Benjamin Bigl,
Sebastian Stoppe
(Eds.)

Playing with Virtuality

Theories and Methods
of Computer Game Studies

BENJAMIN BIGL, SEBASTIAN STOPPE

Introduction

Since the early 1970s the academic discourse about computer games is determined by different perspectives. The first one is situated in the broad field of *media studies* and is oriented in a more general way about the media itself. The second one is taken by the *Game Studies*. Generally spoken, the Game Studies try to establish an academic area which can fulfill the special needs of computer games. However, it must be noted ahead that it is the claim of the present book to embed both of these perspectives. Some preliminary considerations are needed to outline the current development in the field. Especially because the Game Studies themselves were conducted hitherto in two slightly different traditions. First, *Narratology* tries to approach the subject's area by determining the narrative paradigms within the medium and its structure. It recurs on an "objective framework (story and discourse, dramatic design of the game) beyond its use" (Schuhmacher & Korbel, 2010: 57). Second, in contrast, *Ludology* refers to the game play which includes rules, game mechanics and the application of these rules (ibid.). Therefore both approaches try to describe and to explain the features, the fascination and the function of computer games in a particular view. They do this either "through their narrative or representational strategies" (Apperley, 2006: 8) or with models or typologies of players or games. Nevertheless, both traditions try to decrypt the digital code of the game to make the quality of the game-experience understandable also for non-players.

We also have to notice the upcoming relevance of the academic discourse in general. This is demonstrated impressively in various journals like *gamestudies.org, eludamos.org, edugamesresearch.com, the Games for Health Journal* or *the International Journal of Computer Games.* Furthermore there are also newer ones like the *computergamesjournal.com*, whose editors try to bring academics and game developers together. A striking importance is also shown through international conferences ranging from *DiGRA*, *The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference*, and the *Game Developers Conference* to the g*amescom* in Cologne. More than 250.000 visitors in 2012 (Gamescom, 2012) and huge media coverage made an impressive statement that computer games have arrived at the center of society, too. The reasons for this evolution in academia are not only lying in the fascination of these fictional worlds. In fact, computer games have

fascinated millions of users for more than 30 years now. In addition, they constitute the strongest sector in media-entertainment industry. In summary, they are part of the digital everyday life experience.

The scientific community is receiving numerous publications from many dedicated authors at this time. They consider both areas inside the Game Studies as well as the media studies either through introductions into the different issues of the field (e.g. Egenfeldt-Nielson et al., 2008) or with emphasis on special topics. For example, with respect to famous titles attention is paid to the learning and education with games (Miller, 2009), to the design of games and its rules (Salen & Zimmermann, 2003), to the relationship between games and cultural aspects of this new medium (Fromme & Unger, 2012), and to the history of computer games (Kent, 2001).

Nevertheless,
why do we need yet another anthology about computer games?

Regardless of the specific positions and traditions of the Game Studies pointed above we have to ask first which perspectives and benefits are given through a *communication studies* view. This third perspective to the topic requires also some preliminary remarks. One considers the appropriate use of the terms *communication* and *media.* One asks to what extent computer games are *communication based media.* In general, as a communication medium computer games are located between players and stakeholders (e.g. programmers and producers). In particular — spoken more or less abstractly — they are *part of the communication process.* Going into detail the reciprocal exchange of mediated information through signs and symbols is included in this view (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1967). The reciprocal exchange is relevant to the players on a personal level (e.g. regarding the game experience itself) and furthermore on the level of society (e.g. through ethical values or economic regulations). Role-taking is required (Beck, 2010: 31) to accomplish this kind of understanding of what communication really is. Moreover, all participants in this process must have access to the same repertoire of symbols and signs (e.g. they must understand the communicative symbols inside the game). Certain theories and methods established in the traditional fields of communication sciences try to shift the focus on this perspective. One important benefit of these shifts is the possibility to include contiguous academic disciplines, like media-psychology, in which research with high relevance to the topic is also done. We also have to take respect to research covering the new developments in the field of online communi-

cation and online games like *World of Warcraft,* which are offering a huge potential for scientific research (Bainbridge, 2007) as well as with new gaming devices. Both developments are supposed to offer a virtual game experience to players (e.g. Taylor, 1997; Biocca & Levy, 1999). Due to this circumstance, computer games are slowly accepted as a relevant topic at international conferences in the field of communication studies like the *ICA* or *IAMCR* as well as in publications with this specific view (e.g. Quandt et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, the discussion and the academic research about usage and effects of computer games mostly takes place isolated within these outlined contexts with various theoretical and methodological approaches. Therefore, this anthology is an attempt to combine the perspectives of the media studies, the game studies and the communication studies as well as to present their findings.

Five aims outline the anthologies character. First, the main concept of the anthology is to bring together the drafted divergent perspectives from media studies, game studies, and communication studies to the topic. Second, we want to introduce the reader to the latest findings in computer game research, its current topics and theoretical and methodological approaches gained in diverse disciplinary contexts. Third, the book's style is a kind of an anthology which gives some benefits to the reader. In addition to the traditional reference lists a compact list of *literature for quick access* into the topics of our contributors is given to the reader. Fourth, the book chapters bring together well experienced authors and scholars with young academic talents who are often not able to publish their work due to various reasons. They can give important impulses to the scientific community. The fifth aim refers to the structure of the book. It places great emphasis on a well-balanced compilation of latest findings and topics in research and overall considerations. Therefore we have divided this publication into six different chapters. **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** are dealing with theories and methods in current and overall game research. Furthermore, the **Chapters 3, 4 and 5** are giving examples for the application of game research in society related fields. In the end, **Chapter 6** outlines two challenges for society as well as for every game player.

In the first chapter **Florian Kiefer** analyzes the quality of involvement using the example of *Call of Duty 4.* **Rafael Bienia** tries to clarify two modes of play within the genre of role-playing games. **Matthias Stork** is combining theories of cinema with video games while looking at post-cinematic aesthetics and **Antonio José Planells de la Maza** discusses video games as ludofictional worlds. Finally, **Stefan Höltgen** introduces

us to early microcomputer phenomena like illegal opcodes or errors in programming and **Letícia Perani** shows influences of games in human-computer interaction.

Our second chapter tries to illustrate different methods of Game Studies. **Gareth Schott et al.** describe a mixed methodology approach on how you can capture accounts of players' experiences of play by combining knowledge of structure and function of games with quantitavive summaries and qualitative reflections on gameplay. **Benjamin Bigl** describes in his contribution how certain transfer effects have an impact on the player's real life, while **Danny Pannicke** and **Rüdiger Zarnekow** discuss the interdependencies between online role-playing games and consumer behavior. The awareness of violence in video games is the topic of an empirical study by **Sebastian Koch. Anne Mette Thorhauge**'s contribution deals with alternative gameplay activities created by players in game discussion forums and how these differ from the intended gameplay of the game designers. **Claus Wohlgemuth** presents us a qualitative study concerning the relation between player and avatar with a certain focus on immersion as a result of game design and metagame.

Playing with the avatar is also the main topic of **Arne Schröder**'s contribution in the third chapter of our book (discussing game spaces). He describes the deliberate process of creating a virtual character by the player within the game space of *World of Warcraft*. The two other contributions in this section focus on e-sport games. **Janina Maric** discusses e-sport as a socio-cultural phenomenon and **David Gause** and **Volker Gehrau** write about certain characteristics that motivate people to play football manager games.

In the fourth chapter we will have a closer look on identity through gaming. **Pascaline Lorentz** talks about ludological socialization using the example of *The Sims*. The current and future research on gender and gameplay will be examined by **Gabriela T. Richard** and **Juan F. Belmonte** in their contributions.

Our penultimate chapter five has its focus on the opportunity of learning with video games. The current states of play will be examined by **Matthew Barr**. Video games may be a powerful tool for innovative educational setting as it will be discussed by **Héctor del Castillo et al.** while **Felix Kronenberg** has a certain focus on how one can learn foreign languages with video games. However, **Michael Filsecker** and **Michael Kerres** have a closer look on the limitations of design and research approaches in game-based learning.

We want to conclude our book with our sixth and final chapter about the challenges that games represent for society. **Thomas-Gabriel Rüdiger** points out that as virtual game worlds become common, there are also more and more offences in the virtual world like theft or sexual harassment. Eventually, **Jasper A. Friedrich** provides us with a short and strong insight into the main topics of media ethics and how various stakeholders within the gaming community should react.

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