Klagenfurter
Beiträge zur
Visuellen Kultur
Band 5

Digitale Spiele

Jörg Helbig
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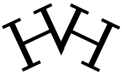
(Hrsg.)

HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG



Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.ddb.de abrufbar.

Jörg Helbig / René Reinhold Schallegger (Hrsg.)
Digitale Spiele
Klagenfurter Beiträge zur Visuellen Kultur, 5
Köln: Halem, 2017

Die Reihe *Klagenfurter Beiträge zur Visuellen Kultur* wird herausgegeben von Jörg Helbig und Rainer Winter.

ISSN 2197-0602

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ISBN (Print): 978-3-86962-158-6
ISBN (PDF): 978-3-86962-159-3

Den Herbert von Halem Verlag erreichen Sie auch im Internet unter http://www.halem-verlag.de
E-Mail: info@halem-verlag.de

SATZ: Herbert von Halem Verlag
GESTALTUNG: Claudia Ott Grafischer Entwurf, Düsseldorf
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KLAGENFURTER BEITRÄGE ZUR VISUELLEN KULTUR

Jörg Helbig / René Reinhold Schallegger (Hrsg.)

Digitale Spiele

HERBERT VON HALEM VERLAG

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JÖRG HELBIG / RENÉ REINHOLD SCHALLEGGER

Digitale Spiele: Grundlagen, Kontexte, Texte. Einleitung

Die Produktion von digitalen Spielen ist seit der Jahrtausendwende zur wirtschaftlich bedeutendsten Kulturindustrie im westlichen Kulturraum aufgestiegen, indem sie sowohl die Film- als auch die Musikindustrie mit ihren Umsätzen und Einnahmen abgehängt hat. Gleichzeitig hat sich auch die Demografie der Spieler nachhaltig gewandelt: Gamer sind heute fast ebenso oft weiblich wie männlich, und die größte Alterskohorte sind Personen über 35 Jahre. Man muss also konstatieren, dass Video- und Computerspiele in der Mitte der Gesellschaft angekommen sind und daher nicht mehr länger nur in einem jugendkulturellen oder gar subkulturellen Kontext gedacht werden können.

Parallel zu diesen gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen etablierte sich in der akademischen Landschaft das multidisziplinäre Feld der Game Studies. Durch das multimediale Wesen digitaler Spiele motiviert, bringen Forscherinnen und Forscher aus den unterschiedlichsten Fachrichtungen ihre Perspektiven und Kompetenzen bei ihrer kritischen Reflexion ein und spannen damit einen weiten Bogen von den technischen und Computerwissenschaften über die Medienwissenschaften bis hin zu den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. Nur gemeinsam scheint es zu gelingen, der Komplexität des Mediums, das eine zentrale Rolle in der von Henry Jenkins beschriebenen Konvergenzkultur einnimmt, gerecht zu werden.

Wie schon die ersten beiden Bände der Reihe *Klagenfurter Beiträge zur Visuellen Kultur* basiert auch der vorliegende Sammelband auf einer interdisziplinären Ringvorlesung, die im Wintersemester 2013/14 an der Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt stattfand. Ziel dieser Aufsatzsammlung ist es, unterschiedlichste Facetten digitaler Spiele als Form kulturellen Ausdrucks zu beleuchten. Ausgehend von einer Problematisierung der Grundlagen des Mediums und seiner soziokulturellen Verortung, soll eine Annäherung an mögliche Textualitäten und Kontextualisierungen erfahrbar gemacht werden.

Dementsprechend sind die Beiträge des Sammelbands in drei thematische Blöcke gegliedert. Im ersten Teil, ›Grundlagen‹, finden sich Aufsätze, die digitale Spiele beschreibbar und die speziellen Erfahrungen, die sie ermöglichen, sowie deren Design verständlich machen sollen. RENÉ REINHOLD SCHALLEGGER widmet sich in seinem Beitrag der Verortung des Mediums in seinem theoretischen Diskurs und stellt das notwendige begriffliche Werkzeug der Game Studies vor. Spiele werden von ihm als letztlich ethische, emotionale und intellektuelle Erfahrungen begriffen, die die Schaffenden und Spielenden gemeinsam in einer verantwortlichen Wechselbeziehung binden. Mit seiner Triade von Triaden schlägt er einen Rahmen zur Beschreibung dieser Interaktionen vor, der durch Systemdynamik, Avatarfunktion und spielerisches Erleben gebildet wird. GUNDOLF S. FREYERMUTH erweitert die im ersten Beitrag vorgestellten theoretischen Ansätze um den Aspekt der Praxis und der Theorie derselben. Er moniert ein doppeltes Schisma, das die Game Studies immer noch lähmt: zwischen sozialwissenschaftlichen und kulturwissenschaftlichen Zugängen einerseits und zwischen Theorien des zweiten Grades und denen des ersten, der Game Design Theorien, andererseits. Eine Integration beider zu einem theoretischen Gebäude des dritten Grades, einen adaptativen Zugang, sieht Freyermuth als einzig tragbaren Weg, um die Game Studies als eigenständige Disziplin nachhaltig zu verankern. ANDREAS LANGE betrachtet digitale Spiele als Kulturgut, die, wie schon andere ›neue Medien‹ vor Ihnen, etwa Filme oder Comics, einen langsamen Prozess gesellschaftlicher Anerkennung durchleben müssen. Neben dieser kulturellen Ebene beschäftigt ihn auch die technische Problematik der Bewahrung digitaler Kulturgüter, die seiner Meinung nach nur in Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Spieler-Community und traditionellen Kultureinrichtungen mit ihren etablierten Methoden zur Auswahl, Dokumentation und Kontextualisierung gelingen kann. Den Abschluss des Grundlagenteils bildet der Beitrag von CLAUDIA STREUSSNIG, MATTHIAS WIESER, PHILIPP HÜBNER, BERNHARD DIEBER und RAINER WINTER, der das interdisziplinäre Forschungsprojekt CROSMOS vorstellt. Dessen zentrale Fragestellungen sollen Wege aufzeigen, die von Freyermuth thematisierten Schismen in den Game Studies zu überwinden, indem sozialwissenschaftliche und technische Zugänge zum immer wichtiger werdenden Phänomen des Mobile Gamings diskutiert werden. Ziel ist es, eine holistische Herangehensweise an das Medium zu ermöglichen, da digitale Spiele aufgrund ihres Wesens ja schon mehrere akademische Disziplinen berühren.

Nachdem die Grundlagen einer wissenschaftlich fundierten Auseinandersetzung mit dem Medium etabliert sind, widmet sich der zweite Teil, ›Kontexte‹, dem Versuch, die Perspektiven unterschiedlicher Disziplinen sowie unterschiedliche Teilaspekte des Untersuchungsgegenstands vorzustellen. DANIEL MÄRKISCH und LINGQUI XIE untersuchen weniger Spiele an sich, als vielmehr die Spieler-Gemeinschaften, die sich um sie herum bilden. Als Sozialwissenschaftler interessieren sie sich für Strukturen, Organisationen und die Räume, in denen sie entstehen, und das nicht nur in Bezug auf die virtuellen Welten, die die Spielenden bevölkern. Märkisch und Xie gehen von einer wechselseitigen Beeinflussung aus, in der der Mensch seine Umwelt verändert oder erweitert und diese wiederum auf den Menschen als solchen verändernd zurückwirkt. FLORIAN KERSCHBAUMER betrachtet als Historiker die Auswirkungen der Digital Humanities auf seine Disziplin und wie diese die Auseinandersetzung mit Videospielen maßgeblich beeinflussen. Die Erschließung der Populärkultur und entsprechender neuer Methodologien werden in der traditionellen Geschichtswissenschaft tendenziell eher als krisenhaft wahrgenommen. Kerschbaumer argumentiert aber neben den Problemen, die sich durch die Referenzierung des Historischen in digitalen Spielen ergeben, auch mit den sich eröffnenden Chancen. Nicht nur das didaktische Potenzial, sondern der partizipative Charakter des Mediums und seiner Communities an sich sowie die Erfahrungen in der Bewahrung digitaler Kulturgüter, die hier gemacht werden, sind für Kerschbaumer zentral. DANIEL WUTTI erweitert das Spektrum der beteiligten Disziplinen um eine sozialpsychologische Sicht, mit der er besonders die Darstellung und Funktion von Gewalt in Videospielen betrachtet. Ausgehend von einer widersprüchlichen Studienlage stellt Wutti anhand von Beispielen aus Videospiel und Film dar, wie die voyeuristische Funktion der Gewalt von den ProduzentInnen bewusst eingesetzt wird, um ein Produkt am Markt zu platzieren. Besonders die Verwendung sexueller oder sexualisierter Gewalt beunruhigt Wutti, er verweist aber auch auf die Chancen, die der demografische Wandel hin zur Beteiligung von mehr Frauen an Produktion und Rezeption von Videospielen eröffnet. WOLFGANG HOI rundet den zweiten Teil mit seiner detaillierten

Betrachtung von Nintendos Aufstieg von einer lokalen Manufaktur hin zu einer globalen Marktmacht neben Sony und Microsoft ab. Besonderes Augenmerk legt er auf die gänzlich unterschiedliche Geschäftsphilosophie, die Nintendo von seinen beiden Mitbewerbern trennt: So sieht sich der Konzern zuerst als Spielzeughersteller, was sich auf Zielgruppe und Spielinhalte auswirkt. Das Unternehmen bietet seinen Kunden bewusst eine virtuelle zweite Kindheit, so Hoi, und vereint dabei Moderne und Tradition, japanische und westliche Ideen.

Die dritte und letzte Gruppe von Beiträgen versteht digitale Spiele als ›Texte‹. STEFAN KÖHLER hinterfragt in seinem Artikel das Wesen dieser ›Textlichkeit‹, das besonders durch Praktiken wie das Modding problematisiert werden muss. Nach einem geschichtlichen Abriss der Entwicklung des Moddings differenziert Köhler unterschiedliche Arten des Eingriffs in den Urtext und stellt dann aufgrund seiner Erkenntnisse Definitionen zentraler Begriffe sowie ein Klassifikationssystem zur weiteren Verwendung in der Forschung vor. Er versteht dabei seinen Beitrag auch als Aufforderung, den wissenschaftlichen Diskurs zu ›modden‹, um Fehler zu korrigieren und neue Perspektiven zu eröffnen. Die Arbeit mit konkreten Texten beschäftigt ASTRID EBNER-ZARL, die neben Videospielen auch Filme für Kinder auf die Darstellung von Geschlechterrollen untersucht. Ihre Analysen beruhen auf konkreten Fallstudien, die im Zuge des Forschungsprojektes *TraeX: Transmedia Extensions – Gender-sensitive Storytelling for Children* vorgenommen wurden. Ebner-Zarl stellt dabei ein großes Spektrum an Darstellungen fest – von emanzipatorischen bis hin zu stereotypen –, besonders aber interessieren sie scheinbar egalitäre Oberflächen, die auf tieferen Ebenen dennoch starre, traditionelle Geschlechterrollen vermitteln. Kleine Details und die generelle Dynamik einer Erzählung können so das Potenzial für geschlechtersensible Inhalte in transmedialen Erzählformen unterminieren. Für MIRIAM AUER machen Videospiele es auch möglich, alte Texte – in ihrem Beitrag klassische Lyrik – in neuer Form (wieder) zu erleben. Sie fordert deshalb die Ausbildung eines intermedialen Leseverständnisses, das ethische und empathische Videospielerfahrungen stützen kann. Abseits des Wunsches, die Welt zu verändern und die Zukunft zu verbessern, sieht Auer die direkte und indirekte Verwendung von Lyrik in Videospielen als Ausdruck des zutiefst menschlichen Bestrebens, die dunkelsten Kapitel unserer Geschichte im Prozess des Erfahrens aufzulösen.

Den Abschluss dieses Teiles bildet der Beitrag von TANJA RATTENEGGER, GERHARD RATTENEGGER und MICHAEL G. WAGNER. Sie berichten über die

Entwicklung und den praktischen Einsatz des Serious Games *playBENNO 2014*, das zur Stressprävention und zur Stärkung der Resilienz bei Kindern konzipiert wurde. Da Kinder beim bewussten Training ihrer psychosozialen Ressourcen und Bewältigungsstrategien eher geringe Motivation beweisen, eröffnet das Videospiel eine Möglichkeit, Spielen und Lernen unbemerkt miteinander zu verknüpfen. Serious Games im Allgemeinen werden von Rattenegger et al. als vielversprechender und effizienter Ansatz im Bereich ›Public Health‹ und insbesondere der Präventionsarbeit gesehen.

Jörg Helbig, René Reinhold Schallegger
Klagenfurt, November 2016

I. GRUNDLAGEN

RENÉ REINHOLD SCHALLEGGER

WTH Are Games? – Towards a Triad of Triads

1. Defining Games: Theories of Play and Games

According to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938), »[p]lay is older than culture«, and it is also »a significant function – that is to say, there is some sense to it« (1955: 1). Not only is it therefore not just a meaningless pastime, the author goes so far as to make it the motor of the development of human civilisation: »The great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start«, he writes, and concludes that language, myth, ritual, law, commerce, craft, the arts, even science, »[a]ll are rooted in the primaeval soil of play« (ibid.: 5).

The definition of play Huizinga gives hinges on five crucial features. First and foremost, it has to be *voluntary*, or as he puts it: »Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it« (ibid.: 7). What is essential is that it is only up to the player alone to decide when to play since »it is free, is in fact freedom« (ibid.: 8). This raises interesting questions about both Educational Games, where players are obliged to play, and the Gamification movement, where they are tricked into playing. Both of these also directly clash with Huizinga's second feature: Play has to be *disinterested*, separated from ›real‹ life, »a temporary activity satisfying in itself and ending there« (ibid.: 9). It must be utterly self-motivated and based on intrinsic rewards, not extrinsic goading or pressure. This separation from life, or primary reality, is not only a motivational one, it also extends into the third aspect of Huizinga's definition: Play must be *limited*, circumscribed in time and space, and this is what the author calls »its secludedness, its limitedness« (ibid.). Often there is a special place for play, but always it has a beginning and an ending. It is »the magic circle« that limits play (ibid.). Play that pervades all of existence would stop being play, it would just become part of life. The fourth dimension is that »[a]ll play has its rules« (ibid.: 11). An agreed upon set of regulations binds every player within the magic circle equally, establishing the principle of fairness. In a way, it is the *rules* that structure or even constitute the experience of play, and »as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses« (ibid.). Finally, play creates communities, groups of people who share the (literally) extraordinary frame of reference play has to offer. They are an in-group activity that automatically creates out-groups: »This is for us, not for the ›others‹«, Huizinga describes the tendency towards *secrecy* and separation from other groups (ibid.).

Openly building on his predecessor's conceptualisation of play as voluntary, disinterested, limited, structured and secret, Roger Caillois creates his own variation. In *Man, Play and Games* (1958), he reiterates Huizinga's claim that »play [is] present in or animating the essential aspects of all culture« (2001: 3). He then goes on to take up, clarify, and expand upon the five defining aspects in Huizinga's work, coming up with his own catalogue of six. Above all, play has to be *free*, non obligatory, or »it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion« (ibid.: 9). Secondly, it must be *separate*, »circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance« (ibid.). Caillois's third defining feature seems obvious, but it is his own original addition to Huizinga's criteria, fixing a major oversight in the latter's analysis: Play must be *uncertain*, so its result must not be predetermined or even attained beforehand. If there is no possibility for the player to impact the experience and its outcome, this is not play: there must be »some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative« (ibid.). This aspect is frequently hotly debated in relation to rather linear playing experiences, and some cases, such as the recently popular ›Walking Simulators', will be considered play by some and non-play by others with equally stringent arguments. In his last three features of play, Caillois again sticks close to the earlier definition. Play has to be *unproductive*, »an occasion of pure waste« (ibid.: 5), »creating neither goods, nor wealth« (ibid.: 10). It also has to be *structured*, or »[g]overned by rules« (ibid.) that suspend ordinary laws and bind all participants in a temporary covenant. Finally, play must occur in situations of *make-believe*, »accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life« (ibid.: 10).

Besides the addition of the necessity of interactivity for play to occur, Caillois's merits in establishing the foundation of what later would become Game Studies also includes his classification of games. Huizinga in his study only defines play, he does not consider a theory, let alone a classification of games. As his successor, again Caillois reacts to this research gap and suggests four types of games, based on the central concept that drives the experiences they provide. The first type of games is determined by competition, and the author uses the term *agôn* to designate it. These games are all about the recognition of skill and superiority, measured and compared amongst players. They establish ranks and hierarchies of success in »a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, [...] susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph« (ibid.: 14). The opposite to agonic games are those that rely only on chance, Caillois's principle of *alea*, and where the players' skill has no influence on the outcome. Here, »winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary« (ibid.: 17). The author sets up a strong dichotomy between the two principles in relation to the ideas of the self and its empowerment that are communicated: »Agôn is the vindication of personal responsibility; alea is a negation of the will, a surrender to destiny« (ibid.: 18). While all play through the prerequisite of entering the magic circle requires the acceptance of an alternate frame of reference for player (inter-)actions, games that rely on *mimicry* intensify this experience: they are determined by simulation, games of make-believe, and focus player energy on becoming someone else, becoming a character. »The pleasure lies in being or passing for another« (ibid.: 21), not to deceive but to open up a liberating space of carnivalesque otherness. Finally, after competition, chance, and simulation, games can also be driven by what Caillois calls *ilinx*, vertigo, the pure and simple exhilaration of freedom, disorder, even destruction. Going beyond the physical, »there is a vertigo of a moral order, a transport that suddenly seizes the individual« and »which is normally repressed« (ibid.: 24). This is a violent but pleasurable experience that speaks to the darker aspects of the human mind.

Almost half a century later, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman used the definitions and categorisations established by Huizinga and Caillois to create a comprehensive study of what games are with their *Rules of Play* (2004). They approached the issue from three different perspectives: games as sets of rules, or systems (SALEN/ZIMMERMAN 2004: 116); games as instances of play (ibid.: 298); and games as culture (ibid.: 502). In his article »Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline« (2004), Zimmerman distilled their ideas down to come up with definitions for these four terms essential to any academic understanding of games. This is especially relevant since the author diagnoses a »tremendous amount of interest in the intersection of games and stories these days« where »game developers increasingly rely on filmic story techniques in the design of their products« (ibid.: 154). Yet, Zimmerman does not claim to provide - or even aim to do so – a universally binding set of definitions. His four concepts »are ›things to think with‹; [...] they are frames and schemas for understanding; they are dynamic conceptual tools; they represent a network of ideas that flow into and through each other« (ibid.: 155). These tools allow for a viable description of the medium of videogames.

Already with the first of the four, *narrative*, the author enters difficult ground, as the game/story debate dominated much of the late 1990s and early 2000s. As will be explained later in more detail, the question was whether videogames constituted a ludic or a narrative medium. By the mere inclusion of the concept of narrative in his description of videogames, Zimmerman exposes himself to attacks from the opposing camp of critics, but he is quick to add that his inquiry is based on a »broad and expansive understanding of the concept« and that he needs it »to help uncover the common turf of stories and games« (ibid.: 156). The definition he works with is taken from J. Hillis Miller's *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (1995) and consists of three parts: (1) narrative knows »an initial state, a change in that state, and insight brought about by that change« (ibid.: 156); (2) it is »not merely a series of events, but a personification of events through a medium« (ibid.); and (3) its »representation is constituted by patterning and repetition« on both the conceptual and material level, in content and form (ibid.: 157). Narrative is therefore a representation of a fixed series of events in a linear medium, and the process of meaning-making the audience engages in with it is mostly based on reflection and interpretation of the presented material.

What fundamentally differentiates videogames from traditional, linear media and narratives is *interactivity*. Here Zimmerman adds a caveat that »perhaps all narratives can be interactive«, elaborating immediately, however, that videogames are still different, because »they can be interactive in different ways« (ibid.: 158). He then proceeds to subdivide interactivity »into the various ways it can be paired up with a narrative experience« (ibid.: 158), describing four modes of narrative interactivity. Mode #1 is

Cognitive Interactivity, or »Interpretive Participation with a Text« (ibid.). This encompasses all forms of »psychological, emotional, hermeneutic, semiotic, reader-response [...] kind of interactions« (ibid.). Mode #2, or Functional Interactivity, is even more basic. Also designated »Utilitarian Participation with a Text« by the author, Zimmerman uses it to subsume »functional, structural interactions with the material textual apparatus« (ibid.). This is about the literal ›handling‹ of the physical artefact that contains the information accessed, the act and strategies of ›reading‹ this artefact. Mode #3, then, is the one where videogames diverge in the quality of their interactivity from linear media such as written/printed text, film, or music: »Explicit Interactivity; or Participation with Designed Choices and Procedures in a Text« (ibid.) goes beyond physical manipulation of the container or the intellectual and emotional interpretation of the content of an artefact. Participation here means configuration of »choices, random events, dynamic simulations, and other procedures programmed into the interactive experience« (ibid.: 158). This is where the recipient becomes the player, where they actually get to affect the experience, not just take it in and process it. Mode #4 finally takes interactivity beyond the experience itself and is therefore rightfully termed »Meta-interactivity« by Zimmerman (ibid.). Also called »Cultural Participation with a Text«, the players here become active creators in their own right, and, as the author comments, the »clearest examples come from fan culture, in which readers appropriate, deconstruct, and reconstruct linear media, participating in and propagating massive communal narrative worlds« (ibid.). While Zimmerman's categories are pertinent and useful in any attempt to grasp the specificity of the gaming experience in comparison to the reception of linear media, the more logical sequence seems to be to go from Functional Interactivity, to Explicit, Cognitive, and eventually Meta-Interactivity, following the process of handling, playing, interpreting and disseminating games and their contents.

As explicitly interacting with a game constitutes the heart of playing, Zimmerman then goes on to first differentiate between different kinds of *play* before offering a definition. He describes three nested general categories of play, or as he puts it: »the latter categories contain the earlier ones« (ibid.: 159). From most to least specific, these are Game Play, Ludic Activities, and Being Playful. Game Play, or »the Formal Play of Games« is »the focused kind of play that occurs when one or more players plays [sic] a game« (ibid.). Even if the definition itself seems a bit of a tautology, the essential differentiation here is constituted by »formal« and »focused«. Playing a game is a strongly focused activity where players explicitly interact with a heavily formalised, rule-based structure. Increasing the degree of freedom for the participants, Ludic Activities, or »Informal Play«, are all »nongame behaviours that we also think of as ›playing‹«, and Zimmerman adds that they »are quite similar to games, but generally less formalized« (ibid.). Game Play and Ludic Activities are less different in kind but more in degree, the degree of formalisation to be precise. On the other end of the spectrum, the author situates Being Playful, or »Being in a Play State or Mind« (ibid.). While the configuration of a formalised game constitutes Game Play, and any act of playing Ludic Activities, this last category encompasses »all of the ways we can ›be playful‹ in the context of other activities«, or simply »injecting a spirit of play into some other action« (ibid.). From artefact to action to state of mind, the formal aspect decreases as the focus of the definitions shifts to different aspects of the experience in question.

Zimmerman elegantly accounts for the protean nature of his subject of inquiry with the overarching definition he proposes: »Play is the free space of movement within a more rigid structure. Play exists both because of and also despite the more rigid structures of a system« (ibid.). Pointing beyond the mere necessities of a definition to describe the experiences and media Game Studies focus on, the author here opens up whole new fields of conceptual, philosophical, social and political meanings of play. Well aware of his implicit positioning, Zimmerman clarifies: »This definition of play is about relationships between the elements of a system«, and ultimately »the free movement within [a system], in the interstitial spaces between and among its components« (ibid.). His final movement clearly echoes Linda Hutcheon's *Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) and her »paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique [...] that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces« (HUTCHEON 2000: 11). Zimmerman concludes: »Play exists in opposition to the structures it inhabits, at odds with the utilitarian functioning of the system. Yet play is at the same time an expression of a system, and intrinsically part of it« (2004: 159). This relates play to Postmodernism and its ludic turn, the rising cultural impact of ludic, participatory artefacts that exist in an unresolved tension between criticism and commercialism, supporting and subverting the systems they inhabit.

Using the foundations laid by Huizinga, Caillois, and others, the work done by Salen and Zimmerman has contributed considerably to our understanding of what *games* are, how they function, how players interact with them, and how they interact with their socio-cultural context. The result is a very compact definition: »A game is a voluntary interactive activity, in which one or more players follow rules that constrain their behaviour, enacting an artificial conflict that ends in a quantifiable outcome« (ibid.: 160). A closer look at the key components of this highly distilled quintessence of their deliberations can help the reader understand their implications and ramifications.

Since a game has to be, above all, voluntary, players interacting against their will with a game-like artefact are not playing a game. As with Huizinga's and Caillois's definitions, this has fundamental consequences for Educational Games, or any other setup where the players are not participating because they choose to do so out of their free will. Taken to its extreme, this definition would actually mean that ›Gamified‹ systems that use the – in neutral terms – motivational power of games to make people perform actions they would not otherwise engage in cease to be games as well, even if they look and feel like games. Zimmerman actually puts it in rather strong terms: »If you're forced against your will to play a game, you're not really playing« (ibid.).

The second fundamental element games require to be games is interactivity, or explicit interactivity to be more precise. Functional, Cognitive, and Meta-Interactivity also happen in or with linear media, it is the configurational intervention of the player in the game-state that differentiates games and other ludic media from them. Interactivity alone is not enough, as, harking back to his three categories of Play, Game Play can only happen when player interactivity is constrained and regulated by rules: «All games have rules«, Zimmerman writes, »[t]hese rules provide the structure out of which play emerges« (ibid.). If the will to play, the opportunity to interact, and a set of constraining rules converge, but the stakes and rewards of the resulting experience lie mainly in primary reality, Huizinga's magic circle is broken and Game Play collapses. Games are inherently defined by their artificiality, they must »maintain a boundary from so-called ›real life‹ in both time and space« (ibid.). Russian roulette is therefore not a game, and despite all of its deeply ludic elements, neither is the stock market. Real lives are at stake here, real existences can be made or unmade. These activities happen outside of the magic circle, they can therefore happen in a playful state of mind, for as long as they last, but they can never be games.

If anything in Zimmerman's definition offers itself as a weak point, it is certainly his conception that it is conflict alone that drives games, or as he explains: »All games embody a contest of powers« (ibid.). Cultural critics might connect this absolute claim to the author's own socio-cultural context, as competition and conflict have been constituting elements of much of US-American culture from the moment of its inception in Revolution (itself an act of supreme competition and conflict). But if one looks beyond the narrow sense of the terms ›conflict‹ and ›contest‹, the strictly agonistic nature of games Zimmerman seems to imply can also be understood as a more neutral negotiation between diverging interests, an existential challenge to overcome, or the establishing of a stable new state after a state of chaos. This would allow for the inclusion of co-operative games that, especially also in the area of boardgames, have garnered a steadily growing player base in recent years. In any case, as games are circumscribed events in space and time, they have to end, and there will be a quantifiable outcome: »At the conclusion of a game, the participants either won or lost (they might all win or lose together) or they received a numerical score, as in a videogame« (ibid.: 160-161). This is closely related to another essential element of games: they are based on feedback.

Even if it is the most basic form of feedback (victory/defeat), they will let players know how successfully they have interacted with the system, according to the parameters decided upon by the designers. The motivation to play has a large impact on the experience of ›success‹ individual players will have, however, and it may diverge considerably from the designers' intended and therefore implemented definition. Even a ›losing‹ feedback according to the design of a game, the death of the player's avatar i.e., can have aspects of a ›winning‹ experience for the player, and vice versa. This potential *décalage* between the quantified outcome and the intellectual and emotional experience attached to it is not included in Zimmerman's definition of games, which is purely design-centred in this respect. This strong orientation towards the designer and the process of design can also be seen when the author argues that »[t]o create a game is to design a set of game rules (as well as game materials, which are an extension of the rules)« (ibid.: 161).

In a way, the understanding of games Salen and Zimmerman have established is based on a binary: »[P]lay is the opposite of rules. Rules are fixed, rigid, closed, and unambiguous. Play, on the other hand, is uncertain, creative, improvisational, and open-ended« (ibid.). Games are described as dynamic systems, »as narrative systems, or as interactive systems, or as systems of play« (ibid.) that bring together freedom and constraints, player and designer, the ludic and the narrative, and for Zimmerman the leading question should be: »How can we capitalize on the unique qualities of games in order to create new kinds of game-stories?« (ibid.: 163). It is this question that the discipline of Game Studies has been trying to answer for several years now.

2. Studying Games: Central Concepts of Game Studies

Game Studies as a discipline, or rather a trans- and interdisciplinary field of research, are a fairly recent development. They coalesced during the late 1990s when two camps of critics opposed each other, arguing for two (seemingly) conflicting perspectives in how to approach the medium of videogames.

This debate pervades Gonzalo Frasca's article »Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other Trivial Issues« (2004), and the author himself implicitly takes sides when he writes:

> »The ›interactive drama/storytelling/narrative‹ paradigm has been the leading design guide in most current videogame design, supported by such theorists as [Brenda] Laurel and Janet Murray (MURRAY 1997) and by the videogame industry. It seems that the current tendency is to explain the computer (and videogames) as an extension of a previously existing medium« (FRASCA 2004: 85).

This line of argumentation, whose central text is considered to be Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), sees videogames in continuation with earlier narrative media, claiming that the toolset and methods of narratology can be applied to analyses of this new medium, if in adapted form. Consequently, critics supporting these assumptions were known as Narratologists. On the other side of the conflict, for this is what the scholarly debate unfortunately turned into (cf. WARDRIP-FRUIN/HARRIGAN 2004), stood the self-proclaimed Ludologists. They argued that games are an inherently new and different medium, and that all previous approaches (such as literary theory, film theory etc.) cannot and must not be used, but that »as Espen Aarseth argues (AARSETH 1997), it is necessary to study games through a cybernetic approach« (ibid.: 86).

This irreconcilable divide – which was most aggressively fuelled by the Ludologists – is also expressed by the sharp dichotomy Frasca sets up between narrative and games. While he describes the former as static in nature, as »a fixed series of actions and descriptions« (ibid.), videogames are dynamic and determined by interactive, cybernetic participation. »Narrative«, he elaborates, »is based on semiotic representation, while videogames also rely on simulation, understood as the modeling of a dynamic system through another system« (ibid.). So representation and interpretation on the one hand encounter simulation and configuration on the other. Due to this fundamental difference in process, Frasca also associates narrative with the past, »while simulation is about what could happen« and therefore the present and (possible) futures (ibid.). All of this then sets up two different kinds of ideal use for the media concerned: »Because of its static essence, narrative has been used by our culture to make statements. We explain, understand and deal with reality through narrative. […] The potential of simulation is not as a conveyor of values, but as a way to explore the mechanics of dynamic systems« (ibid.). And Frasca concludes: »Simulation is an ideal medium for exposing rules rather than particular events« (ibid.: 87). This systemic, simulational, explorational focus in games defines their unique quality, and it is thus that Ludologists refuse the application of the analytical tools developed for earlier (narrative) media whose representational, hermeneutic, and interpretational nature makes them incomparable to them.

Another, essential aspect to how games reflect (on) reality in different ways from linear narratives, is that they are »a kaleidoscopic form of representation that can provide us with multiple and alternative points of view« (ibid.: 93), as Frasca rightly points out. Ironically, he adds: »Hopefully, this might lead to the development of a tolerant attitude that accepts multiplicity as the rule and not the exception« (ibid.), a mind-set that many of his Ludologist colleagues sadly lacked when discussing the development of Game Studies with scholars whose perspectives differed from theirs.

In spite of all the shortfalls and problems of Frasca's proposed dichotomy between narratives and games, it can provide a viable frame of reference, a sounding of extreme points in how games and narrative can relate to each other and the different opportunities they offer for expression and reflection. At a closer look, his seemingly simplistic and antagonistic argument also shows hints of the more differentiated and inclusive attitude he hopes for from games, such as when he writes that »videogames also rely on simulation« (ibid.: 86; my emphasis), implying a co-existence of multiple layers of communication and expression. This moves him away from a strict either/or and more towards a lenient both/and, a movement that finds a convincing resting point in Henry Jenkins with his essential contribution to the Ludologist/Narratologist debate, and the establishment of Game Studies as a discipline.

»[A] blood feud threatened to erupt between the self-proclaimed ludologists, who wanted to see the focus shift onto the mechanics of game play, and the narratologists, who were interested in studying games alongside other storytelling media« (JENKINS 2004: 118), this is how the author describes the situation during the late 1990s and early 2000s. His position is located on a middle-ground between the two extremist camps, and his intention is to provide a framework »that respects the particularity of this emerging medium – examining games less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility« (ibid.: 119). This spatial metaphor for and conception of videogames has since become a mainstay of Game Studies and how they talk about the medium. Jenkins explains: »Specifically, I want to introduce an important third term [beyond narrative and game] into this discussion – spatiality – and argue for an understanding of game designers less as storytellers and more as narrative architects« (ibid.: 121).

While not all games tell stories, many do, he argues, and »[g]iven those narrative aspirations, it seems reasonable to suggest that some understanding of how games relate to narrative is necessary before we understand the aesthetics of game design or the nature of contemporary game culture« (ibid.: 119). His strategy aims at two groups in particular, players and designers. As far as the player experience is concerned, Jenkins supports a move to »foster diversification of genres, aesthetics, and audiences, to open gamers to the broadest possible range of experiences« (ibid.: 120), while game designers »need to be retooled in the basic vocabulary of narrative theory« (ibid.). At the same time, he does not deny the essential contribution of the Ludologists: »The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story«, he argues, and »the ludologists' insistence that game scholars focus more attention on the mechanics of game play seems totally in order« (ibid.). Narratological and ludological competences have to converge to produce a critical frame of reference, a terminology, and a methodological toolbox that can do the complex medium of games justice: »We must, therefore, be attentive to the particularity of games as a medium, specifically what distinguishes them from other narrative traditions« (ibid.).

Jenkins proceeds to propose a categorisation of four possible ways narrative content can interrelate with a ludic structure in videogames, as

»[g]ame designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces« (ibid.: 121). These ›Four E's‹, as one could name them according to the initial letter their descriptors share, are especially helpful to think about the creation and experience of ludo-narrative spaces. On a first level, games can be Evocative Spaces, using evoked narratives to »draw upon our previously existing narrative competencies« (ibid.: 123). Here, remediated pre-texts (of any medium) or broad genre conventions serve as foundations for new experiences, following the general cultural logic of Convergence Culture (cf. JENKINS 2008): »increasingly, we inhabit a world of transmedia storytelling, one that depends less on each individual work being self-sufficient than on each work contributing to a larger economy« with »each [medium] doing what it does best« (JENKINS 2004: 124). The contribution games can make to such dispersed narratives or narrative ecologies »will almost certainly center around their ability to give concrete shape to our memories and imaginings of the storyworld, creating an immersive environment we can wander through and interact with« (ibid.).

Secondly, games can be seen as Enacting Stories through player interaction. This happens on the macro-level of »broadly defined goals or conflicts« and on the mico-level of »localized incidents« (ibid.). The player's navigation and configuration of the game space is motivated by narrative elements as well as the design of the space itself. Organising such a space for enacted narrative relies on techniques such as »setting and varying the rhythm of game play through features of the game space« (ibid.: 125). Alternating between fixed plot points, also known as the spine of a game, and enough room for player choice, »between performance (or game play) and exposition (or story)« (ibid.), an experience is created that remains recognisable and comparable as ›the same‹ between different actualisations of the content, while also acquiring aspects of ›my own‹ for every player enacting the spatially encoded narrative. A successful and satisfying balance between the centrifugal and centripetal forces inherent in such a set-up are what makes for ›good‹ game design: »trying to determine how much plot will create a compelling framework and how much freedom players can enjoy on a local level without totally derailing the larger narrative trajectory« (ibid.: 126).

Thirdly, games provide content that is disseminated across the possibility space they open and that could be termed Embedded Narratives. Acknowledging more active theories of narrative comprehension and interpretation, such as reader-response theory, Jenkins describes them as »an active process by which viewers assemble and make hypotheses about likely narrative developments on the basis of information drawn from textual cues and clues« (ibid.). All recipients (listeners, readers, viewers) create what he calls mental maps, but in addition to this cognitive interactivity, to use Zimmerman's terms, participants (players) »are forced to act upon those mental maps, to literally test them against the game world itself« (ibid.). The distribution of information across game space allows the designers a certain amount of control over the process of narrative participation, and, in reference to art director and concept designer Don Carson, Jenkins argues that »part of the art of game design comes in finding artful ways of embedding narrative information into the environment without destroying its immersiveness and without giving the player a sensation of being drug around by the neck« (ibid.: 127). The skillful dissemination of embedded narratives to motivate, guide, and reward the player without breaking the magic circle is one of the central tools in a game designers repertoire.

When evoked, embedded and enacted narratives come together, and the player willingly and successfully immerses in the game world, what they create is an experience Jenkins names Emergent Narratives: »Emergent narratives are not prestructured or preprogrammed, taking shape through the game play, yet they are not as unstructured, chaotic, and frustrating as life itself« (ibid.: 128). Oscillating between freedom and constraints, or structure and anti-structure to use Victor Turner's terminology (cf. TURNER 2008), videogames can be »understood as a kind of authoring environment within which players can define their own goals and write their own stories« (ibid.). The possibilities offered here go beyond mere procedural authorship, as they are »working not simply through the programming, but also through the design of the game space« (ibid.: 129). This is to say that not only does the player get to actualise pre-programmed explicitly interactive choices through dialogues, decision points in plots, or the successful or not-successful manipulation of the user interface (combat, quicktime events, etc.), the design and navigation of the game space itself provides opportunities for exploration and interaction the designers might not have conceived of. »Game designers«, Jenkins writes, »move into the production of game platforms which support player-generated narratives«, or post facto narrativised play experiences (ibid.).

Jenkins himself sums up his argument and the ramifications of his categorisation in a very compact paragraph that warrants reproduction in full:

> »In each of these cases, choices about the design and organisation of game spaces have narratological consequences. In the case of evoked narratives,

> spatial design can either enhance our sense of immersion within a familiar world or communicate a fresh perspective on that story through the altering of established details. In the case of enacted narratives, the story itself may be structured around the character's movement through space and the features of the environment may retard or accelerate that plot trajectory. In the case of embedded narratives, the game space becomes a memory palace whose contents must be deciphered as the player tries to reconstruct the plot. And in the case of emergent narratives, game spaces are designed to be rich with narrative potential, enabling the story-constructing activity of players. In each case, it makes sense to think of game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects« (ibid.).

With his approach, Jenkins therefore manages not only to bridge the gap between Ludologists and Narratologists, but to even fill the formerly dividing space between them with the potential for new meaning only games by their very nature can provide. His spatial turn, and his conception of games as narrative architectures, brings about the constitution of a fully functional theoretical framework that can be used to satisfyingly describe and analyse the experience of gaming in Game Studies. With the basic methodology established, what remains is to define a few central items of terminology that are helpful for and therefore often encountered in the discipline.

The first of those, and without doubt the key term, is ›agency‹. Michael Mateas, quoting Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1998), explains that it is one in a set of »three aesthetic categories for the analysis of interactive story experiences«: immersion, transformation, and agency (MATEAS 2004: 21). A later section of this paper will be dedicated to immersion, but, anticipating this more detailed discussion, the author defines it as »the feeling of being present in another place and engaged in the action therein« (ibid.). Why this definition is not sufficient, will become clear later. As a close relative to Coleridge's ›willing suspension of disbelief‹ – and here Mateas shows his narratological bias, the participant in an immersive experience is »willing to accept the internal logic of the experience, even though this logic deviates from the logic of the real world« (ibid.).

Transformation is a bit of a mixed bag: it includes »[t]ransformation as masquerade«, the possibility for the player to become someone else while playing the game (ibid.), »[t]ransformation as variety«, or how a game offers the player numerous variations on a given theme (ibid.: 22), and, finally, there is also »[p]ersonal transformation«, which means that the player as a person is affected and grows – or changes, to remain more neutral in tone (ibid.). Since these meanings of ›transformation‹ are very different beasts and happen on different levels of the gaming experience, throwing them all together under one heading appears unfortunate.

As the third in Mateas's triad, »Agency is the feeling of empowerment that comes from being able to take actions in the [game] world whose effects relate to the player's intentions« (ibid.: 21). Unlike his definition of immersion, Mateas's understanding of agency offers a very differentiated approach, and it contains crucial specifications.

First of all, agency »is not mere interface activity« (ibid.), that is, interactivity that has no or little impact on the experience is fake agency at best. Secondly, even if there is the opportunity to have considerable influence on the development of a game state but the mapping between player intentions and the results in the game world is not sufficiently direct, the feeling of agency collapses and is replaced with frustration. Helplessly erring through seemingly endless loops of trial and error, or having player intent misinterpreted by the mechanics of a game can both lead to this dead-end. The third aspect that makes this definition so helpful is ironically not even identified by the author himself. A perceptive reader will notice that Mateas starts his sentence with »Agency is the *feeling* of empowerment« (ibid.; my emphasis), which means that it is not the experience of real empowerment, but that the mere feeling of empowerment is already enough to constitute the experience of agency for a player. From a game designer's point of view it is therefore enough to create an illusion of successfully projecting player intention into the game world, and this player will then experience the feeling of agency. Fake agency, as long as it is cleverly camouflaged and not detected (through multiple play-throughs with alternating choices e.g.), will suffice.

Strictly speaking, however, (and this would be a point of criticism to be held against Mateas's definition) agency is not directly equivalent to the feeling of empowerment, as even disempowering experiences can provide agency by fulfilling these three conditions: the player has to feel as if through their meaningful interactions they successfully project their intentions into the secondary (or tertiary) reality of the game. After the experiential component, the author also suggests a structural aspect to how agency is maintained in games: »*A player will experience agency when there is a balance between the material and formal constraints*« (ibid.: 25; original italics). This means that the actions that are motivated by the narrative of a game (the formal constraints) have to be commensurate with the opportunities to interact on a mechanical and aesthetical level (the material constraints). »An imbalance results in a decrease in agency«, the author warns (ibid.). If a design lets a player do things but provides them with no motivation to do so, they might feel lost, and agency will diminish. On the other hand, if the narrative of a game creates the wish to do something and the mechanics and/or aesthetics of the design then prevent the player from projecting their intentions accordingly, this again means that agency will collapse. These are crucial problems to be aware of for designers and players alike, and Mateas himself identifies agency as the »most fundamental of Murray's three categories« (ibid.: 22). He also adds that »[w]hile immersion and transformation exist in some form in noninteractive drama, the audience's sense of having agency within the story is a genuinely new experience enabled by interactivity« (ibid.: 23). This is why the quantity and quality of agency provided can and must be understood as a key component in the analysis of videogames, or any other ludic medium for that matter.

Another term that is frequently encountered in Game Studies is ›flow‹. Going back to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's eponymous book published in 1990, it designates an »optimal state of inner experience« where »there is order in consciousness. This happens when psychic energy – or attention – is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action« (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI 2008: 6). Flow states are thus about order and balance, and they are highly focused moments of action. »Contrary to what we usually believe«, the author writes, »the best moments in our lives [...] are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times [...]. Optimal experience is thus something that we *make* happen« (ibid.: 3; original emphasis). It takes interaction, participation, and commitment to achieve flow, and so games are especially effective ›flow-machines‹. The necessarily voluntary nature of play (formulated by critics from Huizinga and Caillois to Salen and Zimmerman) also feeds into the second requirement to achieve this very special state of mind. Flow is produced by autotelic activities, i.e. activities that are intrinsically motivated, where participants »want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake« and not for extrinsic rewards (ibid.: 6). In addition to the balance between skill and challenge and the intrinsic motivation, games also fulfil a third prerequisite to support flow experiences: »a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing« (ibid.: 71). A game space is necessarily defined by mechanical and aesthetical rules, motivating player