thy, and communication skills through everyday, unstructured interactions with siblings and peers.

In general, many Western educators, psychologists, other social scientists, and practitioners associate learning in childhood with activities occurring in school or other settings in which adults deliberately instruct children. Many university students associate the study of learning in childhood with information processing, cognitive, or developmental psychology. Yet, anthropological research on learning has advanced significantly since the mid-twentieth century. As Lancy, Bock, and Gaskins’s book reflects, this scholarship has resulted in a fundamental reformulation of learning including its evolutionary significance, what children learn, and how learning takes place in diverse cultural contexts.

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Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds
Celia Pearce and Artemesia
Forwards, illustrations, references, index. 327 pp. $29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780262162579

Celia Pearce’s Communities of Play is a fascinating, wide-ranging study relevant to anyone interested in online games and worlds, ethnography, or game studies. The book tells the story of a group of players who originally met in the massively multiplayer online game (MMO) Uruprologue and their efforts to stay together after the game closed. This work is significant for three major reasons. First, it is a study of the processes that give rise to emergent behavior in MMOs, a topic of relevance to both game designers and sociologists. Second, the book is also one of very few studies addressing how a virtual world’s closing affects its players. Finally, it contains an insightful analysis of the perks and perils of doing ethnography in an online community, an analysis that is invaluable for anyone considering a similar project.

Uruprologue was intended as the beta test for Urulive, an MMO set in the popular Myst universe. Urulive was canceled before release, however, and Uruprologue closed on February 9, 2004. This closure marked both the end of the beta test, the cancellation of Urulive, and the birth of what Pearce refers to as the “Uru Diaspora,” a group of players who now inhabit other online spaces but still identify as Uru-vians (p. 93). The book focuses on how one particular group of players known as “The Gathering of Uru” (TGU) reacted to the closing and attempted to stay together.

One notable theoretical tool Pearce defines early in the book is a continuum of online game types, with “fixed-synthetic worlds” (such as Uru and World of Warcraft) at one end and “co-created worlds” (such as There.com and Second Life) at the other. In the former, users have few content-creation tools, while the latter emphasize user-created content. Pearce’s continuum provides a useful means of analyzing how the emergent social behavior occurring in an MMO is shaped by the affordances and constraints placed on
ness. The book is nearly as much about the process of ethnography in an MMO as it is about TGU.

Perhaps the most enjoyable section of the work is book 4, which contains a series of journal entries in which Pearce narrates her experiences throughout the study. This section makes for interesting and engaging reading, and it gives great insight into the dynamic process of ethnography. One entry, “The Crises,” stands out. It recounts a time when a local journalist interviewed Pearce about her work studying TGU. Members of TGU disliked the article, and Pearce had to spend much time and effort repairing relationships with group members. This incident caused Pearce to alter her approach, prompting her to take a more active and involved role in the group rather than simply observing it from a distance.

As a whole, Communities of Play is a multifaceted work that touches on many fields and disciplines yet remains interesting throughout. The book’s main weakness is structural. The book’s topical organization makes it somewhat difficult to follow the exact history of TGU. The fact that Uru has reopened and reclosed twice after the original closure of Uru Prologue compounds this problem. Readers would be well served to familiarize themselves with the timeline of events surrounding Uru before diving into the book. Such an effort would be worthwhile, however, for the book is a major contribution to the study of games and online communities, both as research and as a reflection on the process of research.

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