

The Liège Game Lab: presentation of a young research center on videogames

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The main goals of the paper are, first, to present the Liège Game Lab, the different studies carried out in Liège on videogames and their specificities and, secondly, question our own position in the research field. To do so, we will situate ourselves in relation to the main paradigms of game studies dominated in France by social sciences and in the world by English-speakers, with a particular attention to the domination's concerns of a peripheral position.

This paper will focus on presentation and discussion of the videogames' study in a mid-sized French speaking University. The aim is, first and foremost, to question the domination's issues related to a triple peripheral position: geographic, methodological and linguistic.

- The University of Liège is indeed peripheral in Belgium, in comparison to the centrality, geographically speaking, of the Universities of Brussels and Leuven.
- The main group working on videogames, in French speaking Belgium, is the LabJMV (the "Games and Virtual Worlds" Laboratory), where the anthropological and sociological perspectives are dominant, while in Liège we developed more a communicative and literary outlook.
- The OMNSH (the main association about game studies in France), which could be our "natural" link to the field because of the sharing language, is also dominated by social sciences and separated by a political frontier which could be seen as a boundary.
- The DIGRA (the Digital Games Research Association), at the opposite, is geographically close to us (given that they are present as a chapter in Flanders), but disconnected owing to the difference of language (they publish mainly in English, we publish mainly in French).

Despite of this peripheral position and making of it a strategic observatory of the tendencies of game studies, an original research hub emerged in Liège for two years. We chose to work on objects and/or with methodological perspectives which diverge of mainstream game studies: amateur game making, videogame press, Belgian players' uses and poetical perspective on gaming practices.

Various contingencies brought together at the University of Liège several researchers working more or less directly on videogames: students' demands to write master's thesis on videogames, the rise of grants from funding agencies like FNRS to study this medium and the development of Digital Humanities in the University of Liège. It is time, now, to question ourselves about the situation of the game studies in the University of Liège, but also the place of this University in the international field of this discipline. In first approximation, we can postulate that this gathering of researchers generated a shared research process, whose specificities stem particularly from the triple peripheral position (geographic, methodological and linguistic) of the University of Liège in the game studies field – as explained earlier. However, we would like to discuss this hypothesis not only on our own, but publicly, in the context of an international conference.

Consequently, with this paper, we aim to present our group questioning our shared position and, at the same time, to expose a comparison of our five perspectives on videogames in order to understand in what ways they match each other and in what ways they create fruitful opposition. Björn-Olav Dozo and Boris Krywicky are interested in French speaking videogame press with book history's methods. Pierre-Yves Hurel examines amateur game design with sociological tools (the dominant methodology in French speaking game studies), but these are serving communication and political investigations. Fanny Barnabé studies the same kind of objects (players' creative practices of "misappropriation"), but through a formal and poetic approach (she analyzes the works so produced and not the players' activities). Julie Delbouille, at the opposite, adopted a sociological and quantitative methodology, but investigated a restricted category of gaming practices: the French speaking Belgian players.