues that the easy acquisition of free items creates an immediate

sense of achievement and satisfaction in the buyer. This is because as Ariel (2009) puts it 'zero is not just another price . . . zero is an emotional hot button – a source of irrational excitement' (cited in Anderson 2009, 63). Ariely goes on to explain that part of this excitement is linked to the fact that with free items there is no fear of loss. When one puts money towards an item a certain level of anxiety is attached to the transaction because making a poor purchase decision also represents a financial loss. A free item, however, does not require any monetary investment and thus on the surface at least, always constitutes a favourable choice (Anderson 2009).

Social games and the freemium model

Freemium games for mobile devices and SNS pair the alluring concept of a 'free' product with the appeal of virtual goods and services in order to create new financial dynamics between players and game companies. By inviting casual gamers to spend real money via in-game microtransactions, freemium games turn players into repeat commercial users of abstract economies (Hamari and Lehdonvirta 2010). Defined as 'low value transactions at a high volume', microtransactions involve minimal sums of money (US$0.99 or US$1.99) and are spread out over long periods of time, thus making it difficult for players to track how much money they have invested in a game (Casual Games Association 2012). What do players spend money on? Hamari and Lehdonvirta identify several game features that promote virtual good purchases, including inventory mechanics that let players acquire new items for their game environment or avatar, and gameplay mechanics that give paying customers different user interface settings or augment certain aspects of the gameplay (2010, 26). Gifting practices represent yet another motivation for spending real money on virtual goods or services. Wohn notes that sending virtual gifts to friends is a common practice in social games, and that players, especially those who have a larger number of friends, are willing to spend real money on in-game items for their friends (2014, 3363).

F2P games that are played on portable devices are especially interesting because the mobility and convenience of the devices they are played on add additional layers of complexity to the control and affect dynamics between games and players. Handheld devices occupy a unique space in the world of gaming by reason that they are 'always on and always within arm's reach' (Casual Games Association 2012). Computer and console games engage players for as long as they are physically present in front of the machine. Play-time in these instances is tied to a specific location such as the living room or office, and once players decide to stop playing, they turn the system off and

are no longer bound to the virtual world of the game. Manghani, in his work on text messaging, has recognized that 'a significant attribute of the mobile phone is its ability to redefine how we experience time and space' (2009, 221). Portable devices have changed the relationship between players and games not just thanks to their ability to cross spatial boundaries, but especially by virtue of being constantly on. Casual mobile games are designed around the notion of constant accessibility and use push-notifications to update players about in-game happenings and invite them to return to the game. Under this new construction of continuity, players of mobile games never truly leave the game. In effect, unless push-notifications for particular applications have been turned off, it silently runs in the background while players go about their everyday business.

The mobilization of affect in freemium games

Expansive and yet intangible, affect is a kind of non-place that is highly dynamic (Negri and Hardt 1999). Ash, in his characterization of affect, refers to it as 'the force of an encounter', hinting at the fact that affect can influence behaviour and action (2012, 9). This definition supposes a certain dynamism and energy to affect, reflected in Teresa Brennan's (2004) observation that the transmission of affect has both behavioural and bodily effects. Difficult to define because of its abstract capacity and irreducibility to cognitive apprehension, affect is produced through interaction with people or an environment and belongs to the complex realms of emotion, passion and human motivation. One of the main goals of this chapter lies in understanding the function of affect as part of casual games' design model and, more precisely, the reliance by freemium games on affective responses from players to draw people in and convert free users into paying customers. The excitement that accompanies the acquisition of a free game is only the first of many affective responses players experience when playing social games that make use of the freemium model.

Indeed, affect is incorporated throughout the freemium model's operational structure. From the initial attraction to a free download to the application of excessive positive feedback, affect is a primary feature of many casual games that make use of the freemium business model. Juul uses Kyle Gabler's term 'juiciness' to refer to this exaggerated affective design element and explains that positive feedback 'gives the player an immediate, pleasurable experience' (2010, 48). Positive feedback is a form of extradiegetic praise that is 'tied specifically to feedback for the actions of players' and enhances 'the

experience of feeling competent, or clever, when playing a game' (Juul 2010, 47–9). Positive feedback then, is an affective design element that praises players directly with the hopes of generating an affective response.

While positive feedback can increase a player's enjoyment of the game, the same feature can also be used to further aggressive monetization strategies, placing 'short-term profits' above 'long-term player engagement' (Alha et al. 2014, para. 3). Pybus (2007), in her observations about the use of affective marketing strategies in the virtual pet game *Neopets.com*, argues that the aim of casual game companies is 'to expand their market share by forging strong relationships with consumers through the production of dynamic subjectivities' (para. 4). According to this rationale, players are progressively incorporated into the large-scale mechanisms of global capitalism through the emotional actions they perform in virtual spaces (Malaby 2006). Deployed by game companies to encourage in-app spending, affect is the impetus behind the production of new subjectivities of consumption (Pybus 2007, para. 2). Positive feedback is used not only to generate sensations of excitement and attachment, but also to encourage players to return to the game as consumers, to the financial benefit of the game companies.

Locating affect and positive feedback in *Tap Fish*

Tap Fish is an aquarium simulation and caretaking game developed by GameView Studios. The game invites players into a highly customizable aquarium management system where they can decorate their own aquariums and breed various fish and other marine life forms. The game's environment is highly picturesque and soothing and, while not exciting per se, *Tap Fish* is intensely appealing in its simplicity. The aquarium backdrop emanates sensations of relaxation and comfort and the game's interface is very user-friendly. It simulates actual aquariums as well as the emotional attachment one develops when caring for pet fish. In that regard, the game shares many of the qualities found in earlier types of virtual pets such as the Tamagotchi, an egg-shaped electronic toy that displays the image of a pet and requires regular engagement in order to stay alive (Wrye 2009).

In addition to providing players with virtual pets, *Tap Fish* also offers a lot of positive audio and visual feedback in the form of audible clicks and rings, as well as congratulatory messages which are accompanied by a shower of stars or hearts that fill the entire screen (Figure 9.1). Feedback of this kind provides positive reinforcement and lets players know that they are doing a good job, but more than that, it also has the potential to generate powerful

FIGURE 9.1 *Screenshot of a* Tap Fish 2 *congratulatory message.*

affective reactions. Game tasks such as loving one's fish, feeding them or cleaning the tank are repeatedly rewarded with positive feedback, leaving the player feeling accomplished. Although it operates on a simple reward system, positive feedback is highly exciting and increases players' enjoyment of the game (Juul 2010). Perceived enjoyment in turn, has been associated with purchase intention as well as continuous use intentions, thus showing that how players feel about the game is related to their spending behaviour (Hamari 2015). Developers of casual games therefore, I argue, use affective design elements to promote longer playing session and count on the resulting emotional ties to sell virtual items and services.

An analysis of the different currencies used in *Tap Fish* sheds light on how companies take advantage of players' affective connections to virtual pets to generate revenue from the sale of virtual items. *Tap Fish* has two in-game currencies: coins and Fish bucks. Coins can easily be earned by farming fish and then selling them for profit. Fish bucks on the other hand, are very hard to acquire unless they are purchased for real money through the in-game market store. Players get one Fish buck each time they level-up and sometimes Fish bucks can also be won by playing the weekly in-game jackpot lottery. What complicates the player's interaction with the game's virtual currency system is that some items can only be bought with Fish bucks and some only with coins. Safe to say, it is impossible to save up enough free Fish bucks to buy all the fish and decorations offered in the game or to be

competitive in events. In order to satisfy one's affective relationship with the game and access the most desirable features, one has to invest real money. This is why *Daily Show* correspondent Aasi Mandvi (2011) jokingly compares casual players' fixation with freemium games to drug addiction. During the sketch, Mandvi (2011) verbally confronts Rizwan Virk, the CEO of GameView Studios, by saying: 'You provide a product. The first one is free, and then as they get more accustomed to your product, the price rises. So you're a drug dealer' (http://www.thedailyshow.com). While his exaggerated observation was made mostly for laughs, the claim that freemium game companies are purposely taking advantage of people's desire for instant gratification has merit. Freemium games such as *Tap Fish* allow players to build up a basic emotional investment with virtual pets for free, but then create a dependency on real money for the continued maintenance of that relationship. When one considers that a large part of *Tap Fish*'s audience is composed of children, the game's revenue strategies take on a rather sinister tone. As one parent whose child rung up an expensive iTunes bill aptly put it: 'there is a degree of callousness in the way these [games] prey on unsuspecting children like my son with whom these games hold great appeal' (Lui 2011, para. 12). Several scholars have criticized the F2P model's aggressive monetization strategies (Alha et al. 2014) and Bogost (2014) even argues that 'free-to-play games are a kind of classic racket' where players get swindled of their hard-earned money because they didn't realize the terms of the game at the outset (para. 9).

Locating affect and positive feedback in *Candy Crush Saga*

Other casual games such as the tile-matching game *Candy Crush Saga* may not exploit children's emotional bonds with virtual pets, but they still manipulate a player's range of affective experiences for monetary benefits. Games can be very addictive and the positive feedback of juicy games only increases the desire to act on these affective impulses. As Allison points out in connection with the Pokémon universe: 'once one enters this world, it is addictive – and addictively wired to one's own sense of ease . . . In this game whose objective is getting . . . the getting – and pursuit of getting – goes on and on' (2009, 96). Allison's remarks about addiction and the never-ending desire to accumulate more Pokémons can be applied across numerous game genres, but rings especially true for the F2P model. By limiting the content non-paying users can access, the free aspect of the freemium model becomes an obstacle to players' drive for more acquisition.

In order to exit this state of crisis and carry on with the game's emotional attachments, players have to become subjectivities of global capitalism's consumption economy by either spending money to sustain their gaming addiction or generating social value through the recruitment of friends. This particular subtype of the freemium model, because it makes paying real money a contingency for immediately continuing the game, is sometimes referred to as pay-to-play (P2P).

Candy Crush Saga is a good illustration of how what is initially a F2P game makes use of juiciness and affect to draw players in only so as to better convert them into paying customers via a P2P scenario or encourage them to produce social value by turning to friends for game-related help. Non-paying players can play all levels of *Candy Crush Saga* for free and have five in-game lives that replenish at a rate of one life every thirty minutes. When players run out of their allotted free lives, the screen presents them with the affective image of a personified crying heart and gives them the following three options: (1) wait up to thirty minutes for one life to replenish, (2) connect to Facebook and ask a friend for extra lives (thereby hopefully creating a new player for the game company) or (3) spend US$0.99 in order to instantaneously be able to continue the game (Figure 9.2).

FIGURE 9.2 Candy Crush Saga *no more lives screenshot.*

Smith (2014) reflects on *Candy Crush Saga's* imposed timeout by stating that players 'can never be completely satiated when playing', and that by abruptly interrupting their gaming experience, the game continuously 'leaves [people] wanting more' (para. 10). Not being able to continue playing when one runs out of free lives feels like a failure. This is why 'by not letting [people] play, the game actually becomes even more rewarding when [one is] let back into Candyland' (Smith 2014, para. 10). *Candy Crush Saga* simultaneously presents players with a problem and a solution to that problem: wait, turn to your friends or spend money.

The figure of the crying heart (Figure 9.2) is directly opposed to the otherwise excessive juicy and joyful atmosphere of the game. C*andy Crush Saga's* 'No more lives' screen exemplifies an affective transformation from high to low. Before reaching this screen, the player was immersed in virtual play, consumed by the affective qualities of the game's juiciness. Positive feedback messages such as 'Tasty!' 'Divine!' and 'Sweet!' proliferated and made for an exciting gameplay (Figure 9.3). The switch to the crying heart screen represents an abrupt change of environment and a decrease in positive

FIGURE 9.3 Candy Crush Saga
accomplishment screenshot.

affective stimulus. P2P freemium games count on this affective transmutation and the ensuing shock to generate revenue from microtransactions and recruit more paying players.

Affective and immaterial labour in *Tap Fish*

Lazzarato defines immaterial labour as 'the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity' (1996, 132). There are two aspects to this definition. Under information content, Lazzarato understands the shift from a mostly manual industrial workforce to an economy of services: 'where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and horizontal control' (1996, 132). This side of immaterial labour encompasses the production of freemium games and other types of cognitive work. Cultural content differs from the previous designation in that it 'involves a series of activities that are not recognized as 'work' – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion' (132). The immaterial labour players carry out in caretaking simulations such as *Tap Fish* falls into the second category. Playing games is conventionally viewed as a leisure activity, engaged in because it is pleasurable and a welcome distraction from the toiling associated with professional labour.

Scholars have employed different terms to refer to the culturally produced iterations of immaterial labour. Allison, for instance, uses affective labour to denote the form of immaterial labour 'that engages affects such as well-being, excitement and ease' (2009, 91). Terranova understands the work provided by users of digital environments as free labour, qualifying it as 'simultaneously voluntary given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited' (2000, 33). Individuals who contribute their time to expanding and improving these social and cultural milieus of the digital economy are, according to Terranova: 'acting out a desire for affective and cultural production' (36). Their immaterial labour fuels the new digital markets of global capitalism, yet the majority of these amateurs don't receive any monetary compensation for their contributions.

Affective labour, a subtype of immaterial labour, while prevalent in many casual games, is especially dominant in games that focus on caretaking and resource management. This section will therefore focus on the many forms of affective labour in *Tap Fish*. The affective labour performed by players in *Tap Fish*, includes activities such as feeding one's fish, cleaning the virtual aquarium and decorating one's tanks with appealing items to increase the happiness level of the virtual pets. These tasks are similar to the labour performed by

users of the Neopets site (Pybus 2007) and owners of Tamagochi toys (Wrye 2009) and don't require expert knowledge about game design or production. In *Tap Fish*, every three hours players have the opportunity to 'love' their fish by simply pressing a menu button. This action also impacts the fish's happiness scale and positively affects their selling price, making affective labour a central part of *Tap Fish*'s in-game economy. Players who devote the most time and resources to keeping their fish alive and happy are the ones who reap the greatest profits. While on the surface *Tap Fish* appears to be a simple, worry-free game, a closer look at the dynamics of affective labour in connection with the monetary features of freemium mobile games, reveals the complex relationship between players and immaterial labour.

Taking care of virtual pets in *Tap Fish* is very time-consuming and requires multiple playing sessions throughout the day. The game is not forgiving to players with low time commitments and if one forgets to check in on the fish for a few days, the virtual pets die. This threat of impending death creates a dependency scenario where players feel obligated to spend considerable periods of time engaging in affective labour just to maintain their virtual aquariums. The impending death of a virtual pet has been shown to cause considerable distress in some people. Wrye observes that: 'in some cases, people have even committed suicide, had nervous breakdowns, or become clinically depressed following the death of their virtual pet' (2009, 17). These reactions show that users are capable of forming strong emotional bonds with virtual pets. *Tap Fish* anticipated players' inability to dedicate enough time to the game and thus offers food bricks which keep fish content for several days or weeks for sale in the virtual in-game market. These alternatives to prolonged gameplay can be purchased with both gold coins and Fish bucks, but represent a substantial financial investment if players have a large system of aquariums. Game designer Bennett Foddy (2013), in an interview for the gaming news site *Gamasutra*, states that 'giving players the choice between paying or grinding', is a common tactic with freemium games (cited in Alexander 2013). These games are purposely designed to be very time-consuming so that players who want to succeed in the game find themselves having to pay real money in order to reduce the amount of time labour involved with playing.

Social value and viral marketing in *Candy Crush Saga* and *Tap Fish*

While only paying users are viewed as direct revenue contributors, one should not underestimate the value of free players as 'even those who choose not to pay anything play a crucial role in the success of a title by helping to spread

awareness of the game and boost its ranking and visibility in the app stores' (Holmes 2013, para. 9). The social value produced by non-paying players through indirect advertisement and recruiting mechanisms benefits the game companies. Additionally, non-paying players contribute to the prosperity of a game simply through their presence by 'creating the feeling of a populated community' (Tyni, Sotamaa and Toivonen 2011, 24). In *Candy Crush Saga* for example, players can compare their scores on a particular level to that of their friends and see how far they've progressed in the game in relation to others. The presence of others on the board game creates a sense of competition and community.

Freemium games rely on systems of contagion or viral marketing to expand their audience and are structured so as to facilitate the dissemination of game information across a large user base. By contagion I refer to the practice by which players directly and indirectly promote a game to others and thus help game companies acquire new users and broaden their field of exposure. *Tap Fish*'s main game menu has a 'social' option which lets players summon their Facebook, email and phone book friends to join the game. The game also lets players reach out to others for help with tasks such as feeding fish, cleaning tanks and reviving dead pets. Additionally, both *Candy Crush Saga* and *Tap Fish* make use of sociability within the game itself by offering players the opportunity to publish scores and screenshots on Facebook. According to Tyni, Sotamaa and Toivonen: 'game requests and wall posts serve as a regular reminder of the game being there and that other people are playing it' (2011, 24). All these actions represent forms of immaterial labour produced by casual gamers for their own pleasure, but with substantial benefits to game companies.

When players announce their game achievements on SNS they are doing important publicity and recruitment work for game companies. Mäyrä (2011) calls people who recruit new players through SNS 'viral agents', and explains that many casual games use 'mutual in-game rewards' to promote the spread of the game from one person to another (118–20). In addition to encouraging players to promote their scores on SNS, *Tap Fish* also invites players to visit other aquariums, an activity which introduces players to decorations and fish breeds they may not yet have. When players tap on a friend's aquarium features, the game prompts them with a purchase option. Here, players engage in free labour by working as advertisers for each other. The social value produced by players via SNS and other advertising avenues is vital to a freemium game's success.

While this type of promotion is beneficial to the game companies, phone contacts and SNS users who don't like games tend to find game-related

updates and notifications frustrating. In their research on social games and relationships, Wohn et al. (2011), found that non-players were frustrated by the amount of game-related updates their friends were posting on Facebook and, generally, were annoyed by the presence of freemium games on SNS. Paavilainen et al. (2013) claim that non-gamers are not the only ones who experience frustration in connection with the excessive advertising tactics of freemium games. Several of their interviewees who regularly played social games complained about 'the amount of spam [freemium games] create in the form of notifications, requests, news feed items, and wall posts' and stressed their attempts to limit game-related spam as much as possible so as not to annoy their SNS contacts (Paavilainen et al. 2013, 804).

Conclusion

As a business model, freemium has successfully penetrated the social games market by taking advantage of the gaming features casual gamers find most appealing and combining them with 'free' marketing strategies to encourage in-app spending. While the model relies on what can be considered the exploitation of players' affective relationships to virtual items, the social recruitment mechanism and the communities of players built around these games, are not inherently negative or abusive. The payment structure of freemium games is of great interest to the relationship between positive feedback, affective variance and in-game microtransactions, but it would be unfair to reduce the entire model to a purely financial system. As Mäyrä points out, some casual players benefit emotionally from the social system that is built into the freemium model and gain 'a sense of achievement and sociability' by helping their friends care for virtual pets (2011, 119). Sharing game-related tasks with friends can be a highly enjoyable activity, yet this same social component also has disadvantages. It is possible for players to experience recruitment fatigue, to feel taken advantage of, or to undergo a crisis in decision-making: Do I ask my friends for help yet again or do I wait 30 minutes for one of my free lives to replenish? Additional research is needed in order to explore the full extent of the social, cultural and economic ramifications of the freemium model on casual gaming. As evidenced throughout this chapter, various tensions surround the F2P business model and gaming experience. The multifaceted relationship between casual players and game companies, that arises when real-world financial dynamics are incorporated into the experiences of virtual gameplay and sociability, requires further inquiry.

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