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Building Gaming Worlds: The Construction of TRPG Scenes

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BUILDING GAMING WORLDS

This a **midpoint analysis**
for a qualitative exploration
using **grounded theory** of
the socio-cultural spaces of
TRPG play and discourse,
presented as **metalogue**.

David Altheide & Christopher J. Schneider, *Qualitative Media Analysis (2nd ed)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013.

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1967.

Gregory Bateson, *Steps To An Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine, 1972.



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Building Gaming Worlds BEYOND SYSTEM MATTERS

The Other Side of the System Matters Coin

Thesis: Although The Forge community and the OSR differ in their approach to system, design, and experience, they share a foundational commitment to the idea that system matters. [maybe say what it matters for or say the commitment is to the idea that system and experience are inseparable, or something along those lines]



Bill White
Jul 23, 2020



What's the question or problem to which this is the answer?

Nicolas LaLone. "A Tale of Dungeons & Dragons and the Origins of the Game Platform." *Analog Game Studies* 3, no. 6 [online] (2019).

Nicholas J. Mizer. *Tabletop RPGs and the Experience of Imaginary Worlds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

William J. White. *Tabletop RPG Design in Theory and Practice at the Forge, 2001-2012: Designs & Discussions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

We began with an interest in how some TRPG communities were similar despite their differences.



Building Gaming Worlds BEYOND SYSTEM MATTERS

As we created our study protocol, we were still wrestling with questions about the relationships among concepts related to the **social configurations of RPG groups**.

Theorizing the TRPG Scene

Concepts Akin to Scene

- An “imaginary-entertainment environment” Mackay (2001)
- A fannish subculture McCallum-Stewart & Trammell (2018)
- A [geek] habitus Bourdieu (1977)
- A social network Wellman & Berkowitz (1988)
- An actor-network Callon, Law, & Rip (1986)
- An “art world” Becker (1982)
- A community of practice Wenger (1999)
- A dramatistic element Burke (1945)

Fan
Studies

Participatory culture

Jenkins (2006)

Gamer culture

Crawford (2012)
Paul (2018)

Gaming
Community

Communities of play

Pearce (2009)
Chen (2012)
Taylor (2018)

From William J. White, Nicolas LaLone, and Nicholas J. Mizer, *The Idea of Role-Playing: Prolegomenon to a Phenomenological Inquiry*. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association [virtual], April 2022.



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Building Gaming Worlds GOING INTO THE FIELD

Our purposively sampled **19 key informants** were mostly White⁽ⁿ⁼¹²⁾ males⁽ⁿ⁼¹⁵⁾ from North America, with a median age of 45^(min 24, max 58).

In addition to characterizing themselves as players, GMs, game designers, and writers, specific informants described their participation in role-playing gaming in these terms:

- **A game critic & archivist**
- **An OSR blogger/scenester**
- **A facilitator and mentor**
- **A game industry consultant**
- **A cultural consultant**
- **A semi-professional gamer**
- **Both a role-player and an academic**
- **“The independent RPG industry”**

Our “reflexive” interviews established that we are straight White middle-aged cis men from the US, “aca/fen” who have written about TRPGs in scholarly venues. We differ in our experience of role-playing as a creative pursuit.



Building Gaming Worlds GOING INTO THE FIELD

We can offer a **Latour litany** of the sociocultural entities identified by our informants:

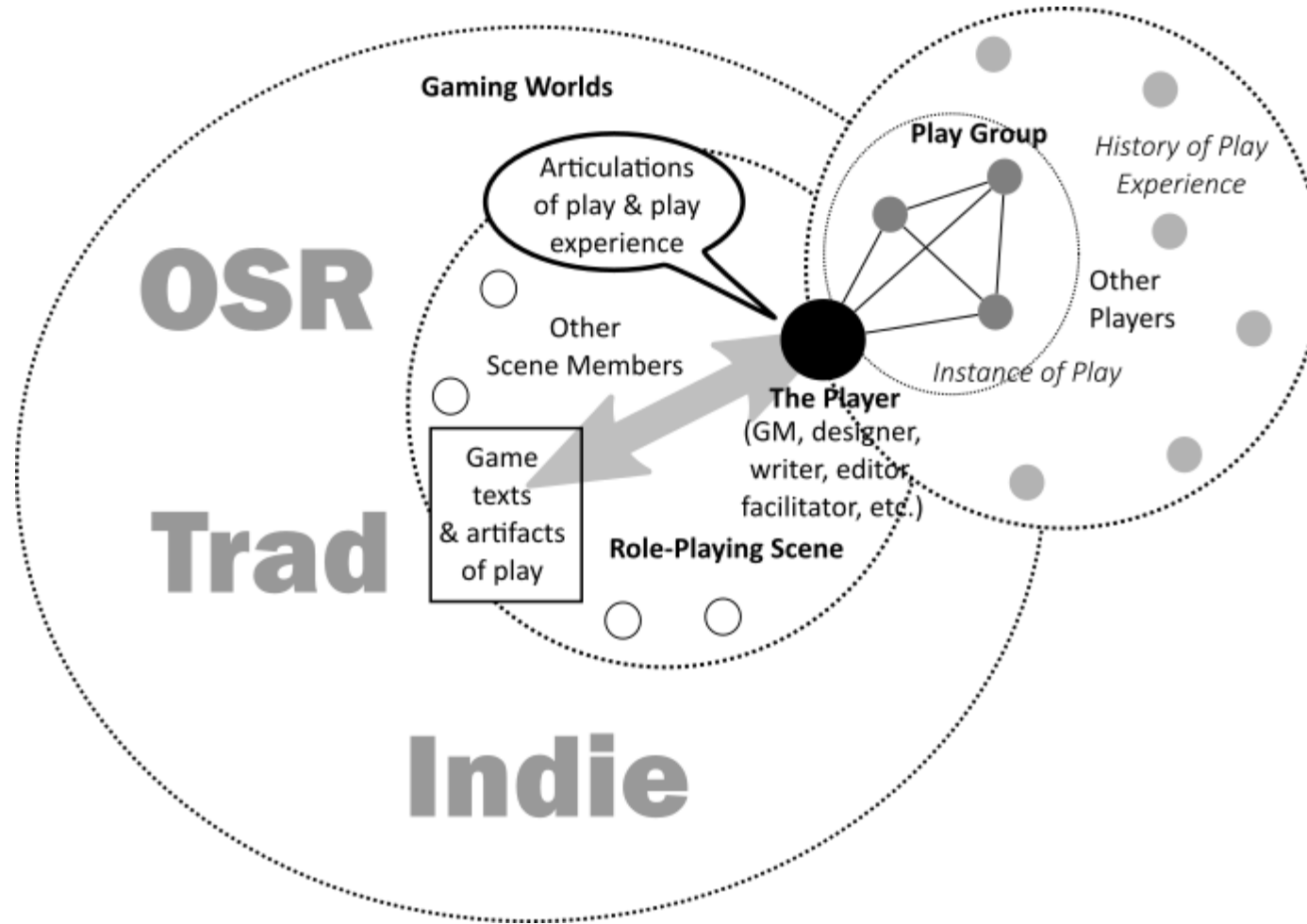
Actual Play, the Adventure Zone, AkadaCon, American freeform, artpunk OSR, the Ashcan Front, Big Bad Con, boffer larp, the broader Albuquerque gaming scene, Burning Con, Camp Nerdly, ChupacabraCon, Critical Role, D&D, DCC, Double Exposure, Dragonsfoot, Dreamation, DriveThruRPG, East Coast gamers, Fastaval, the Forge, forum roleplay, the Foundry, freeform digital role playing, Friends at the Table, G+, game bloggers, game designers, the game jam scene on itch.io, game scholars, Games on Demand, the Gauntlet, Golden Cobra, Goodman Games, the Indie Game Developers Network, indie games, the Indie Games Reading Club, an indie/larp design scene, IRC groups, itch.io, KublaCon, LARP, lyric games, Magpie Games, Metatopia, neo-trad games, the new OSR, Nordic larp, old school gamers, old school GMs, the OSR, OSR-descended games, pbtA games, the post-Forge post-G+ diaspora, private Discords and Slacks, queer D&D, queer indie tabletop Twitter, Roll20, RPGGeek, RPG Pub, the RPG Site, RPG.net, Secrets of Blackmoor, Story Games, the story games movement, straight D&D, trad gaming, SWORDDREAM, wargamers, West Coast gamers, West Marches campaigns, western Massachusetts RPG designers, Wizards of the Coast, the World of Darkness

Ian Bogost. *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.



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Building Gaming Worlds MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA



Mizer: ...by gaming world, I mean those big three things that everyone, or nearly everyone, seems to agree on. We've got a remarkably high level of intercoder reliability that there is a thing called the OSR. There's a thing called trad gaming, and there's a thing called indie gaming. If I distinguish those from all the other groupings that people have mentioned, we could say that, that these gaming worlds are broad ideational commitments. Then once you combine that with material practices and add in a particular social network of people, then you're dealing with a scene.



Building Gaming Worlds CONCLUSION

We want to **describe some TRPG scenes** and the changes they've experienced as well as **outline the gaming worlds** they draw upon. In moving forward from this point, we will focus on identifying scenes that **challenge our situated experience** and give us a sense of the impact of generational shifts, technological changes, and the articulation of new ideas about role-playing.

William J. White, Nicolas LaLone, and Nicholas J. Mizer, "At the Head of the Table: The TRPG GM as Dramatistic Agent." *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies*, no. 3 (2022).



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