EDITORIAL

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Today increasing technological development and deepening digitalization, particularly in developed countries, are widening human imagination and creativity. Digital games, in both their technological and art form, represent the best example of this process and play a leading role on the frontier of entertainment and popular culture. The steadily growing number of people who regularly play digital games in the leading techno-regions (such as North America and East Asia), as well as in some developing countries (such as China and Brazil) chasing after them, demonstrate how the variety and multiplicity of digital games and networked gaming are fostering a new consumption power and audience culture. The diversity that the virtual world is producing and the capacity of games to be played in multiple ways, through multiple platforms (PC, console, handheld, mobile phones, etc.) have become so extraordinary that, many believe, they are eating up the share of 'traditional' media industries like TV and film. As a response to this rapidly changing mediascape – where 'playing/doing something' is slowly overtaking 'watching/staring at something' – and in an era of more physical/sensory reactions and interactive mediation experience, more than ever have we seen contemporary media and communication analysts shifting their focus from traditional media to the rising star of this new medium.

Being the key editor for this special issue, it has been encouraging to see both experienced and newly emerging game researchers willing to contribute their different thoughts and ideas on 'gameplaying' and to search for the potential meanings of 'games' and 'gaming' from diverse perspectives/approaches/research disciplines. Only through more research and writing on this creative subject, can the so-called game academics create more opportunities to express their shared passion and make more sense of game culture and gaming. As the readers will find in this WPCC collection, each article has its own approach and originality, whether it is about gaming philosophy, the political-economy of games, game research methods, or gamers' identity and socio-cultural experience. This special issue includes eight original articles and one book review covering a range of interesting topics related to gaming culture.

The first article, from Thomas Apperley and Darshana Jayemane, opens our discussion by digging into the essential question of digital games' material contexts. Revisiting the three most common approaches (that is, platform and software studies; critical studies of digital labour; and ethnographic studies of game culture and gaming in everyday practices), they argue that game studies should never ignore the importance of digital games' materiality.

The second article, by Steven Conway, intends to challenge the philosophical principle of modern game design and looks at the politics of winning and losing in gameplaying.

By probing the idea of automation and its designed contexts and mechanisms in relation to various big-hit games, Conway re-examines Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and questions whether the invasion of hypo-ludicity is undermining the original purpose of gameplaying.

From a sociological perspective, Chih-Wen Chen's article provides a detailed study of the production of the app system, and the socio-economy of the app game Angry Birds, based largely on Nicklas Luhmann's systems theory. Chen attempts to reveal the complexity and the inner economic structure of today's app production. What we can also learn from his interpretation is that the App Store or Android Market should not only be referred to as organized online shops of some kind, but also have symbolic meanings. Through millions of active downloads, they symbolize a more complex social system within capitalism.

The fourth article, by Adrienne Shaw, is concerned with the online gay gamer (gaymer) community's use of virtual space and games in finding their gender-belongings and expressing their identities. Shaw presents evidence from her 2006 ethnographic research that highlights the continuing identity/gender politics and struggles in gaming, and unequal sexual representations from the gaymers' point of view.

The fifth article, by Jasper van Vught and Gareth Schott, on 'game suspense' also focuses on gamers as an anthropological subject. More precisely they look at suspense experience through gamers' emotional involvement and responses in the constructed fictional game world. Their theoretical discussion, defining suspense as a human nature between hope and fear, helps to clarify a very important aspect of gamers' emotional engagement and interactive experience.

The sixth article, contributed by Karolien Poels, Yvonne de Kort and Wijnand IJsselsteijn, also conducts thorough social-scientific research on gamer experience. They develop a categorization of gamers' personal feelings about gaming based on focus group discussions, revealing nine dimensions, including enjoyment, flow, imaginative immersion, sensory immersion, suspense, competence, tension, control and social presence. The quotes from the gamers themselves give us more clues about different types of gamers and their multiple layers of emotions and feelings when engaged in the games.

Yu-Pei Chang's article mainly emphasizes the local context and socio-cultural forces influencing online gaming in Taiwan. Bringing in Bourdieu's thesis of leisure capital, Chang offers a deeper reading of Taiwan's burgeoning game generation and specifically looks at the three components of economic capital, cultural capital and

social capital. Studies like this are a reminder that, beyond the experience of the individual gamer, external social, cultural, economic and political influences should always be considered, as gaming is a social practice and cultural behaviour.

The final article, from Hanna Wirman, helps us to rethink the use of ethnographic methods in directly approaching gamers. In a detailed fashion, she explains how researchers can learn and benefit from email interviewing, and why such a method may be appropriate to earn participants' trust and further engagement. Her discussion of the basis of reciprocity, reflexivity and respect also gives clear guidelines regarding the significant technical advantages and disadvantages in comparison with face-to-face interviews.

With this selection of articles, contributed by a wide range of international game scholars from the US, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Belgium, Hong Kong and Taiwan, we intend to show how digital games can be approached and studied in many different ways. As digital games continue to evolve and create unimaginable human experience to engage people deeper in the so-called virtual world, this academic field will need more passionate researchers, like all our contributors, to capture its cultural transition, social impacts, and the different ways people negotiate this complex process.