Sherry Turkle

• Notable publications:

• Background in psychology

• Methods: psychoanalytic theory, ethnographic observation

• Teaches at Science, Technology and Society dept at MIT
Video Games and Computer Holding Power

• Video games offer insight into the holding power of computers
  - How they will be (have been) significant in daily life and how we will (we have) come to live with them
  - (thinking tool or “evocative object”)

• Video games offer players a new perspective on the self, and access to social/psychological roles not otherwise available to them
  - (So does role-playing in general – “playing out” of multiple identities)
• Computer holding power: intimacy with machines
  - Interactive computer microworlds
  - Magic machines in which anything is possible but everything is rule-bound
  - Video games as catharsis, release
  - Exploration and ultimately mastery of the rules enables control
  - Losing oneself, altered states
  - The “perfect” (invariant) contest/mirror
  - Pressure/concentration/relaxation/catharsis
• The rhetoric of the time warned of the dangers of video games
  – Addiction
  – Escapism
  – Non-productivity
• Tension between culture of calculation and culture of simulation
  
  – CALCULATION: programmers and the traditional use of computing machines
    • Transparency, nuts and bolts
    • Computers as tools
    • Computers perfectly reflect human competence (do they?)

  – SIMULATION: games, microworlds, metaphors (e.g. “desktop”)
    • Opacity
    • Computers as interfaces
    • Computers as counterparts/companions (symbiosis)
• NM’s remarks about story:
  - In most arcade games, “story” has little influence
  - Adults consider story irrelevant while children will project themselves into the characters, but this has little effect on gameplay
    • Pinball is a ball, flippers and bumpers – how much does the narrative add to the game?
    • Pong was originally featureless rectangles on a screen. Modern-day Pong clones tend to try to work in fancy graphics in order to produce a setting or story.
    • Even arcade-oriented Peggle describes progressing through each repetitive level as a “quest”
  - NM claims that designers miss the mark when they think they can make action-based games that “people clearly do not play for narrative reasons” better by adding story:
    • Agree? Disagree? Do people just get sick of the novelty of an action-based mechanic after a few years and demand something more? What about the increasing popularity of RPS?