

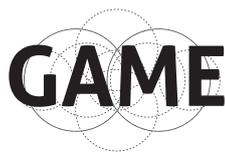
## VIDEO GAME SUBCULTURES

### Playing at the periphery of mainstream culture

Edited by Marco Benoît Carbone & Paolo Ruffino







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# Nordic game subcultures: between LARPer and avant-garde

This article is about structural resemblances, linguistic and rhetoric similarities and media-strategic as well as tactical operations, that Nordic LARPer and 20th century avant-garde artists share. Many of the 20th century avant-garde movements and subcultural formations started from a shared collective experience and then branches out into refined, diversified and individualized forms of expression. Futurism, DADA and Fluxus, Punk, Emo and Goth did originally constitute a dress code, a toolset, a jargon, a mission statement and a territorial assignment within the cities they choose as the center of their activities. Manifestos defined what a Futurist, Dadaist or Punk would most probably think and say, and how he or she would say it. A similar observation can be made for the communities that engage with live action role playing games (LARPer) in the Nordic countries. The Turku manifesto and the Dogma 99 manifesto influenced directly and indirectly how the Nordic LARPer subculture framed itself and presented itself to the world. The initiating, collective experiences of Café Voltaire, the Wuppertal art galleries, SOHO, and respective locations for Nordic LARPer have been constitutive for the process of identity building and identity shaping for artists and gamers alike.

**KEYWORDS:** *LARPer, Avant-garde, Punk, Futurism, Art Manifesto*

If a special flavour of gaming deserves to be called “a subculture” with all of the tangible and non-tangible assets of rebellious music and avant-garde rhetoric, dresscode, code of honour, cryptic messages, social politicking, commitment to the agenda of a specific age group, and a rootedness in a well-defined territory, then the Nordic LARPer would certainly qualify.



Figure 1 – LARPers. Photo by Axel Schnepat.

This article is about structural resemblances, linguistic and rhetoric similarities and a joint set of tactical operations, that today's Nordic LARPers and 20th century avant-garde artists have in common. The proposition made here is not based on the genealogical assumption of one subculture having developed out of another subculture. What we want to point out here is rather that there is a distant resonance of structure, language and politics in between two movements that happened in different centuries and at different locations. The methodology used here can therefore not rely on spatio-temporal, historical consistency, but needs to compare the aesthetics of different subcultural movements. Such a comparison has to start on surface level and look at wordings rather than at words and their meaning. Such a comparison will also initially look at dress codes and not at a "system of fashion" (Barthes 1967) or an alleged "meaning of style" (Hebdige 1979). We hope however to be able to hint at a vicinity of attitudes, ideas and values that help detect relations beyond the borders of countries and centuries.

A LARP is a live action role playing game, and the games of that kind that have been developed and staged in Finland, Iceland, and the Scandinavian countries have created communities that strongly resemble 20th century avant-garde groups. The Larpers present themselves to the world with a set of attitudes not unlike the ones that Futurists, Fluxus artists or DADAists cultivated to shock their contemporaries. The Nordic Larp communities also share the obsession with publishing manifestos and establishing master-apprentice relationships

that the art movements of the first five decades of the last century had. A first look at “The Vow” of the Dogma 99 manifesto and the statements that can be found in the Turku Manifesto reveals similarities to the Futurist Manifesto from 1909 and consecutive manifestos from 20th century avant-gardes. Both Dogma 99 and the Turku manifesto have been written at a time when Nordic Larp was still in its infancy<sup>1</sup>. The manifestos have not only shaped the behaviour and consciousness of tens of thousands of Larpers, they have also created a community of young people that considers themselves a special group of people within society. Ironically the Turku manifesto ends with words that describe this group as something even bigger than a group and as powerful as a class in political economy:

“The simulationists and the eläytyjists have nothing to lose but their chains. But they have the whole world to win. TURKUIST ROLE-PLAYERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!”<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2 –Larper. Photo by Axel Schnepat.

It is obvious that the Turkuist role-players are by no means a class and even hardly a relevant social group. There is however good reason to describe them as a subculture in contemporary society along with other subcultures like Emos, Innocents, Post-Punks, Stilyagi and Goths. The manifestos that speak about the autonomy status and self-imposed rule system of larpers have a vague resemblance to a constitutional text, but they differ from legal documents or corporation mission statements by a rebellious undertone of opposition and provocation. The following observations on the subcultural character of Nordic Larpers are therefore based on an analysis of style of the Larpers’ vows and

1. Trenne Byar from 1994 is considered to be the first relevant Nordic Larp. (Montola & Stenros 2010: 31 – 38)

2. An eläytyjists is a person who believes in immersion in Role Playing Games and who practices it instead of pretending and acting like on stage.

manifestos and on a historical comparison to manifestos from the history of 20th and 21st century avant-gardes. It is not so much the content that the manifestos try to communicate but the phrasing that tells us something about the respective subcultures.<sup>3</sup>

**Dogma 99:** Furthermore, I swear to regard myself as an artist, and any LARP I write as my »work«. (...) My highest goal is to develop the art and medium of live-action role-playing. This, I promise, will be done through all means available, and at the expense of good taste, all conventions and all popularity amongst the so-called LARPer.

**DADA manifesto, 1918<sup>4</sup>:** We consider this to be the most valuable form of art: An art that is fully conscious of the thousand of problems that face our time; an art that dares to be thrown onto pathways directed by last week's explosions; an art that reassembles its body that has been disassociated by the attacks of the former days.

**Dogma 99:** We seek to oppose the pitfalls of conventional LARP, the dominance of the mainstream genres, and the refusal of the general public...

**A Slap in the Face of Public Taste, 1927<sup>5</sup>:**

To feel an insurmountable hatred for the language existing before our time.

**The Manifesto of Futurist Music, 1910:** To combat categorically all historical reconstructions and traditional stage sets and to declare the stupidity of the contempt felt for contemporary dress<sup>6</sup>.

**Turku Manifesto, 1999:** The Turku School struggles for the immediate and long-term goals of the eläytyjst and simulationist role-players, but presently it also stands for the future of all role-playing. In Norway the dramatists are trying to re-invent theatre, but there the word of the Turku School still brings hope to the oppressed simulationists.

**A Slap in the Face of Public Taste, 1917:** We alone are the face of our Time.

Through us the horn of time blows in the art of the world.

The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics.

Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity.

It is also not by chance that the form of Dogma 99's Vow of Chastity with its 10 numbered proclamations corresponds to the 14 numbered statements of the filmmakers' Dogma Manifesto from 1995 and to the 11 provocative statements Marinetti proclaimed in his Founding Manifesto for Futurism.<sup>7</sup>

3. Dylan Clark (2003) points out that one should not mix up the subcultures with the prophets and leaders of subcultural movements. In this respect the manifestos say probably more about the prophets than about the believers.

4. German original: "Die höchste Kunst wird diejenige sein, die in ihren Bewußtseinsinhalten die tausendfachen Probleme der Zeit präsentiert, der man anmerkt, daß sie sich von den Explosionen der letzten Woche werfen ließ, die ihre Glieder immer wieder unter dem Stoß des letzten Tages zusammensucht."

5. David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Victor Khlebnikov: A Slap in the Face of Public Taste, 1917

6. Balilla Pratella: The Manifesto of Futurist Music, 1910

7. Marinetti used the form of a numbered list of statements to suggest a clear logical structure of his thought, not unlike Wittgenstein did in his 1921 tractatus. In Marinetti's case at least the enumeration was a rhetoric manoeuvre, the numbered arguments do not follow a linear logical development.

Erik Fatland and Lars Wingård, the authors of the Vow of Chastity and masterminds of Dogma 99, repeat a canon of statements that has become a convention within avant-garde manifesto writers. Futurists, Dadaists, Fluxus masterminds, Vienna “Aktionisten”, Webartists, Game Artists, Critical Engineers and finally Nordic LARPers All seem to share an attitude and a rhetoric ritual that is based on these rhetoric figures:

1. Proclaim that something that has not been considered art is art now. (“Nordic LARP” in the case of Dogma 99, “Noise” for Luigi Russolo and the futurists, “Radio“ for the Kunstradio manifesto).
2. Tell the world that every form of your medium preceding your own attempts within this medium are to be regarded detestable. (“so-called LARPers” for Dogma 99; “Pushkin, Dostojewskij and Tolstoj” for the Russian Futurists; “La Gioconda” for Marinetti).
3. Use swearwords for your predecessors (“...the filthy slime of the books written by the countless Leonid Andreyevs” or “from the heights of skyscrapers we gaze at their insignificance!” for the Russian Futurists; “Fuck the Magic Circle!” for the AMAZE manifesto; “the [TURKU] school is struggling against the short-sighted, the conservative, and above all, the gamist and dramatist schools”, as the Turku manifesto put it.)
4. Construct a rationale why your own region or country is the most feasible place to create works of excellence. (Scandinavian “allmansrät” for Nordic Larpers as Montola and Stenros observe; Italy for Marinetti: “It is from Italy that we launch through the world this violently upsetting incendiary manifesto of ours”; the USA for Burljuk: “America is worthy of GREAT NEW ART“).
5. Develop a dresscode, a disguise or a costume that makes members of the movement immediately recognisable (various historic or futuristic costumes in the case of Nordic LARP; black coat and bowler hat for the Futurists; black polo neck for the existentialists; leather, torn t-shirts and rivet stud spikes for the Punks).

The aim of the manifestos seems on one hand an attempt to gather a crowd but on the other hand also to prove deviation from the norm and to gain recognition as a relevant phenomenon. Why would anyone bother about a bunch of Scandinavian youngsters having fun in the forests, if the very same youngsters were not to launch a manifesto, declare their otherness and curse 99% of the gaming community of having missed the point? Probably nobody. It is therefore strategically important to publish a manifesto and declare oneself as arty, rebellious, non-conformist and dangerous. The result of such action is that the group switches opponents. It is not any longer the parents or the local forest authorities one has to quarrel with, but art critics, university lecturers and game studies journals.

**1 – Art.** Games subcultures share a desire with avant-garde subcultures to be considered as truly artistic. In the Turku manifesto the third paragraph is not only dedicated to state that role-playing can be an art form. The manifesto furthermore attempts to do the impossible: to define what art is. “Art can be broadly defined to be use of a medium with precision and individuality (which is creativity combined with personality). Thus it is possible to create art, as well as pointless entertainment, with RPGs”. Manifestos from Critical Engineers (2012), Game Designers (2011), Web Designers (1999) and Radio producers<sup>8</sup> (1998) have told us that every conceivable medium can be declared art. The statement “Radio art is the use of radio as a medium for art” is quoted here to function as a template for future media declaring their art status. If every medium can be declared art, the question arises why it is worth mentioning it for a specific medium. It also raises the question why such a trivial statement should then be published as part of a manifesto. Or is it true what Hans Ulrich Reck suggests in his book on “The Myth of Media Art” (2007): It makes no sense at all to describe media as art, but one should rather talk of “art through media”.

**2 – Arrogance.** “Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed”<sup>9</sup>. In his 1909 manifesto Marinetti does not provide us with an explanation, why he believes that time and space might have died. It would actually create quite a lot of problems for Marinetti to explain how he could have created speed, if there is no time and space left, because speed is distance taken in a period of time. But that is not the problem. Marinetti fuels the effect of his lines with a rhetoric style and a mesmerising mix of arrogance, provocation and threat. The verbal style introduces a formal framework of assertions that is so strong that logic or inductive reasoning become almost obsolete. The statements of arrogance also protect the subcultural group from any comparative assessment. “The criticized and feared, acclaimed and admired Turku School is here to tell the world what role-playing is, how and why it should be done, and why everybody else is wrong.” A sentence like that prevents from others drawing conclusions, because it states that a conclusion has already been arrived at. This is methodologically hazardous to say the least. But then again: “Realization over Theorization!” as the net.art Manifesto proudly states<sup>10</sup>.

**3 – Strong Language.** The Game Design Manifesto “Controlled Invasion” that was first published in 2011 contains five statements. The fifth statement reads like this: “5 Fuck the magic circle. – we need game ethics!” This is a short sentence to request an unspecified ethical approach to game design, but the phrasing obviously addresses an enemy. The enemy is traditional game design based on the assumption that there is a situation that has been called the magic circle by Salen and Zimmerman (2007) and others. Gaming subcultures need to identify an enemy that they can agree upon in order to create some consistence within the group.

8. *Radio Art Manifesto*, 1998. <http://kunstradio.at/THEORIE/index.html>.

9. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in the 8th paragraph of the *Futurist Manifesto* (1909).

10. Shulgin and Bookchin, 1999

The energy is therefore constructed *vis-à-vis* symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1993) of a strong opponent. For “Controlled Invasion” the enemy was traditional game design, for Nordic Larpers it is the Anglo-American gaming industry. “The supreme demonstrations of the weaknesses of conventional LARP are the commercial products of the Anglo-American gaming industry. By aiming at a lowest common denominator, these publications achieve nothing beyond the infant stage”<sup>11</sup>. Strong language is indicative of subcultural rhetorics. As long as the verbally uttered disrespect targets just another subculture there is no reason to perceive the rebellious group as countercultural (Turner 2006). Countercultural action is characterized by a profound opposition to the values of a broader societal segment – and not just by disapproval or a specific subculture’s canon of music, fashion and life-style. Insofar the statement of “Fuck the magic circle” can hardly be seen as a countercultural exclamation. Society as a whole has hardly any issue with the concept of a magic circle. It is game studies scholars who cherish the notion and the “Controlled Invasion” invaded or tried to invade just another subculture and nothing more.



Figure 3. Picture made by the Nuremberg-Kulmbach-Connection, 20. September 2008, Author: NKC.

**4 – Territorialism.** Subcultures are often closely related to the subculture’s birthplace. Many of the 20th century avant-garde movements and subcultural formations started from a shared collective experience in a particular location and then branched out into refined, diversified and individualized forms of expression in different parts of the world. Futurism, DADA and Fluxus on one hand, and Punk, Emo, Innocent, and Goth-style on the other hand did originally constitute a dress code, a toolset, a jargon, a mission statement and a territorial assignment within the cities, where Futurists, Punks, Hippies or Dadaists would most probably be found. The initiating collective experiences of Woodstock, Cabaret Voltaire, the Wuppertal art galleries, Camden, and respective locations for each of the subcultural movements was constitutive for the process of identity building and identity shaping. But for some reason the subcultural group identifies the location where the founding fathers had met in the first place with the location where their followers will meet.

11. *The Turku Manifesto*, 1999.

Everybody knows that there are punks in Tokyo and Rome, in Helsinki and in provincial German towns, yet the myth of the Englishness of Punk is celebrated with the Union Jack, with Euro-English jargon and with a deep hatred of the royalties in Buckingham palace - wherever the punk would happen to live.

For Nordic Larp it is the Scandinavian region, Finland and Iceland, that is mistaken as an essential ingredient of Nordic Style larping. It would however be impossible to point out what difference it makes whether a larp is staged in Bavaria or in Turku, in Minnesota or in Peru. It also makes no difference whether the larpers themselves are proper Finns or Swedes or if they stem from another part of the world. There is a larp tourism nowadays that mixes and merges participants. There are also Nordic Larps in Palestine as one can read on nordiclarp.org<sup>12</sup> and the question must be posed whether we have Nordic Larp in Palestine there, or Palestinian Larp by Nordic players here. However one might turn it, it seems to make no sense to identify a subculture by the territory the founding fathers have been roaming in.



Figure 4 – The oppressor’s camp in front of Helsinki’s main railway station. Screenshot from the visual material for Piiritystila – State of Siege – Halht Hisar. Montage by Joel Sammallahti, 2013

12. In August of 2012 the Larp “Till Death Do us Part” was organized as a cooperation between Norwegian and Palestinian larp designers. It was the first bigger Palestinian larp project and since then many projects happened in connection to the emerging Palestinian larp community. The latest addition is “Piiritystila – Halht Hisar”, a Palestinian-Finnish larp. <http://nordiclarp.org/tag/palestine/>

**5 – Fashion.** It is certainly true that the Nordic Larp community is hardly uniform in the fashion they follow. The Wild West look of “Once upon a Time” (July to August 2005) differed completely from the pseudo medieval “Trenne Byar” (July 1994) or the enclosed space opera of “Carolus Rex” (November 1999). The fashion that Larpers subscribe to is functional as it serves to support roles in the role playing game. On the other hand the costume is a projection surface for individual fantasies and dreams. In this respect it reaches beyond functionality. Larpers are sensitive to dresses, robes, make-up and hairstyle as any subculture is, but the driving force for their sensitivity seems to differ from what motivates punks or Hell’s Angels to dress up – and it also differs from the motivation of the futurists to dress up.

Angela McRobbie argues that punk fashion is driven by “creative defiance” (McRobbie 1999, p. 136). Dylan Clark speaks of “calculated anger” and the “potency through an ability to shock and dismay” (Clark 2003, p.2, p.1). This is hardly the main objective for Larpers to dress up. Also, Larpers can not be subsumed under one specific dress code. As has been mentioned above the codes range from medieval to futuristic. This is not different to fans or band members from The Clash differing in visual appearance from those of Siouxsie and the Banshees and the latter again differing from those of My Chemical Romance. The subcultural framing of identity is wide enough in both cases - Nordic Larpers and Punks - to cater for a wide range of sub-styles. All of these sub-groups have something in common, that links amongst the various stylistic variations. But even though the consistency within the sub-groupings is strong and the differences amongst them are obvious there is a feeling to belong to the same metaverse. It makes therefore sense to describe the whole of Nordic Larpers as a subculture and not only those who subscribe to a sci-fi, medieval or fairy-tale aesthetic within the Larp community.

**6 – Conclusion.** In other words: specific subsections of the whole of playing humans, like Nordic Larpers, might be described as a gaming-subculture with shared codes and conventions about behaviour, jargon, music, dress, food and other aspects of life. What they attain is a temporary identity that is often constituted via strong opposition against the symbolic violence of a dominant group like the Anglo-American role playing community. The Larpers’ identity does however not manifest itself as a habitus in the way Bourdieu would describe an embodied adaption to a lasting scheme of regulations and conventions (Bourdieu 1993). The arrangements that Larpers agree to may last for a day, a weekend, or a week at the longest. They attain a weekend-habitus, which is to say: not a habitus at all. The mode of transformation from a standard citizen to a spectacular follower of Larp-fashion is rather related to the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984) than to habitus. For a limited time the larpers attain a high level of identification with the group, a canon of do’s and don’ts, and a methodological – if not a philosophical and ethical superstructure that keeps the group together. It is possible to conceive this superstructure as the constituent for a subcultural cohesion amongst Nordic Larpers. It is however impossible to call the whole of gamers a subculture within digital cultures, because gamers differ not only in one of the before mentioned aspects of social identity. Their multiplicity of jargons, musical preferences, dress codes or lack of such, social status and different political positions makes them a completely incoherent bunch and therefore unfit for constituting a subculture.

The initial proposition of this article, that tangible and non-tangible assets of fashion, music and avant-garde rhetoric, code of honour, cryptic messages, and some kind of in-group sociality would qualify Nordic Larpers

as a subculture has to be put into perspective vis-à-vis the “classical subcultures” (Clark 2003, p.1), i.e., pre-1970s subcultures, whom David Clark sees as equipped with the potential for social change. These subcultures – early punk included here – that preceded the decline and commercialisation of punk, differ from the new subcultures like the ones of Nordic Larpers. As has been shown above the new subcultures share aspects of style, rhetorics, values and attitudes with the classical subcultures, but they differ in their relation to fashion and to their quest for social change. Beyond that Nordic Larpers lack continuity in their efforts to provoke, shock and dismay, and do therefore neither own habitus nor a potential for change – despite all of the formal similarities that exist between Nordic Larpers and punks, futurists and other 20th century avant-gardes.

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## MANIFESTOS (in chronological order)

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# Tribute and Resistance: Participation and affective engagement in Brazilian fangame makers and modders' subcultures

This paper proposes a discussion on particular aspects of production and circulation of Brazilian fangames and mods, in an effort to better comprehend these growing phenomena as actual subcultures in the Brazilian context. Although not limited to the following characteristics, we assume that fangames are game productions that are not directly related to profit purposes; also, the production of these games is mainly based upon successful mainstream games. From this hypothesis, we observe that fangames and mods are essentially the result of today's participatory culture, in which tribute and resistance – two concepts that will be properly treated throughout the paper – are two important engagement forms of the prosumer public.

**KEYWORDS:** *Fangames, Mods, Tribute, Resistance, Brazil.*

## **INTRODUCTION: THE THREE WAVES OF FAN STUDIES**

Since the 1980s, when the phenomenon took visible proportions in the academic research, fan studies have been marked by three distinct periods. In the first period, fan studies were focused on the “fan exaltation” as part of a counterculture that was eager to critically respond to the dominant media culture, mainly the mass media communication. One of the exponents within this period was the theorist Jon Fiske, who pointed out the subversion characteristic of the fan culture that operates through re-appropriations of popular culture products (Fiske, 1992).

This approach has been contested ever since. McKingley (1997) affirms that fandom power and resistance would only occur if there were a disruption between the traditional cultural hegemonic values and the ideological canon of media producers. Departing from his gender researches, the author argues that the values propagated by the media cultural movement are often shared by fans; their consumption is also consistent with the identity of the individuals that are present in the communities around such cultural products. Thus, McKinley's proposition points towards the second period of fan studies, which took place in the 1990's. Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007) argue that this second period (the second "fan wave") was constructed through a sociological bias due to the proliferation of technologies of communication, which resulted in social groupings of fans within communities. This became evident when cultural industries got stronger, feeding those communities in a highly competitive market.

The current fan-related studies have received a wider approach, trying to frame fans within the experience of daily life. In addition, the market deregulation and the media decentralization provided by the proliferation of new network technologies have allowed the cultural productions not only to focus on the traditional media, but especially on the creativity and the re-appropriation of the fandom's productions. As a result, the cultural industries conceal these fan productions as part of the cultural circulation process of their products. Therefore, fan studies have not only focused on the social relationships, but also in the cultural and market context that allow us to comprehend the entire system. According to Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington:

Studies of fan audiences help us to understand and meet challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us, as well as the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience (Gray, Sandvoss, Harrington, 2007, p. 10).

Reinforced by Jenkins (2009), this statement reveals that recent fan studies also try to frame the fan's role as a content producer. The fan's creativity and intense interaction with cultural objects are capable of allowing her to create new productions as a tribute to the "original" product. Cultural appropriations by fans are then considered as a kind of symbolic capital in the participatory culture: a feature of the contemporary media convergence period.

However, the idea of resistance, despite being part of an initial period of fan studies, must not be completely left aside. Sandvoss (2013) argues that the fandom phenomenon, if approached by the distinction bias proposed by Bourdieu (1984), should not be faced as a subversion behavior characterised by clashes between hegemonic and minority classes. On the other hand, it is possible to analyze this behavior through habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) as a reflex of any combination of social, cultural and economic capital. In this way, the resistance's role in the fandom culture overtakes class empowerment issues to be merged into emotional rewards, as well as its social and cultural relations.

The conception of resistance that directed part of the studies was based on the concepts of culture and subculture, especially in the Chicago School and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: strands that consolidate this research. Hedbig (2002) defines subculture as “the challenge of hegemony represented by subcultures not directly thereunder; Indeed, if tendentiously Expressed by the style” (Hedbig 2002: 33). For the author, the members of a subculture reject the dominant culture, through gestures, movements, poses, outfits and words, expressions that manifest contradictions and denials by traditional society.

Taking this concept of subculture, and recognizing the particularities surrounding each game production in favor of a resistance to the mainstream market, we intend to explore game’s productions made by Brazilian fans and modders, focusing on understanding the phenomenon as a whole, in its social, cultural and economic contexts. Three distinct periods marked the production and distribution of games in Brazil, alongside its own social and economic history: the 1980’s decade and the origin of Brazilian modding culture through the production and appropriation of foreign software and hardware; the Brazilian “commercial opening” in the 1990’s and its intense economic and industrial relation to the Brazilian game market; and, at last, the beginning of the 21th century, which was marked by the customization of products to supply the market’s demand, adjusting to the necessities of a specific niche.

In order to achieve this goal, we shall first elaborate a taxonomy that comprises not only the fan as part of the phenomenon of fandom culture, but also analyzing the thin distinction between fan-game-makers and modders.

### **FAN-GAME-MAKERS AND MODDERS**

Fiske (1992) proposes an initial classification about the fans’ participation modes, distinguishing these modes in three different productivity forms: semiotics, declaratives and textual. The semiotics productivity describes the creation of meaning in the reading process and, thus, occupies an intrapersonal space. The declarative productivity regards the forms of social interaction that are cultivated by means of fan consumption. It also includes the verbal as well as the non-verbal communications as, for instance, the use of collectibles to show some kind of affection towards the cultural object. At last, the textual productivity, according to Fiske, describes materials and texts created by fans that act as forms of physical manifestations. Echoing Fiske’s thought, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) recognize the different forms of fan productions, gradually differentiating these productions by analyzing their consumption and production levels, in which fans act not only as mere consumers, but also as small producers. Between these three poles, we can find three different fan groups: common fans; the “cultists” and the enthusiasts. The first group is the consumer of a particular cultural product through the general media. According to the authors, these consumers are part of a fragmented public and are not related to one another in an organizational level.

The second group, the “cultists”, is comprised by consumers of specialized media and tends to relate to other people who share their same interests, yet in a non-complete organizational level. The enthusiasts, by the other hand, bring forth the very textual activity and production as the essence of their fandom. They consume very specialized texts, made by other enthusiasts, and relate to one another through their own organizational structures. These three groups search for ways of corresponding to the fans’ wishes and motivations. Thus, the power relations inside the fandom community are based on the capacity of those productions of articulating the fans’ identities, as well as their objective and subjective position within the society.

Departing from this categorization, we shall propose a taxonomy for video games’ fans, based on what Abercrombie and Longhurst would call enthusiasts, that is, fans whose relation with the cultural object overtakes the consumption regime for the production scale. In this category we face two distinct modalities: fan-game-makers and modders.

For mod, abbreviation for modification, we consider any alteration made in any game element. There are several communities in which modders – the individuals who make mods – build their own subculture, with their specific groups who develop and share their mods to other players.



Figure 1 – *CounterStrike*: source and *Jail*: similarities and differences beyond gameplay

Within the modder category, there is a subcategory that upholds a consolidated tradition: the rom-hackers. Rom hacking is the rom edition practice, with the purpose of fixing game bugs, but mainly of making game translations. In fact, the practice of rom-hacking is very common in the Latin-American context, since many games are not published in Latin-American languages. Despite being a practice that is considered a copyright violation, many groups get organized in order to translate those games, searching for software that make this work easier.

In our understanding, the act of making mods is a practice that alters some game elements, and it comprises including something new in its structure or mechanics (add-ons), improving the game aesthetics, or even including new game levels and game contents.

As pointed by Olli Sotamaa (2003), it is not only the enthusiasm of amateurs that drives the phenomena of modding. For the author, the phenomenon goes beyond the entertainment or the intention of reaching a place of production in the gaming market. Modding combines the true hacker spirit with commercial interests.

Besides mods, there are also the fangames. Fangames are games developed by fans that can be started from a scratch or with the help of game development tools. Usually, fangames are based on an already developed game – usually a known and successful game – and can be seen as a tribute to that “original” game, although it is also known as a copyright infringement.

Thus, at this point, we would like to raise a specific question: if a mod can add contents to a game and a fangame is a game based on an already developed game, which also adds or alters elements of that game, what would be the differences between those two practices? To what extent the modding practice cannot be also considered a fan practice?

While the modders’ work is somehow interdependent on the “original” game and has among its goals the inclusion or improvement of game elements and, in many situations, is endorsed by the original game developers, a fangame has a referential relation to the original game, being completely isolated, in terms of development, from the original production, having its own and complete structure, being, most of the times, unknown by the game market. In fact, there is not only a refusal to the fangame practice, as there are, sometimes, lawsuits against fangame makers, for having violated copyright issues. That is to say that the fangame maker practice – either a work driven by an affective feeling towards the original work or in order to build of a personal portfolio – can be turned from a tribute to a crime, no matter the commercial practices involved in the distribution of the fangame.

We consider mods and fangames as a facet of the current participative culture, in which tribute and resistance are presented as two important engagement forms of the consumer-producer public. Thus, we intend to explore the Brazilian scenario on the video games’ customization practices, either mods or fangames, searching to observe the economic and social contexts throughout three important periods that marked the Brazilian economy.

### **MODS, FAN TRANSLATIONS AND FANGAMES: ON THE DAWN OF THE BRAZILIAN GAMER CULTURE**

In Brazil, we can identify the modder culture as a phenomenon that dates back to the 1980’s decade, when the first personal computers (home computers) were launched in the country. Those computers were manufactured by Brazilian companies that borrowed and “copied” foreign hardware, launching those very same computers with different skins and names, but with appearance that resembled their original counterparts. Later, those computers would be called clones. At that time, the MSX platform brought two of the clones that most

circulated throughout the Brazilian marketplace: Expert, made by Gradiente, and Hotbit, made by Sharp/Epcom. Unlike IBM PCs, these computers afforded a specific use towards game programming and game playing. This happened, to a great extent, due to their very configuration as, for instance, native TV, video and audio outputs, game controller ports and cartridge slots: features that are commonplaces in the majority of videogame consoles. However, all those companies – and this is important to point out – didn't have the official permission to launch their computers with the MSX label: the entire manufacturing and distribution process was taken on without the consent of the MSX Association, the owner of the MSX mark. We can indicate this phenomenon as a kind of resistance, by those Brazilian companies, to the obstacles that were imposed by the Brazilian Market Protection Policy that was ongoing in the country during the 1980's decade. Besides computer cloning, those same companies were also responsible for the beginning of the game cloning scenario, through the activity of copying and selling game cartridges without the permission of the companies that developed those games as, for instance, MSX Konami's games.

### THE MSX STANDARD

The MSX was a computer standard announced in 1983 by Kazuhiko Nishi, who at that time was the vice-president of Microsoft Japan and CEO of ASCII Corporation (currently ASCII Media Works) – a huge software developer company (games included) during the 1980's decade. Nishi's intention was the creation of a computer standard (hardware and software) that could be manufactured by any company. It is not by chance that, when the MSX standard was launched, several Japanese companies started to manufacture MSX computers, as Sony, Sanyo, National, Panasonic and Yamaha, but also European companies, such as Philips, and even a North American company, Spectravideo. One of the main purposes of the MSX platform was the alleged interchangeability and its capacity to be expanded (hence one of the explanations for the MSX name: Machines with Software EXchangeability), as we can notice even nowadays, with new homebrew accessories been produced around the world for the platform by the MSX community, as IDE/CF/MMC/SD interfaces, Flash Cartridges, Graphic Cartridges, Sound Cartridges, and so on.

The MSX platform was launched in Brazil at late 1985, through two electronics companies: Gradiente and Sharp/Epcom. Before long, many Brazilian teenagers and adults would be interacting with MSX computers, largely in order to “replace” what at the time was the main game platform in Brazil: the Atari 2600 (including its clones). One of the reasons for this replacement was the fact that the MSX platform had graphic and sound capabilities far superior to the Atari 2600, besides being used as a personal computer. It is not by chance that many home computer users at that time had their first contact with computer programming through a MSX.

Due to the same Market Protection Policy mentioned above, it was very rare that original game cartridges (usually made in Japan or in Europe) arrived in Brazil to be resold. This fact opened a space to those Brazilian companies (Gradiente and Sharp, for instance, but also other smaller companies, like GranSoft) to import original cartridges and “clone” the software “recorded” in its ROM and then launching them into the Brazilian Marketplace, in the same cartridge format (and also in floppy disks and audio tapes), but without any mention to the game developers (they used to remove the developer logo from the title screen as well as from the game playfield). We could consider this practice as the beginning of the modding activity for the MSX platform, made not by individuals, but by huge electronics companies.

The lack of references to the game developers was not limited to the “external” game components (boxes, labels, manuals, etc.) but, as mentioned earlier, also to the games’ “interior” elements. Developers’ logos, such as Konami’s, were replaced by the more generic MSX logo (this was the case of the games distributed by Gradiente; maybe the company didn’t chose to put her logo in the game in order to avoid legal issues), or even by the Brazilian “publishers” logos (it was the case of the aforementioned GranSoft), with no “shame feelings”. One example of this type of mod is the Konami’s *Hyper Olympic* game series (1984). In Brazil, the game was “published” by Gradiente and GranSoft (let alone other smaller companies). In the Gradiente version, Konami’s logo was extracted from the game title screen as well as from the game scenarios and replaced by the MSX logo. Besides, the game title (*Hyper Olympic*) was replaced by a Portuguese translation, Olimpíadas, both in the game external assets (boxes, manuals) and in the game title screen. In the GranSoft version, the game was almost completely translated (only the game title remained the same), and the Konami logo was replaced by GranSoft’s.

Unlike what happened to many computer platforms of the time, the MSX platform is still “alive” and has a huge and loyal user community in countries as Brazil, Spain and the Netherlands. Many of these users develop “updated” hardware and software, which are commercialized through mailing lists or discussion forums, as is the case of the MSXBR-L mailing list, the biggest MSX related Brazilian mailing list, which counts for almost 2000 posted messages each month<sup>1</sup>.

Besides mods, some MSX Konami games received fan translation and fan games versions. Among these games translations is *Snatcher* (Konami, 1988), a cyberpunk themed game developed by the famous game designer Hideo Kojima, and *Shalom* (1987), also known as *Knightmare III*, both translated to Portuguese. Without these translations, it would be almost impossible for the majority of Brazilian players to have any interaction with those games, for their texts originally came only in Japanese. Regarding fangames, maybe the most known MSX Konami Brazilian fangame is *Knightmare Gold*, developed in 2005 by a team headed by Daniel Caetano.

1. Available at: <http://listas.amplus.com.br/pipermail/msxbr-l/>

*Knightmare Gold* is a tribute to the 1986 Konami game *Knightmare* (*Majou Densetsu*, in Japanese), one of the most acclaimed MSX games ever. *Knightmare Gold* has graphics that are very similar to the original game, but comes with a remastered CD quality soundtrack.



Figure 2 – Boxes of the game *Hyper Olympic 2*: on the left, original Konami. On the right, Gradient’s clone.



Above: Figure 3 – Images of the main menu of the game *Hyper Olympic 2*.

On the right, Figure 4 – original Konami; on the right, Gradient’s clone; below, GranSoft’s clone with text translated into Portuguese



### BRAZILIAN'S MARKET ADAPTATIONS IN THE COMMERCIAL OPENING

The 1990's decade was marked by significant changes in the Brazilian exterior commerce policy. This period was characterized by the “commercial opening”, initiated in Fernando Collor's government: part of a globalization process within the new world order (Vigevani; Oliveira, 2008). The Brazilian market, suffering with the inflation process since the 1980's, established international agreements for fiduciary loans, in exchange for liberation measures for the entrance of foreign products into the internal market. Such measures culminated in disagreements in the internal economy in many sectors, and just postponed for a while the return of the inflation. That liberation process brought on the entrance of products from developed countries, which changed radically the relations of the national industries. In opposition to the competitive scale expected by the commercial opening, the consequence was a regressive insertion of the capital's goods, since “the productivity increase is associated to a small production growth, to small investment levels, to a growing unemployment and to a modest increase on the technological and organizational improvement process” (Gonçalves, 2001, p. 89).

It is important to underscore that although the high level of piracy in Brazil could be explained by a lack of capacity, by game developers and publishers, to respond to the market demands, the modding of software and hardware cannot be explained only by those factors. As mentioned above, the difficulties faced by Brazilian companies forced them, to some extent, to make their own game versions. These modified versions firstly appeared in open markets where, more than price accessibility, individuals looked for the games' localization. It was very rare to find games that the public could fully understand, due to the translation problem aforementioned: the majority of titles would come only in English, with a few exceptions where official (authorized) modifications/translations could be made, as is the case of Brazilian console game manufacturer TecToy, which manufactured many of the SEGA consoles in Brazil.

The “non-official” translation practice was most common during the “cartridge decade”. Even when there were not Portuguese translations of those games, Brazilian users were pleased with Spanish translations due to the proximity of this language with Brazilian Portuguese. On the other hand, the localization problem is not unique to the South American game market. During the 1980's and 1990's, many games that were produced in Japan came to the North American market also without being localized. In this context, the modding practice can be seen as a measure to answer to a specific social demand, having as one of its consequences the illegality, due to the failure of game development and publishing companies to respond to those needs. Thus, while observing the existence of mods, hacks, cracks, skins and add-ons, it is possible to say that the consumer of fictional works is encouraged to take part as a collaborative agent regarding the products for which she has some kind of affection, meaning, also, a non-passive relation to the overall gaming context.

Nevertheless, there were also “legitimate” enterprises of game modding. This was the case of the above mentioned Brazilian company TecToy, which acquired the rights to publish worldwide known games, but modified to serve Brazilian consumers. Two examples are the cases of the games: *Mônica no Castelo do Dragão* (*Monica in the Dragon Castle*), which portrayed well known Brazilian comics characters created by Maurício de Souza, and *Chapolim vs. Drácula*, which portrayed the Mexican TV Show Super-Hero *Chapolim Colorado*, which has been aired in Brazil since the 1980’s decade and has gained great reception by Brazilian viewers since then. Although these games were “original” games, all their mechanics was based on well-established games like *Wonder Boy*, which was also launched in Brazil by TecToy. These cases show a facet that is often forgotten when treating the piracy subject: more than the simple translation of a game, companies like TecToy afforded cultural contextualization, as is the case of the games mentioned above, fulfilling, to a certain extent, local demands.



Figure 4: Monica at the Castle of the Dragon

Although companies like TecToy had venture into the work of turning things a little easier to Brazilian consumers, by translating and developing contextualized games, this was an exception to the overall situation, leaving to users the role of translators and modders. One of the greatest examples resides on the sport/soccer game genre, for its success within the Brazilian culture.

Answering to this specific demand, many soccer games versions/mods were made, to almost all the videogame platforms that were available to Brazilian consumers. In a time when there were not games like today's *FIFA* or *PES*, with Brazilian teams and soccer players, users had to implement these features by themselves. Titles like *Ronaldinho Campeonato Brasileiro 1998* ("Ronaldinho Brazilian Championship 1998"), a non-official mod for the Super Nintendo game *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe* shows this movement.



Figure 5: Ronaldinho and the hacked version of *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe*.

The practice of modding soccer games had a continuous growth during the 1990's decade, due, among other aspects, to the proliferation of Internet access to the Brazilian population. This practice was intensified when the videogame storage media turned from cartridges to CDs and DVDs, when patches with updates were released every year, as soccer players moved from one team to another. Those patches also contained localized voices, taken from Brazilian TV soccer commentators. Besides, they were not only distributed by Internet but also sold at newsstands, with appellative covers made by modders.

### GUITAR HERO BRAZIL

It is known that Internet has changed entertainment business in the 21st century. Companies face a turnaround from the passive customer to an active content user and producer, which can easily pass on to others a customized product via Internet. As discussed in this article, the customization of products to serve a local niche demand began before the Web 2.0.

However, the possibility of digital distribution and the ease of finding products have allowed the free replication to be a common phenomenon, even when most of the times those products are copyrighted. Chris Anderson (2008, p. 11) explains the economics of abundance: “what happens when the bottlenecks that stand between supply and demand in our culture start to disappear and everything becomes available to everyone”. The author also defends that consumers are becoming active producers because of low costs and population of technology, removing the control of content off the big corporations. It is a time when games made by fangames and mods are easily available to the mass of niches. Therefore, Brazil continues the products’ customization in the 21th century.



Figure 6: Pirated version of the game *Winning Eleven 8*.

The *Guitar Hero* series (Harmonix Music Systems, 2005–2010) is a successful American game based on Konami’s *GuitarFreaks* (1998). They both have similar gameplay, consisting in combining coloured buttons with the colours displayed in the screen, in order to accumulate points and animate a simulated audience in a concert. *Guitar Hero* is played with a joystick shaped as a guitar, one of the main attractions of the game. In this sense, *Guitar Hero Brazil* is an example of customizing a product to a local culture, adjusting to its demands. The mod was designed by a musical producer and an engineer, which created a new repertory, based on Brazilian bands. Instead of mainstream American or English songs and bands, the Brazilian version has local popular bands, such as Raimundos, Mamonas Assassinas, Legião Urbana, Pitty, and others.



Figure 7: Game cover made by a fan.

Discouraged by big companies and their copyrights policies, the abovementioned modders believe in the game's content improvement as fans and players of *Guitar Hero* who studied the game's programming code and re-recorded it with Brazilian songs. While companies worry about money loss, modders usually don't aim for profit, but for an intimate experience with the game. According to Nobre (2010, p. 1), today's piracy is different from the pirates of XVIII century, because when it happens in the cyberspace, it does not mean to leave someone without, but to leave someone with something more. Although they are both against the law, today's cyber piracy is not restricted to sea brigands of the Mediterranean like in the Middle Age, but to those who have a computer and certain knowledge of the machine.

In an interview to a show called PlayTV, Daniel Monteiro, one of the creators of the mod *Guitar Hero Brazil*, enlightened:

And we always thought, but we can't distribute the game, right? Because, anyway, it is piracy. And it was always this issue, and now, how do you do it? Anyway, until now we don't do it. We don't have any contact to the game's producer, and it is only here, at home, in fact. We made it only for us and we are the owner of the original game and we substituted this in the game and we play<sup>2</sup>.

From this statement, Monteiro seems uncomfortable with the piracy subject. In Brazil, the Law 10.695/03 typifies a violator behavior of the copyright policy, although after browsing for a few minutes on the Internet it is possible to find a kind of "law infractors" searching for entertainment, improving creations in a process that can be called "customization" (Messias et al., 2012, p. 46).

2. Interview with the creators of *Guitar Hero Brazil* available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pRdZjiU5ps>. Accessed: July 2nd, 2013

This customization process, especially the *Guitar Hero Brazil* case, points out to a local demand. Most of the comments from YouTube videos showing the designers team playing the *Guitar Hero* mod are positive, and many look for the game as if it was available by the modder/producer. Although Monteiro affirms that the game is not distributed, it is easy to find download pages to have access to the *Guitar Hero Brazil* content, with step-by-step explanation on how to record and use the game. Even if the mod discussed is not a demand for gamers all over the world, Brazilians found a way to add new content for a niche's pleasure, not aiming for profit.

Some mods are encouraged by the original game's producers, like the case of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2011), but until now *Guitar Hero* has not shown interest in producing content for specific places other than United States, where the game was developed and cradle of the mainstream culture, that is either seen as straightly directed for the market or seen as "culture for everybody" (Martel, 2012). In any case, it is an antonym for "niche's culture", therefore, still not interesting for the companies, even if it's interesting for a local niche.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to reflect upon the barriers between the definition of mods and fangames through a historical bias within the Brazilian context, regarding two different phenomena that are related to each other: tribute and resistance. Those two types of media production cannot be isolated, due to the historical moment and all the social and cultural issues that allowed their development, either by the use of specific platforms or by the motivations that are implied within these productions.

Despite having their own subcultures, with their internal social regimes of coherent groups or dispersed individuals that, however, share the same ideological feeling, it is possible to identify an important issued that is therefore put in evidence: local cultural resistance acts against the global context.

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# Participation at the Global Game Jam: a bridge between consumer and producer worlds in digital entertainment

The Global Game Jam (GGJ) is an event in which aspiring game developers with different expertise, meet together in order to prototype complete games over a limited time. Initially targeted to game developers only, GGJ has become over the years a new collective ritual to strengthen practice communities and share videogame culture, open to the participation of more subjects even when qualified as simple players<sup>1</sup>. What is happened in these years? Our sociological study primarily wants to understand this evolution from “event for developers” to “prosumerism age”. Even for the small number of investigation on GGJ, our research<sup>2</sup> has a descriptive purpose to define new profile of GGJ participants.

**KEYWORDS:** *Cooperative learning, punk-capitalism, communities of practice.*

1. The theme is decided by the “Theme Committee”: a team of game industry professionals. In chronological order: 2009: “As long as we have each other, we will never run out of problems”; 2010: “Deception”; 2011: “Extinction”; 2012: An image of “Ouroboros”; 2013: The Sound of a Heartbeat.

2. The research team won a research call, sponsored by GGJ Research Committee, which provided for the winners technical assistance for the implementation of a research about the event. The data will be partially presented in this article.

## 1 – GGJ AND PROSUMERISM (S. Mica, A. Bonaiuto & S. Fallica)

The term “prosumer” comes from the fusion of the words “producer” and “consumer”, identifying a major change of current society. The consumer is no longer a mere target, a goal to reach: he regains its central role, requiring more space and attention and claiming freedom of judgement. Society is currently providing ex-users with increasing efficient tools to be used for reaching such goals. Consumers can easily communicate through social networks with brand owners, influencing decisions about development of services and products, organizing official beta-testers groups, and eventually even financing through crowdfunding platforms (Arcidiacono, 2013).

Considering consumers as new producers requires a short step: from these new capabilities was born indeed the Makers' Revolution, aiming at transforming the world by the alternative use of common objects. The digital industry and videogames world are main witnesses of this revolution, main example being the MOD phenomenon, as the structural modification of games or main assets, such as graphics weapons or maps, by the work of fans strongly supported by videogame industry professionals (Kushener, 2003).

Videogames are forerunners of current media industry for introducing the concept of interactivity as deeply rooted as we experience daily through our favourite media. Videogame industry is full of tools to simplify developers' hard work, several software and middleware significantly simplifying the creation of interactive worlds, with ready-made patterns and environments ready to use and easy to modify through visual editors. Such tools have made game development more accessible to collective imagination and game fruition becomes more and more similar to game production.

The scholar James Paul Gee splits videogame investigation in a four-section process, as the player: investigates, speculates, re-examines, and rethinks. The author theorizes a clear parallel between players' interaction between videogame practices and the scientific method. Games actually require players to make assumptions about operations, narrative structure, roles and protagonists, challenges to be faced and overcome and use the tools provided within the simulated world (Gee, 2003). When the player fails to understand the basic game mechanics, he is strongly penalized. Furthermore he is given opportunities to try again until the reach of proper mind sets and methodologies to meet the challenge requirements. Playing videogames means mostly finding order and meanings in the world and make decisions that help creating that order. Two worlds have come together: game consumers and game producers belong to the same community. This new trend has been exploited by worldwide events focusing on prosumers and aspiring professional, so as GGJ does. The media landscape will be "reshaped by the bottom-up energy of media created by amateurs and hobbyists as a matter of course. The resulting output will overrun the institutions and strategies created to organize and navigate an era of great scarcity of media equipment and products. Images, ideas, news and points of view will come from everywhere and travel along countless new routes to an ever growing number of places where it can be viewed" (Blau, 2005, 1,3).

## **2 – GGJ AND PUNK CAPITALISM** (S. Mica, A. Bonaiuto & S. Fallica)

The "Global Game Jam" phenomenon fits perfectly into a social and economic context of rapid change. As we have already mentioned by the concept of prosumer, GGJ event is the focus of several revolutions involving both use and production of digital media. The notion of production has changed in line with the punk capitalism manifesto. The cry of "1. This is a chord 2. This is another

chord. 3. Now make a band” (Philopat, 2006) led to the creation of several punk bands in the 80s; in the same way today, new development teams come out of GGJ and similar events, ready to face the market striving to become professionals. The punk movement was a precursor that has imposed itself as a law for new economy. Such cultural model was inspired by spontaneity, innovation and unauthorized use of images; later on hip hop, rave parties, urban graffiti and street art, and finally the videogame industry have done likewise (Mason, 2009). The birth and growth of alternative channels of production and distribution proves game development as the leader of this revolution. As fruition and development has changed, the same goes for distribution and access to markets.

Once again developers born and raised thanks to such events, who have acquired knowledge and skills directly from their peers, have certainly transferred their innovation and their alternative practices even to the distribution of their game products. GGJ board is strongly encouraging such dynamics by publishing the games produced during the event under Creative Commons rights, leaving the property into the hands of developers who can keep working on their projects till possible later releases and upgrades. The alternative distribution channels are mostly made of digital delivery platforms, such as Steam for PC games, or App Store for iOS devices, and Google Play for Android platforms.

Indeed many videogames developed during GGJ, and later on published into marketplaces, follow this line. Digital delivery is a recent revolution allowing developers to avoid the mediation of traditional publisher to enter the market. So the circle closes: fruition, semi-production (typical of prosumers), production and distribution are all part of a single alternative channel that is growing in strength and importance, influencing traditional business practices. Behind this alternative economy lie a better access to the products on the one hand and a free access to the market on the other, as a response to a the strong demand for democratization inspired by social networks and the paradigms of Web 2.0 (Mason, 2009).

### **3– RELATIONS BETWEEN GGJ, GAME INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION**

(S. Mica, A. Bonaiuto & S. Fallica)

The dream of becoming become a game developer is affecting an increasing number of people: many “wanna-be” developers that learn, meet, compete, and hence grow together. All developers of this generation know and well understand the value of grouping, networking, sharing information as much as successes and failures with their peer groups. For this reason there are more and more events and festivals rewarding independent developers and giving visibility to “indie” game authors, meaning those developers who are not funded by publishers: Independent Game Festival and Indie Cade are among the most famous events as such.

A trend of highly specialized training courses for young game developer, who have motivation and the skills to learn, is growing next to events and festivals. In old Europe and even in reluctant Italy, are to be counted tens of courses more or less specific, more or less relevant, promoted by public and private universities to their learners. The connection between events, festivals, schools and crowdfunding platforms are innumerable.

Hereby a short mention of products created during the GGJ and later on awarded within such kind of events: *Mirror Moon* (GGJ12 – GGJ Genova, Italy), by the Italian indie developers Santa Ragione; *Polygon Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime* (GGJ12 – GGJ Toronto, Canada) by the Asteroid Base team; other significant connections are represented by GGJ videogames that have been funded later on: *Mushroom 11* (GGJ12 – NYU Game Center – New York, USA) developed by Itay Keren; *Something Fragile* (GGJ13 – St. Louis, USA ); *Proppa* (GGJ12 – De Paul University, Chicago, USA); *LangGuini* (GGJ11 – IGDA Philadelphia | IndyHall, USA); *Gnilley* (GGJ10 – GGJ Sydney, Australia). All this shows clearly how GGJ event is both an important step for young developers education and a good showcase for those who already have tools and skills to deal with the market.

#### 4 – GLOBAL GAME JAM: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (M. Mingrino)

GGJ is a worldwide jam session of game development, taking place every year during the last weekend of January, hosted simultaneously by hundreds of volunteer locations all over the globe. The event structure is simple: participants register themselves no later than Friday afternoon, a welcome keynote video produced by the main organizers is shown, where professional videogame developers offer tips and motivation talks regarding methodology and goals. At the end of the keynote the theme around which all games have to be designed is revealed: there the forty-eight hours developing marathon starts. Few hours before the event GGJ main organizers communicate to local organizers the theme, issues and micro-goals to help diversifying the development. GGJ is the most important event among those themed as “Game Jam”. Basically GGJ is structured as an hackaton event focused on game development.

During these hours game developers explore their strengths and limits, acquire professional skills through informal learning, information is communicated and consumed by the community of peer groups by osmosis: such structure allows to easily learn multidisciplinary skills needed to the creation of videogames. Participants learn the development model applied to their individual skills, being them programming, graphic production, interactive media design, writing narrative texts, creating sound effects or soundtracks. GGJ format does not provide competitions: no winners, no prizes. The whole event is designed to bring participants together, to stimulate creativity and collaboration rather than competition.

Global Game Jam shows the characteristics of a true social experiment. The event has proved to enhance the spread of videogame culture and to create a real “community of practice”.

Quoting Lewin the jammers are dynamic sets made up of people who perceive themselves as mutually interdependent. The goal of creating a videogame in 48 hours makes members mutually dependent on each other, as they recognize their limit in achieving the goal all by themselves (Lewin, 1936). Group members become aware since the beginning of the experience that only the exchange and sharing of personal resources (ideas, knowledge, skills) will result in higher levels of performance, indeed higher of the possibilities of each single member. Everyone plays a specific and recognized role, ensuring the well-being of the individual and aiming, at the same time, to the development of the individual components and of the group itself. Hereby the properties that contribute to building a good working group in this context:

- Common Goals: clear and explicit, motivating and inspiring, help to achieve maximum performance.
- Interdependence: made possible by the possession of complementary skills and by coordinated actions and complementary components.
- Operational procedures aided by common rules and shared procedures and processes. The jammers decide together which software, development tools and instruments to use in order to realize their own games.
- Personal and shared responsibility in order to achieve specific results. Roles and responsibilities should be outlined from the beginning in order to achieve a satisfactory result. (Hertz - Lazarowitz, Miller, 1995).

By analysing GGJ distinctive and peculiar characteristics we propose to define it as a community of practice, intended as a group of people who play a similar activity and interact with each other in an informal way. The merging element between these social gatherings is the strong cohesion and team spirit.

The bond between the people who are part of the community comes from the fact that all the jammers believe in what they do: they engage in a collaborative activity because they share a common interest, a goal or a need to be faced. The passion they put in reaching a common goal is not limited, however, to the reaching of a pre-set achievement. The real reason why these people are willing to cooperate with each other is given by the desire to undertake a process of mutual growth.

Strictly speaking we can therefore consider communities of practice those community of professionals sharing knowledge through a social process of mutual learning: they produce and share new knowledge.

The assumption on which everything rests is that learning is an inherently social and not just individual process: more or less consciously, each subject owns a capital of experience that can be shared during the process of collaboration between the members. Learning is also “located” in a well-defined context and at a specific time (Hertz - Lazarowitz, Miller, 1995).

The effectiveness of the process comes from the fact that the content discussed within the community of practice meets operational needs, timeliness and contextualization of learning.

GGJ participants mobilize a large amount of resources, which enhance the overall professional development of the entire community, especially in its less experienced members. Each member using all that is made available by the other participants can devise own paths of research and study, as a process of self-directed learning and may finally seek the help of the other members. Communities of practice are based on the theoretical assumption that information has a value only when accessible, and that the willingness of individuals in order to create a common knowledge base and work practices should be encouraged.

Practice is clearly the core of GGJ. In other words the real value of communities of practice, their shared heritage, it is the participants' shared expertise, their knowledge acquired in the field. This knowledge is often made of silent aspects, not always revealed or clearly expressed.

There is a real "heritage" of tacit knowledge that is commonly called "tricks of the trade" that makes the real difference. Such information is not easy to be transferred, as is also rooted in daily actions and past experiences that each an individual brings. This know-how is not simply made of technical skills, but composed of a series of very subjective perceptions (Lave, Wenger, 1990).

GGJ turns out to be an "affinity space" as defined by James Gee, set for cultures of informal learning in the landscape of nowadays participatory culture. Within this space the parties are confident of the importance of their own contribution and feel somehow connected to each other.

This new culture is an ideal environment for learning. Affinity spaces offer many learning opportunities because they are ruled by common efforts that exceed all kinds of differences (age, sex, and class level of education). People participate in different ways according to their interest and ability, they learn by a peer-to-peer teaching experience, where participants are motivated to acquire and increase their own expertise taking advantage of the experience of others. A highly innovative and experimental environment, that creates new aesthetic experimentation and where innovation emerges.

In this kind of context interaction is positive. Although part of the group work can be divided and performed individually, it is necessary that the members of the group work in interactive mode, checking with each other the chain of reasoning, conclusions, difficulties and providing one another with feedback.

An accurate use of skills is essential for collaboration: within the group jammers are encouraged to develop confidence in their abilities, leadership, communication, make decisions and defend them, managing conflicts in interpersonal relationships (Stewart, 1997).

Main characteristic of the event is the grouping of several different developer profiles into teams. They may form before the event or during the first day.

Team members have different skills, training and experiences and come from different parts of the territory as we will see in next part.

### 5 – JAMMERS: FEATURES AND SEGMENTATION (R. Sampugnaro)

Diffused across the world and addressed initially to game developers (Graf.1), the GGJ has turned into a new collective ritual in a short time, able to strengthen a community of practice and to animate the game culture. Created by Susan Gold, in close collaboration with Gorm Lai and Ian Schreiber, the event was born in 2008, clearly inspired by previous Game Jam events of such as Ludum Dare and Nordic Game Jam. GGJ is a project created and organized by IGDA or International Game Developer Association in 2009. Starting in 2013 the main board of the event has formally become Global Game Jam, Inc organization. In a few years, the numbers of events and participants has quickly strengthened. In 2009 the first GGJ took place between January 29th and February the 1st. A total of 1600 developers coming from 23 countries worldwide attended the event, producing nearly 370 games. The amount of participants reached 4300 members already in 2010, with 900 games released. In 2011 participants were more than 6500, coming from 44 countries and over 1500 the games created. In 2012 242 locations were registered, divided between 46 countries and more than 10,000 developers took part in the activity with 2100 videogames developed. The latest event represents another leap in quality: several economically marginal countries joined the event (Bolivia, Chile, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, India, Latvia, Macedonia, Morocco, Nigeria, Serbia and Tunisia) that reached the quota of 319 simultaneous hosts in 63 countries around the world, and a number of games higher than 3200, setting the Guinness World Record™ for Being The Largest Game Jam in the World [details: [http://globalgamejam.org/sites/default/files/news\\_attachments/GGJ\\_Guinness\\_Book.pdf](http://globalgamejam.org/sites/default/files/news_attachments/GGJ_Guinness_Book.pdf)]

Given the reduced number of searches on GGJ research, our sociological study has primarily a sociological descriptive purpose. The research allows building a profile of the participants in 2013 edition, (that reached the number of 16705).

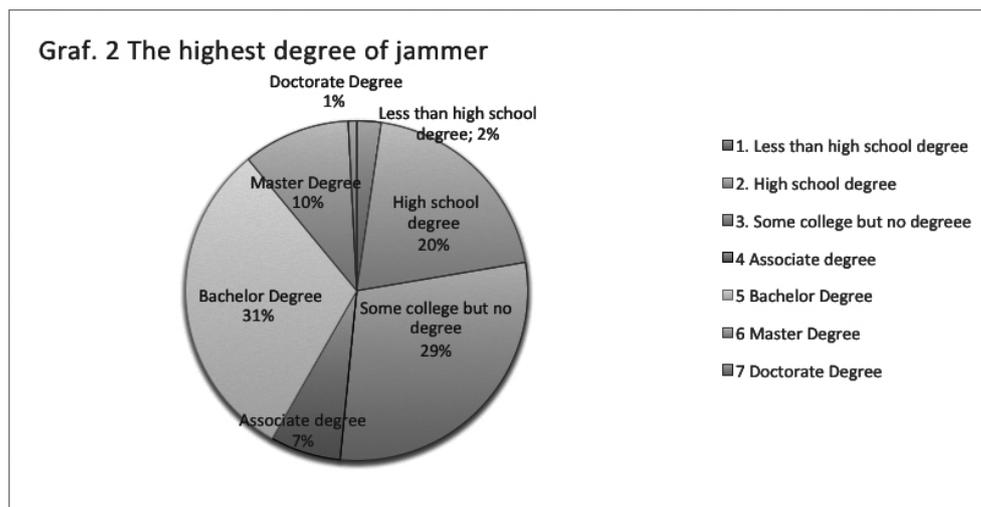
This has been possible thanks to research call promoted for the 2013 edition by the GGJ Research Committee. The Committee provided the selected groups with technical assistance for the set up of a research dedicated to the event participation. The research is based on three surveys that have had answered respectively by 875 jammers the first, 2218 the second, 2050 jammers the latter. During this latest edition, the data were collected through a questionnaire using CAWI (on Survey Monkey platform), regarding all event locations around the world. This survey allows highlighting the participants' sociodemographic profile and investigating whether the jam is still the meeting place for aspiring, professional game developers and players, as intended by the original spirit. The enhancement of the latter is highly dependent on the main GGJ value which is the mutual support: through a deliberate and structured

cooperative process – working together and task sharing – it is possible to add value and to create new and different things. The heterogeneity of the groups, being part of the initial philosophy, is a positive value: each participant has personal characteristics, has its own history and different skills compared to his teammates. In addition, each jammer is not only responsible for his own actions, but also for those of all other members of the group, given that leadership is “distributed” and there is no manager who directs others.

The analysis of participants profile reflects the spirit of the initiative returning a structured composition of users and is able to detect the segmentation of jammers, for origin, gender, training and experience. Data say that the jam is still characterized by a predominance of men and young people. Women (Bryce, Rutter, 2003) still constitute only 12.6% of the total. If we put together the first two age groups 18–20 (23.9%) and 21–29 (56.5%), we get over 80% of the participants, even though 15.5% of the 30–39 class shows that video games are not “kids stuff”.



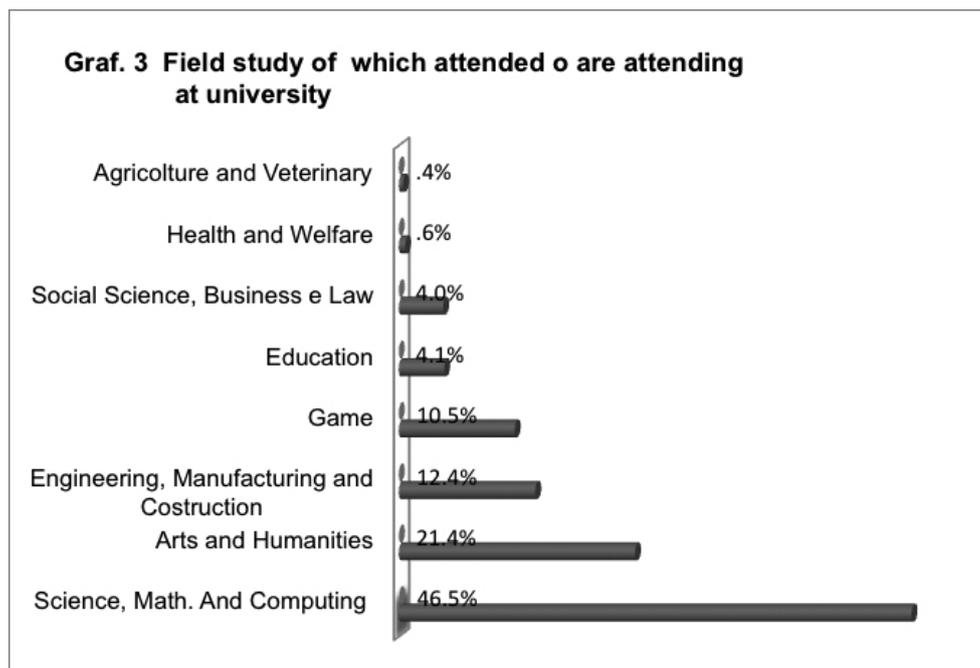
Figure 1 – 2 013 GGJ hosts around the world (source: CartoDb).



The interest in games not only spreads across all generations but also across educational levels (Graf. 2) with approximately 50% of subjects with degree or higher qualifications (Bachelor, Master, PhD). In many cases, high-level courses are in the training of specialized personnel in the videogames creation.

The distribution of university study areas, reveals the presence of training paths focused on game design that is selected by 10% of participants. Specific courses, together with scientific and popular publications on the topic, associations and journals and conferences, highlight an advanced process of profession institutionalization. As many as 10.5% undertook studies on game design, however, they don't represent the range of educational resources necessary for the development of games (Graf. 3). Among the participants there is a significant portion of those who have a background related to the studies of mathematics and computer science (computing) (46.5%) and of those who come from Arts and Humanities (21,4%).

The analysis of further elements (Tab. 1) shows that the Jam is primarily a meeting place for lovers of video games whether indifferently from the fact of being simple users, scholars of the phenomenon or producers of games. An analysis of the employment status indicates that just under 73% of the participants works: the 65% are full-time, the part-time is 0.7% while those who work on their own or in a family firm are 7% of the participants. In remaining portion, those who are looking for a job are prevalent (23.1%). However, only some of those who work are employed in the production of video games - particularly programmers, Game Designers and 2D and 3D Artists - since 63% are employed in other sectors. The presence of the world's production is surely a point of interest for those looking for a job and who define themselves on the basis of to the professions of the Game Industry (8.5% of total): the event offers networking opportunities in the industry of video games. Those who do not have a direct link with the world of production are greater in number, 63.8% of the participants.



	Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?									Tot.	
	Full time*	Part time	Working in own o family-member's firm o farm	Pensioner	Disable	Looking for work	Not looking for work/ Student	Other			
If you are employed in the Game Industry, what is your current occupation?	2D e 3D Artist	8,1*	16,7	1,9	0,0	66,7	10,3	12,0	0,0	8,6	
		5,3**	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,3	2,4	0,4	0,0	8,6	
	Producer		40	1	1	0	2	18	3	0	65
			1,2	0,0	1,9	0,0	0,0	1,1	4,0	50,0	1,5
	Business/ Legal		0,8	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,1	0,1	1,5
			6	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	11
	Programmer		2,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,3
			1,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,3
	Game Designer		10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
			16,5	0,0	17,0	0,0	0,0	17,2	4,0	50,0	16,2
	Writer		10,7	0,0	1,2	0,0	0,0	4,0	0,1	0,1	16,2
			81	0	9	0	0	30	1	1	122
	UI Designer		6,9	0,0	9,4	0,0	0,0	6,9	4,0	0,0	6,9
			4,5	0,0	0,7	0,0	0,0	1,6	0,1	0,0	6,9
	QA/Play Tester		34	0	5	0	0	12	1	0	52
			0,6	0,0	3,8	0,0	0,0	0,6	0,0	0,0	,8
	Not Employed in Game Industry		0,4	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	,8
			3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	6
	Count (A.V.)		0,4	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	,3
			2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Column%		0,6	0,0	1,9	0,0	0,0	0,6	0,0	0,0	,7	
		0,4	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	,7	
Total		3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	
		63,5	83,3	64,2	100,0	33,3	63,2	76,0	0,0	63,8	
Total %		41,2	0,7	4,5	0,1	0,1	14,6	2,5	0,0	63,8	
		311	5	34	1	1	110	19	0	481	
	490	6	53	1	3	174	25	2	754		
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		

Note: \* Column % \*\* Total %

The Jam confirms the philosophy of its constitution: to be the meeting place between a plurality of worlds and therefore personal goals. When asked “What is your main motivation for attending the GGJ?”, the participants argue for reasons related to the expressive dimension: the value of experience (22.2%), entertainment (24.3%), the challenge (9.3%). The instrumental value of the investment is less intense overall: 19.9% mentions the possibility to learn something and 8,3% reported the possibility of networking. The event is set up as an example of prosumerism (Sassatelli, 2004). Through the convergence between the world of production - in this case videogames - and that of consumption, video games are becoming closer to the desires and motivations of end users.

**CONCLUSION: FROM PROJECT TO OUTCOME** (R. Sampugnaro)

The study of GGJ event shows how to meeting, initially targeted to game developers only, has become a new collective ritual for those who love video games in a few years. As provided by the organising Committee, event has become an opportunity to strengthen communities of practice and share video game culture, opening to the participation of subject even qualified as simple players. The analysis demonstrates not only the diversified character of the audience of the event but also the complexity of the motivations and individual interests that drive people to participate. Many questions remain unexplored: in particular, since there we dealt with those who have decided to “cross the river”, we have no information about the differences between ordinary

consumers and those who, even if only partially, enter in the producing world of video games. However, the study produced some remarkable results and, in particular, the possible effects of the phenomenon of prosumerism, precisely for the prevalence of expressive motivations, the GGJ is an accomplished example of meeting between production and consumption and indicator of the considerable attention of the entertainment industry to consumer tastes: through the convergence between the world of production – in this case videogames – and that of consumption, video games are becoming closer to the desires and motivations of end users.

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