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Infinite Play and the Virtual Wonderland: From *Homo Ludens* to Counter-Effectuation

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Abstract: Contemporary discourse has largely abandoned the charge of video gaming as a degraded compulsion, yet valorisation extends no further than the game as an elevated cultural artifact. This essay recovers a third term: play itself, older than civilization and, in the play-theory tradition, generative of culture. Across three models, gameplay performs cultural, psychological, and ontological work essential to a meaningful life. The analytic model, drawn from Huizinga and Caillois and extended by Bataille on expenditure and Benjamin on innervation, frames the game as voluntary, anti-utilitarian, and bounded by the magic circle. Caillois's *ilinx*, *agon*, *alea*, and *mimicry* extend socialization and self-actualization even as they risk pathological immersion, as in *hikikomori*. The psychoanalytic model, drawn from Freud and Winnicott, reframes the game as potential space, the avatar a transitional object, where respawning and reset let the player metabolize trauma and rehearse identities, extending the creative living from which art, religion, and literature derive. The ontological model, drawn from Deleuze by way of Carroll, posits the ideal game, in which rules emerge in the throwing of the dice, and each move affirms chance. Sandbox and emergent games gesture toward this pure play but remain bounded by finality. Artificial intelligence extends virtual play towards the ideal game, without arriving. AI produces an incorporeal surface effect but cannot counter-effectuate, generating chance divided and dominated, a counterfeit of the impersonal. Pure ontological play remains the province of thought and art. Yet the computer persists as the corporeal machine that might yet counter-effectuate the incorporeal game-event: the hardware that dreams.

Keywords: *Play Theory, Video Games, Deleuze, Winnicott, Psychoanalysis, Artificial Intelligence, Game Studies*

While society has largely moved beyond early discourse condemning video games as futile entertainment, the split remains divisive between gaming as high art and gaming as time-consuming brain rot draining psychic energy, and breeding emotionally stunted degenerates maladapted to function in society. High art and brain rot divide the tableau, relegating pure play to an underexamined periphery.

Video games fill galleries and residencies. Last year in Tokyo, Mori Art Museum exhibited *MACHINE LOVE*, showing 50 contemporary works exploring game engines, AI, and VR (“MACHINE”). Last June, the Manhattan-based Onassis Foundation launched a new festival, ONX Screens, featuring 30 video game and moving-image works (“ONX”). Each year in Toronto, Vector Festival showcases digital games and creative media practices. The School For Poetic Computation, an experimental school in New York and online, offers courses on video games and their ethics, temporal mechanics, genre tropes, platform histories and more.

In the same vein, literary theory upholds the cultural value of video games, namely via the analysis of worldbuilding, narratology, and procedural rhetoric. Video games as installation and new media, elevated, conceptual, exhibited to a cultivated audience. But what about the value of plain, ordinary fun with my friends online?

There’s the video game as a cultural artefact of conceptual or artistic value; then there’s the gameplay itself, an essentially primitive act.

Play predates civilization. Long before the conception of the fine arts gallery or the literary establishment, humans spent more hours of the day at leisure than even hunting or gathering. Play theory leans back toward this ancient function; to elucidate play at its most fundamental, its core nature, that is, as a catalyst for cultural evolution, social construction, and self-becoming: a vein of human actualisation, plain and simple.

Historically, the playful spirit manifested in human culture as poetry, law, and ritual. Huizinga traces the element of play from primitive culture through Greek antiquity, the Roman Empire (*panem et circenses*, play turned into spectacle), and the medieval world (chivalry, the tournament, courtly love), all the way to modern civilization, where play decays in the face of seriousness, work, and utilitarianism (Huizinga 36).

At peak productivity, civilized humanity has streamlined play to endangerment, putting the domesticated man in a deep deficiency. Gaming remains among the few modern-day outlets for subdued primal urges, an artless art largely lost in the modern capitalist world of efficiency and energy optimization, a free and useless activity with the sole function of keeping our humanity intact.

At the crossroads of anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, three models outline play as a generative force. Johan Huizinga's analytic model presents play as foundational to human culture, particularly to the competitive and sacred. For Roger Caillois, play promotes socialization and human expression. Sigmund Freud and Donald Winnicott emphasize the psychoanalytic dimension of the game in inner exploration and emotional development. For Gilles Deleuze, the ideal game opens a realm of pure ontological creation.

Play of Culture: The Analytical Model

Huizinga lays the foundations of modern play studies in his work *Homo Ludens* (1938, "the human being who plays"), presenting play as human expression and symbolic social exploration. From lighthearted forms of entertainment to weightier, mass-scale social phenomena, he affirms play as a force of cultural dissemination, a function that manifests across society in the form of team sports, competitive tournaments, theater, masquerades, carnivals where simulation and imitation rule, legal trials, collective ritual, and even war.

Huizinga characterised the game, firstly, as voluntary and anti-utilitarian. Playtime is free, totally liberated from everyday pressures of productivity in the sense that it has no direct purpose for society. Voluntary in the sense that the player faces no practical pressures to participate, unlike everyday working life. If anything, play is a waste of energy and resources.

Georges Bataille expands on the principle of expenditure, in particular, as central to the division made by human civilization between productive work and the primal (Bataille, "La notion" 23–72). Work conserves energy, mastering raw energy toward productive ends. This controlled mastery demands the suppression of immediate impulse and desire, the impatient, chaotic energy of the primal. This energy builds up and demands an outlet. The festival to dance and perform to exhaustion. The feast to consume the hard-earned surplus. The quarantined transgression of the primordial laws of productivity and conservation.

Bataille's theory on sacrifice and sexuality enters here, which he traces as a practice across ancient cultures. When society evolved beyond sacrifice and domesticated sexuality, this pent-up energy was channeled into, among other outlets, war: raw violence on a mass scale, ceremonially orchestrated as an ancient pagan sacrifice, down to the elaborate, arbitrary rules of decorum, sacrificial vestments and festivities both in preparation and conclusion (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 124). In such a way, the popularity of video games concerning themes of war and crime appears not only a natural extension of the pressure for energy expenditure, but an exceedingly preferable alternative to a structural demand.

The game departs from reality, in what Huizinga calls the *magic circle*, creating a temporary world with its own order, time, and meaning (Huizinga 12). The magic circle structures itself according to strict rules, just as the video game is preconfigured by its creators: manifest in the interface (UI, HUD) and the level design. When the player enters the video game, he leaves reality for a new order established by the map and interface. He leaves himself behind to become a new character symbolised by the avatar.

In his play typology, Caillois names this phenomenon *mimicry*, the codified role-playing within a fictional universe that imbues a sense of reality into the simulated avatar and, by extension, the virtual world. Dedicated role-playing servers in adventure games like WOW enable total immersion, strengthening the sense of identification through multiplayer interactivity and an extensive mythology. The player transforms into an actor within the fictional universe, making a real personal investment.

The symbolic nature of play produces its own source of meanings, fictions, and an imaginary order. This quality captivates when the player voluntarily neglects his own real life to invest himself in the magic circle accessible only by his screen or console.

Within the magic circle, the player becomes immersed not only in the separate virtual space but often virtual *time* as well. Typical symptoms testify to the extent of immersion to eclipse hunger, thirst, or fatigue, and at the extreme persisting through sleep deprivation, dehydration, and fasting. While not a found cause of hikikomori, the dominant theory in literature is the Compensatory Internet Use model, that game use functions as an addictive form of emotional and psychological coping that enables isolation and detachment from offline life in a self-perpetuating cycle (Kardefelt-Winther 351-54). Total absorption overrides the body's signals: the magic circle becomes pathological.

Caillois elaborates on this immersive property in *Les Jeux et Les hommes (Man, Play and Games)* (1967), where he proposes a precise typology of play that both extends and criticizes Huizinga. The typology elaborates along four axes: *ilinx*, *agôn*, *mimicry*, and *aléa* (Caillois 47).

Ilinx, meaning vertigo, designates the immersion that dissolves the ordinary perceiving self. This quality causes a loss of bearings, a feeling of dizziness, and both physical and mental disorientation. In video games, this design feature manifests as instability, falling, speed, and rotation to produce sensory confusion. In game design, *ilinx* often announces the arrival of evil, the loss/death of a character, or simply to express the chaotic terrain in racing games, for example, Mario Kart, to heighten the immersive experience. In horror games, physical disorientation incites a psychic disorientation, a sense of unease that supersedes the player's security in physical reality. The iOS Slenderman, simple but effective, plunges the player into a foggy and dark landscape, vignetté to

reduce the range of vision, interrupted by a sudden static to announce the approach of the formidable antagonist.

VR headsets advance the *ilinx*, producing not only a more immersive experience, but real vertigo and motion sickness, particularly triggering for unaccustomed players, for whom even normal movement can trigger nausea. I've come away feeling sicker than after a carnival roller coaster after riding the virtual zipline in *The Forest*.

But the phenomenon becomes most interesting when the player's nervous system actually reorganizes itself in adaptation to the new stimuli, recalling Walter Benjamin's theory of innervation. Borrowed from physiology, "innervation" names the transmission of stimulus (nervous energy) into muscles and organs (Benjamin, "Surrealism" 29). The theory anticipates the collective, somatic retraining of modern bodies according to new technological landscapes, not only the reception but the transmission of stimulus into motor response. The social body absorbs the technological apparatus into its habits, reflexes, and perception (Benjamin, "The Work" 45).

The concept, which originally privileges film, foreshadows the near-dystopian VR symptom, familiarly known to the community as *phantom sense*. The term refers to the uncanny effect on users who have spent enough time immersed in the VR landscape that their brains begin perceiving the virtual touch of other avatars in the server as a physical sensation. On a broad scale, Benjamin concerns himself more with the implication that the relationship between users and their virtual game worlds holds for collective society rather than the individual.

In the past year, the through-line of hikikomori coverage is globalisation and de-culture-binding, a systematic review finding a global prevalence of 8% of the total population with no significant difference between East Asian and Western regions (Hussey). And the youngest cases are digitally hyperactive, the key evolution from the 1990s model. The online video game is the technology that allows the magic circle's potential space to become total, removing the natural endpoints that bound pre-digital play.

Yet Caillois' typology of play presents a case for gameplay in which socialisation and personal actualisation are not only sustained but accentuated. The virtual game space allows the player to develop herself within idealized spheres, to extend herself where she would be otherwise discouraged by practical constraints. In the virtual game world, the weak become strong, and the shy uninhibited.

Agôn (rivalry) describes the category of competition where players compete in a balanced framework, assuming the guarantee of equal opportunity. Fighting or adventure games are the most obvious genre in compliance, but to a certain extent, *agon* exists in all games. In romantic, story-driven

otome games such as *Mystic Messenger*, players compete via simulated dialogue for the affection of a love interest. In fashion games like *Dress to Impress* on *Roblox*, popularity and reputation are at stake, determined by the votes of other online players. Even in life simulations like *Stardew Valley*, the player competes against time and resources to secure agricultural prosperity. Essentially, *Agôn* involves a structured assessment of skills that ensures equality between the players. The game forms a perfect meritocracy, testing skill, effort, or pure strategy, liberated from the inequalities of the outside world. The game becomes a unique realm of equal opportunity in which players may freely pursue dreams of status and power, cultivate romance or domestic bliss, or otherwise develop themselves beyond the limits of reality.

Privilege of genetics, intergenerational wealth, and other disparities inherent to a reality in which discrimination exists are structurally absent from the game, secured by *aléa*, the principle of chance and randomness, literally “the die”. Caillois positions *agôn* in total opposition to *aléa*, yet the two work in tandem towards the utopian equality of play. *Agôn* assures total autonomy, answering to effort and personal responsibility alone, while *aléa* inserts the negation of will, the helplessness to fate. In all games, to a certain extent, chance decides the outcome. Whether fortune, luck, or fate, the probability is distributed evenly across players. Beyond the easy example of digital poker, *gachas* exemplify how the theft of direct control produces uncertainty and dependence on luck, while simultaneously evading any accusation of unfairness. The *gacha*, often included in Japanese dating simulations, involves players trading currency to receive random virtual items. Loot boxes in open-world games and first-person shooters carry surprise supplies, captured after an enemy kill. In survival games, random enemy spawns guarantee unexpected adversity, but fair adversity.

A continuum of play along two axes, *paidia* and *ludus*, describes how the game articulates freedom and constraint. Open world games like *World of Warcraft* fall on the *paidia* end of the spectrum, an extreme freedom for spontaneity and improvisation, with dating simulations on the other end as games of *ludus* characterized by rigid rules: the player is restricted to linear interactions with the love interests to develop a romantic relationship. Thus, play acts as a mirror for society: teaching social rules, behaviors, and skills. At the individual level, the game enables the player to test behaviors, explore identities, or simulate situations inaccessible in real life.

Beyond mere imitation of the world, the game embodies the purest form of that initial spirit of play from which, according to Huizinga, all the most extensive and complex cultural phenomena derive, from politics and war to art and religion. The player participates in the active creation and dissemination of cultural symbols and rituals. More than a trivial memetic simulation, the game constitutes its primary matrix. In such a way, life imitates play.

Through the combined power of technology and imagination, the video game extends the fundamental human act of play, a force of self-actualization and cultural generation, beyond the material sandbox into impossible realms.

Play of the Mind: The Psychoanalytic Model

While early analytic play theory fixates on the relationship between the individual and society, psychoanalytic models conceive of the game as a potential space within which the player explores their own interiority. Between reality and the unconscious mind, the video game opens an intermediate space for psychic exploration.

Freud posits the game as a productive psychic mechanism metabolising trauma and the pleasure principle. In play, the maturing child represents scenes of existence, particularly those of distress or desire. Repetitive games model the need to relive and master a traumatic event. In the *fort/da* case study, the game stages the mother's disappearance and reappearance through a symbolic object (Freud, *Beyond* 9).

The loop of gameplay, appearing most often in adventure or action genres, gives the player the chance to respawn after being killed, to return to a saved point of progress and retry a boss, replay a scene, or otherwise improve their performance in the face of adversity. Following the psychoanalytic model, this repetition allows the player to approach the control of a simulated or symbolic trauma. *The Sims* simulates real life in all its glory and domestic tragedy, including but not limited to divorce, burglary, and poverty. After the confiscation of a neglected child by social services, a devastating house fire, or even the haunting appearance of a deceased family member's ghost, the game can always be reset to the last saved progress, to be replayed again and again.

Through the symbolic experience of impossible situations, the child integrates principles of reality, just as the adult *Sims* enjoyer learns resilience to social rejection and household devastation, an exercise in self-mastery adjacent to dream-work.

Like a dream, the game works as an in-between realm, a "psychic apparatus" simulating emotionally-charged scenes insulated from real-world consequences, guided by desire and creativity. On the pleasure principle and traumatic neurosis in children's games, Freud emphasizes the compulsion to repetition, linked to a certain "psychic fixation of trauma" observed in the dreams of patients, evidencing the subconscious occupation with repressed memories (Freud, *Beyond*, 13).

For Freud, play extends into adulthood as writing and fantasy, the last surviving territory of the pleasure principle after the reality principle has annexed everything else (Freud, "Creative" 141–53).

The poet creates an imaginary world injected with real psychological investment. Play becomes analogous to poetry.

In departure from the Freudian concern with productivity and libidinal economies, Donald Winnicott interests himself in the inherent value of play as a state of free and formless creativity. The creation of the play space is facilitated by the transitional object, an extension of the self situated in the impossible logical position between external reality and inner creation, like a newborn's blanket, held in the magical psychic suspension between found object and baby's creation (Winnicott 1-25). Holding the transitional object, the baby navigates passage into harsh reality by opening an intermediate area between the concrete external and psychic internal. And this third space of potentiality welcomes the blanket as its first inhabitant.

In a video game, the avatar serves as the transitional object, a virtual character on which the player projects himself onto a fictional form to enter the virtual world. Whether the fantasy rooms of *VRChat* and *Second Life*, the epic landscapes of *World of Warcraft*, or the multiverses of *Roblox* and *Minecraft*, this space cannot be located in either the reality of computer software or the player's imagination, but a third place, the virtual. The virtual world takes on psychic potentiality when the boundary between the internal and external blurs, and springs from the player's imaginative investment in the blurring.

This paradoxical suspension between the real and imaginary, the me and not-me, is the potential space (Winnicott 41-50). The only space where genuine creative living happens. Neither compliance with reality, nor detached hallucination. The individual apperceives the world: creating the space in the same moment as they are discovering it.

For the child, the potential space of play revolves around the paradigm of adulthood, accessed through intermediate objects such as a doll, chessboard, or fairy-wings. Even a humble stick sword or unassuming cardboard box-castle can suffice. The object's power is limited only by the force of the child's imagination.

In adulthood, the object matures and expands: a paintbrush, flute, church or book. The child's games of pretend evolve into adulthood as art, music, religion and literature. For Winnicott, the potential space never closes; it persists for a lifetime and becomes the location of the whole cultural experience (Winnicott 135).

Winnicott, who died the same year as the first arcade game *Computer Space* (1971), and before the first Magnavox Odyssey home console (1972), could barely have predicted the emergence of virtual reality in its modern form that we take for granted. Yet his theories announce the deep

embeddedness of virtual worlds within the collective psyche, and the necessity to actively engage with these worlds, to exercise our innate capacity for creative, meaningful living. Technology has merely uploaded the magic of the cardboard castle into the infinite expanse of cyberspace.

Play of Existence: The Ontological Model

Inspired by AI research, *The Sims* (2000) introduced more complex and credible behaviors than previous titles, allowing players to experiment with the possibilities of simulation, yet still within preset rules. *SecondLife* (2003), a vast MMO virtual world, was conceived as a universe entirely shaped by its community. The game predetermines only the basic foundation of the internal economy. Players are free to determine the essential functions and economic dynamics, to create their own shareable spaces and content without imposed objectives.

In *Minecraft*, players gather resources to build tools, improve their equipment, and build shelters against hostile creatures. The game sets few limits on how to build, and thanks to the wide variety of materials available, players can create practically anything they imagine. In response to player reception, the developers added Creative mode to allow carefree building unfettered by time or deadly creepers. This user-inspired development in *Minecraft* away from controlled outcomes toward free-building implies a trend in gaming towards pure play.

In contrast to known games, "nos jeux connus" set by preexisting rules, fixed distributions, winners and losers, Deleuze takes inspiration from Lewis Carroll's nonsensical literary wonderland when he conceives of an ideal game, a pure game, the reality of thought and art itself (Deleuze, *Logique* 74).

As with the analytical model, the Deleuzian model insists on internal autonomy: the game is not subordinate to a social, moral, or utilitarian goal. The pure game, however, expands upon this principle of autonomy to total freedom from all constraints, even that of reason, indifferent to the pressure of strategy optimization or to skill as the mastery of cause-and-effect.

Where analytical theory assumes a rational player as a strategic subject, one who plays to maximize a result, the Deleuzian model insists upon the idea of non-finality, which confers the player the freedom of creation and independence from utilitarian constraints. The goal is not equilibrium or optimization, but a perpetual transformation in which each move invents its own rules, creates new futures, contradicts itself, opens new potentials, and transforms the system.

In Deleuze's ideal game, the rules emerge through the act of playing, like throwing the dice, *lancer*: one continuous act that resists pluralization. Each throw reaffirms random chance, *le hasard*, without ever ceasing to expand upon new potentials with each stroke, *le coup*, when the die falls (Deleuze, "Sur Foucault"). Each *coup* is a series, like the plural dots on the die, a spread of infinitesimal singularities in a nomadic distribution of simultaneous instances. Each throw is a chaos, in which each stroke is a fragment, a resonant system that expands across infinity.

The resonance implies the aleatory point, like the seed point which generates the video game: unlocalizable within the virtual landscape, but deriving all other points and determining their belonging to that particular world run.

To generate "randomness", most video games use an algorithm that takes a starting number, the seed, and produces from it a series of numbers for the game to read. One number for castle height, one number for feral hog placement, etc. The whole world, the run, unfolds from a single seed, letting it circulate through the generation code.

The seed is neither the one run nor the totality, but the aleatory point that brings both into existence and makes them communicate. Yet even a seeded RNG (random number generator) is deterministic. It models the structure of the ideal game but within the limits of reality. In the ideal game, we continue to throw the dice into infinity, resisting actualisation, rolling infinite possibilities in the eternal affirmation of chance. If the game is the machine that effectuates reality as the finite, play is the departure into infinity, the Wonderland of unlimited potential.

We've long since departed from the analytical or psychological models of gaming. Rather than question what the player can learn about society, the Deleuzian model experiments with what can be generated in the structures of pre-existence. Deeper than cultural dissimulation or social experimentation, the ideal game is an ontological act.

Dmstfctn's GODMODE trilogy explores AI anomalies in a series of games. The London-based duo describes their work as an exploration of complex systems through the lenses of simulation, fiction, and experience. GODMODE (ep. 1) explores anomalies in the trianong of AI with synthetic datasets and consists of a live interactive simulation. The sequel, Waluigi's Purgatory, tells the story of an AI finding itself in purgatory for AIs that cheated during their training, depicted as theater. In Godmode Epochs, a multiplayer AI training clicker game set to an infinite, simulated supermarket, players race to train an AI to identify products.

In pure play, as in thought or artistic creation, we cast the die and unfurl a multiplicity of singularities that differentiate and connect. “To think is to play, that is to say, if we take this as the fundamental sign of the game: to think is to throw the dice” (Deleuze, *Logique* 75)¹. From this unfurling of singularities, a relation arises: the interconnectedness of an incorporeal system, the genesis of sense, the root of creation.

This sense-genesis is a surface effect, an incorporeal event. It can be realized in the world by neither man nor god (Deleuze, *Logique* 76). It is the unconscious of pure thought. The transcendental unconscious. Like Freud’s collective unconscious. Impersonal, pre-psyche. The work of art. It is what makes thought and art real and so troubling to reality, morality, and economies of the world. It can only be thought of, Deleuze affirms, and thought of as nonsense.

Anyway, what does it mean to think nonsense? Nonsense cannot be thought. And it definitely cannot be brought into reality. It counter-effectuates sense. It opens into unreality. As art and play countereffectuate the personal, they dispossess the subject. Alice dreams and enters Wonderland. She hasn’t created Wonderland, and Wonderland doesn’t exist. She wanders Wonderland, dispossessed of authorship. Play enters the Wonderland, and so play exists nowhere. Nowhere is where play happens. And yet this nowhere place is the transcendental source that conditions existence.

How I’d like to dream while I’m awake. To enter Wonderland whenever I liked. The dream of *le jeu ideal* is structurally impossible to realize in the waking world. Yet some games seem to yearn for infinite play, for the freedom of unreality in the virtual Wonderland.

The sandbox remains in flux, evading any final state, reaching toward continual becoming. Emergent games unfurl unscripted stories from interactive systems in endless scenarios. Exploration games mutually transform the player and the system in co-creation.

Players in these virtual worlds begin entering the kingdom of flow and process. Gameplay evolves incessantly, dynamically, opening a space for experimentation and sense-making, akin to artistic or literary creation. Yet these exemplars remain bounded by finality; nonsense calcifies into reason. A convergence-selection machine cannot throw the dice that affirms divergence.

The reality of pure play lives in thought and art, and only them, because they are incorporeal. We generally experience AI as incorporeal, but it’s running on very big, very hot computers (re: data center outrage, the “invisible” fiber-optic internet that supports high-speed networks). Yet my experience of thought is as incorporeal as the conversation I have with my virtual chatbot. Deleuze

¹ All translations from the French are my own.

distinguishes between casualties, between the corporeal operation (firing synapses, hands painting), and the incorporeal event (the thought, the artwork). I'm not thinking about the wetware of my brain, nor about the GPUs.

So then, can disembodied AI realize forms of pure play in the virtual world that are impossible even for a reality-bound human or god? AI touches the Deleuzian framework in that it produces an incorporeal surface effect, but cannot counter-effectuate. It's impersonal in that it represents a collective of individuals, but not pre-individual, a sort of counterfeit of the impersonal. Finally, pure play requires the affirmation of chance, and AI generation is chance divided and dominated.

I yearn for a gaming future that could sustain contact with the transcendental source that conditions existence, where a waking player could enter the realm of nonsense and pure potential otherwise reserved for dreamers. What if there were a realm of play on Earth that evaded the bounds of reality, a conceptual realm, incorporeal and infinite as it is timeless?

Such a game would appear closer to the process of artistic creation or unconscious thought than to our "known games" of skill or chance. Everyone who plays is a winner, that is to say, everyone who affirms and expands upon chance, *le hasard*, rather than who dominates (Deleuze, *Logique* 76). Play as pure ontological creation, but on my computer.

And if not on my computer, then the computer as the corporeal machine that counter-effectuates the incorporeal game-event. The hardware that dreams.

Conclusion

From analytical play theory and psychoanalysis down to Deleuze, these models reveal a vision for video gaming that assumes cultural, psychological, and creative functions, a transformative practice essential to living a meaningful life, fundamentally human.

As technology advances, the potential of gameplay extends toward Wonderland. It's up to the player and game designer together to appreciate and fulfill this potential. To determine in collaboration the landscape of play.

The pursuit of pure play, enabled by emerging technologies such as AI, deepens actualisation across disparate axes: social, psychological, cultural, and ontological. A new horizon opens to a conception of video games as educational tools, labs of cultural innovation as much as identity-forming, therapeutic instruments to support psychic healing, and virtual worlds of pure conceptual creation and sense-making.

Already, all across the internet and private digital spaces, billions of players connect to their screens, whether by console, controller, or VR headset, and enter gameplay as a cultural laboratory, a field of social investigation, a tool for identity formation, a space for inner exploration, psychological development, and artistic creation, spawning new forms of free thought.

Probably this playful ideal, *le jeu idéal*, the counter-effective realm of pure nonsense, the spontaneous regeneration of ontological existence, already exists somewhere undetected in the depths of cyberspace, the virtual wonderland.

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