Vampires: Network Games Challenging the Game

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Abstract

Computer games are cultural software, meaning that not only are they an example of play as a particular cultural behaviour, other cultural forms and behaviours are also accessed through computer games. In this way, computer games have been the scene for exploring new forms of identity construction, new narratives, new forms of human computer interaction and so forth. Today, many games explore the possibilities of staging games within social networking services. In other words, they at once explore the social network as a game and transform the cultural significance of the social network. Investigating the significance of this transformation, the article will analyze the network game *Vampires*, an application for the social networking service Facebook.

The article argues that the coupling of game and social networking service in *Vampires* first and foremost changes the properties of the game by blurring the borders between game and network. This is all but insignificant from a cultural perspective. By changing the game, basic cultural behaviours are transformed, predominantly the notion of sociality, productivity and the distinction between public and private. In this way, the analysis of *Vampires* will reveal a manifestation of immaterial labour, late capitalism and network culture.

Keywords:

game definitions, network games, social online games, facebook, social networking services, network cultures, late capitalism, immaterial labour, public/private.

Introduction

A game system's main purpose is not merely to enable playing through computers. From the very beginning of computer gaming it has been clear that what the computer has brought to the game is not an encoded version of a game. A prime example of this is Atari's failed attempt to publish Rubik's Cube as a game for their 2600 console in 1982 (aka *Atari Video Cube*). The computer is not just an instrument managing the rules and virtually representing the game in a simulation. Computer games are cultural software, meaning that not only are they an example of play as a particular cultural behaviour, the game play is always paired with other cultural forms and behaviours, i.e. other cultural forms and behaviours are accessed through computer games.

Throughout the past four decades of digital gaming, designers have (regardless of success or failure) explored various coupling of games and other cultural forms and behaviours. Amongst others, Ted Friedman argues that players enter a cybernetic loop with the computer that teaches them to think like a cyborg (Friedman, 1999). Not only do players focus on the sound and visuals of games, they also internalise the algorithms of the system governing the sounds and objects on the screen. As such, the game is coupled with algorithms in the computer,

demonstrating the attributes of the computer to the player. This is not only true in *Civilization* and *SimCity* (the games Friedman analyzes) but in particular also in arcade games, where the governing system is not too complex and the player is left a genuine chance to actually appropriate the system (e.g. learn the behaviours of the monsters in *Pac-Man* and act accordingly to prevent getting caught).

In many games, however, players enter very complex cybernetic loops that are hard to see through. In those cases, only expert players are concerned with the coded, technological layers of the system. As Sherry Turkle argues, players are likely to submit to the "seduction of the simulation" (Turkle, 1996, p. 71). Hence, the representational layers of the game interface (the world and its characters) become dominant in the game experience. This does not cause a resignation to the simulation but in fact new cultural behaviours, including new ways of constructing identities on the screen.

Not least, many computer games have explored the possibilities of pairing the game with the narrative. This is evident already in early games genres, including adventure games and MUDs. In the nineties, with the possibilities for storing larger amounts of data on CD-ROMs, stories and games where coupled using detailed game worlds and cut-scenes. Stories in games thus exceeds the simple role of framing the game (e.g. Mario saving the princess) and, as described by game researcher Britta Neitzel, may in fact explore many types of story models (Neitzel, 2005, p. 235).

What seems to be widespread is that the coupling has never been straightforward. The abovementioned examples not only demonstrate the cultural property of computer games to enable experiences of other cultural forms and behaviours, they also demonstrate how these forms and behaviours are transformed when coupled with the computer. The narrative is no longer an internal experience of a reader but also an instrumental experience. . Already demonstrated by Espen Aarseth in the nineties, the reader is also a user who explores, configures and adds to the text, changing the text and the foundation of the narrative fundamentally (Aarseth, 1997). Likewise, the algorithms are no longer purely mathematics but become instrumental in the cybernetic system of the computer. When the players enter this system in a game, they even become tactile. Also, the presentation of the self in a virtual game world where the avatar functions as both the instrument and the representation of the player, is bound to differ from other modes of identity construction. No doubt couplings between games and other cultural forms and behaviours could also be described (interactive television, arcades, animation and so forth).

In many contemporary games, a basic characteristic is the coupling of computer game and network. Single player gaming is simply put incomparable to the online, networked experience. Here, the players enter social relations and contribute actively to the game in various ways (including constructing objects in the game world, interface macros, fan fiction and even staging events in the game , e.g. battles, funerals and marriages). What is the nature of this social networking service and what cultural forms and behaviours does it transform?

To investigate this question, the article will analyze a particular manifestation of a network game: *Vampires*. *Vampires* is a game that takes place in the online social networking service Facebook. Many players will probably not

characterise *Vampires* as a game but just as part of their activities in Facebook. As a game, it is a highly stylised version of participants' everyday activities in the social network. The game thus distinguishes itself from games that contain networks (e.g. *World of Warcraft* or *Counter-Strike*). It is a network game, and more specifically a Facebook-game. To investigate the differences between different ways of coupling games and networks is not the object in this article. The aim, however, is to stress that the nature of the coupling does not merely lie in the network as a technology but in the culture of the network. To understand the true implications of the coupling we need to investigate this aspect. *Vampires*, in this sense, is an important game; not because it is similar to all games that couple game and network, but because it is a game that consciously reflects the network. The stylised version of network activities reveals something about the nature of the network it works within.

What becomes evident in *Vampires* is that the basic cultural form that is transformed is in fact the game itself. Based on Roger Caillois' theory of play and games in *Man, Play and Games* from 1958 (Caillois, 2001), the article will demonstrate how *Vampires* blurs the distinctions of a game. Furthermore, the article will argue that this is all but insignificant from a cultural perspective. By changing the game, basic cultural behaviours are transformed, predominantly the notion of sociality (in what way am I social when I play and engage in online social networks?), productivity (am I productive when I play?) and not least the distinction between public and private (to what extent does the game take place in a private, demarcated game space or a public setting?): in short, transformations that characterise what has formerly been labelled both 'the network society' (Castells, 1996) and 'late capitalism' (Jameson, 1984). Without going into detail about the vast theoretical implications of these terms, the overall prospect of the article is not to demonstrate *that* creative/immaterial labour is widespread (cf. Terranova, 2004), that we perceive networks both as a threat (as in terror networks) and the core organisational structure for politics, economics and culture (cf. Galloway & Thacker, 2007). Others have thoroughly investigated this. The analysis of *Vampires* in relation to a traditional notion of games will reveal *how* such a network culture can manifest itself.

What Is a Game?

The answer to this question has been approached in many different ways from many different angles (including applied mathematics, psychology and cultural theory). This article approaches the game as cultural phenomenon, discussing a) the cultural role of games and b) the formal elements of a game.

The Cultural Role of Games

Considering the cultural role of game, playing a game is primarily about fun and leisure (as also explored by not only Huizinga but also by Erwin Goffmann (Goffman, 1961) and Brian Sutton-Smith (Sutton-Smith, 1997)). As such, playing games is, as any type of play, a basic part of our very nature. A characteristic we share with other animals. Within the confined space of having fun the dog may assume the role of the angry attacker, but it is in fact just having fun, and every bite is not serious but just a

pretence. The purpose of this play can be considered a way of practising roles and behaviours.

As Brian Sutton-Smith and John Roberts have demonstrated in their ethnographic studies of the cultural role of play in 111 different societies (Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1971), this is not only true in the animal world. Societies concerned with natural resources are characterised by having competitive games, societies with higher complexity in their social structure are characterised by having strategy games, spiritual societies by games of chance and so on. Arguably, games in this way games may function as initiations, transforming the state of mind of the player, accustoming a child to the societal structures she must submit to when growing up. This perspective may be labelled 'rhetoric of play'. In a 'rhetoric of play', games are placed within a larger value system (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Perceived as 'rhetoric of play', the network game can be considered play practising the culture of the network, revealing and training fundamental characteristics of the network society. Considering social networks and games in a media theoretical perspective, one may assume that the networked game then will function as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have called not only mass media but also mass deception (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006). That all its players eventually will behave according to the value system the game prescribes. This, however, is not entirely true.

The game also has its own rhetoric. It addresses the player in a certain way.[i] Players will continuously evaluate the actions of play depending on the character and reputation of *who* is setting up the game (the ethos of the game). This can be an actual person or institution, but broadening Aristotle's rhetoric to a linguistic level, this *who* is also functioning implicitly within the semantic levels of language itself. As demonstrated by French linguist Emile Benveniste, one type of discourse is the discoursive. Here, the person speaking in the text will be present by, for example using first person. This directs the recipient's attention to the context of the enunciation and sets the reputation of the enunciator at stake. Another type of discourse, the historicising will refrain from using first person pronouns to direct attention away from the context towards objectivity and universality (cf. Benveniste, 1966). This use of language in a discourse not only applies to spoken and written text, but also to interface design. Evidently, instrumental 'work' interfaces will tend to be historicising seeking objectivity whilst game interfaces will tend to be more discoursive and context driven.[ii]

A game, in this sense, is a cultural expression through which social realities are not only experienced but also constructed and interpreted. Furthermore, the interpretation of the game will depend on the appeal of the game, its pathos, logos and not least its ethos.

Also *Vampires* may be considered a fun and consistent game (with pathos and logos) staging the value system of the network and thus letting the player practise the network. The game may almost function as an initiation into the life of the social networking service. Concerning the ethos of the game, however, the enunciation of the game is complex. The game establishes an inter-textual relationship with the literary world of the vampire (including not only Bram Stoker's *Dracula* but also the contemporary *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, in the sense

that vampires fight other monster creatures). From this perspective, the game seems to claim an allegorical relationship between the value system it is functioning within (the social networking service) and the value system of the vampire's world (which is, if anything, the opposite of a social system). The game is set up as a perfect version of the social networking service. This claim, evidently, is not to be trusted. An effect of these overt references is an awareness of the game's implicit director staging the events. This awareness of the implicit directing in the game is exactly what adds an atmosphere of fiction to the game. Thus, the game not only pretends to be subordinated to the value system of the network, it also frames its own enunciation as fiction. As such it does not offer us the truth but a fictional interactive simulation open for interpretation, and potentially opening a debate about the nature of the value system it addresses.

The Formal Elements of a Game

As demonstrated by game researcher Jesper Juul, games can be defined in many different ways, stressing different aspects of games (Juul, 2005, pp. 23-54). Evidently, games have changed over time and particularly they have changed when they became computer games. A reworking of the classical definition of games (as proposed by Juul) has therefore been much needed. The aim in this article is not to challenge Juul's definitions but to highlight how the classical notion of a game is even further challenged when the game is coupled with a network.

In his famous work *Homo Ludens* (*Man the Player*) from 1933 Johan Huizinga describes how play fundamentally is characterised by a separation from the work sphere. In short, play is not serious and without any profit or material interest. When playing, the sole purpose of the game is to open a room, controlled by certain rules that bind the players together: playing is leisure and not productive work. An important function of play is thus the social grouping. Through disguises, secrets and masked activities (all intrinsically linked to playing, where the players dress in a certain way marking their particular roles and have particular codes of conduct not easily understandable to outsiders), the players distance themselves from the outside and are bound together by play as their common activity (Huizinga, 1970, p. 13).

The French play theorist Roger Caillois in his book *Les jeux et les homes* (*Man, Play and Games*) from 1958 further elaborates on Huizinga's ideas. A game, according to Roger Caillois, is by definition a particularly formalised, 'ludic' type of play controlled by explicit rules that the player, for a limited period of time and at a particular place, voluntarily submits to. Caillois extracts a number of formal properties characterising the activity of gaming (and playing in a broader sense).

> […] the preceding analysis permits play to be defined as an activity which is essentially:
> 1. *Free:* in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
> 2. *Separate:* circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;

> 3. *Uncertain:* the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative;
> 4. *Unproductive:* creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;
> 5. *Governed by rules:* under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
> 6. *Make-believe:* accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or a free unreality, as against real life.
> (Caillois, 2001, p. 9)

Though Caillois manages to put his claim convincingly and straightforwardly, the subordination to these basic cultural elements of play is all but simple when considering *Vampires*. The fundamental elements of the game become dim and unclear. As it will be demonstrated in the following analysis, *Vampires* seems to train the player to the confusion and re-negotiation of these properties and their value within the social network.

What Is a Network Game (*Vampires*)?

When having a profile on Facebook, the user may use other services within the network. This includes sending messages, chatting, micro blogging (short text messages visible to friends in the network), commenting on other profile's actions and many other features. Some of these features are automatically present in the interface but some need to be added by the user. These features, labelled 'applications', are usually provided by third party producers and include a broad range of activities: 'walls' where one's friends can post comments, dating services, lists of ones tastes in music, text translators and much, much more. Many of these applications are games, or contain game like features. Finding 'applications' is usually not a problem. Users deliberately or unknowingly send out 'invitations' in the network, driving other users to participate in the application's activities.

So, *Vampires* is a game application in Facebook. As the name suggests, *Vampires* is about biting, sucking the blood of friends and fighting other vampire friends for points. Though traditional games like *Attack* (a.k.a. *Risk*) can be found in a Facebook version, *Vampires* seems to expose a logic intrinsically linked to the social networking service. In its structure it resembles many other games only found on Facebook as well as, in fact, many of all the other applications in Facebook. Though not explicitly listed as games 'dating applications' where users send virtual drinks to each other, or in other ways express their interest, are in many ways very similar to *Vampires*. Even though *Vampires* is listed as a game in Facebook, the game differs in fundamental ways, not only from more 'traditional' games that appear in Facebook versions (like *Attack*/*Risk*) but also from games in general. In the following, how the formal elements of *Vampires* differ fundamentally from a traditional understanding of a game's elements (in this case, expressed by the French play theorist Roger Caillois) will be analyzed.

According to Caillois' definition of play, the activity is characterised by being voluntary and ***free***. A game is a social activity that demands an invitation, permission or appointment. Permission to play can be granted, given or decided according to people's own free will. One may ask players to play football, ask if one can join a game or schedule a meeting. Nobody is forced. If any kind of force was involved, the sense of fun and leisure would immediately disappear and the game would seem more like work.

Vampires is also a voluntary activity, but only to a certain degree. If one wants to participate in the game, one simply needs to add the application to one's profile in Facebook. Most active players have added the application because a vampire has bitten them. When biting someone in the game, an invitation to join the game is automatically generated. Participation in the game thus only matches the notion of a voluntary activity to a certain degree. Of course, users who have been bitten may reject the invitation. Nonetheless, they have already partly abandoned their will to do so. Doing nothing in Facebook is not an option. This is an a priori to the network. As game researcher T. L. Taylor has pointed to "we increasingly live in a world in which opting out of technological systems is becoming more and more difficult" (Taylor, 2003, p. 10). A user's mere presence in the network thus suggests that the person already has accepted the command to participate in the activities of the social network – including the use of applications that can structure the users activities. The Facebook user is, in other words, always receptive to transform his or her presence into a goal oriented activity. In this way, *Vampires* seduces users who are unable to resist the temptation of a game.

A game is, according to Caillois, always restricted to a ***separate*** time and place of its own. One also says that the game has a sacred space or a 'magic circle' – a term borrowed from ritual magic. It takes place only within a reality of its own – at a particular place and for a given period of time. One does not enter the game before one crosses the magic circle by, for example crossing the chalked line of a football pitch. The game does not begin before the whistle blows and it runs only for a period of time (90 minutes) – only suspended when the rules are broken or the ball leaves the pitch.

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Also *Vampires* has a magic circle that the players may step into, in the sense that they can select the game application from their profile menu in Facebook. This

is where they play the game, where they bite, fight and keep track of their friends' scores. It is, however, also unclear where and when the magic circle of vampires begins: the temporal and spatial boundaries of the game are diffuse. *Vampires* neither begins nor ends but is a piece of software that runs 24 hours a day for ever (in theory). Even though the software application's interface is the designated space of the game, it potentially includes the whole network. This property is caused by the fact that the application – unlike most other computer games – contains very little direct manipulation and is characterised by a high degree of automation. The vampires the player chooses to fight, or the strangers that are bitten, are in other words not controlled by humans but by the software application itself. Defence against the attack of other vampires does not demand the presence of the user. The player may bite or fight users who are asleep on the other side of the globe and who haven't, so to speak, formally entered the magic circle. The game of *Vampires* is everywhere in Facebook.

In a game, the dim and complicated rules of everyday life are replaced by very concise rules. Games are, as Caillois puts it, ***governed by rules***. Within the magic circle of the game, the player knows who to fight and who to love. Though breaking rules may occur in a game, the rules remain explicit and the game prevails. For example, in a game of football, breaking the rule that states that kicking an opponent is prohibited still remains when the rule is broken. Breaking rules does not challenge the game itself. Only the nihilists, who refuse to accept the rules or follow their own rules, challenge the game and leave the players baffled. The game only makes sense within its own confines, and confronted with an intruder's lack of acceptance, the game leaves no room for counteractions. The nihilists destroy the game and the only option is to exclude them from the magic circle.

The rules of *Vampires* are simple. When the player chooses the application from the profile menu, the different actions the game provides are presented.

Figure 1: Menu of player actions on *Vampires*.

In short, the objective is to score points and get a high ranking. Points are scored by fighting another vampire (or other creatures from the paranormal world) or by biting an innocent friend. As only a certain amount of fights are allowed per day, friends that are not vampires can be fed to other vampires, giving the player an extra opportunity to attack. Points can also be scored automatically when the player is not present in the application. If the player is attacked by another vampire and wins the battle (because of superior strength (ranking) or simple luck), one scores points too. Similarly, when bitten friends accept the game (by installing the application), the overturned becomes part of a 'vampire army', eternally earning points for the player whenever he or she overturns new players. The game thus includes the logic of a vampire world into the game's dynamics.

From the point of view of the network, however, *Vampires* seems nihilistic, destroying the social rules of conduct. The social network is turned into the game-

board of a separate group of vampire-players who constantly bite the users or transform them into vampire fodder. The endless row of invitations thus function as a threat to the simplest rules of sociality: that relations are entered voluntarily on the basis of hospitality and invitation and not by neither invasion nor impersonal, involuntary invitations.[iii] This, however, is only partly true. The social network seems to accept this invasion because the game replaces the negation and destruction of ordinary social rules of conduct with the *production* of a new kind of network relation, created by invasion and diffusion.

According to Huizinga's definition of play there are no material interests involved, no profit can be generated from a game or a play (Huizinga, 1970, p. 13). As Caillois remarks, this is hardly true. Games like roulette or betting games are designed to reward (or ruin) the player economically (Caillois, 2001, p. 5). What seems to be a fact is that games, by definition, are ***unproductive***: "Property is exchanged, but no goods are produced", as Caillois concludes (ibid.). Games are thus ultimately a waste of time, resources, energy, knowledge and, ever so often, money. The resources one invests in a game of *Risk* may lead to huge armies that will eliminate the opponents, but when the game is over, nothing remains but the plastic pieces that will be wiped off the board by a single stroke of a hand. Despite the effort, nothing has been produced outside the magic circle of the game. In our ordinary conception of a game, the border between a game and its external environment is constituted by a distinction between production and non-production, between work and leisure.[iv]

Vampires is a game one plays because it is fun. It stimulates the simple desire in the player to compete, beat a high score or get a better ranking than one's friends. This production of points is, of course, unproductive. When leaving the computer behind, the player brings nothing from the game. Yet, from another point of view, the aimless leisure activity separated from ordinary life is highly productive.

The effect of the game activity outside the limits of the game is the constant reminder to others of the player's activity. These reminders seem invasive to the user of the network, threatening her with the rule of activity: she cannot choose not to do nothing in the network; this will render her socially dead. Social life in Facebook is, in other words, mediated by activities (including applications) that the user cannot refuse if she wishes to become part of the network. There is no life in the social network but leisure life mediated by an application. Hence, the threatening invitation of becoming an active vampire-player cannot be defined as all negative, something separated from a goal-oriented, productive life. The vampire invitation is actually an invitation to join and become alive in the network, creating and strengthening its nodes: to net*work*. The economy of the social networking service thus relies on a capitalisation of play and the overall idea of sociality as the basis of wealth.[v]

The course of a game cannot be given beforehand. Games are ***uncertain***, according to Caillois. If a result is given in a game of football in advance, or 'a game is fixed' in any other sports for that matter, it is clearly illegal. It disturbs the essentials of the game: any result must be the outcome of player actions.

Most computer games break with this notion of a game. Players always eventually always win when playing the computer. If not, they simply lower the

difficulty of the game or they plain and simply cheat. This is accepted behaviour. If they are playing other players, in a network game this is, of course, something else. The game cannot be fixed and the course of the game must be subject to the initiative of its players. In *Vampires* this is hardly the case. It does not take initiative to gain a high ranking in *Vampires*, only time. The ranking system thus directly reflects not the skills of the players, but the amount of time the players have wasted on the game. Paradoxically, this at the same time equals the sum of the player's productivity in the network.

Most games involve the imagination of a different world. They are ***make-believe*** as Caillois put it. A little girl playing can pretend that she is the doll, the doll a patient and the doll's house a hospital, i.e. she is playing *as if* she was someone and somewhere else. Playing with dolls cannot, of course, be characterised as a true game. It is just role-play with no strict rules governing the outcome. The rules formalising the play, however, also stress this element of make-believe (Caillois, 2001, p. 8)

One might say that a game is real because it is experienced in reality, as opposed to a book or a movie, which are both mediated experiences. If a foul is committed, a free-kick in football, e.g. it is not something the players imagine. The rules *have* really been violated and a play has been obstructed. The rules of a game must be obeyed and are therefore experienced for real. In spite of this, submitting to the rules also separates the player from the real world. The rules only apply under special conditions in *another* world. The player's behaviour is consequently 'a game'; something pretended and not necessarily obeyed in real life.

Is *Vampires* fiction or reality? In the game, players appear with their Facebook -profile names and may only use a predefined icon for their vampire profile. The game as such does not seem to encourage role-playing and make-believe. Even though the players actually do have the opportunity to role-play by using the game's chat feature and a discussion board, this particular kind of discourse seems to be absent. The players in general seem to stick to a discourse that stresses the game as real. Their focus is on getting a better ranking and not on becoming Dracula ("If you fight me, I'll fight you!").

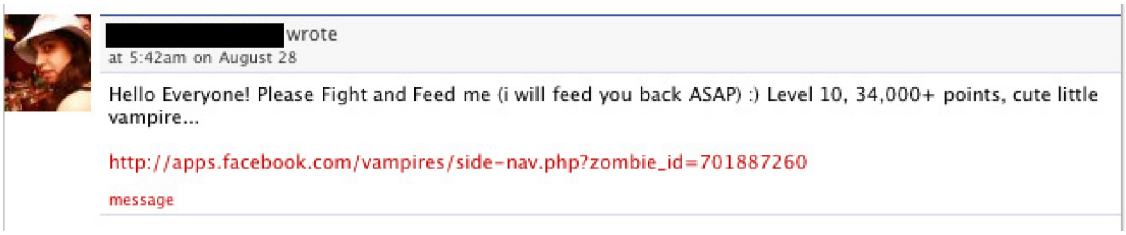

Figure2: Example from *Vampires* user forum, the 'Coven', demonstrating a user not role-playing.

Nothing in the game thus suggests that the players pretend that they are entering a different, make-believe world or assuming a different, make-believe profile. They are still just on Facebook and very few elements in the game lead them to think

otherwise. Perhaps they will not even think that they are playing a game, but simply consider the game a part of their network activities.

When opening the game application, players step into a fictional world of vampires and vampire rules of conduct. Here, within the magic circle of the game, the game's fictive rules become real. Unlike other games, however, this reality does not belong to *a different reality*. In a world where users constantly 'bite' each other by offering overwhelming amounts of invitations to participate in various network activities (adding applications, groups or friends), the fictional rules of the game have become reality.

At the same time, players do not even have to open the application to participate in the game's fiction. The application is open at all times and evolving in the network where friends become objects one can bite in the game without their acceptance or knowledge. The external reality of the game becomes the board of the game; reality becomes fiction.

When the distinction between fiction and reality becomes blurred it affects and dissolves the limits of the private, leisure sphere and a public, working sphere.

Traditionally, the fiction of a game is private in the sense that it is only shared by the initiated: the ones who have stepped inside the magic circle. A public, following the game as spectators, may of course observe this private game space. In this case, the contract between players and spectators is free, separate, governed by rules and unproductive, precisely as the game itself. The spectators are allowed to watch the game, but the game itself is vulnerable and no interference is allowed. Spectators must remain at a distance. *Vampires* is also exhibited to an audience, but in a very different way. The distance between players and spectators, between private and public, is changed. This change can be regarded from two interrelated angles.

First of all, from the point of view of the network and spectators, the publication of the players' private, fictional world is intrusive, and in this way very real. The spectators witness how the players, often during work hours, devote themselves to fiction and leisure activity. According to traditional work ethics, this is embarrassing. However, as much as this private performance of an ego seeking to get a higher rank in a social system is intrusive and embarrassing it is, as formerly addressed, also positive and productive from the public point of view of the network, creating and strengthening its nodes. In a social network culture it is positive and productive when private fiction becomes public reality.

Secondly, from the point of view of the player, the network becomes a private playspace where the fiction can evolve. The public in other words becomes private, and reality its fiction. This makes the player mighty. Unlike a traditional gaming situation, where the contract between players and spectators is established to protect the game and the players from intrusion of the real (a public spoiling the fiction, e.g.), it is the public, the network that is left vulnerable. The relation of power and control is reversed. The player is powerful and it is the public that must live with the threat of the private self-performance and networking activities. The public has an obligation to participate in the private but has absolutely no protective contract. In a social network culture, the public reality becomes private fiction and

all contracts protecting the public from the private, reality from fiction, are abandoned because they hinder the production of the network.[vi]

Conclusion

The analysis of *Vampires* and of the formal cultural characteristics of play in a social networking service demonstrate that the game is:
1) ***Involuntary***: In a social networking service, social life is obligatory and one cannot refuse its offers. The users are a priori tempted by the social activities and looking for a way to fulfil their needs to become socially active. They have to play and bailing out is not an option.
2) ***Ubiquitous***: In the social network, the staged social activity of a game is ubiquitous; it is offered everywhere and users participate automatically, even without having agreed to it, or while doing something else.
3) ***Viral***: Most network games are rule bound social play. The game in the social network also has rules (turns, moves, etc.). A basic rule, however, is the rule of being viral, spreading the social activity of play. This viral activity does not obey the traditional regulation of sociality, but is rather (because of its invasive nature) in opposition to the fundamental social rules of hospitality and invitation.
4) ***Productive***: Traditionally, the staged social activity is perceived as the opposite of productive work, as unproductive leisure, ultimately a waste of time and resources. In a social networking service, however, leisure becomes productive. Spreading the network by creating relations is not just an evil disease (a virus) that lures people into leisure and un-productivity. It is in itself a kind of production: net*working*.
5) ***Time-driven***: The result of a network game is not merely the outcome of player actions. Time is a factor, too. The amount of time actively participating in the game will be directly reflected in the outcome of the game, equalling the sum of the player's production of network.
6) ***Real (shifting the relation between public and private)***. In the social network, the reality of the public (the network and its participants) becomes the playspace of the private activity of the game players (the public becomes private). As objects in the game world, non-participants will witness the (imposing) leisure activity of the game participants. This private activity of play is not considered as invasive exhibitionism but as productive net*working*. The public thus has no choice but to accept the private self-performance and its status as props in a game reality (the private becomes public).

Returning to the initial question of this article, the question of what the coupling of game and network means, the answer appears anything but straightforward. It is not just a game between many players connected in an online social community that may or may not choose to play. The game changes the game, and blurs the distinction between game and network (is the network a game or is the game a network?). As demonstrated in the analysis, this has vast effects. Because activities in the social networking service are compulsory and because the game is ubiquitous, the game is able to use the network to proliferate.[vii] In doing so, it transforms the notion of a social network as built upon hospitality, the notion of leisure as being

unproductive and otherwise clear distinctions between public and private. The role of the network game in the network society (the rhetoric of play) can, from this perspective, be considered as a way of experiencing and appropriating the network society. By playing *Vampires*, the player appropriates the societal values of Facebook itself.

Vampires, however, is not simply subordinated to a larger value system. It is not just fun and leisure, pathos, within Facebook (that educates its players). It also has a value system of its own, a logos. It consistently applies the logos of the fictional world of vampires. It thus presents victims as not entirely innocent but driven by a fascination of the mystic vampire. Victims are unable to resist. A vampire's blood is infected suggesting the ability to spread geographically as well as persist over time. Vampires negate any expected sociality: they sleep at day and live at night, they live on the blood of others. They are playing games where man becomes a resource in the production of depraved life from blood, in a production of terror that nourishes the life of the livings' fascination with the eternal life of the virus. By existing in a shadow land where night, in the light of the full moon, becomes day, they even blur the distinction between fiction and reality. Haunted by creatures from this shadow land one can never be sure weather it is a dream or reality: a bite mark on the neck bears witness to both the human as an object in the game of the vampire (reality as part of fiction) and to the presence of a fictional, mystical creature in a human world (fiction as part of reality).

In this way *Vampires* reveals something. It functions as an allegory of the social networking service. This means that it is not a simulation of the network but a world that is presented as a highly stylised and perfect demonstration of the network. Perhaps ironically, this demonstration is structured in the image of a vampire society characterised by its epidemic and life-sucking nature. The validity of this 'vampire value system' can of course be questioned: it is not given that the true nature of a social network is a vampire world. The game may be accustoming the player to the larger value system of the social network but in doing so it uses fiction. In other words (considering the 'ethos' of the game) it cannot be trusted but is a fun and compelling demonstration of the social network, suggesting that its allegorical, perfect version is the anti-social world of the vampire. As such, it encourages a new debate on how games, when coupled with social networks, express fundamental characteristics of late capitalism and the network society.

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[i] Game researcher Ian Bogost has also labelled this rhetoric a 'procedural rhetoric', stressing the game's demonstrative powers. Other aspects of Aristotelian rhetoric can be applied too, as highlighted in this article.
[ii] This has been elaborated elsewhere (Andersen, 2009).
[iii] For a further elaboration on this notion of sociality one may consult Jacques Derrida's reflections on the notion of hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).
[iv] To the professional players – e.g. professional footballers - it is, of course, something else. They collect a wage when they leave the pitch because they have *not* merely played a game but also performed a work. In fact, Caillois remarks, playing is something they do elsewhere in their spare (leisure) time (Caillois, 2001, p. 6). Thus, leisure can be lucrative, in the sense that that the spectator may bet on a match winner, and working life may be leisure, in the sense that one can work as a footballer, but the distinction between work and leisure remains intact and constitutive to the game as a private leisure activity.
[v] Such thoughts, also labelling this kind of productivity 'immaterial labour', have been more thoroughly investigated by autonomist Marxists, including Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato and Tiziana Terranova.
[vi] This may not count for the social network alone but also for an experience culture as such; a culture that regards the interference of fiction in reality as valuable production.
[vii] This property also makes the games of the social networking services suitable for viral marketing. An example of this is the game *Parking Wars*, another Facebook application that in its structure resembles *Vampires* built on a reality TV show of the same name.