

Introduction

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We all play, regardless of gender, age, cultural background, or social status. Some of us play chess while others play golf. Children play catch or hide and seek. Americans play football, Europeans soccer. Actors play theatre, musicians play instruments. Comedians play their audiences, politicians the media. Lawyers play the legal system, economists the economic game. Whether we like it or not, play is one of the most fundamental activities in human life, it is immersed in our language and has a substantial influence in how we define our culture. It is sometimes unintentional and informal like the unorganised play of children on a playground, other times it is intentional and formal such as the play of baseball players in the World Series. Play is always subject to rules, even if these rules change over time. Play has a beginning and an end; it is creative and always voluntary. If we are forced to play we can withdraw by spoiling it. Play is fun and motivating; it challenges us and makes us learn about ourselves and life in general. Through play we exit reality and experience a make-believe world. When we are done playing, play disappears and we return to reality. Everything that was important during play has then somehow lost its meaning seemingly leaving no serious consequences of play in real life.

Although we all play, it is not at all common that we all talk about it. We generally only admit to socially accepted forms of play such as tennis or scrabble. Adult play has to have a purpose, a measurable outcome. Life is serious, actions have consequences and there is no simple exit if we fail. Death in a digital game restarts the game; death in real life is final. Life is not a game. Even if we play, we therefore often avoid the term “playing” because it seems not serious enough. Football players do not play, they “compete”. Managers do not learn by playing a make-belief company, they learn by “simulating” it. Students generally do not study games; they study “Interactive Media”. If they do study games, they tend to study “Serious Games”. It almost appears as if the loss of playfulness is a requirement for entering adulthood. This, however, reduces play and anything related to play to a childish activity. To this day, working in the games industry often is not considered serious work even though it is now one of the most powerful industries and some high end digital game productions rival even the biggest Hollywood movie productions in terms of budget as well as revenue.

In ELUDAMOS we want to challenge this misconception by celebrating the cultural and economic significance of digital game play in our technological world. We want to discuss digital games not only as recreational medium for digital natives but rather as a driving force which is shaping the future of our society. We see Wikipedia not only as a “free encyclopedia that anyone can edit”, we see it also as a Massively

Multiplayer Online Game in which editors compete for the top positions in elaborate high score lists detailing page edit statistics. In this sense digital play is at the core of what French philosopher Pierre Levy called demodynamics, a post-democratic process in which our networked society is increasingly gaining control over the dynamics of its own intellectual progression. It is this evolving cultural significance of digital games and digital game play that we want to capture and explore in ELUDAMOS.

Focus and Scope

ELUDAMOS is an international, multi-disciplined, biannual e-journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles that theoretically and/or empirically deal with digital games in their manifold appearances and their sociocultural-historical contexts.

ELUDAMOS positions itself as a publication that fundamentally transgresses disciplinary boundaries. The aim is to join questions about and approaches to computer games from decidedly heterogeneous scientific contexts (for example cultural studies, media studies, (art) history, sociology, (social) psychology, and semiotics) and, thus, to advance the interdisciplinary discourse on digital games.

This approach does not exclude questions about the distinct features of digital games as an aesthetic and cultural form of articulation, on the contrary, the issue is to distinguish their media specific characteristics as well as their similarity to other forms of aesthetic and cultural practice. That way, the editors would like to contribute to the lasting distinction of international game studies as an academic discipline.

The journal consists of three main sections:

1. An introductory article presenting and discussing current scientific discourse in game studies and/or responding to latest developments and problematic aspects on the digital games sector.
2. Academic peer reviewed articles on game studies in the broadest sense
3. Reviews of games and books.

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In an age where simulation connects warfare and entertainment, Hartmut Gieselmann's article promises an examination of how combat as entertainment emphasises the soldier's experience at a time when the conduct of war increasingly reflects attempts to demonstrate technological prowess in place of conventional ground force. While Johan Huizinga argued that: "Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game," this article embodies the complexity of the relationship that now exists between the nature and experience of an encounter and its representation. In his article Gieselmann separates the war game from its representational function and cultural context instead preferring to explore it principally as play or modes of action and activity. In doing so, it is argued that while players experience a 'clean war,' historically more reminiscent of the way conflict was often bound by game-like rules and customs, free from civilian casualties and collateral damage, it is better able to reinforce the heroic.

The issue of distance and its impact on the nature of engagement and experience of simulated conflict is expressed as a concept of space in Edvin Babic's analysis that charts the evolution of games from static game environments to abundant gamescapes. Here the confounding variables, or complications of war, are reintroduced as Babic discusses the lack of certainty that expansive game worlds bring with them. In operating a processual concept we find a dip in the intensity of the game event as pure battle and conflict, instead replacing it with a greater level of mundane everyday life experience capable of assimilating more sustained relationships and community building practices. In this sense, are we paving the way for a played version of Casablanca?

As the public and social spheres of game spaces assume increasing authenticity in individuals' lives, Susanne Keuneke presents fascinating research data on the impact of gaming practices not only on relationships developed in game spaces but those that are lost through play. Rarely is the concept of a game-initiated friendship or the meaning of friendship as applied to game companionship examined. Such work has much to offer as an extension of traditional social psychological understanding of the form and function that friendship assumes.

Marguerite Charmante's article tantalisingly offers a new approach to understanding play through the process of play itself. Here we find play used as a conceptual catalyst for theoretical thought. In drawing on the pataphysical, Jahrman presents a parody of scientific and philosophical conceptions, or a science of emerging solutions, that functions as playfulness itself. In contrast Stefan Werning's contribution takes stock of the existing range of game studies literature, to consider the possibility of more integrative models of analysis. In doing so, he presents and operationalises a model based on programming theory (object-oriented narrative) that is based on the assumption that games recode the act of 'reading' into a mode of 'text-processing' that fundamentally modifies the parameters of our cultural appropriation and media literacy.