

# **(Digital)Game Criticism and New Media: Prolegomena to the ludic (cyber)simulations**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article proposes an overview, as accurate as possible, of the genesis and first scientific and academic steps of Ludology Studies (Game Studies), especially, in confrontation with other media. On the one hand, this new scientific field within the Communication and (Cyber and Algorithmic)Culture Sciences has evolved in close interchange and, in some cases, even comparatively with the field of New Media Studies, being historically parallel to the development of e-culture and digital culture (especially from the 1950s onwards). On the other hand, as was the case with other areas of knowledge, stemming from the confrontation with narratological analyses, it seeks its methodological, disciplinary and scientific specificity in the (criticist) configuration of new, phenomenologically considered categories, namely of “gameplay experience” and of “mediation”. The question which arises *prima facie*, and which has been mentioned with varying degrees of insistence and incisiveness by other scholars, is to know whether this new study object, called «videogame» or «electronic/digital/computer game», as object of study of Game Studies (but which does not end there!) does not force us to design new hermeneutical categories, since it implies an activity which, as regards experience, is different from the one analysed in formal terms by the descriptive methodologies in use in other media. Indeed, the ergodic simulation/gameplay category allows for new ways of experiencing/designing mediation/immersion and with it we find ourselves closer to depicting ourselves, playful and mechanically, on the other side of the mirror/screen (different from the mirror/paper) where we find ourselves transformed, more often than not in heteronymic terms, into an Alice made into person.

## **Keywords**

Ludology/Game Studies, Narrativity, Gameplay, history of discipline, New Media

*Most notably, film and literary theorists have begun to discuss game theory within their own idiosyncratic frameworks. These disciplines have much to add to the discourse on games, particularly when the discussion is centered on narrative. However, they are missing a fundamental understanding of what games are about.*

Celia Pearce (2004), «Towards a game theory of game», in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (edited by), *First Person: New media as story, performance and game*, Cambridge, MIT Press, pp. 143

*Game studies entering academia means that games are finally positioned at the heart of a dedicated field of learning. (...) As the academia is loaded with expectations of providing games industry with workforce or opportunities for more innovative and experimental game culture, it is good to remember that the fundamental task of universities is to create knowledge and promote learning.*

Frans Mäyrä (2006), «A moment in the life of a generation», in *Games and Culture*, Volume 1, Number 1, January: 103-106

## Introduction

The phenomenon of the ‘game’ is not easy to understand to the full extent of its complexity. As cultural and mass phenomenon (Berger, 2002), it covers almost the totality, if not the full totality, of the human complexity of Being. Today, in some fringes of thought, the ludic activity is seen as something less dignified, as something contrary to the central nature of reflexion and the adulthood of Being and Thinking. More and more, gaming and the activity associated with it is relegated to the margin of Life. Although it does not disappear, it is now seen as mere entertainment, as recreational pause. Such position, however, does not withstand any less prejudiced hermeneutics, since, phenomenologically, the category of the game is part of the pure realization of life and of Culture; it is, as in the title of Eugen Fink’s work (Fink, 1996), symbol of the World. Its homeland comprehends both the human finiteness and the totality of the world. Understanding this phenomenon is an exercise that enables us to access the intelligent totality of any given culture as well as its primeval and existential dignity.

If this is true about the phenomenon of the game in general, the description of the state of the art in studies of digital and algorithmical (Galloway, 2006) games and videogames implies both the need to define and contextualize its object and stating that it is parallel to the rise of new digital media, as was the case, anyway, with electronic fiction and e-poetry. Historically, the academic tradition of game studies, which involves sociology, anthropology, but also mathematics and economics, has evolved, a) essentially as a branch of mathematics and economy, as study of competitive situations in general, not as entertainment (Game Theory<sup>1</sup>); b) as research around the understanding of child pleasure and its psychological and genetic

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<sup>1</sup> John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (1953).

supports (Piaget<sup>2</sup>); c) as experimental field applied to education and goals of educational training, creating games and/or pleasure situations that simulate reality (both for acquiring skills and for correcting potential deviations); d) as ludomaniacal research, in other words, in the area of the clinical treatment of the compulsive player; e) as historic research regarding the genesis and development of various types of games (board games in particular); f) as Philosophy of Sports, that is to say, applied research in the fields of sports training and in the very philosophy of specific games.

However, with the exponential development of digital and algorithmical culture, reality has been completely transformed, and at many different levels, undergoing fundamental changes, at the cultural and social level as well as in cognitive, ontological, aesthetic and phenomenological terms. In turn, this has forced us to carefully ponder this culture of simulation in its multiple and cross-disciplinary intersections.

Thus, although one can say that digital games (and the subsequent «game software») have developed especially since the 1950s, in this way giving rise to over two decades of sporadic academic studies in this area – reaching its highest point with the academic constitution, in 2003, of the Digital Games Research Association (DIGRA) ([www.digra.org](http://www.digra.org))<sup>3</sup> – it is, however, with its mass dissemination, rendered possible by the emergence of new media, that the Ludology/Games Studies began to emerge along with its various disciplinary branches<sup>4</sup>. Special reference must be made to the main areas, namely: a) Game Criticism (including Game Ontology and phenomenological and hermeneutical analyses)<sup>5</sup>; b) Game History; c) Serious Games (education, persuasion, and advergaming); Game Sociology, Game Economy and Ethnography; e) Pleasure Theory of Design; f) Game Computational Science (IA, visualisation, virtual environments, etc.). To these other sub-fields of research can be added, such as, for example, the areas of marketing, publicity and market research. With such variety and distinctiveness, how can a single area of research and study be founded? For instance, how interesting can it be for a researcher concerned with the addictive nature of violence of/in games (or lack thereof) the search for the best algorithm (and maybe vice versa)? One of the issues in this «state of the art» is centred precisely here, not only upon the discussion of whether it is possible (and if so how interesting it can be) to found Ludology (in terms of (Digital)Game Criticism) as an (autonomous field of) academic knowledge, but also upon knowing what its disciplinary contexts are (Media Studies? Ciberculture?).

## Contextualisation

As Jasper Juul refers<sup>6</sup>, when he discusses the history of this name and especially its genesis applied to this study, the oldest use of the term «ludology» goes back to 1982<sup>7</sup>, and was associated with computer games and games studies in an article by Gonzalo Frasca<sup>8</sup>. The term was later taken up again by Espen Aarseth and by the same Gonzalo Frasca in *Cybertext Yearbook* (Markku Eskelinen is the co-editor, with Raine Koskimaa). Afterwards, it is used in an article by Juul himself<sup>9</sup>, as begins to become popular as a way to define a field and a research methodology that is different from the narratological tradition and, on the other hand, as an attempt to create an autonomous field of academic research. So far, in a general manner,

<sup>2</sup> Piaget (1945).

<sup>3</sup> See Aarseth (2005: 3-7).

<sup>4</sup> We follow Aarseth's proposal in the above mentioned paper, albeit with small terminological and disciplinary adjustments.

<sup>5</sup> Teixeira (2004: 155-192); Teixeira (2006); Teixeira (2008); and Teixeira (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Juul (2005: 16).

<sup>7</sup> In a text by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1982).

<sup>8</sup> Frasca (1998: 365-371).

<sup>9</sup> Juul (2000).

it served to convey the general reality of games, in particular concerning the community of board games, at the same time that it expresses a discourse (*logos*) within the (social and cultural) borders of entertainment (*ludus*). Hence the importance of the historic landmark of Espen Aarseth, in an editorial, electing 2001 as the «Year One» of the Odyssey in the scientific field of electronic games<sup>10</sup>. This was so both because this was the year when the first international academic congress dedicated to games studies was held<sup>11</sup>, and also because it was the year the first peer-reviewed academic journal of this name was founded ([www.gamestudies.org](http://www.gamestudies.org), coordinated by Aarseth himself). Why the need for this?

Since the 1980s electronic games have become a mass culture phenomenon, together with the massification in the use of the personal computer and the first home consoles. On the other hand, economically speaking, its industry nowadays generates more money than that of Hollywood<sup>12</sup>, rivalling it<sup>13</sup>. Few youngsters ignore names like Lara Croft, Snake, Mario, Jack & Daxter, Ratcher, or Sonic, but also those of Atari, Nintendo or Sega.

Thus, especially after the 1980s, the bibliography on electronic games started to grow, producing some of the texts already considered classics in this scientific area, namely the following (in chronological order): Loftus (1983); Provenzo (1991); Herz (1997); Diberdier (1998); Poole (2000); Wolf (2001); King & Krzywinska (2002); Wolf (2003); Newman (2004). To these works of a general nature, we can add some that focus on more specific areas, such as on history (Kent, 2001; King, 2002; Demaria & Wilson, 2002; Baer, 2005); genre theory (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998); on violence (Grossman, 1995); popular culture (Berger, 2002); on social identity (Turkle, 1995).

However, from this general overview, and despite everything, the first times of ludological studies centred essentially on the discussion (still on) between the narratological perspective («games as narratives», literary, cinematic) and the ludological perspective («games as unique entity»)<sup>14</sup>. In a certain way, we can say that the former goes back to the tradition of Aristotle's *Poetics*<sup>15</sup>, through the Russian Formalism proposed by Vladimir Propp, by the French Structuralism (Barthes, Todorov, Genette, but also Lévi-Strauss) and by Post-Structuralism (George Landow<sup>16</sup> and his analyses on the hypertext theory and «interactive fiction»<sup>17</sup>). As to the second line of research, based on the particular nature of «gameplay»<sup>18</sup>, some of its historic (and canonic) pillars can be found in the works by Johan Huizinga<sup>19</sup> and Roger Caillois<sup>20</sup>, to which Brian Sutton-Smith's book (orig. of 1997) *The ambiguity of play* should be added<sup>21</sup>. To these two lines of research others have been added,

<sup>10</sup> Aarseth (2001, Editorial).

<sup>11</sup> In March, at Copenhagen University.

<sup>12</sup> According to one of the issues of the New York Times, in 2003, for the first time, the sales revenue of electronic games (for computers and consoles) surpassed in the United States those of cinema box-offices: 10 thousand million dollars against 9.5 thousand million. Ultimately this explains the wish of cinema directors and producers to enter this industry.

<sup>13</sup> This explains that one of the Cahiers du Cinema, of September 2002, was a “Special Jeux Vidéo”!

<sup>14</sup> The essential texts for this discussion are: Murray (1997); Aarseth (2005a: orig. 1997); Aarseth (1998: 31-41); Frasca (1998: 365-371); Kirksaether (1998); Juul (1999); Ryan (July 2001); Kücklich (2001); Ryan (2001); Galore (n.d.); Eskelinen (2001); King & Krzywinska (2002); Frasca (2003a); Frasca (2003b: 221-236); Atkins (2003); Kücklich (2003); Aarseth (2004: 45-69); Jenkins (2004: 188-130); Zimmerman (2004: 154-164).

<sup>15</sup> In his book *Computers as Theatre* (Boston, Addison Wesley), Laurel (1986) proposes a theory based on the teachings of the Aristotelian Poetics in which the computer, like a theatre, interactively generates the plot.

<sup>16</sup> Landow (1997: orig. 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Teixeira (2004: pp.107-154 and, in particular: 145-153).

<sup>18</sup> See Juul (n.d.); Jesper Juul (2005).

<sup>19</sup> Huizinga (2003: orig. 1938).

<sup>20</sup> Caillois (1990: orig. 1958).

<sup>21</sup> Before this he had published, with E.M.Avedon (1971) *The Study of Games*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. His first papers, from a very extensive body of work, go back to the early 1950s, with essays on the comparison between the European cultures and the Maori, and their influence in the Maori children's games («The meeting

namely: 1) that of a broader perspective on videogames, supported by Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2003), in which they are integrated in a complex of «cross-media storytelling», comparatively with other media; 2) that which analysis games both as an «extension of Man»<sup>22</sup> and in the context of the human cognitive game and as symbolic act, crucial to the representative process. The name to be drawn out is undoubtedly that of David Myers and their essential and reference studies, covering several levels of investigation<sup>23</sup>. 3) That of the Ontology and Aesthetics of Games, not merely in what *they are* or what *they should be*, but also in the (aesthetic) pleasure they provide. It is in this line that most analyses regarding design and game construction must be inscribed, and the following names should be emphasised: Chris Crawford, Richard Rouse, and Andrew Rollings & Dave Morris<sup>24</sup>. We should also mention all the research that goes from AI analysis and programming to graphic modelling, sound, music and so on. In these areas there is already a vast quantity of papers and essays edited in various speciality journals, namely, *Game Developer Magazine*, *Gamasutra* and the *Annual Conference on Game Developers*. As an example of the cross between ludological research and design, we must mention, especially, Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman's work on *Rules of Play*<sup>25</sup>, which brings together the levels of «rules», «game» and «culture». To all this bibliography, we must add J.Raessens & J.Goldstein's book (2005), which presents this field's state-of-the-art up to 2004, and the more recent *Tomb Raiders and Space Invaders: Videogame Forms and Contexts*, by Geoff King and Tania Krywinska (2006).

## Reconfigurations

Digital games, especially those of the adventure genre, have attracted the attention of narrative researchers from early on. Games like *Adventure* (Crowther & Woods, 1976) and *Zork* (Infocom, 1981), for example, exclusively in text mode, marked the attempt to adapt to a new medium, and in which the gamer only moves as directed by commands written directly from the keyboard, like «go north», «say xyz», «take the keys on the ground», «get lamp», and so on. This association between the textual nature and the fulfilment of certain tasks in a narrative environment of pleasure and new interaction forms created the conditions for new discussions regarding, on the one hand, the relationships between author, text and reader (for instance, within the scope of reader autonomy theories); and, on the other, the new ways of «telling stories» in the context of a new medium.

Moreover, it wouldn't be too much to recall that, although what is usually assumed to be the «first» computer game is *Spacewar* (developed in 1962 at the MIT by Stephen Russell, running originally on a PDP-1), it is only 11 years afterwards that a videogame is first marketed, in the case *Pong* (Atari, 1973). This game, when compared to modern graphic standards, is terribly «basic» (white rectangles on a black background), in spite of the fact that

of Maori and European cultures and its effects upon the unorganized games of Maori children», *Journal of Polynesian Society*, 60, pp. 93-107). Other studies followed covering anthropological, psychological and social aspects, both of the games and gameplay (in New Zealand and in other cultural contexts), as well as the structures and pleasure models (especially after the 1970s).

<sup>22</sup> McLuhan (1995) [«Games: the extension of Man»]. Attention must be drawn to the title chosen for this chapter, which clearly demonstrates and reinforces the importance of this concept in the general scope of the McLuhanian «understanding of media»!

<sup>23</sup> From an already wide number, which began between the years 1984 and 1990 on the evolution of home computer networks in the 1980s, and which moved on to an analysis of technological forms that led to the design of a generic semiotic model (or models) of game, we draw attention to the following: Myers (1990); Myers (1991); Myers (1992a); Myers (1992b); Myers (1999a); Myers (1999b); Myers (2004); Myers (2005); Myers (2006). These articles should be complemented by the reading of his book, Myers (2003).

<sup>24</sup> Crawford (1982); Rouse (2001); Rollings & Morris (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Zimmerman (2004).

the game concept that underlies it has surprisingly endured<sup>26</sup> [the same is valid for *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1977)], which is symptomatic on its own: a gamer controls an object/actor against a certain number of enemies; the score increases as the game evolves, demanding increasingly more and better reflexes; the gamer has a limited number of lives (generally three); the game's degree of complexity and score lie on the relationship between the number of enemies to eliminate and the real time used for the task, a relationship that is used to define the levels that are overcome. These games typify what could be called «classic game model», in which «winning» or «losing» is associated with a better or poorer performance, to which corresponds a higher or lower score. From this time onwards, and especially between 1977 and 1993, these games were dominated essentially by those intended to be played by a single gamer. It is *Doom* (ID Software, 1993) (which can be played by various gamers simultaneously from a link to multiple computers), which, despite its excessive violence, will open up new possibilities, not only in terms of a new genre (*3-D shooter* or *FPS - first-person shooter*), but also concerning what we could call «tribal» notion of the game and/or of multi-gamer (*MUD – multi-user dungeons*). This rise will be influenced by cultural and historic factors, independent of the technological component, namely, the notion of «personal computer» and, in 1990, the emergence of the Internet outside strictly academic realms – factors which, when combined, resulted in the idea of the «individual-as-part-of-a-network» (Teixeira, 2009).

It is along these lines then, that, for example, from the early 1980s we should see the above mentioned adventure genre, sometimes renamed interactive fiction, a quite controversial and problematic term. Its controversial nature relates not only to its conceptual ambiguity but also, and in particular, to the fact that it has never theoretically defined. Espen Aarseth is one of its critics, rejecting it point-blank.<sup>27</sup> This genre, which in general has been constant throughout the last fifteen/twenty years, includes games developed initially in particular by Infocom (*Zork* trilogy (1981) based on *Adventure*), a company that introduced its games closer to the notion of «novel» than that of «game». This genre is not foreign to the influence of J.R.R.Tolkien's works, as they involved, in their structure(s), a quest inside «caves», «woods», «caverns» and the confrontation with elves, dragons and fairies, for the conquest of «treasures». This is the case of the hybrid textual/graphic adventure *Hobbit* (Melbourne, 1984). One of the high points, development-wise, of this kind of adventures will undoubtedly be the game *Myst* (Cyan, 1993), which will mark a sort of new pleasure paradigm, by attempting to distance itself from existing games, precisely, as stated in the game itself, by refusing the excessive use of violence and death<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, this genre, as well as its designation, is also open to some critical discussion when applied to games in virtual environments.<sup>29</sup>

It is quite clear, as always happens with similar cases, that early research in this field of study (which have evolved as one of the research lines of ludological criticism) considers the study of games within the context of already existing theories, in particular comparatively to narratology theories<sup>30</sup>, which is not to be considered odd when we consider that indeed while

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<sup>26</sup> For example, this is the concept that is (still) the basis for the *Brickles Plus* game [see Aarseth (2005: 56)].

<sup>27</sup> Aarseth (2004: 45-54); Aarseth (2005). See Aarseth (1994), with his previous paper.

<sup>28</sup> *Myst is real and, like in real life, you don't die every five minutes. In fact, you probably don't wish to die at all. The key to *Myst* is to lose yourself in this fantastic virtual exploration and act and react as if you were really there.* Thus is the essence of the game described!

<sup>29</sup> On all this and for a «brief history of the genre», see Aarseth (2005: 119 ff.)

<sup>30</sup> The essential texts for this debate are: Murray (1997); Aarseth (2005a: orig.:1997); Aarseth (1998: 31-41); Frasca (1998: 365-371); Kirksæther (1998); Juul (1999); Ryan (July 2001); Kücklich (2001); Ryan (2001); Galore (s.d.); Eskelinien (2001); King e Krzywinska (2002); Frasca (2003a); Frasca (2003b: 221-236); Atkins (2003); Kücklich (2003); Aarseth (2004: 45-69); Jenkins (2004: 118-130); Zimmerman (2004: 154-164).

the study of games is close to 40 years old, the study of narratology has several centuries to its credit, and is one of the most influential of our Western culture, beginning precisely with the Aristotelian studies<sup>31</sup>. From early on in the history of Mankind, narratives have represented one of the basic structures when it comes to organising and making sense of the world, already to be found in the oral discourse<sup>32</sup>. It was based on this premise that narrative studies were applied to Literature, to History, to Drama and later on to Cinema and Film Studies, each field finding in it its own specificities. The same was true of games, varying from analyses that fully accept the narrative premise of games, to those that completely deny it. Example of this are those that make them a different form of narrative and «ergodic» experience, different for instance from the Oulipian texts. It is considered thus by Aarseth (2001, 2004), Eskelinen (2004), Juul (2001) and Teixeira (2004, 2007, 2008 and 2009). It will indeed be within this debate that in the 1980s and 1990s, from within the debate on Theories on Hypertext and digital narratives, also commonly known as non-linear compositions, that the possibility first arose that there could be «interactive narratives» (interactive storytelling) in digital media<sup>33</sup>. One of the early examples of the application of these theories can be found precisely in the so-called (first) «textual adventures», like *Adventure* (Cowther & Woods, 1976), *Zork* (Infocom, 1981), *Hobbit* (Melbourne, 1984), as we said before. It is along this line that, for instance, we must understand, especially since the beginning of the 1990s, the adventure genre sometimes renamed by the rather controversial and problematic phrase *interactive fiction*. Its controversial nature is related not only to its conceptual ambiguity but also, especially, to the fact that it was never theoretically defined. Espen Aarseth is one of its critics, outright rejecting it<sup>34</sup>. Regardless of the approach and their later developments, as well as of our acceptance or not of the theories they are based on and from which they stem in historical terms, these narratological perspectives mark the beginning of the scientific and academic concern for this reality, beyond the issues of mere computation and programming, regardless of the fact that the history of games in virtual environments is obviously part of a history of technology(ies).

Games in virtual environments started to play an increasing role in our culture (and, in particular, in popular culture, changing, for better and for worse, the way(s) we relate to ourselves, to the world and to others<sup>35</sup>), in its various dimensions, making it a «joystick nation»<sup>36</sup>. Today the (video)ludic industry in general, and the computer games industry in particular enables the gamer to take on various identities: we can be God, good or bad (*Black White*), or politician (*Republic: the revolution*), robber and/or murderer (*Grand Theft Auto III*), hero (*Rising Sun*) or wolf or lava monster (*Dungeon Siege II*) in a heteronymic multiplicity<sup>37</sup> worthy of its Demiurge and, also, in an open system to boot, placing us face to

<sup>31</sup> The study published by Brenda Laurel (orig.1986) in her book *Computers as Theatre*, is now a classic. Here, applying precisely the teachings from Aristotle's *Poetics*, she puts forward a theory in which the computer, *as theatre*, interactively generates the plot.

<sup>32</sup> As W.Ong writes (2003: 37) «A familiar instance of additive oral style is the creation narrative in *Genesis* 1:1-5, which is indeed a text but one preserving recognizable oral patterning».

<sup>33</sup> See Bolter (1999) and Landow (1992, 1994). Complement with Henry Jenkins, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Aarseth, 2004, 2005, 2006a and 2006b

<sup>35</sup> Mention should be made, for example, to Turkle's works (1998 and 1997), in psychological terms, but also concerning the social and philosophical implications of «playing» and computational culture. We must not forget, in this line of «stories for interacting», Laurel's book (1986), as well as Janet Murray's work (1997), along another argumentative line, but within the same question of ludological culture and technological mutations.

<sup>36</sup> This is the title of the book by J.C.Herz (1997), journalistic in nature and not at all systematic. Another work that should be mentioned along the same line is Poole's (2000).

<sup>37</sup> About all this applied both to the Pessoan mechanisms of 'othering' (heteronymia) and to (neo-pagan) multiplicity, see Teixeira (1992); Luís Filipe B. Teixeira *Fernando Pessoa e o Ideal Neo-Pagão: subsídios para*

face, via online, with the possibility of multiple confrontation (MUDs – Multiple-User Dungeon/Domain/Dimension)! In short, as one of the ads for PS2 makes clear, gamers only have to go the «identity supermarket» and choose the «heads» they want to place on their necks!

Now it was this awareness that resulted in the urgency of the scientific interest in Ludology and (Digital)Game Criticism on part of the Academia(s), and its study was included in the programmes of various university departments. This need to look upon the universe of games not as «mere entertainment» and «children's stuff»<sup>38</sup>, removed from the essential universe of our contemporary culture and of our *Weltanschauung*, characterising feature – at every level and whatever the viewpoint we take – of our *Zeitgeist*, in other words, of the inner essence of the «simulation culture» we live in, has become even more urgent with the growing awareness that we are changing from a paradigm of a «text culture» into a paradigm of «image/visual culture» associated with the notions of «hybrid culture» and «new media language»<sup>39</sup>, something Bolter and Grusin have called «remediation»<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, in videogames we face a combination of various planes of what is human, from aesthetic to social, from psychological to anthropological, from onto-phenomenological to logic and simulative, in a «hybrid» form and in an «integrated» manner that the old media, like theatre, cinema and the literary novels always aspired to but never managed to achieve. [Note, for example, the aesthetic and social dimensions of games (of the multi-gamer type) such as *Quake Arena* or *Ultima Online*, where a new audience structure is quite apparent, both in terms of «mass» and in terms of «reception» itself, in some aspects comparable only to the invention of the «dialoguing-protagonist» (*exárchein*) by Thespis, in other words, of the chorus in classical tragedies<sup>41</sup>). This makes us wonder, for instance: what are the boundaries between Ludology and Literary Studies and Film Studies<sup>42</sup>? It is possible that they share any point of contact or intersection, or are we dealing with distinct and autonomous fields of study? And what about its (possible) relation with Media Studies? Hence derive all the curricular framework proposals for this scientific area, as is the case of the one made by the IGDA – International Game Developers Association<sup>43</sup>, as well as the search for other research programmes<sup>44</sup> which stem, for example, from as many other methodological frameworks. It is the case of Lars Konzac's proposal regarding how to analyse games in virtual environments<sup>45</sup> which he applies to the analysis of *Soul Calibur* (1999). As always, this proposal of his has some advantages and as many limitations<sup>46</sup>.

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uma edição crítica, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Acarte, 1996; *Pensar Pessoa: A dimensão filosófica e hermética do pensamento de Fernando Pessoa*, Porto, Lello Editores, 1997; and, more recently, *Obras de António Mora, de Fernando Pessoa: Edição e Estudo*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Eugen Fink had already drawn attention to the concept of «game» as the object of philosophical reflection [Fink (1966, especially: 7-18)].

<sup>39</sup> The title of Manovich's book (2001). See also Kittler (1990) and Kittler (1999).

<sup>40</sup> Bolter & Grusin (1999).

<sup>41</sup> This is the reason these protagonists are called «thespian» («théos»+«èspos» = «who speak by the gods»), that is, actors. Besides, interestingly enough, one of the fundamental roles of this chorus was to divide the play into what we now call «acts». See Aristotle (1951: see 1448 a 9 and 1448 a 19); and Teixeira (1992, especially: 59-64).

<sup>42</sup> See Eskelinen (2001a); Eskelinen (2004); and Juul (1999).

<sup>43</sup> [www.igda.org/academia](http://www.igda.org/academia)

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Pearce (2003); Pearce (2004); Zimmerman (2004a) and Zimmerman (2004b).

<sup>45</sup> Konzac (2002: 89).

<sup>46</sup> On this issue and its developments, see Aarseth (2003: 9-23).

## Perspectives

As is only natural, the development and complexity of videogames is closely dependent on technical achievements and on increasing «transparency» (as in the ability to produce greater immersion on the gamer's part) of the technology that implements them and the (growing) ability in terms of simulation and mimetic production. On the other hand, and following the same line of thought, the «hybridism» is also growing, especially due to the proximity of cinema, an in the last times to the cartoons, in both senses!

(Digital)Games, especially RPGs (role-playing games), by allowing the construction of **technolog(o)ical** (*técnhê+Lógos*) *mundus imaginalis* (H. Corbin) and our immersion in them<sup>47</sup>, come close to a mimetic (sacred) experience, especially in that attempt to overcome the circumstances of daily life. This is what explains, for example, as Caillois writes, that «the game soothes, calms, distracts from life and makes one forget dangers, concerns, work» (Caillois, 1979: 156). Now, the development of digital technologies and of the complexity of computer systems and algorithms has increased that ability to immerse in and to «project» onto (almost to the point of dilution ...) the prosthesis of simulation. One example of this is clear in Cronenberg's *ExistenZ*, where the (mediated) relation between body(organic)-ludic-interface blurs the frontiers between reality and dream, the «outside» and the «inside». Here is a case where, paradoxically, as Borges would say, *the map covers the territory itself and where the principle of reality disappears*.

Examples of this can be found in, among many others that could be used here, the film *I'm your man* (1992, dir: Bob Bejean, Interfilm Technology; DVD version prod: Bill Franzblau, 1998) and the game *Fahrenheit* (Atari, 2005), a paranormal interactive thriller set in New York in a (very) close future: January 2009. Besides, this «hybridism» is not alien to the Hollywood industry's interest, especially since 2003, to the creation of computer games producers, as is the case, for instance, of John Woo, who set up Tiger Hill Entertainment and bought the film rights to *Metroid* (Nintendo), but also of the recently created Warner Brothers Games! But we should add names like those of the Wachowski brothers, creators of the film trilogy *Matrix*; of Peter Jackson, initially, with the Lord of the Rings trilogy (10<sup>th</sup> most sold game in the USA in 2003) and, more recently, with the game-remake on King Kong; but also Ridley Scott and his brother; and Spielberg, who is developing productions in this area. By simulating, in a increasingly mathematical manner, the complexity of the world and of reality, the world of computers is more and more «alive» and «ontological» and even more economical, this if we add the increasingly closer relation between the computation capacity and the size of the supporting technologies.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> In his essay *On fairy-Stories*, J.R.R.Tolkien writes the following, on the writing of fantasy literature, words that can be adapted to our case: «[The story-maker] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.» (Tolkien1966: 60). On the concept of immersion as one of the three categories of narratives (immersion, agency and transformation), see the fundamental work by Murray (1997: especially: 97-182); regarding the notion of «text as world» and «text as game» and the «poetics of immersion» and of «interactivity», it is complemented by the excellent book by Marie-Laure Ryan (2001: 175-203); compare all this with the works by Hayles (1999) and Hayles (2002).

<sup>48</sup> See what is going on nowadays in the cell phone industry, with phones that integrate, among others, the concept of games console, and where «talking-with-another» is not always the main function! Is it necessary to mention the concept of the new N-Gage equipment, by Nokia, among other phones and brands? Or, more recently, the case of iPhone? On the other hand, the notion that lies at the root of the PSP (portable Playstation) (the Nintendo DS is, in this as in other senses, different), may well be the equivalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of what the walkman (interestingly enough, also by Sony) was to the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

Nevertheless, both in the case of Film and Literature and in the case of digital and videogames and videogames, we are before specific «grammars», although common points can possibly be found between them. However, similarly to what happened before with Literary, Drama or Film Studies, for instance, Ludology/Games Studies, and its two major branches, the critical/theoretical and the creative/industry-related, are still just starting. In some aspects, and in some theoretical conditions, because of the «mix-concepts» and the youngest of the disciplines evolved, we need, previously, to ask: What do we talk about when we talk about digital (or video)games? In other words, they are still at that stage where the various concepts and categories are defined and sorted out, where one is still studying how videogames should be analysed. This is to say, the discipline is still at the early stages of the phenomenology, ontology, epistemology and hermeneutics of technoludology. One thing is certain: this discipline, within the Sciences of Communication and Culture and especially of Media Studies, must be able to address, *prima facie*, the disciplinary differences that exist in Academia and, in the end, the industry itself, since this is the teaching that we derive from tradition, for the good of all and, in particular, of the culture of simulation itself.

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