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Hats of Affect: A Study of Affect, Achievements and Hats in Team Fortress 2

by Christopher Moore

Abstract

An iconic staple of the First-Person Shooter genre, *Team Fortress 2*, is popular for its chaotic action, distinguished by its painterly aesthetics, and made unique by the introduction of hats as rewards for its players. This study investigates the intersection of virtual millinery items, player achievements, user generated content and the implications for online gamer personas as they are connected to the digital distribution platform, Steam. The article examines the iterations of affect involved in the design and play of a game no longer imagined by its publisher, the Valve Corporation, as a distinct commodity but rather a commercial community service.

Keywords: affect, achievements, persona, FPS, *Team Fortress 2*, hats

Introduction

"Feelins? Look mate, you know who has a lot of feelings? Blokes what bludgeon their wives to death with a golf trophy! Professionals have standards."

- The Sniper, Meet the Team series (Valve, 2007).

The introduction of a millinery reward system in *Team Fortress 2* (TF2) (Valve, 2007) is exemplary of the game's design philosophy and history of incorporation of player-gifted content, which have combined to produce a specific affective tone unique within the FPS genre. This article first examines the game's aesthetics and the connection between the game world, the intensity of the play experience and affective resonance of the player. It then considers the achievements and rewards system of TF2 as an integral part of the digital distribution platform, Steam (Valve, 2003), and the potential for generating and maintaining affective bonds between games, games developers and gamers. The argument then finally turns to the function of the millinery reward system of TF2 and the role of hats in the construction of an online gamer persona.

Hats for player avatars were introduced in TF2 in May 2009, eighteen months after its initial commercial release. Rarely has the FPS genre featured the means for differentiating player avatars through customisable wardrobe options. Games developers have typically resisted such individualization, limiting players to preconfigured uniforms in order to maximize standardization in the highly competitive gaming environment. The addition of hats in TF2 has attracted new players, reinvigorated veterans and invited significant contribution in the form of user-generated content. Hats are earned by completing tasks set by the game's achievement system, they are also distributed randomly during play at a rate that is monitored and adjusted by the developers (Johnson, 2010). Hats can be 'crafted' in game by collecting, sacrificing and reassembling other items and, with the introduction of the in-game 'store' in September 2010, hats can be purchased directly from the publisher. The hats, including the Fedora, Ushanka, Tyrolean, Pickelhaube, Panama and even the Beanie among many others, are purely fashionable items and do not invest the wearer with special abilities - or do they?

A comprehensive history of 'affect' is well outside the objective of this article. As Kavka (2008, p.29) suggests, the only common overlap between the various disciplinary approaches is that "affect is opposed to cognition, or in the vernacular, feeling is opposed to thinking". For behavioural psychologists, the study of 'affect' has been largely attended through an attention to player aggression, violence, addiction and other negative emotional states (Anderson & Bushman, 2001, Carnagey et al 2007). Psychology, post the influential work of Silvan Tomkins who was the first to account for affects as a set of complimentary circuits parallel to Freudian drives and cognition (Hemmings, 2005, p.552), considers affect to be a link in the "chain of causality" occurring between an experience and the formation of a reaction (Marshall, 1997, p.73). An alternative framework for considering the affect involved in the achievements and rewards of games, is derived from the "turn to affect" of cultural theory (Featherstone, 2010, p. 209), where affect refers to states of being rather than explicit manifestations or interpretations of emotions that can be attributed to a range of objects (Hemmings, 2005 p.551). This analytical perspective works to reconfigure the Cartesian mind-body

dualism, to force open the lacuna between events that are registered by the organic sensory technologies of the body and the points at which action is required and occurs. Massumi calls this gap the "missing half second" (2002, p.28) where the implication is a recursive physiological ordering; a latency or 'lag' between "the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression" (Massumi, 2002, p.29). The half-second is occupied with the autonomic reactions of the body, previous to, or alongside, conscious application and exists "between brain and finger but prior to action and expression" (ibid). Cognitive function, that includes semiotic meaning making in Massumi's argument, does not have a monopoly on the determination of human action (Shinkle, 2005). The half second is an eternity for FPS gamers who have a particular name for the reactions of the body that can occur during game play that are not always cognitive and intentional - the twitch.

A further sense of affect also part of the analytical framework is the "affective voice" employed here to convey a general but deep sense of investment in the subject (Gregg 2005, p.18). The analysis offered in this article is a framing of personal understanding, interpreted through the lenses of theories of affect and weighed against a lifetime of playing games. The affective voice of this article conveys a degree of investment and it works to orient the discussion around the participatory, collaborative and commercial cultures that are contingent to the formation of personas and subjectivities of the gamer that have become part of the everyday enjoyment and emotionally resonant forms of game play.

A (Brief) History of *Team Fortress*

"If fighting is sure to result in victory, then you must fight!" Sun Tzu said that, and I'd say he knows a little bit more about fighting than you do, pal, because he invented it, and then he perfected it so that nobody could best him in the ring of honor. Then he used his fight money to buy two of every animal on earth. And then he herded them onto a boat, and then he beat the crap out of every single one. And from that day forward any time a bunch of animals are together in one place it's called a zoo... unless it's a farm!
- The Soldier, Meet the Team series (Valve, 2007)

Team Fortress 2 (TF2) is a First Person team-based online multiplayer game available for PC and the Xbox360 and Playstation3 game consoles. The original version of *Team Fortress* (Team Fortress Software, 1996) was a modification (mod) of *Quake* (id Software, 1996). Designed by Australian RMIT students, Robin Walker, John Cook and Ian Caughley, *Team Fortress* was highly popular with gamers seeking alternatives from the individualistic 'deathmatch' style of play that dominated early multiplayer FPS games. Named for its distinctive team oriented game play and arenas that feature two 'fortresses' where players 'respawn' after their avatars are reduced to zero hit points (character death), it was also the nine different player classes that distinguished the game from other mods available at the time.

In both the original and the sequel each player class has different abilities, weapons, character models, visuals and sounds that offer alternative sets of play and rules combinations. The nine classes (see Figure 1.) are divided into three categories; assault, defence and support. The Scout, the Soldier and the Pyro are assault options; the defensive line-up includes the Heavy, the Demoman, and the Engineer; and the Medic, the Sniper and the Spy are support classes. Like chess, each is a different piece or component of the overall team with different movements, strengths, shapes and sizes. The tactical combinations of these classes produce complex formulae for matching different elements in different sequences. Player choice of class, weapons and items are not always rational, particularly in public games (as apposed to organized competitive leagues), where emotional responses to the intensity of the matches, and simple player preference, often dominates over the tactical demands of larger game strategies.



Figure 1. The nine character classes from *Team Fortress 2*

assembled as the RED team (image used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

The success of the original mod fostered an international community of players and contributors, and drew the attention of the Valve Corporation, the software company established by ex-Microsoft employees Gabe Newell and Mike Harrington in 1996. Valve hired Cook and Walker to produce Team Fortress Classic, a total transformation mod of their game Half Life (Valve, 1998) and in April 1999, announced the future release of Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms. The game world of the original mod, and Team Fortress Classic, was a techno-fantasy battlefield. Players could turn weapons, like the Soldier's rocket launcher into means for swift locomotion across the virtual terrain, but the early screenshots of the sequel reveal a stark military 'shooter' with realism foremost in its design philosophy (see Figure 2.). The player avatars appearing in the early Brotherhood of Arms screenshots are clad in heavily camouflaged uniforms, with highly detailed weaponry but minimal visual information to distinguish between them and the game world is rendered with broad flat textures, crisp lighting and bright contrast. Development of the sequel was reconsidered multiple times by Valve and little was publicly revealed about the sequel until the launch of The Orange Box in 2007, a compilation of games that included *Half Life 2: Episode 2*, *Portal* and *Team Fortress 2*.

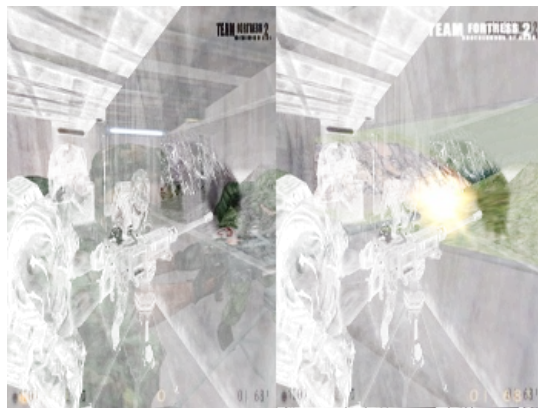


Figure 2. Publicity screenshot of *Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms* (image sourced via Wikipedia, used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

The Affective Tone of *Team Fortress 2*

"You listening? Okay... Grass grows, birds fly, sun shines, and brother, I hurt people. I'm a force of nature! If you were from where I was from, you'd be f--ing dead! Whoooo!"

- The Scout, Meet the Team Series (Valve, 2007)

The game released as part of The Orange Box offers a radically different iteration of the FPS game contemplated for *Brotherhood of Arms*, one that can be considered in terms of its affective tone. In Sykes' (2006, p.80-81) player-centred approach to game studies the "affective tone" of a game encompasses the methods the designers implement in their games to evoke emotional responses from the player. The affective tone of TF2, has subsequently been influenced by the inclusion of user-generated content in the semi-regular game patches, called 'updates', but was at the forefront of the design team's philosophy during the redevelopment of the game for The Orange Box collection. The desire to simulate the techniques of culturally significant artists, as well as naturally occurring physical materials in the game, led to the "painterly" look of the game inspired by the illustrative techniques of J.C. Leyendecker, Norman Rockwell and Dean Cornwell (Eng 2008, Mitchell et al 2007). Leyendecker's conventions for conveying the warmth, sophistication and opulence of an imagined America in the 1920s, and the cold austerity and industrial modernism of the 1950s, were directly interpreted in the algorithms used to render colour, light and shading in the simulated environments of TF2. Rather than the typical use of black as the absence of a light source in FPS games, Leyendecker's illustrative technique of transitioning colours from warm to cool hues is replicated in TF2 (Mitchell et al 2007).

Other illustrative innovations were adopted from Rockwell and Leyendecker, including the fabric compression folds of garments worn by the character models (Mitchell et al 2007). This approach extends to the games' virtual world, for example the railways, silos, and smoke stacks of Dean Cornwell's imaginings can be found in the game. Many of these hint at further imaginary locations that can only be observed from behind chain-link fences or over brick walls and

are just beyond the players' reach in a Freudian loop of a desire (one that can be emulated or simulated, but never reached or attained).

Team Fortress 2 is a game of two teams, the Builders League United (BLU) and Reliable, Excavation and Demolition (RED). The visual differences between the two teams are entwined with the game world's virtual environment through a symmetrical colour palette (see Figure 3.). The colour palette was designed to delineate between different game spaces and communicate strategic information to players within a consistent visual order (Mitchell et al, 2007). Prior to this visual significance, however, the affective tone of these design decisions can be considered not as a duality, between red and blue, but elemental in a consistent aesthetic spectrum. This spectrum is crucial to the affective resonance of the game, as it contributes to the sense of movement, speed and transition between the virtual game locations. It cannot easily be reduced to a specific meaning or single intended reaction but part of the motion and sensation of play that is unique to TF2.



Figure 3. *The Team Fortress 2* colour palette (image used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

The RED team's base locations are rendered in warm red, orange and brown tones. The buildings are exaggerated and idyllic examples of farmhouses and warehouses and other fixtures of rural America of the mid twentieth century. BLU bases tend towards cooler colours, the blues and greys of industrial materials, with flat roofs and angular building designs. Movement between these locations is a virtual movement of the player avatar, that includes the amorphous sensations of the romanticism of an imagined rural existence and the cold progressiveness of industrial modernism without directly representing either. The intensity of the experience, an excess of meaning and sensation, is anticipated by designers seeking to convey sensory information to the gamer amidst the chaotic action of the online battle (Mitchell et al, 2007).

The design of an affective tone is continued through the use of specific textures (the images applied over the top of the wire-frame models of the 3D objects); rough wooden textures and worn cement rendering carry the impression of organic depth, while colours appear "painted" on even if that visual information is never actively interpreted as such by the player. The designers cite the animation techniques of *Spirited Away* director Hayao Miyazaki (2001) as a key influence (Mitchell et al, 2007). This has helped to emphasize the affective resonance of the aesthetic dimensions of the game world as the players navigate these virtual spaces.

The affective tone was carried over into the rebuilding of the nine distinctive player classes. The classes were re-imagined for TF2 as characters classes with (self-parodying) histories, temperaments and relationships to the game world. The artists produced background biographies and stories, deeply infused with twisted parody of popular stereotypes and iconic tropes. The result is a degree of pastiche and absurdity that dislocates the signification or 'meaning' of the characters with extremity to match the hyperreality of the game play. These new character formations in turn conjured a range of emotional responses from the artists that were over emphasized to avoid directly referencing popular culture examples and stereotypes (Eng, 2008). In order to convey greater degrees of tactical and strategic information to the player, the designers were then required to realize that aesthetic sense of affect by stripping back the artist's detail to produce black and white character silhouettes before rebuilding them as 3D models. The information detailed by the posture, shape, size of the avatar as it experienced in game is ultimately conveyed cognitively, but in the frenzied action of a TF2 match (online games typically range between from 12 to 32 players) it is affective tone that is a crucial contributor to the player's sense of an opponents speed, strength, abilities, abilities and direction in motion (see Figure 4.).



Figure 4. The *Team Fortress 2* character class silhouettes (image used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

Affective tone includes to the colours, music, architecture, lighting, and voice acting that build the *mis-en-scene* of a game and “leaves an impression on the player” (Sykes, 2006, p.80-81), but the discourse of screen theory, however, and the interrogation of styles and techniques used by filmmakers to communicate with and manipulate audiences provides only a limited basis for the discussion of games as a medium and does not entirely convey their capacity for affect. Similarly, Shouse (2005) argues it is important not to confuse or limit an account of affect to feelings and emotions. Affect can be more broadly considered as the non-conscious experience of potential:

“...at any moment, hundreds, perhaps thousands of stimuli impinge upon the human body and the human body responds by infolding them all at once and registering them as an intensity. Affect is this intensity” (Shouse, 2005).

Affect is an abstraction of excess, an intensity that Massumi (2002) positions as ‘outside’ or ‘prior’ to consciousness. Affect is not any single one emotion, but the “body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience” (Shouse, 2005). Similarly Kavka (2008, p.29) sees affect as covering the entire range of feelings and emotions before they have been assessed or identified in relation to a particular object or source. Thus, while ‘alive’, the TF2 player experiences the subjective translation of affect to effect through the intensity of the experience moderated by the signification of the visual and auditory information and its interpretation manifesting as intentional tactical responses and unintentional physical interaction between input and outcome. The gamers’ ‘twitch’, a potential product of this translation, has also been equated to the muscle memory of the trained dancer, or that of the surgeon. Swalwell (2008, p.78) compares the finger movements of the gamer to the intuitive movements of the hand of the touch typist, where the interface does not require the application of conscious intention or “thought”, but she warns against “any simplistic equations of automaticity in game play” such as ascribing it purely to affect, signification or cognition.

Swalwell (2008, p.86-87) also extends Hansen’s focus on Walter Benjamin’s use of the term “innervation” to consider the conversion of somatic and motoric stimulation into new forms of imagination, suggesting the kinaesthetic responsiveness of the gamer, typically presumed as “mastery” of the game”, can open up “new and imaginative subjective possibilities”. Salen and Zimmerman’s (2004, p.226) description of a game as a cybernetic system is a notion employed by Giddings and Kennedy (2008 p.22-23) to develop an account for the “imbrications of agencies and their attendant pleasures” that are enmeshed in the understanding of games as cybernetic technologies. The result is multiple levels of play parallel to the ‘shooter’ elements of the game that are “characterized” by the cybernetic processes that include the body by amplifying affect and “generating extraordinary moments” of emotional, visual, auditory intensities and further “kinaesthetic pleasures” (Giddings & Kennedy 2008, p.24).

One of the kinaesthetic pleasures of TF2, useful to open up discussion of the affective possibilities of the game, is the management of the production and release of tension that Rose (2010) considers is a crucial component of the games’ commercial success. *Team Fortress 2* adheres to many conventions of the FPS genre, including penalising the player at the point of character death by forcing them to spend time awaiting their character’s respawn. This player limbo is used to reset the intensity the game experience, and provides match specific information through an over-the-shoulder view of others on the same team while awaiting the return to play. Accumulation and release of tension in TF2 is observed in the interplay of nonverbal communication between gamers that is anticipated by the games’ mechanics occurring in the moments immediately post character death: the control of the screen view is momentarily arrested while the ‘camera’ zooms in on the player responsible for the fatality. The ‘dead’ players’ screen momentarily ‘freezes’ prompting the viewer to take a ‘freezecam’ screenshot (pressing the default ‘F5’ key takes a snapshot of the screen). This action is accompanied by the sounds of a whirring analogue camera and the snap and light flash of photographers bulb that rewards the player with a screenshot saved

to their PC.

Further affective communication and interaction between the player and their vanquisher occurs immediately post death through the use of character emotes and taunts: the victorious player can anticipate the freeze cam and pose their character with the (default) 'G' key which animates the avatar depending on the weapon or item the character is holding at the time (see Figure 5.). The freeze cam and taunt combination reorients the impersonal interactions of virtual combat during the break in the immediate tensions of the frenetic game play. The nonverbal and interpersonal communication between players of opposing teams during game play further contributes to the affective tone of the game through the Domination/Nemesis mechanic: if one player consecutively defeats another three times they become a 'Nemesis' for the 'Dominated' player.



Figure 5. When equipped with the fire axe the Pyro taunt 'emotes' the rock guitar pose (personal screenshot used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

Achievements of Steam

"Hey, look buddy. I'm an engineer. That means I solve problems. Not problems like, "What is beauty?", because that would fall within the purview of your conundrums of philosophy'."

- The Engineer, Meet the Team series (Valve, 2007)

Game designers are directly implicated in the production of experiences that are "imbued with the rhetorical strategies of affect" (Calleja, 2007; 245). Such strategies are coordinated, programmed and codified through the interactive digital environments of games systems and are rendered audibly and visually to heighten sensation, but also include other channels of "rhetorical delivery" to influence player mood (ibid). These include the design and the aesthetics of the game world and characters, but also refer to game scores, rewards and achievements connected to game play. The game score, as an expression of the cybernetic process of play, is a means of quantifying player skill. The feelings and emotions involved in mastering a game are condensed as scores that can stand in as signs of the experience, but they are incapable of conveying the dimensions of affect involved during the time, space and virtual place of game play. Some games reward the player with detailed breakdowns of scores but these methods are pure "catatonia" condensing movement and speed over time as static objects of attention (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p.400).

Achievements, unlike game scores, are a contributing element of the affective tone of TF2, they are set tasks for the player to fulfil in game that reward TF2 players with the accumulation of social capital and occasional in game items. The humour and pastiche of the popular culture and historical references of the achievement titles in TF2 further adds to the game's affective tone: for example, the Heavy Weapons Guy's 'Rasputin' achievement (in a single life, get shot, burned, bludgeoned, and receive explosive damage) and the

'Lenin A Hand' achievement (help 5 team-mates get revenge on their nemeses). Since its launch Valve has added hundreds of character-specific achievements to the game, each complete with its own iconography, with many further awarding the player with specific hats.

Several game achievements require the use of taunts in combination with the freezecam, including the Sniper's 'Be Polite' achievement (provide an enemy with a freezecam shot of you doffing your hat). Others require players to defeat their Nemesis, including the Soldier's 'Trench Warfare' (kill a your nemesis with a shovel). These cybernetic interactions help to produce and diffuse the tension of the game, while the rhetorical function of these achievements is to translate the speed and pace of player actions into "objective matter" (Deleuze and Guattari, 198, p.401). Achievements translate the chaos of action and intensity of affect into constrained and regulated activity through the entertaining but technical elements of game play. They have also become part of the "intercommunicative self" of gamers, who manage their online personas through a "multilayered form of communication that kneads mediated forms with conversation" (Marshall, 2010, p.42) as they are recorded as part of the social networking elements of Valve's digital distribution platform, Steam. The record of player achievements can be accessed in the game, via the Steam software interface and through the player's Steam profile on the community website.

The combined apparatus of the Steam software, in game achievements and hats (which have become marketing features) and the digital distribution platform is a means for capturing the activity of gamers that has much in common with technologies of work and labor. Other achievement systems take this relationship further, including the Xbox Live (Microsoft, 2002) online gamer service, which utilizes the affinity between play and work, to translate game achievements into metascores. For example, the gamer known as CRUX360a was ranked among top five female Xbox360 gamers worldwide based on her accumulated gamer score (the numerical tally of achievements). In describing her passion, CRUX360a transitions between labelling the accumulating of achievements and gamerscore, first as a "race", then later as an "addiction" and finally as career that she will "retire" from when she reaches the pinnacle of the 200,000 points (Good, 2010). To do so CRUX360a must labor in games that she does not enjoy: "I definitely play more games I don't enjoy than games I do...Like, maybe 65 percent of the games I play I don't enjoy." (CRUX360a cited in Good, 2010). In considering the difference between play and labor in the future, game studies scholars might consider this lack of enjoyment in terms of the affective dimensions of games further.

The importance of the relationship between gamers and their games, and the imperative of effectively converting affective potential into games sales is one that Valve has utilized since it introduced the Steam digital distribution platform in 2003. Steam uses a proprietary Peer-to-Peer system as well as fixed hardware to increase security and centralized control while displacing some of the distribution load to the users themselves (Dymek, 2005). More significantly for the industry, when Steam introduced the online game store it circumvented traditional and physical distribution channels (Dymek, 2005 p.2). The move to digital distribution alters the emotional and physical relationships gamers have with their games as commodities as they are no longer directly tied to boxes, plastic, and 'bricks-and-mortar' retailers.

In attempting to minimize the emotional fracturing of ties to the physical containers of games, Valve CEO Gabe Newell also sought to ensure that Steam would "maximize the relationship to our customers and monetize that relationship..." (Newell cited in Remo, 2009). This was achieved by increasing the affective connections to the company's intellectual property by organising play and identity around acts of social consumption through its digital distribution platform. All Steam games by extension are considered as part of the Steam service and not purely as disintermediated instances of discrete commodities. For example, achievements and hats have now been included in the social marketing components of Steam which rewards TF2 players for purchasing and playing other games: pre-purchasing Left4Dead2 (Valve, 2009) or the adventure game Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse (Telltale Games, 2010) before their official launch rewarded the player with exclusive hats in TF2 that function in game as advertising for those titles.

The introduction of social networking elements to Steam further cemented the commercial community service model. For example, when any gamer in your Steam friends list launches a game the pop-up window appears on the lower right hand side of the screen informing you, with an implicit offer of joining them in game though a convenient online purchase. In order to expand this commercial community service model and maintain a consistently engaged and affected gamer population TF2 has been regularly expanded with

editions of further content. The game world of TF2 grows with each update with the inclusion of both community generated and in-house content. Each update includes additional changes to the character classes, new items, hats and achievements and major updates have been launched with short animated films (the Meet The... series) produced machinima-style (where the characters are animated and recorded by the artists inside a modified game environment). Further transmedia elements including websites, comics, and cryptic blog posts that are all designed to expand the affective bonds between the publisher, game and the consuming players. The chief aspect of the commercial community service model is the 'update', which is designed to keep players active on Steam and allow them to promote the game through the act of play. With (semi) regular and free shipping of new content, Valve is able to regularly reset much of the games capacity for affect. To fulfil this promise however Steam has incorporated modding and communities of user-contributors to help provide the content and innovation.

Steam is now the largest digital distribution service (Riley, 2010) and one of the reasons for Steam's success is Valve's long term investment in the user-contributed modding culture: two of Valve's 'best sellers' were once mods and the ability to browse, select and download free mods in the Steam store was added in 2009. Herz (2005, p.328) argues that Valve has been successful in "cultivating the elite unpaid R&D community" without alienating its player base by encouraging and formalising the affective and institutional bonds between developers, modding communities and the community of players (Herz, 2005 p.332). Terranova's (2000) observations on the free provision of labor as the creation of value in digital economies are highly relevant to the games industry when it comes to mods and those forms of production and labor that occur during, and in parallel to play, not typically recognized for being so. Online chats, email, user-generated content and fan based works, the maintenance of social network profiles, in game time and even web searching habits all generate economic capital for those services able to translate such work into economic activity and further sources of capital (Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc). Terranova extends Maurizio Lazzarato's account of immaterial labor to highlight the undetermined capacity for work in the digital era that is not dependent on historical formations of class and common to us all in the vast strata of the "postindustrial productive subjectivity". Kücklich (2005) also takes this position to describe the relationship between work and play as a hybrid form of "playbour". The motivations of modders and user-contributors have strong parallels in the open source and hacker communities - and hacker modders have criticized the commercial use of mods as an exploitative marketing strategy (Brown & Oren, 2005, p.149). The appropriation and re-appropriation of commodities through management of intellectual properties in user-generated contexts (screenshots, machinima, mods, maps, industry knowledge and insider experience) complicates this, as does the launch of the in-game 'Mann Co.' store through which players can directly purchase hats and other items. Five members of the online community Polycount, a site for user-contributed content, were selected from those who entered the Polycount Pack contest to be featured as the first to have their items for sale in the store in September, 2010. Within the first two weeks the winners received payments from Valve between US\$39,000 to \$47,000 based on in-game sales of their items (Mitchell, 2010). The 2010 'Australian Christmas' game update introduced the 'World Traveller's Hat', a bicorne (the two cornered officers hat popularised by Napoleon Bonaparte) unlocked by purchases of 'map stamps' through the in-game store that correspond to the community generated maps with the proceeds from each stamp sold directed to the map creators.

Another way to view this relationship is to employ Herman et al's (2006: 184-185) concept of the "performativity of intellectual property in digital gaming environments" with a focus on the creation and management of goodwill, which is described as an intangible asset of value, although in this case Valve directly converts this into further economic activity. Goodwill in this context is an indicator of the affective bonds between consumers, corporations and their commodities and services in the marketplace. Herman et al (2005: 184) have developed a theoretical framework based on the "cultures of circulation" to describe the shifting relations of power and reciprocity between corporations and consumers in digital gaming, where the division between player-consumption and player production is increasingly blurred. For example, every play act is tabulated by Steam's monitoring of players (including the wearing of hats in game via), the information is made publicly available and used by Valve and other developers to improve their games and marketing strategies.

Goodwill is a useful means for capitalism to account for the relationships that are generated between corporations delivering affect-based experiences for their customers that encourage further consumption. Valve is highly adept at managing its customer's

goodwill. When Steam erroneously banned 12,000 users from its Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (Activision, 2009) combat system, Valve issued free copies of their game Left4Dead2 for each banned user and one friend (Kotaku, 2010). The corporation understands the act as being productive of goodwill between existing consumers and its services. Further, through the panopticism of the social networking elements of the Steam player all your contacts gets to see what and when you play, and what achievements you accomplish. Unlike social networks, like Facebook, which converts the informational data of user profiles and actions into intellectual property monetized by the sale of accumulated data, Steam uses gamers' practices, social relationships and goodwill to directly convert play activity and investment of time into further acts of consumption.

Grossberg's (1997 p. 77) description of the "affective economies" of music recording industry suggests that such economies exist at a level of materiality that need not be consciously experienced or even represented as such. This account also fits the digital games industry and the Steam commercial community service model as the "collective production" of the apparatus "...enhances and prolongs the possibilities for investing in an affective economy that empowers its fans and opens new spaces for resistance and struggle" (ibid). Through Steam, Valve organizes itself as a developer, retailer, distributor and service provider reliant on capturing the economic potential of the expansiveness of affective intensity that their games and digital services offer players. Steam reduces player's traditional rights, including the doctrine of First Sale, and Valve retains the right to indiscriminately ban and censor contentious players, but any abuse of power, however, must be anticipated and countered, at the risk of the loss of affective resonance, because as Marshall suggests: "...the challenge of affective power is that it is very difficult to maintain: it is by its very nature subject to dissipation" (Marshall, 1997 p.183). Another example would be Blizzard, which dominates the MMORPG genre, but even this industry giant must organize the cyclical resetting of affect through regular updates, patches, and other content, both made available for free and sold through 'expansions'. Valve has been able to achieve an imbrication of affect within the experience of TF2 gameplay, through modding and fandom and this opens new spaces - including within the games themselves - to articulate new patterns of consumption as well as strategies for resistance and in the very least offers gamers new ways to establish, manage and enhance their gamer personas.

Hats, Flâneurs and Gamer Personas

"So! Tar you fine dandies, so proud, so cock-sure, prancin' about with your head full of eyeballs! Come and get me I say! I'll be waitin' on yah with a wiff of the ol' brim stone. I'm a grim bloody fable, with an unhappy, bloody end!"

- The Demoman, Team Fortress 2, (Valve, 2007)

Huizinga (1949, p.168-169) suggests the spontaneous need to decorate things is a play function, comparable to the "grotesque wildness of the dancing-masks among savage peoples". Hats, as costumes and masks are also constitutive of play functions. For example the judge's wig (available for the Spy as the 'Magistrate's Mullet') argues Huizinga (p.77) is a legacy of the "coif" donned by mediaeval lawyers that transforms the wearer into another "being". Huizinga compares the humour and jousting preserved in British law as juristic sport, a wrangling of play between argument and counter argument. For Huizinga the hat functions as a mask (like those of ancient Greek theatre) that allows the player to be transformed into another ego, not through representation alone but also through incarnation and actualisation that sweeps the audience along with the intensity of the performer's state of mind.

The headwear from multiple professional occupations has been included in the expanding range of hats available for TF2 players - including the Medic's 'Otolaryngologist's mirror', the Pyro's 'Brigade Helm' and others. These hats and wearable items correspond with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987. pp. 400-401) description of jewellery as objects "in motion", carried on other objects (the virtual body) that are mobile and moving. Expressing affect, these adornments are active in the "discharge of emotion" (ibid). The relation between the affect and the weapon, as Deleuze and Guattari see occurring in mythology and the chivalric novel, also occupies the TF2 player. While the score is petrification of the act, the characters, their weapons, the maps on which they battle and the accoutrement's of hats, are "paths of affect", objects subordinated to vectors of speed and action. As martial arts offer 'ways' or paths of affect that leverage the technology of weapons, it is the cultivation of affect and its movement, action and speed that is the goal (ibid).

The virtual weapons and items, and even the character avatars as they are enacted between the body and cybernetic interface, the simulated geography and rules of the digital environments, all

become a means to translate movements "of another nature into a common space...the smooth of the void where there is no longer any goal..." but the "...attacks, counter attacks and headlong plunges." (ibid). Both the avatar and their items attain a weapon-like movement of action in the game involving an interaction between mind, body, time, virtual space and physical place through the cybernetic circuits of the machine interface and algorithms of the game. The bodies of the players compose the direction of movement through the input of mouse and keyboard while the game software and computer hardware supplies momentum and interaction, and the intensity of affect generated occurs in the explosive potential of their meeting. Each time the character avatar respawns they are launched into the game like a projectile and dare the player (or others) hesitate or slow their movement too long as the result is likely to be immediate character obliteration. The trajectory of movement can be represented in screenshots and witnessed in the many online video accounts of game play, but not experienced in the same way as the players, classes and game world combining in motion.

The majority of hats worn by players are those received for special events and global rewards: for example, the 'Cheaters Lament' was a 'gift' from Valve to the community of players who had resisted game 'cheats' to accumulate weapons and items. Hats can be 'found' randomly, or 'crafted' in game by sacrificing other items and these take hundreds of hours of game play to collect and produce. The recent addition of the game store allows the player to exchange with significant amounts of real world currency for the pleasure of distinguishing the player avatar with a Baker Boy or Fez. The hats are game achievements but not representations of skill, and while they do signify, any meaning is routed through the absurdist quality of the games' melange of historical, philosophical and popular culture pastiche, individual taste and expression. One of the hats that can be crafted by players is the 'Towering Pillar of Hats' is a reference to the 'Gentle Manne of Leisure' from a hidden 'Easter egg' featured on the Valve blog website during the week of the launch of the 'Classless Update' that included a fake Victorian period editorial cartoon. The Gentle Manne of Leisure (Figure 6.) is a parody of the English Dandy, described in Benjamin's (1969) reading of Baudelaire as a cold, reserved figure, taking pleasure from the shock and surprise of others, and refusing such displays in favour of a reserved demeanour.



Figure 6. The Gentle Manne of Leisure (image used courtesy of Valve Corporation).

Massumi (199, p. p231) considers "shock" as the participation

preceding recognition, and it is the shock value of hats that is central to both the construction of a gamer persona made possible in TF2 and their affective impact on game play. While the nine character classes remain stable, the individual gamer can personalize their in-game persona through different combinations of class, hats and items. The affective intensity and shock value of the hat, before the conscious interpretation of the hat's meaning, is anticipated and inscribed in the polygons of the character models. The character models have minimum density of detail at the feet, which increases towards the upper portions of the avatar bodies. The result is designed to encourage the movement of human eye upwards to the top of the character model (Mitchell et al 2007) where the character's hat becomes a locus for the intensity of the experience and player persona that precedes the recognition and signification of the selection.

Benjamin (1969) argues the concept of shock is bound within the bombardment of the image, or in terms of the game: the jolting seizure of character death, the Domination/Nemesis mechanics, taunts and emotes, the panoply of player hats or tension release of the launch of the character death and respawn. Benjamin's account of Baudelaire's placement of shock at the centre of the artist's work is an attention to the power of affect in the imagery of the description. Benjamin sees a close connection in Baudelaire, between "the figure of shock and contact with the metropolitan masses" (p.165), but the crowd is hidden in both TF2 and Baudelaire's creativity, meaning the crowd is encompassed without being fully embodied. The crowd's presence in TF2 is the haunting of the spectator, the post death surveillance of the battlefield, and is only encountered as the sound of cheering when an achievement is awarded in game. Benjamin interprets the juxtaposition between the intangibility of the crowd and the flâneur, described as the master of the crowd, as the shock of persona (Benjamin, 1969, p.167). The flâneur is an imposingly dressed figure demanding elbowroom of the crowds that would threaten subjugation within the masses and is uncompromising in refusing to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure even when pressed by throng of the crowd (ibid). The gamer also cuts such a figure, to be privileged enough to access and occupy these virtual environments, from the home, internet cafe or PC Baang, they are already indicating a capacity for uncompromising leisure.

Cockburn's (2006) account of the flâneuse, the feminine of the flâneur, includes examination of an advertisement containing five images of Greta Gustafsson wearing different hats, each subtitled with a different female epithet. Cockburn argues that the hats are not simply different examples of a masquerade, but the multiple identities of a singular individual dictated by an omnipresent abstraction that functions as a succession of cosmopolitan social potential and personal possibility. The production of Gustafsson as flâneuse in the images suggests the wearer remains the same person beneath each different character, but through different hats adorns herself as socially as a persona in control of the potential political and resistant possibilities of "canny customer choice". Following Simmel, Cockburn (2006, 69-70) argues that through purchases the consumer acquires a variety of identities and as such the metropolitan consumer is free from the fixed constraints of identity.

Hats in TF2 therefore have significance located within specific historical discourses and hierarchies of meaning: the dominant presence of different types of hats, headwear, and specific hair styles in nearly all forms of military and religious organizations speak to their lingering power as symbols of status, authority and dominion. The choice of the jewellery such as badges, and other icons and inscriptions adorning even the most basic Baseball Cap allows for a further (if not new) differentiation between broadly masculinized commodities. The hats of TF2 never lose their values as signifiers of culture, fashion, history, gender, sexuality and other politics but their value is remixed with the absurdity and pastiche and the affective tone of game design and have become a locus for the shock at the centre of game play. They enable players to further distinguish themselves amongst the generic worlds of FPS games and allows for a degree of micromanagement of the gamer persona otherwise unavailable in the genre.

Conclusion

"Can you feel the Schadenfreude?"
- The Medic, Team Fortress 2, (Valve, 2007)

The silliness of hats somewhat undermines the tension between affect theorists and poststructuralist cultural theory (Hemmings, 2005). However, following Gilbert (2004), affect has been considered here as complimentary to the attentions of critical cultural theory, and has been suggested as a productive theoretical companion to that of cultural studies or screen studies within game studies. The political struggles of gamers, and the unequal relationships of power and

capital in the games industry, can only be understood, as Gilbert suggests of the music industry, through reference to both the specificities of affect and the semiotic contexts in which they are located.

Massumi (2002, p.27) describes affect as a temporal sink, a hole in time and space, filled with motion that rejects passivity with a vibratory resonance. This temporal sink is a fitting description of FPS games that feature a kind of participatory action and circuits of kinaesthetic pleasure which rapidly flow over into creative acts, including persona management, which are not widely recognized as productive in a world dominated by directions toward practical ends. The mastery of video game achievements is therefore a new language of power--a bourgeois power and social dominance of the digital flâneur, just as avatars are being articulated with their status as symbolic objects (Giddings and Kennedy 2008, p.24). Yet Shouse (2005) reminds us that the importance of affect is not the importance of an object's relationship to the meaning, and that messages consciously received may be less important to the receiver of the message than "his or her non-conscious affective resonance with the source of the message".

Affective resonance is central to the consideration of the gamer persona as flâneur or flâneuse within the information and entertainment industries that have converged alongside those technologies which Benjamin observed; the telephone is replaced by voice chat and the camera is replaced by the game world. It is through the cybernetic experience that shock resonates with FPS gamers and is deeply intensified by technologies of videogames that are not purely militaristic, consumerist, or social, but hybrids. The activity of the gamer should never be considered as passive, but always resistant, contestant and nagging through play, and in the dance between appropriation and re-appropriation of intellectual properties involved in the creativity of screenshots, mods, machinima, and even simple manipulations of identity and persona through profile images or vociferous participation in online forums. Through Marx, Benjamin compares technologies to capitalist production of the factory line. A more contemporary analogy would see gamers as capable of productive and creative acts with symbiotic subjectivities of signification and affective personas, making them digital dandies, flâneurs, flâneuse and important figures in the malls of digital distribution, arcades of virtual environments, and the crowds of multiple social networks.

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