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Playfulness, Play, and Games

A Constructionist Ludology Approach

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Sano laukku, sano laukku. Eipä haavoita se haukku.
Sano kieli, sano kieli. Eikä tule paha mieli.
Liru laru loru, moni turha poru ratki riidaksi muuttuu.
Löpö löpö löpö, se on ihan höpö, joka leikistä suuttuu.

Marjatta Pokela, *Lörpötys*, 1963

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a framework for understanding playfulness, play, and games. The framework presented is developed for the needs of a constructionist ludology, rooted in realist social constructionism. The work is situated in the field of game studies.

The contribution of this work is threefold: firstly, it presents a foundational theoretical framework for understanding and separating playfulness, play, and games. Secondly, contributions to mid-level theory as models for understanding social play are presented. Thirdly, with the help of these tools, more practical insights are examined, in three substudies.

The primary contribution in this dissertation is the presented framework. A very wide spectrum of play is considered, from animal play to human play, and from the play of children to the play of adults. The starting point is very inclusive, considering all activities that are performed for their own sake, regardless of how they are culturally valued. Thus the framework tackles 'good' and 'bad' play: play that is positive and widely considered as desirable, as well as play that is transgressive or destructive. The framework is also used to understand games, both digital and non-digital, in a larger context of play, and there is even room in the framework for enacting play with a goal-oriented mindset. The framework postulates a boundary between play and non-play, but play is not considered to be exceptional or fundamentally detached from everyday life. The framework is not designer-centric, and can handle games both as artefacts and activities.

In the framework playfulness as a mindset and play as an activity are separated. Through these two are connected, and in practice intertwined, analytically they can be separated. Both are rooted in the biology-based tendencies of humans and other animals. The playfulness of humans and other animals is a realist brute fact, but humans are the subject of the more complicated conceptualisations of play and games as they are aided by the awareness of their own playfulness and affected by social construction.

The framework draws together and builds on earlier research. Much of this earlier work has existed in disconnected pieces. Building bridges between game studies and other

fields, as well as positioning the current study of games in relation to other research efforts into games and play during the last century, is an important part of this work. The framework presented is an original synthesis that extends and elaborates earlier attempts. The constructionist ludology framework presented provides a theoretical grounding that delimits playfulness, play, and games without disconnecting them from the world around them. The boundaries surrounding play are also untangled.

The secondary contribution of the dissertation is the presentation of more specific models relating to social play. One of these is for the categorisation of game playing based on the number of participants. All game playing is to some degree social, even single-player games. Another model is presented for navigating the juxtaposition of mindset and context. This tool shows the usefulness of separating playfulness as a mindset, and playing as a socially recognised activity.

The tertiary contribution takes the form of substudies, which bring the framework and models to bear on three particular topics. Firstly, an analysis of grief play and trolling shows a side of play that is often seen as negative, or even as not-play. The analysis helps explain the creativity and enjoyment of acts of griefing without profiling the participant. Secondly, the challenges faced by gamification and other serious games are reframed in the analysis as stemming from the confusion between game as a cultural artefact, and playfulness as a mindset that need not be connected to it. Thirdly, the challenge of lacking explicit rules of play – as well as having divergent player expectations regarding how to play a game – are analysed in relation to the pervasive game *Conspiracy For Good.*

1 Introduction

In the summer of 2011 I grew a moustache. And not just any kind of a moustache, but a ridiculous, 1970s-inspired bush that is colloquially known in Finland as a 'fish stick'.

The moustache was playful in nature. I grew it in anticipation of a live action role-playing game I was about to attend; my character was the kind of a person who would rock an ugly porn moustache.

For the two months leading up to the larp I did not consider the moustache mine. It was just something lying dormant on my upper lip that no one should take seriously. Naturally, the people I met did not know that the moustache was not 'real' but fictional. My family especially were shocked. No one in my family had ever had a beard or a moustache as our genes make growing any kind of culturally acceptable concentration of facial hair difficult, if not impossible. Thus, turning the haphazard and oddly-spaced hairs under my nose into a coherent, complete, and intelligible moustache was a long and gruelling experience.

For me the moustache was a toy, a prop for playing, an ironical take on my own inability to grow a moustache, a joke, an invitation to insults – in a word: play. Many of the people around me understood this instantly. They recognised the rabbit hole to playful interaction provided by the moustache. Yet many also missed the ludic marker and misread the moustache as serious, as an actual part of my face, and did not comprehend the identity work done with the moustache in the right mindset.

In a weird way, the moustache sums up most of the themes tackled in this dissertation. Like play and playfulness, the moustache is rooted in biology. Facial hair sprouts forth, yet in many spots these hairs are considered inappropriate, and they are removed. Sometimes they are appropriate, but require cutting and culturing in order to be recognised as belonging to categories such as "moustache", "beard", and "sideburns". Similarly, playfulness takes different recognised play forms, some of which are valued as positive, others as negative. Free play is harnessed and tamed with the technology of games. Rules are used to direct and control play. My facial hair was shaped in order to

correspond to a cultural norm of not just moustache; it was something not just known in the Finnish cultural context as 'kalapuikkoviikset', but known to be hideous.

The moustache was playful for some, but not for everyone. It was grown for a role-playing game, to be 'used' for four days, but for months the moustache was a part of my appearance. It was playful, but growing it was treated with the utmost seriousness. It was performative, something I used to break the ice when meeting new people or distant acquaintances I had not seen in a while. People would point out the similarity to celebrities with similar facial hair and would make fun of me. Yet it also worked when I was alone; it made looking into the mirror a fun little thing.

Though I never considered the moustache to really be part of my ordinary life, I did start to see myself as a guy with a funny moustache. Those who thought it was an earnest moustache interpreted it differently – for example, during a gay pride parade I received attention from members of a subculture who had never before expressed any interest in me. The bear subculture was not the only cultural context in which the moustache was interpreted in eye-opening ways: although I realised (and encouraged the interpretation) that the moustache was a playful take on the ironic hipster 'stache, I had failed to take into consideration that playing with playful irony will collapse on itself. If you play with play, you will just get play. Thus many branded me a hipster: a fellow researcher at a game conference told me that I would be "barred from Brooklyn". (Notice that this was two years before the fashion press started writing about the imminent "peak beard".)

My moustache play was social play with uncertain borders. Once the borders hardened and I and the people around me became used to the moustache, I shaved it off. It had served its purpose – at least on my face.

Over the following months the moustache achieved a second life as a metaphor for this dissertation. I started to see it everywhere. Many times I contemplated growing a new moustache. Novembers were especially enticing as the Movember movement gained visibility. Growing a moustache for a month in order to raise money to combat cancers that target men is right on trend for benevolent gaming and gamification. When you mix hipsters, social media, drug companies, masculinity reduced to body chemistry, misogyny, and money, you also get a battle over the meaning of a moustache – and quite a bit of trolling and griefing.

In the end the moustache brings together larp and pervasive games, play and performance, fictions and culture, gamification and trolling. In this day and age when economics and engineering are the only worthwhile endeavours and money the sole yardstick of success, spending years getting to understand playfulness, play, and games just seems old-fashioned, quaint, fun, and a little embarrassing. Just like the moustache.

So, without further ado, welcome to my moustache. If you get too close it will tickle.

1.1 Background

I was drawn into game studies through role-playing games. I started traditional table-top role-playing in the late 1980s and branched into live action role-playing, or larping, in early 1990s. At the time there was a vibrant role-player subculture in Finland, connected by larps, conventions, and the quickly-spreading internet. As geek cultures are wont to do, we took our hobby very seriously and would analyse role-playing games and larps in face-to-face discussions, online, and in fanzines.

I missed the very first Knutepunkt in Norway, but in 1998 I travelled abroad to Stockholm to the second annual Nordic convention for larpers. There I encountered vastly different playing cultures from my own. I was fascinated by the people and their enthusiasm, but could not quite understand what the people from other larp circles were doing. However, whatever it was, it was interesting. I wanted to try out their larps, but even more I wanted to *understand* their larps.

During those early years of Nordic larp, we in the scene realised that we lacked words to talk about larp. When a larper from Norway would say 'character' it would mean a completely different thing from what that term meant in Finland. Once we understood how different the traditions were, we started publishing manifestos that outlined the best way (i.e. our way) of larping. However, we also slowly started to construct a common vocabulary – in English, as we did not have a shared local language. As this process continued we realised that in order for the conversation to remain open, we would need to start writing down what we had learned. We would not get very far if we had to start from scratch every year when we came together.

We started publishing books on larp; books that would build on previous work done in the Knutepunkt tradition. After co-editing the Knutebook in 2004 I became increasingly

interested and invested not just in larp, but in the study of it, and researching games in general. Elsewhere, the academic study of games, in its contemporary form, had started to become more prominent. Studying and understanding games was what I wanted to do.

Contemporary game studies is dominated by studies of digital games to the extent that even when digital games are not the focus, the approach is often tinted by the idea of digital games as paradigmatic examples of playing and games. My approach is quite different. Prior, and partially parallel, to this dissertation I have worked on documenting and understanding role-playing and larp, and especially Nordic larp. I have also spent time building an understanding of pervasive games. Although this dissertation does not focus on role-playing games, live action role-playing games, or pervasive games, these games frame the angle from which I approach games. In my thinking, role-playing games are at the centre of what playing games is about. Furthermore, I am often more interested in the experience and activities of the player than in the work of the designer. This slightly different perspective puts emphasis on the individual participant, the session, negotiations and transgressions of rules, and the active construction of the play situation. This is an approach that resonates in all of my work on games.

1.2 Goal of the Work

This dissertation strives to understand the foundations of playing and games and to make sense of the construction of actual social play situations. In particular, the connection between play and games is of interest. Playing and playfulness are key parts of the enactment of games, and yet games can exist – both as artefacts and activities – devoid of playing. The line between playing and games can be thin, and playing can even be a chore. Playfulness as a mindset and playing as an activity are deeply connected, but they can be analytically separated. Playing can take innumerable forms, from dancing to bullying, foreplay to kite surfing, playing *chess* to role-play. Furthermore, it is not just humans who play. Many animals play, and it is even possible to engage in cross-species play. This work explores expressions of the playful mindset, socially intelligible play activities, and culturally recognisable game forms.

The aim of this dissertation is to *make sense of playfulness, playing, and games as social, participant-driven activities, both in contexts traditionally associated with play and in contexts that are not*.

In order to achieve this aim, this dissertation presents *a constructionist ludology framework for understanding play and playfulness as personal, social, and cultural phenomena*. The concepts of playfulness, play, and game are analytically separated and their genesis is traced from biology to complex cultural constructs. Play is delimited, when possible, from non-play, even when play takes place in contexts traditionally not considered playful. This work reviews and analyses studies from numerous disciplines and both expands and strengthens the theoretical framework of constructionist ludology. Thus the goal is to build a coherent synthesis of work done in other fields, based on playing and studying play, as well as conduct an extensive review and analysis of a century of literature on play. A foundational theoretical basis for game studies is what is at stake here.

Special emphasis is placed on playing with others: social play. Establishing, maintaining, and breaking social play are all considered, and more specific models for understanding it are presented. One relates to the juxtaposition of the mindset of a person with the context of the activity in question, in order to develop a more nuanced picture of playfulness in situations not traditionally associated with play. Another model helps find social aspects in all games, even single player games.

The dissertation is positioned on the emerging field of game studies. Game studies is interdisciplinary, and thus also this dissertation draws from numerous research traditions. The four key pillars are realist social constructionism, psychology of metamotivational states, an understanding of social situations through symbolic interactionism, and ludological understanding of games and related phenomena. These are used as four maps of the same territory, as they describe and emphasise its different aspects. Similarly, they represent different decisions when it comes to resolution – and there are some ontological differences that cannot be smoothed over. Nonetheless, a synthetic approach is adopted to create a richer description of the territory than any of the four individual maps produces on its own.

The approach to play taken in this work is very inclusive. Playfulness is deeply rooted in animals including humans and it has endless expressions. In order to grasp the full glory of play, a wide net needs to be cast. In this work I have sought to err on the side of inclusion so as to not accidentally rule out play-related phenomena. Strictly delimited operationalisations of specific shards of play can be useful, but without knowledge of how they figure in the big picture of play, they can be deceiving. Game studies has tended to have a fairly limited concept of play; opening up the idea of play hopefully allows for new connections and questions.

As an application of the framework, models, and the broad concept of play used here, the construction and dissolution of the social play contract is explored in three substudies. These substudies serve as examples of how the framework can be applied to produce insights. In the substudies, pervasive larp is analysed, online grief play and trolling are explored, and the foundational principles of gamification are questioned.

The original contribution of this dissertation has three components. First, there is the framework of constructionist ludology for playfulness, play, and games. Second, there are the models for understanding social play. Third, there are the substudies, offering insights into three specific topics.

1.3 Structure of the Work

This dissertation consists of the eight chapters of this introduction and six published peer-reviewed articles. This first chapter is an introduction and an instruction manual for the dissertation. The second chapter positions the work in numerous ways: it considers how the work relates to game studies and ludology, explains the underlying ontology of Searlean social constructionism, and discusses ludological methods in general as well as the methodology used in the work in particular.

The third chapter untangles playfulness from play. It reviews research and discussion on the topic before building an original synthesis that accounts for different kinds of expressions of playfulness in adults, children, and animals. The fourth chapter continues on this track and addresses the concept of games. Numerous definitions are reviewed; in particular, approaches of games as systemic artefacts and as negotiated activities are discussed. The chapter also discusses the various boundaries that surround games. Together these two chapters introduce a conceptual framework for understanding playfulness, play, and games.

The fifth chapter is slightly more practical: it addresses social play, how it is established, what part rules play in its application, and how it can break down. The chapter also proposes models for play situations based on the context and the mindset of participants. The sixth chapter uses the analytical tools constructed in the previous chapters and exemplifies their use through three substudies: the pervasive game *Conspiracy For Good*, griefing and trolling online, and gamification. The seventh chapter

sums up the work and reviews the contributions. It also introduces the articles. The eighth chapter lists references.

After the introduction there are six articles, which have been previously published in journals and conferences. The articles drill into certain questions that are only discussed in passing in the introduction, but the introduction also provides a more elaborate and detailed treatment of some topics that did not fit in the articles. For this reason it might make sense to jump back and forth between the articles and the introduction.

Article I argues that in order to understand how a "ludic society" or "gameful applications" might work, an understanding and analytic separation of playfulness, play, and games is needed. The article is a criticism of the current understanding of gamification, and especially the lack of a coherent theory of play relating to it. The argumentation presented in the article is explored in chapters 3 and 6. Article II first reviews and then clarifies different metaphors for the boundary around play, often called the *magic circle*, and then proposes a synthesis account of the boundedness of play. The key contributions from this article are discussed in the third chapter.

Article III discusses play online in both systems that are designed for play and those that are not. The *Context-Mindset Matrix* is introduced to make sense of play in less conventional situations. Article IV charts social interaction in different types of games, from single player to multiplayer to massively multiplayer games. The article argues that all games, even single player games, are social – but also that massively multiplayer games may not be as social as they first seem. Both articles present models to understand social play, and both models are contextualised in relation to a larger framework in chapter 5 of this introduction.

Articles V and VI document and analyse the ephemeral pervasive game *Conspiracy For Good*. Article V describes the numerous frictions that arose when the genre and play culture of a game activity were not established. Article VI describes how these frictions were negotiated by the use of so-called interactive actors.

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Finally, I must thank my family for their patience and inspiration. Especially my husband Kalle, who has not only supported me through this process and kept me sane, but who knows when to be playful – and when just to breathe.

2 Positioning the Study: Context & Methodology

> [T]he greater part of reality-maintenance in conversation is implicit, not explicit. Most conversation does not in so many words define the nature of the world. Rather, it takes place against the background of a world that is silently taken for granted. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 152)
>
> [A]s long as one remembers that we are talking about a model and not the real thing, not much harm will be done. (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 11)

This chapter positions the dissertation. Firstly, there is a discussion on the disciplinary context in which games have been studied. The work is situated in game studies and ludology. Secondly, the foundations of the work as based in Searlean social ontology are discussed and the specific framework of constructionist ludology is introduced. Thirdly, the methods used in the creation of this dissertation are laid out. The analytic spiral with its three key inputs are presented: systematic literature surveys, playing, and social science methods. This final section also includes the self-positioning of the author.

This chapter is akin to an extended reader's manual. After this chapter it should be clear with what academic contexts this work is in dialogue, what its deep foundations are, and how the work that follows has been carried out.

2.1 The Study of Games

Games have been studied in academia for centuries, although for much of that time the research has been disconnected. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, publications about games started to make their way into mainstream publishing, and during the last three decades, anthropological, folklorist, and psychological interest in games started to emerge more noticeably (Avedon & Sutton-Smith 1971, 21-6). Certain early works are still remembered, such as Stewart Culin's anthropological work from 1907, *Games of the North American Indians* and H. J. R. Murray's *History of Chess* from 1913, but sustained academic communities dedicated to the study of play and games *for their own sake* did not emerge until much later. Frans Mäyrä noted in 2003:

> Science is created by the scientific community: the verification of results, testing of hypotheses and continuation of research into similar or alternative directions all depends on the existence of a community of other researchers who understand the subject matter, the language and rationale of the research in question. Until then, the person will be writing into the void, having trouble getting research funded, published or getting any kind of serious feedback. (Mäyrä 2003)

For the study of games such a scientific community – or actually communities – started to emerge during the 1970s. Key works such as Elliott M. Avedon & Brian Sutton-Smith's collection *The Study of Games* and R. E. Herron & Sutton-Smith's *Child's Play* (both from 1971), and Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper* (1978) were published. More importantly, the discussions that led to these books and those that were inspired by them now had permanent sites, as journals such as *Simulation & Gaming* (established in 1970 and for the first 20 years known as *Simulation & Games*) and *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* (publication commenced in 1974) were established. In addition to journals there were academic associations established, such as The International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA, founded in 1970) and The Association for the Study of Play[1] (TASP, founded in 1973). (Myers 2006; 1999; Mäyrä 2008, 5-11; Juul 2005, 9-10; Crookall 2012)

2.1.1 Game Studies

This work is situated in the field of *game studies*. According to Mäyrä (2008, 6), "game studies is an interdisciplinary field of study and learning, with games and related phenomena as its subject matter". As a separate field, game studies is a relatively new addition to academia, and this contemporary form of game studies has yet to incorporate the knowledge produced by the three traditions mentioned above – all of which represent different approaches to games and play. The emphases of these three previous traditions – games in relation to simulations and learning, philosophy of sport games, and play and culture – are different from game studies.

For example, the *Simulation & Gaming* tradition emphasises the *use* of games. Similar to the current serious games movement, gamification, and the various initiatives to harness

[1] TASP has been associated with journals (or annuals) such as *Play and Culture* (1988-1992), *Journal of Play Theory and Research* (1993-1997), and finally *Play & Culture Studies* (1998-).

games and play for learning, testing, ideating, training, customer retaining, et cetera, the *Simulation & Gaming* tradition has had a strong focus on *allotelic* play (with predetermined goals and sources of motivation). In comparison, game studies (and ludology) has approached game play as valuable in itself, as *autotelic*, where the players have their own goals and motivations (cf. Klabbers 2009).

Similarly, the *play & culture studies* tradition that exists around the annual meetings (since 1975) of The Association for the Study of Play has a different, if overlapping, focus. Play has historically been studied in numerous different disciplines and TASP is bringing those strands together, and is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of play in children and adults, in humans and animals.[2] Play is seen as an important phenomenon regardless of any possible function it may serve, as it may further understanding of evolution and behaviour (Reifel 1998). In game studies the emphasis is on games, even digital games, and mostly ones played by adult humans – but recently interest in play and play activities of animals other than humans has been increasing.

The traditions are not completely separate, of course. There is significant overlap in areas of interest, and some people do bridge the traditions. Key works – mostly in the form of books – cross disciplinary borders. Conscious efforts to traverse boundaries have also taken place (cf. Harviainen et al. 2013). Still, game studies is surprisingly centred on its own journals: *Game Studies* (established in 2001), *Games and Culture* (established in 2006), *Transaction of the Digital Games Research Association* (aka *ToDiGRA*, established in 2013) and certain conferences (such as the biannual DiGRA and its regional variants). In the inaugural issue of *Game Studies*, Editor-in-chief Espen Aarseth declared 2001 to be "Year One" of computer game studies:

> This year has seen the first international scholarly conference on computer games, in Copenhagen in March, and several others will follow. 01-02 may also be the academic year when regular graduate programs in computer game studies are offered for the first time in universities. And it might be the first time scholars and academics take computer games seriously, as a cultural field whose value is hard to overestimate. (Aarseth 2001)

Aarseth's claim is best interpreted as a declaration of the emergence of a new and contemporary game studies community (Järvinen 2008, 22). It is also important to note

[2] Even with the establishment of TASP, play has continued to be studied in a disconnected tradition, and often in relative isolation. An interesting snapshot is offered by an attempt to bring Finnish play scholars together by Soini & Hyvärinen (1990).

that although the journal is titled simply *Game Studies*, Aarseth discussed the birth of *computer* game studies. Though digital games have existed for almost as long as there have been computers, the critical mass of having enough researchers to study them was not reached until the cultural and economic impact of digital games became undisputed. Perhaps the reason the earlier traditions of the study of games stayed within their communities was the low cultural status of games. Today, with the global multi-billion digital game industry it is easier to justify the need for studying games – even if those games are not digital. Yet this has led to a strange wag-the-dog situation in game studies: digital game studies is often the umbrella under which the study of games in general is located.

Research into games is not limited to the field of game studies. Games, play, and especially their effects are studied, analysed, and theorised in numerous other fields as part of those disciplines. The umbrella of game studies stretches over a shared subject: games. It is common to discuss game studies as an *interdisciplinary* project (cf. Mäyrä 2008, 6; Egenfeld-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2013, 3; Aarseth 2001). However, Sebastian Deterding (2014b) has questioned if that is the correct label for the endeavour. He has argued that the intended kind of interaction and integration of disciplines associated with interdisciplinary work seldom becomes a reality. Instead, he suggests, game studies is perhaps better characterised as *multidisciplinary* since it juxtaposes different disciplinary approaches to games side by side.

Indeed, even when game studies succeeds in bridging disciplines, those disciplines are usually humanities, social sciences, and design. Works originating in natural sciences, works that do not have games as their focus, works that tend to treat games as black boxes ignoring their inner workings, and works stripping games of their exceptional status as human encounters are at risk of being ignored in game studies – and they often dismiss or ignore the work done in game studies. This is understandable in practice as the different approaches to games are not only looking for answers to different questions, but as the knowledge-constitutive interests differ towards those different kinds of questions. Furthermore, as there were approximately 1.7 million academic articles published in 27,000 peer-reviewed journals in 2012, with an annual increase of 3.5% over the last three centuries (Ware & Mabe 2012, 22-23; Björk, Roos, & Lauri 2009), it is no wonder that important work does not always reach all the audiences it might benefit. Thus, building bridges and translating between different islands of research on games and play, as well as reviewing and building syntheses of existing works is, I believe, valuable. In this work I have drawn upon studies on games and play

originating in numerous disciplines, when such work has proven illuminating or has provided an interesting counter-point. Thus I also cling on to the marker 'interdisciplinary' in relation to game studies, as the term is flexible and "there are as many forms of interdisciplinarity as there are disciplines" (Moran 2002, 15), although perhaps the term is more of a goal than an accurate description of the current state of affairs.

Interdisciplinary work carries the risks of cherry-picking only those disconnected parts that fit the task at hand, and an ontological confusion follows when theories, methods, and models are appropriated without consideration of the underlying assumptions. I am fully aware that at times I have used some theoretical apparatus outside of its intended fields, yet I have tried to weave a coherent whole of the theories and tools used in this work. Although the non-game studies scholars used in this work may not have always written with games in mind, games and play have at least been a topic they have expressed an interest in.[3] The difference here is that games are not studied for an external purpose, as laboratories, simulations, or miniatures, but for their own sake.

Games have also been discussed analytically outside of academia. Game designers, journalists, and players have significantly contributed towards a deeper understanding of games. Marinka Copier (2003) has argued that during the construction of the discipline of game studies, othering game designers and players as contributors has been attempted. Now, over a decade after Copier's article was published, it seems to me that game studies as an academic field has separated itself from game design, journalism, and the analyses of players, but it has remained open to contributions from those fields.[4]

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[3] For example, Goffman and Searle hold that games can function as simplified abstractions of 'real-life situations' and may reveal something that would otherwise be difficult to notice:

> Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations. They cut us off from serious life by immersing us in a demonstration of its possibilities. We return to the world as gamesmen, prepared to see what is structural about reality and ready to reduce life to its liveliest elements. (Goffman 1961, 34)
>
> Games can be especially useful objects to study for this analysis [of institutional facts] because they provide a microcosm of larger social phenomena. (Searle 1995, 103)

[4] Accounts by journalists are important especially in relation to new and emerging topics, and for personal accounts. For example, Julian Dibbell's works (e.g. 1993; 2008) have been referenced in game studies for years, but more recent works may also find a way in (e.g. Cheshire 2012; Stark 2012). Theories and models expressed by players and fans of games often make their way into game studies. Examples where some of the players have received credit include the classic threefold model of goals in role-playing games as edited by John H. Kim (2003). Yet it is more common that the work of players remains anonymous, as when quoting from game-related wikis. Designers' thinking likewise continues

Works originating outside academia need to be evaluated, situated, and translated, but game studies remains sensitive to these kinds of contributions as well. Perhaps the reason for this is that there are many game researchers who are also game designers, and almost all of them are players.[5]

2.1.2 Ludology

Ludology is a neologism combining the Latin 'ludus' (play) with the Greek 'logos'. The term was introduced to contemporary researchers by Gonzalo Frasca, who defined it as a "discipline that studies game and play activities" (Frasca 1999).[6] According to Frasca (2003a, 222) the term has been used previously in relation to non-digital games, especially in the board game community.

However, the history of the term is much longer, as noted by Juul (2013), having been used, for example, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1982. The earliest currently known use of the term comes from Per Maigaard, who called for a periodical for ludology and a society for ludologists in 1951. He defined ludology as "the science of games and a part of sociology and the sciences concerned."[7]

During the last fifteen years, ludology has assumed slightly different meanings. It has been perceived to mean not so much the study of game and play activities, but studying games on their own terms. This is the unofficial credo of ludology, to study *games as games* (Frasca 1999). It has been central not to simply lift theoretical apparatus and methodologies from other fields – ones that are used to analyse, say, films, literature, or

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to be a source of insight, with the various game design manuals being an important genre for researchers (e.g. Rollings & Morris 2004; Elias, Garfield & Gutschera 2012). Older examples include *The Well-Played Game* by Bernie DeKoven (1978), which has been reprinted numerous times. There are also important critical voices that have resonated in academia (e.g. Anthropy 2012).

[5] In game studies the majority of researchers identify as gamers (active game player) (Mäyrä, Van Looy & Quandt 2013). However, there is quite a bit of research on games outside game studies where the researchers might not play – or at least they do not address or reflect on their own play (Sotamaa & Suominen 2013).

[6] Also, four years after the introduction of the term, Frasca (2003b) defined ludology in a way that is fundamentally very different: ludology is a discipline that studies "games in general and video games in particular".

[7] Olli Leino (2010, 71) has suggested that Gadamer (1989, 110) was "perhaps the first ludologist in that he was more interested in 'games themselves' than in the players, suggests that the playing of a game is a way for "an activity to become a work" and thus gain independence from the subjects engaged in it."

narratives. Whilst recognising games as things worthy of being studied as they are and not as something else is important, there is a risk that moving games to the centre of attention disconnects them from other similar activities. As Thomas Malaby (see also Apperley 2010, 11-12) points out, this *exceptionalism* is not without risk:

> The issue of "play" and its limitations as a metacategory for games merits further comment because at root here is a conceptual habit that has become pernicious not only in scholarship on games but in the social sciences more broadly and in more popular treatments of games (currently exploding in number). […] What we must realize is that the older and still extant marginalization of games and its contemporary, almost utopian treatments are actually two sides of the same coin; they both follow from an exceptionalist position: that games are play and therefore set apart. This perspective allows some to hold games at arm's length from what matters, from where "real" things happen, whereas others cast them as potential utopias promising new transformative possibilities for society but ultimately just as removed from everyday experience. (Malaby 2007, 97)

Studying games must be possible without disconnecting them from similar cultural forms. Divisions such as play and work, and game and everyday life are ultimately culturally constructed, and forgetting this leads to embarrassing conclusions. If playing games as an activity is treated as exceptional, or as unlike other human (or, indeed, animal) activities, and this idea is taken as given, then we will be sorely restricted by our notion of 'game', whatever it may be.

The call to study games as games has sometimes been interpreted as studying games as formal system of rules (cf. Bogost 2009; Myers 2010). For games to be studied as games, it is quite relevant how they are conceived of. Malaby has pointed out some of the problems this *formalism* raises:

> Speaking very broadly (and a little unfairly), ludology at least began with an awareness of the "gameness" of games and from this conviction recognized that there was something to the experience of what is labeled a game that bears attention. In their fascination to draw attention to this mode of experience and make the case for its importance, however, ludologists ultimately fell into the trap of formalism, treating games as special and distinct activities, fundamentally different from everyday life, and further treated this distinctiveness normatively, seeing play as about "fun" or "pleasure" or "enjoyment". (Malaby 2007, 102)

I do not think that formalism automatically leads to exceptionalism, as a certain amount of formalism is needed in most academic endeavours. Delimitation need not automatically lead to disconnection. However, that risk is certainly real, and Malaby's caveat is important. It is imperative to keep in mind that precise terminology and models aim at rendering phenomena understandable; if they become hindrances they need to be questioned and perhaps even abandoned.

In addition to the formalist and exceptionalist undertones, ludology has also been conceived of as a counterapproach to narratology. This *anti-narrativist* positioning has been present from the inception of the term (Frasca 1999; 2003a, 222), but although many authors have seen rules and stories as both having a (complex, interconnected) part in understanding games (Juul 2001; Aarseth 1997, 5; Frasca 2003b), it has also been taken to an extreme. The most extreme position is usually attributed to Markku Eskelinen, whose position has been called *radical ludology* (Klevjer 2002, 191-192; Järvinen 2008, 23), based on this passage from 2001: "stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy." However, this passage is quoted out of context: even Eskelinen rejects this radical position (Frasca 2003b). Indeed, in hindsight it seems that the key early ludologists Frasca, Juul, and Eskelinen never sought to replace narratology, but to complement it – and the stance of narratology in these debates was a straw man, probably originating in a blog post made by influential media scholar Henry Jenkins (Aarseth 2014a).

I reject these three brands as central to ludology. Ludological research can be formalist, exceptionalist, and radically anti-narrativist, but none of these is a requirement for something to be considered ludology. The difference between game studies and ludology, as I perceive it, is that game studies is a wider field. Where ludology approaches games and play as such, game studies allows for a wider net. Game studies is defined by the object of scrutiny, games and play, whereas ludology has a further limitation of approaching games and play on their own terms. According to Aarseth (2014a) this stance has "seen very little use within the field of game studies". Indeed, he has even argued (Aarseth 2014b) that the world today is without ludology; instead there is game studies. Be that as it may, I use 'ludology' in the Maigaardian/Frascan sense as the study of games and play *as* games and play, on their own terms.

This work is situated in the fields of game studies and ludology. Games and play are at the centre of investigation, and for the most part they are approached as games. While

it is possible, even probable, that fields of inquiry other than game studies and ludology may benefit from the work presented here, I will not speculate on that. However, as these fields are mostly defined by the subject, it is necessary to explain also the disciplinary connections relating to methodology and ontology.

2.2 Constructionist Ludology

This work is undertaken in the framework of realist social constructionism. Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge where understanding of the world is intersubjectively created. The central idea is that meaning and interpretation of reality are socially and culturally produced; consciousness and intentionality enable humans to create social facts.

Specifically, the work is situated within *constructionist ludology*, pioneered by Markus Montola (2011; 2012, 17-20; cf. Mosca 2011). Constructionist ludology uses realist social constructionism, as outlined by John R. Searle (1995; 2010), to understand games.

2.2.1 Social Constructionism and Searle

Social constructionism is a broad umbrella term, covering different approaches. However, Andy Lock & Tom Strong (2010, 6-10) have identified five central tenets. First, social constructionism is concerned with meaning and understanding. Second, these meanings begin in social interaction and are shared. Third, this socio-culturally embedded meaning-making is specific to times and places. Fourth, this makes social constructionism wary of essentialism (but not anti-realist). Finally, social constructionism is a critical perspective that seeks to reveal the operation of the social world and the obscured political power structures in it – with an intent to trigger change for something more just.

Although social constructionism did not really come about until the latter part of the 20th century (cf. Hacking 1999), Lock & Strong (2010, 12-28) track its intellectual foundations to Giambattista Vico, an Italian historian and philosopher, and his magnus opus *Scienza Nuova*, the first edition of which was published in 1725. Lock & Strong trace key influences from phenomenology, hermeneutics, Marxism, and discourse analysis, but also single out individuals like Lev Vygotsky, George Herbert Mead, Ludwig

Wittgenstein, Gregory Bateson, Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel and Anthony Giddens, many of whom will also be relevant later in this dissertation. Yet most social scientists who consider themselves social constructionists mostly build upon the theoretical framework and academic discourse initiated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their 1966 book *The Social Construction of Reality*.

Berger and Luckmann situated themselves on the field of sociology of knowledge, and brushed past the foundational issues. They (1966, 20) saw their project as clarifying the foundation of knowledge in everyday life through a phenomenological analysis of subjective experiences, while refraining "from any causal or genetic hypotheses, as well as from assertions about ontological status of the phenomena analysed." The goal (ibid., 18) was to bridge the dual character of society, and to understand how *objective facticity* and *subjective meaning* form the paramount reality.

The foundational issues that Berger and Luckmann (1966, 19) stepped over and explicitly left to the philosophers, Searle took up and sorted. His work (Searle 1995; 2010) on the construction of social reality is based on an external realism[8], and it provides the ontological basis for constructionist ludology – and this work.

Mountains and tectonic plates are obvious examples of non-mental phenomena. They exist independent of observers and minds. Then there are mental phenomena; some of these are intentional (like beliefs and desires), others are non-intentional (like pain). Then there is a third group that is not reduced to mental or non-mental: things like money and marriage. These things are intentionality-relative. It is the construction of this third group that Searle provides an account of. (Searle 2010, 17)

Searle has argued that the oppositions between biology and culture and mind and body are misguided (1995, 227-228). Social reality is ultimately based on the material one, and there is no disconnection. The key concepts that bridge the alleged gap are consciousness and intentionality.

> We live in a world made up entirely of physical particles in fields of force. Some of these are organized into systems. Some of these systems are living systems and some of these living systems have evolved consciousness. With

[8] Importantly, Searle (1995, 150-2) makes a distinction between ontological objectivity (reality completely independent of minds) and external realism (reality independent of representations), as the latter allows for ontologically subjective (mind dependent) yet representation-independent things such as pain.

> consciousness comes intentionality, the capacity of the organism to represent objects and states of affairs in the world itself. (Searle 1995, 7)

According to Searle (1995) things such as money, marriage, property, and *chess*[9] are facts, yet they only exist because we believe that they do. He distinguishes between different kinds of facts (ibid., 120-125), such as *brute facts* rooted in external reality (there is snow on Mt. Everest) and *social facts* (this is a doctoral dissertation). Brute facts exist regardless of consciousness and intentionality, while social facts are built on collective intentionality (ibid., 23-26), which Searle considers "a biological primitive phenomenon that cannot be reduced to or eliminated in favour of something else."

Throughout the book *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) Searle uses games as an example of social facts, and often specifically as examples of *institutional facts*, a subgroup thereof. Institutional facts, as social facts, require collective intentionality. In addition, they require assignment of function ("the function of X is to Y") (ibid., 13-23) and exist only within systems of constitutive rules – rules that do not merely regulate, but which create the very possibility of certain actions (rules of *chess* are used as an example) (ibid., 27-29).

The Searlean approach is particularly relevant for this work as it prioritises process over product. The social process of playing a game takes precedence over the artefact of a game. It explains, for example, why the game of *chess* is not worn out by repeated use. Though a chess set may succumb to wear and tear, the institution of *chess* does not (cf. ibid., 57).

These elements of Searle's account of the construction of the social world are quite relevant for the task at hand: there is an external realism of brute facts that provides a foundation for the social world being built. Human consciousness and intentionality, especially a shared 'we intentionality', are used to build social facts and institutional facts such as marriage and *chess*. Functions are not intrinsic, but observer relative.

2.2.2 Philosophy for Social Sciences

[9] In this dissertation all names of games and play forms are italicised, whether they are designed products, folk activities, or a combination thereof, to deemphasise any discontinuation on a continuum from free play to very structured games.

According to Ian Hacking (1999, 6-14), works using social construction tend to be critical of the status quo and they usually follow the following rules:

> (0) In the present state of affairs, *X* is taken for granted; *X* appears to be inevitable.
>
> (1) *X* need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. *X*, or *X* as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable.
>
> (2) *X* is quite bad as it is.
>
> (3) We would be much better off if *X* were done away with, or at least radically transformed. (Hacking 1999, 6, 12)

Statement (1) is the most important one, though often works that seek to be transformative progress to statements (2) and (3). The statement (0) is a precondition for social construction talk; without it the following statements seem obvious. Games, for example, do not fulfil the precondition; saying that games are social constructions is trivial. Games are created and played by social human beings often in social settings. Why, then, attempt to employ social construction in connection to games, if such an approach most likely only yields trivial findings?

There are three reasons: first of all, not only are games – be they conceived of as products or processes – clearly constructions, but the *idea* of a game is such a construction as well. This is not a revelation, but a foundational point that needs to be heeded whenever games are discussed. Hacking (1999, 12-14) discussed this as the distinction between the construction of an object and the construction of an idea. Secondly, understanding *how* those concepts are constructed is relevant for understanding (and, by extension, the use of) said concepts. Thirdly, by clearly explicating the constructions relating to play and games, it becomes easier to see those brute facts that exist independent of construction, such as the mammalian tendency to play. Social constructionism can be used to highlight what is *not* socially constructed.

Furthermore, this line of questioning relating to the built-in narrative of social constructionism does not quite hit its target, for this is not the kind of constructionism Searle presents. Firstly, Searle does not position himself in terms of social constructionism, but he does defend his theory against (strong) social constructionism (1995, 190-194). His notion of social constructionism aligns with anti-realism, or the idea that there is no reality independent of representations – and he has spent considerable effort in defending realism (ibid., 149-226). This interpretation of social constructionism

as anti-realist is unfounded (Hacking 1999, 24). Secondly, Searle's project, as an analytical philosopher, is describing the construction of social reality, not to underline its political nature. He (2010, 5) describes his work as social ontology and calls for a philosophy of society. This would not be a philosophy *of* social sciences, but a philosophy *for* them. The transformative bent of social constructionism noted by Hacking, Lock & Strong is not apparent in Searle's work. He does not attempt to show the difference between what is constructed and what is not, but starts from the idea that there is a difference (Hacking 1997; also Searle 1997). Games and play are approached in this dissertation through Searlean realist social constructionism not in order to reveal their constructedness, but to uncover how they are constructed and which parts are independent of representation.

This is also the environment in which Montola (2012, 17-20; also 2011) built constructionist ludology. In relation to ludology, he rejects formalism as necessary, and instead adopts weak social constructionism as the foundation.[10] Montola also underlines that constructionist ludology as an analytical framework is pragmatically motivated. Instead of trying to uncover formalist maxims, it is more interesting and valuable to ask what is learned by studying something *as* something. For example, *chess* can be studied from both objectivist and subjectivist positions.[11]

Montola's approach has been quite fruitful. His analysis of the numerous key concepts in the study of games have been insightful; for example, the different types of rules in games (Montola 2012, 32-47; more on this in Chapter 5) and the different 'views' of games one can take (Montola 2011; more on this in Chapter 4) are especially interesting. However, basic concepts such as play and game require more work, and that task is undertaken in Chapters 3 and 4 as well as Articles I and II.

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[10] Weak social constructionism is social constructionism that is not anti-realist; it does not deny the existence of an external reality. It is weak in comparison to strong social constructionism (or universal social constructionism), which *is* anti-realist, and does deny a world beyond representations, experiences, and assigned meaning. This idea of strong social constructionism is a straw man (cf. Hacking 1999, 24), but unfortunately a fairly common way to disregard social constructionism as a whole (cf. Deterding 2013, 130). Instead of the comparative 'weak' social constructionism, I employ the term realist social constructionism.

[11] Montola's take on 'game' is not fully in line with this pragmatic statement. He (2012, 19) writes: "This theoretical framework sees games as activities based on the fact that their participants agree on a set of rules, which constitute the social institution of the game." This does not differentiate between an instance of *chess* played and *chess* as an institutional fact. As I find the pragmatic approach more valuable, I have chosen to follow that and discuss the concept of 'game' in Chapter 4.

My take on constructionist ludology follows Searle and Montola. Constructionist ludology studies games and play in the framework of realist social constructionism as subjects worthy of study for their own sake. It is pragmatic and promiscuous in its drive for uncovering valuable insights into the construction and meaning of games and play. It rejects both formalism and exceptionalism in regards to games and play; the former as no more than a tool in a toolbox, and the latter as it disconnects games and play from the world that surrounds them.

2.3 Method

Works that are positioned in ludology have tended to avoid discussing methods. The primary method seems to be analysis and theoretical thinking and the "the quality of argumentation is the measure of validity, reliability and generality" (Montola 2012, 125). However, this analysis is usually not described (cf. Juul 2005; Frasca 2007; Montola 2012). In this subchapter I outline the methods used in this dissertation.

Aki Järvinen (2008, 24-28) has described a method for 'applied ludology'. The 'applied' part refers to ludology that has practical applications for analysis, design, and development of games. Järvinen describes his circular model for game research as going through the following phases: play, comparison, recognition, abstraction, theory formation, application (play/design), observation, analysis, validation, iteration, play. Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca (2013) have identified five types of approaches to games: those that focus on a game, on players, culture, ontology, and metrics.[12] This dissertation fits best in the fourth box, that of ontology:

> [S]ome studies examine the philosophical foundations of games. These studies usually seek to present general statements that apply to all games, and may enable us to understand, for example, the relationship between rules, fiction, and the players. Such scholarship builds on logical analysis, which is typically grounded in concrete examples but is not interested in individual titles *per se*. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2013, 10, emphasis in original)

[12] Although presented as a comprehensive list of approaches to games, it makes more sense to approach this list as collecting approaches popular in humanities, social sciences, and design studies. Games are also researched within a number of other fields ranging from ethology to mathematics – and the approaches do not always fit the list presented here.

Järvinen (2008) likens game research to game design (the same observation has been made by Sotamaa 2009, 23). I do not know if creating a dissertation is more like designing a game than it is like any other kind of creative work that has numerous parts that need to fit into each other, and that refers to the external social world. However, I do see playfulness and play as key elements in any kind of research, especially theory construction. Trying out new ideas and models, combining weird works and results, adopting new terminology and tools just to see what they reveal, toying with a theory or a model to see if it breaks, and so forth. (I would wager that most researchers start to see the phenomenon they're addressing as analogous to the process of research.)

An iterative spiral of theoretical analysis characterises this work. The analysis is enriched by theories and models from numerous disciplines (mostly sociology, psychology, social psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, literature studies, narratology, ethology, design research) that are brought to bear on the topics of playfulness, play, and games, as well as the substudies on trolling, griefing, larp, ARGs, and gamification. The aim has been to create a coherent theory of constructionist ludology that explains not just games, but also play and playfulness. The iterative cycle, or the spiral, includes such steps as play, comparison, recognition, abstraction, theory formation, reading of theory and models, coherence policing, thinking, doodling, reflecting in regards to existing play examples, writing, and once again play. The process is similar to the hermeneutic circle or spiral (Ramberg & Gjesdal 2014), where examining pre-understandings, continually reflecting, as well as assessing the whole in light of the parts and the parts in light of the whole are all important. The end result can, hopefully, be characterised as *thinking clearly in public*.

Two parts of the spiral require particular explication: firstly, coherence policing has been important in regards to ensuring that the developed theory is not just practical, but that it is internally coherent. For example, many existing accounts of play confuse either play and playfulness or play and games; they ignore animal play or adult play, or disregard disruptive and destructive play. Secondly, reflection in regards to actual play has been important as many theoretical models centre on games, and not on play. Identification of elements of play or the spirit of play has been particularly important.

However, describing the process of analysis as a circle or even a spiral with discrete steps renders the reality of theory construction too neat and orderly.[13] In practice the work

[13] Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey (2011) have described the Hutter-Hennink qualitative research cycle as three cycles that form a larger cycle. These cycles are the design cycle

that became this dissertation started from studying pervasive games, larp, and online play. Questions such as "Are larps games?", "What is the connection between griefing, *Wikipedia edit warring*, and *Google bombing*?", and "What can pervasive game design learn from political demonstrations?" were on my mind. However, in order to address such questions, much more fundamental questions about delimiting of games and social play would have to be answered. Untangling those concepts led to ever more foundational questions about play. Finally, the works of John Searle on construction of social reality, and Montola's application of it to games, provided some kind of firm spot in the swamp of ontology and epistemology. Combining that with insights from ethology and psychology provided a new basis for constructionist ludology. Yet at all times the complex phenomena of social play and games, as well as the practice of playing games and larping, of griefing and gamification, were kept in mind. Once the foundation is in order, many specific questions become apparent. Inevitably, some questions also fell by the wayside.

The spiral of theory construction mostly involves thinking. The thinking takes many forms, from building a theoretical hypothesis, testing it with different existing and hypothetical cases, evaluating the results, and then revising the theory based on this new insight. The thinking in practice often takes the form of writing or doodling. Furthermore, it is not a completely solitary endeavour; presenting, discussing, defending, and succumbing to criticism are all important. This spiral is also influenced by inputs from the outside.

The key inputs in the case of this dissertation were threefold: (systematic) reading of research literature, playing, and substudies conducted with methods borrowed from social sciences. Next, these three key inputs are opened. Reader discretion is advised: descriptions of methods are always too orderly and straightforward to accurately reflect an actual process.

2.3.1 Literature Review

(formulating research question, conceptual framework, and field work based on a review of existing literature), the ethnographic cycle (research instrument design, data collection), and the analytic cycle (description, analysis, and theory development). A similar cycle of cycles could be drawn for this dissertation (with stronger emphasis on the design cycle and less emphasis on the ethnographic cycle), but it would be a bit too neat.

Systematic reading is known as literature review. It is rarely discussed as a method outside of natural and technical sciences,[14] where research aiming at syntheses, be they systematic literature reviews, metasyntheses, or meta-analyses, are more common; yet due to the increasingly fast-growing number of research publications, the method is increasing in its importance for building general understanding (Kallio 2006). All research publications are expected to be contextualised in relation to earlier literature and, traditionally, literature reviews are an expected part of dissertations (cf. Morse 2004, 497-498). However, since game studies and ludology, as conceived of today, are both interdisciplinary as well as young topics with a long pre-history, the *production of an overview* is a contribution in itself. Games and play are discussed and have been discussed in numerous disciplines, and as games are not at the focus of these studies, the findings are often scattered. The establishing of game studies and ludology seeks to change this, but in the fifteen years these fields have been in existence in their current form, the work done in other disciplines during the previous century (and even before that) have not yet been processed and consolidated. Without synthesis, these disconnected discourses remain fractured – at least from the point of view of play and games. Now, synthetic works are especially relevant for researchers entering a new field, for people who yet lack an overview of a field, and for fields that get stuck in rhetorical circles when an overview is missing (Kallio 2006, 19). I would argue that it is also relevant for emerging fields forming around a topic that has been researched previously.

Earlier research relating specifically to playfulness, play, and games, as well as other topics discussed in this dissertation, have been searched for, read, reviewed, and condensed. The central aim of this dissertation is to make sense of playfulness, play, and games as social, participant-driven activities, both in contexts traditionally associated with play and in contexts that are not. This goal has helped delimit the works reviewed, the emphases placed, and the syntheses constructed. The aim has been to evaluate each reviewed work in its original context, both in relation to discipline and time. Then these (often disconnected) works have been used as a basis for constructing a new contribution, a new synthesis. This kind of an approach has been discussed as systematic and trait-descriptive analysis (Harviainen 2012, 52-54).

[14] The methods described in discussions of literature review in natural and technical sciences cannot be directly applied in game studies, but the principles presented have guided the formulation of the systematic literature reviews conducted as part of this dissertation (e.g. Petticrew 2001).

Literature reviews have informed every step of this dissertation process. The numerous reviews have varied in depth, aims, and processes. Although it seems that commonly systematic literature reviews are carried out to combine empirical data (probably due to the longer history of meta-analysis, cf. Fink 2010), in this work the aim has been mostly theoretically oriented (cf. Kallio 2006; Baumeister & Leary 1997).[15] This work concentrates on building a coherent theoretical foundation by marrying (preferably empirics-based) theoretical works form a number of fields.

However, it can be hard to delimit exactly where the 'traditional' literature review becomes systematic and worthy of discussing as a method. I shall next explicate the process and the goals behind the four most comprehensive literature reviews conducted for this work: first, in relation to playfulness and play (Chapter 3), the review was integrative and descriptive. The review was not comprehensive in the sense that all literature on play and playfulness would have been processed. That was not possible due to the sheer amount of research on playfulness and play. However, the aim has been to enrich and broaden the understanding of and discussion about play in game studies that currently centres on select classic works. This review seems closest to the 'traditional' literature review that usually is not discussed as a method, and which current research method literature has criticised as unsystematic (cf. Metsämuuronen 2006, 37-39). However, 'unsystematic' would hardly be a fair description of a four-year-long process of reading, reflecting, condensing, contextualising, following citations, reading for context, comparing cited data, selecting new works to review based on numerous criteria from number of citations to originality of approach, rereading, et cetera. The analysis of the topic of playfulness and play has been systematic even if the review of all the possible literature on play was not systematic. Thus, the review can be described as qualitative metasynthesis (cf. Salminen 2011, 12; Walsh & Downe 2005), as it not only brings together and reviews numerous approaches to play, but puts forward a synthetic model informed by and encompassing previous works. The aim is to be interpretative and integrative, rather than just aggregative.

Second, the work relating to the definition of games (Chapter 4) can be characterised as a systematic literature review (cf. Salminen 2011, 8-9; Petticrew 2001, 99), where all definitions of games that have been found through database searches, following

[15] An exception to this is found in the charting of online play (Article III) which is closer in its aims to some of my past work (e.g. the charting of pervasive games and play for Montola et al. 2009), where I have sought to map practice through descriptions of play instances.

references, and serendipity have been reviewed. Third, the work on the magic circle and other metaphors (Article II; Chapter 4) for the boundary around play was systematic in its inclusion of all found metaphors, and the result is a qualitative metasynthesis, as an integrated new model is proposed.

Just as the depth of the various surveys has varied in the context of this dissertation, so has the goal. Baumeister and Leary (1997) identify five goals for literature reviews: theory development, theory evaluation, survey of the state of knowledge on a particular topic, problem identification, and historical account of the development of theory or research on a topic. For me these goals are often in sequence: first one reads to have a clear idea of the current state of a topic. If there are clear problems or gaps in that knowledge, then this leads to problem identification. This helps delimit the choices of works selected for further reviewing, both in identifying new works and in poring over familiar works in greater detail. This then can lead to theory evaluation and even theory development. There is a cyclical process of reviewing and assessing that guides a longer research project, even if a single literature review can be relatively straightforward. This brings us to the fourth literature review conducted of this work: I conducted a basic review to understand the state of the art in relation to academic understanding of grief play (Article III). This helped refine questions relating to playfulness (Article I, Chapter 3). I later conducted a new, more thorough review of literature relating to grief play, this time armed with new theoretical insights, which helped delimit the search for relevant publications in a different way (and incorporated literature on trolling) – and which moves towards theory development (Stenros & Paavilainen 2013; Chapter 6).

Literature review and synthesis-building can be criticised as reductionist, or rife with totalising concepts that erase rich and thick descriptions (Walsh & Downe 2005). This is indeed criticism that can be levelled on any formal theory (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1967). I find a map metaphor helpful in this: there is a territory that can be described using numerous maps. The resolutions, representational choices, and purposes of the maps vary, sometimes even greatly. Yet as long as one remembers that the map is not the territory, no great harm will be done. One should also keep in mind "that explanatory efforts and theory generation are transitory and always open to revision" (Walsh & Downe 2005, 205). The conceptual framework presented in this dissertation is finished for the time being, but it is not in any way final. Furthermore, the methods used in this dissertation are not limited to systematic literature review; the theory developed has constantly also been tested with actual practice of play.

2.3.2 Playing as Research

If there is such a thing as a ludological method, then *playing* is it. It is common to make the claim that it is not possible to understand games without playing them (e.g. Aarseth 2003, 3; Järvinen 2008, 24; Mäyrä 2008, 165-7; Frasca 2007, 171; see also Mortensen 2009, 75; Aarseth 2014a). This appeal is not just practical, it is ideological:[16] the first-person experience of using games and the knowledge gained through them is at the core of ludology.

> During the 1990s it was still possible to specialise in the study of games without any personal experience of play. For the new generation of game researchers this seemed odd, comparable to a literature scholar who had not read a single novel, play, or poem. From an external position she might occupy herself by measuring reader reactions and thus draw the conclusion that books have a worryingly strong impact on their readers. This kind of an approach could not say anything about the character of literature or the meanings it conveys. Indeed, game studies has followed the usual developmental path of communication and media studies; in the beginning attention is drawn especially to the study of reactions and impacts. As there has been progress along the developmental path research has become more diverse. (Suominen et al. 2009, translated from Finnish by the author)

I agree that game scholars should play. However, I feel that a stronger argument is needed than just presenting the need as self-evident with a comparison to book-averse literature scholars just interviewing readers – after all, not only has the field of *reader-response criticism* (e.g. Tompkins 1980) done exactly that, but some of their insights have relevance for discussing games, players, and play experiences. Also, respected researchers have written about games in ways that seem to imply that they have not played said games (e.g. Jenkins 2008, 127-134). A common argument that I have encountered in seminars with researchers from other fields is that the idea that one needs to play games in order to study them is ridiculous; according to these critics by the same logic one would need to be an immigrant in order to study immigration, or to commit a homicide

[16] This appeal also has a historical context: studies of digital games before the birth of game studies and ludology were dominated by condemnatory stances, often conducted by scholars who were unfamiliar with them (Karppi & Sotamaa 2012). Particularly, games with an interesting visual surface are susceptible to this (i.e. audiovisual elements of digital games are available to non-players). Yet looking at the screen (or a recording of the screen) while someone else plays is not the same as playing the game. Aarseth (2003, 4) has put it: "When others play, what takes place on the screen is only partly representative of what the player experiences." The mental processes, interpretation, the actions taken, the experience of playing, are all missing – leading to theories and readings of games that can be alienating to players.

in order to study murder. Indeed, it is possible to study games in many ways without playing them. One could easily study the economic impact of video games, the presence of games in pop culture, the short-term effects of playing board games, game interface design, visual aesthetics of collectible card games, representations of homosexuality in role-playing game rulebooks, and many other game-related topics without ever playing. However, we come back to the essence of ludology: to study games as games in order to be able to say something about the character of games or the meanings they convey. Although there is disagreement about how to delimit the concept of game, there is unanimous agreement that games are to be played.[17] If the researcher is lucky, ignoring this aspect of games whilst doing research will have no impact on the result, but it can lead to having fewer insights to share, or even to the complete misinterpretation of the data. The questions that ludology asks are difficult to answer without playing games. The decision not to play the games one studies certainly would need to be carefully explained.

Furthermore, the idea that a game or play researcher needs to play is much older than contemporary ludology. It has been noted that, for example, play is very different whether it is observed from the inside or the outside.

> It is clear that theorizing about a ludic experience is not the same as that experience. When the scholar says play is developmental experience, for the player it may be satisfying and joyful experience. Because forms of play, like all other cultural forms, cannot be neutrally interpreted, it is impossible to keep ambiguity and discrepancy from creeping into the relationship between how they are observed by scholars, and experienced by players. (Klabbers 2006, 28, paraphrasing Sutton-Smith 1997, 216)

> What play is cannot be derived merely from observing play activities, since that would imply that one already knows what play is (or else, how could he identify it in order to study it?); it is therefore not surprising that much has been said about the nature of play, much that can be said, is a mixture of the author's intuition, his common sense, his sharing in the public domain of meanings, and his experiments and observations. (Makedon, 1984, 30)

One need only read the descriptions of play written by those who are prevented from joining in the play – the researchers of animal play and children's play – to notice that participation adds a completely new dimension to the analysis of play.

[17] Curios, like zero-player games and the discussion that surrounds them, strengthen more than they question this notion (see Björk & Juul 2012).

When playing, the researcher cannot completely bracket herself. It is possible to use games without playfulness, to approach them earnestly and seriously, like a research experiment. However, although that kind of approach is a valuable tool in a game researcher's toolbox, it does not capture all the modes of interacting in a ludic context.[18]

Furthermore, playing games together creates community (e.g. Huizinga 1938; Henricks 2006). Anyone who participates in a game becomes, to a degree, an insider. The majority of game researchers are active game players, or 'gamers' (cf. Copier 2003; Mäyrä, Van Looy & Quandt 2013); they not only have a high gaming literacy, but they are also passionate about some games or gaming cultures. How objective can they be in their assessments of games? Do researcher-gamers become too enamoured with their topic – and is this insider status somehow different from other researchers who are passionate about their subjects?

The conceptualisation of 'game' is relevant here. Is it possible to become an insider, through playing, in relation to a game-artefact, or only in relation to certain instances of playing a game, a gaming group, or a gaming culture? The question about insider status has different weight for a formalist researcher of a single-player digital game, and a games-as-negotiated-activity researcher involved in a social live action role-playing game. The former can make a stronger claim of avoiding insider status, whereas the latter must carefully evaluate their position. Needless to say, my approach is the latter, and I have elsewhere discussed the challenges of subjectivity, ephemera, co-creation, and first-person audience in such research (Stenros & Montola 2011a).

The dilemma has been addressed in fan studies (Hills 2002, 3) by use of the term *imagined subjectivity*: the boundary between a fan and an academic is built up with the idea that the "'duly trained and informed' academic is a resolutely rational subject, devoted to argumentation and persuasion." Yet the academic imagined subjectivity is somehow seen as transcending the subjective (ibid., 62) as 'we' are fully rationally self-present – unlike some others (ibid., 152).

Thus in most game research the researcher cannot hide. Playing as a method does bear some similarities with autoethnography (cf. Madison 2012; Chang 2008; Muncey 2010),

[18] Furthermore, it can be questioned if research experiments in general are devoid of playfulness. Certainly numerous researchers have compared their work to play (e.g. Apter 1991; Csikszentmihalyi 1975).

especially analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006). The researcher is part of the social world under scrutiny, and makes use of personal narratives and experiences in the analysis. However, usually the researcher is not focusing on uncovering a culture or even describing a group within or around the game (although there are online-world ethnographers who are out to do exactly that), nor are they describing themselves as representatives of a gaming culture (although obviously gaming subcultures are an interesting topic as well). Even if the aims are different, there are similarities in practice; in playing, collecting self-observational and self-reflective data (cf. Chang 2008, 89-102) is important.

Furthermore, playing as method is not chosen in order to question traditional methods of social sciences that seek to abstract and explain, as in evocative autoethnography (cf. Anderson 2006). Playing is chosen as a method as it is the best way to access some of the data, and to contextualise existing data. Thus it is analytic autoethnography that resonates with playing. Leon Anderson (2006) has proposed five key features of analytic autoethnography: complete member researcher status, analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher's self, dialogue with informants, and commitment to theoretical analysis. These can fit playing games: the researcher can be a full member in the multiplayer games she participates in and can be a full member of gaming groups and subcultures, but neither is a requirement.[19] The researcher should reflect on her own position while playing. I do not think that the researcher should be constantly present in the narrative, but clear positioning is something that I would advocate. A demand that a game researcher needs to interview other players has not been issued, but obviously a game researcher is open to data other than her personal experience, such as game reviews, wikis, and discussion forums. Interviews are common when the research is more oriented towards capturing gaming culture. Finally, playing as a method is geared towards analysis and theoretical development.

To sum up, my stance is that through participation in games, researchers gain more in insight than they lose in critical distance, but ultimately that is an assessment that a reader

[19] In an article outlining how to research pervasive games, I have discussed how a participating researcher attempts to play in an average, invisible way in order not to draw too much attention or influence the playing too much (Stenros, Waern & Montola 2012). Obviously different games are played in different ways. For example, with a digital single-player game, the researcher can do whatever she likes. With multiplayer games there are ethical considerations. With singular, ephemeral, event games (such as pervasive games and larps), the researcher should not hijack the only instance of a game.

of a study or the research community as a whole needs to make in each case. For that to happen, the researcher needs to be open about her level of involvement. Furthermore, the researcher needs to be open to accounts of other people's play experiences to keep her analysis grounded. Playing is an important method for game studies. However, we still need to establish *how* playing as research should be conducted.

2.3.3 Scholarly Play

Playing games for fun is not identical to playing games as part of research. Research play has a function outside of play and is thus instrumental. There is relatively scarce discussion on how playing as research should be conducted (e.g. Aarseth 2003; 2007; Kücklich 2007; Karppi & Sotamaa 2012; Mortensen 2002; Mäyrä 2008, 165-167). According to Mäyrä (2008, 165) a researcher does not choose the games she plays based on her own taste alone, but may need to become well acquainted with genres she does not enjoy, as well as their connected player subcultures. Indeed, it is important for a researcher to familiarise herself not just with the game she is studying, but with other contextually relevant games. A *game literacy* is assumed for researchers. In addition, Mäyrä (2008, 165) outlines that analytical play "needs to be responsive and observant of the game in several levels." He identifies three such levels: structural gameplay analysis, thematic analysis, and social analysis.

In relation to digital games, Espen Aarseth (2003, 7) has identified and described seven "strata" of engagement that play analysis allows. These are all related to the skills of the player and progression within the game: superficial play, light play, partial completion, total completion, repeated play, expert play, and innovative play. An expert player would win in a multiplayer game and innovative play implies that the player is able to imagine new strategies in and uses of the game. Furthermore, Aarseth has argued that the game researcher should be an expert player:

> Although expert and innovative play are always hard and sometimes impossible to reach, they do imply that the (successful) analyst has understood the gameplay and the game rules better than others. A superficial cheater or a casual socialiser simply cannot be expected to reach a deep understanding of the games they examine. Then the question becomes, should we expect game scholars to excel in the games they analyze? This idea, while fairly militant, has some merit, especially if we look to other performing arts, where academic training is often combined with training for practical performance skills. As

> game scholars, we obviously have an obligation to understand gameplay, and this is best and sometimes only achieved through play. While our achievements as academics are measured by the quality of our publications rather than by our scores in *Tetris* and *Quake*, that quality is nonetheless also, at least for most of us, an indirect result of our playing skills. (Aarseth 2003, 7)

A similar stance has been advocated by David Myers (2010, 10, 22-23, 44). He has likened the process of learning to master the game controller and the game interface to learning a language before reading a book. For him, the playing of a (digital) game that takes place before the game has been sufficiently mastered is not worthy of consideration; only expert play matters. Indeed, he feels that one really starts to understand a game only through repetition and replay, through exploration of the different choices afforded by the game – in the testing of boundaries, and transgressing them. Thus, in Aarseth's terms, Myers requires researchers to reach the level of innovative play.[20]

These requirements hardly fit all types of games. Some games are staged as events and can only be played once, while others never end. Deciding what 'mastery' means in games where social play and the sociability around the game are central (party games, games on virtual worlds, some role-playing games) is also far from trivial, nor is reproducing a game situation in exactly the same way (cf. Mortensen 2003, 26). And even if a similar game state might be attainable, the situation around the game (i.e. *metagame*, see Garfield 2000) will have changed. Some games also have numerous

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[20] It is interesting to note that another advocate of formalism, Markku Eskelinen, has noted in relation to a comparison between digital games and literature that for a successful piece of criticism on an *ergodic* (Aarseth 1997) text, one need not encounter every textual element:

> In literature, theatre and film everything matters or is conventionally supposed to matter equally - if you've seen 90% of the presentation that's not enough, you have to see or read it all (or everything you can). This is characteristic of dominantly interpretative practices in general. In contrast, in computer games you either can't or don't have to encounter every possible combinatory event and existent the game contains, as these differ in their ergodic importance. Some actions and reactions in relation to certain events will bring the player quicker to a solution or help her reach the winning situation sooner or more effectively than others. (Eskelinen 2001)

The question about how much one should play remains open. It is interesting that magazines that publish reviews of digital games often have official guidelines as to how much time one should spend playing before writing a review. Obviously no such standards have been adopted for research of digital games.

variations that can be significantly different from each other (e.g. *Minecraft*, *poker*), begging the question as to how many variants a researcher should attempt to master. Finally, in casual games and free-to-play games the particularly interesting questions for the game industry relate to the player experience during the first minutes of starting to play. Understanding – and especially relating to – a virginal play experience may be difficult for an expert player. If expert players and game designers would be the best at understanding the learning experience of adopting a new game, then game companies would probably hire fewer play testers to try out the games they develop. Furthermore, the requirement needs to also be considered in the context of the research being conducted – and the game types under scrutiny. For example, the experience of playing games that fit the genre of the so-called *casual games* (Kuittinen et al. 2007) are apparently meant for more casual encounters, and should theoretically be easier to access than so-called hard-core games – although casual games are also played in very committed ways.

Indeed, this question is also connected to that of the ontology of a game. If games are conceived of as finished artefacts or systems, then it is possible to master them fully and it makes sense that a researcher should know her subject as deeply and thoroughly as possible. However, if games are conceived of as processes, if they are always in the process of becoming (Malaby 2007), then a complete knowledge is impossible (see also Chapter 4).

Innovative play should also be further scrutinised. Playing with the rules, as opposed to according to them, has an effect on play. Cheating, griefing, and modding are all common practices, and if the attempt is to understand play, then that pursuit should not be limited only to the 'good play'. The challenge is that 'bad play' (Myers 2010, 15-29) questions the rules of a game and can result in a variation, undermining the notion of the game as an unchanging object – even if all games always contain the potential for new meanings and new refigurations (Malaby 2007, 102). Tero Karppi and Olli Sotamaa (2012) have pointed out: "Any formal categorisation that fails to capture this recursive and processual quality of games is in danger of missing something essential."

Cheating, grief play, and other sorts of bad play have, of course, been studied (cf. Consalvo 2007; Foo 2008; see Chapters 3, 5, and 6), which opens up another question: if playing a game is a central method for ludology, should one also engage in cheating and griefing if one is to study those phenomena? Neither practice is illegal, but they can be unethical. Yet if that is not done, then we run the risk of limiting the study of transgressive play to only those types that ultimately have a positive effect, such as the

'well-timed cheat' that DeKoven (1978, 37) discusses as positive and constructive. Research that questions normative playing styles (e.g. Myers 2010, 144-157), or attempts to understand the player experience and aesthetics of games that are not fun (e.g. Montola 2010), or otherwise makes sense of transgressive play practices, can prompt and has prompted particularly emotional responses even in academia. However, descriptions of such play practices based only on external points of view runs the risk of othering those who participate in such play.

Numerous researchers have questioned this rather formal way of approaching games and their play. T.L. Taylor (2009) has called for a more holistic understanding of the complexities of play situations. She has imported the concept of *assemblage* from science and technology studies and philosophy. Assemblage is used to refer to the combination of the human and the non-human, for example of driver and car, or player and videogame (Giddens 2006, 151), but also to de-emphasise essential traits and classifications in order to foreground dynamic empirical and historical relations that result in social and natural phenomena (De Paoli & Kerr 2010).

> Games, and their play, are constituted by the interrelations between (to name just a few) technological systems and software (including the imagined player embedded in them), the material world (including our bodies at the keyboard), the online space of the game (if any), game genre, and its histories, the social worlds that infuse the game and situate us outside of it, the emergent practices of communities, our interior lives, personal histories, and aesthetic experience, institutional structures that shape the game and our activity as players, legal structures, and indeed the broader culture around us with its conceptual frames and tropes. (Taylor 2009)

Taylor argued in reference to massively-multiplayer online role-playing games, but her argumentation has been applied to games in general. Karppi and Sotamaa (2012) have similarly questioned the boundary of 'the game' as a research object. What actions count as 'playing' when a game artefact is part of a technological and genre-based continuum, is discussed in gamer media, there are numerous updates (and hence versions), and the game connects via internet to other resources? They argue for a contextual approach, not unlike a *situated methodology* (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman 2004, 7):

> What should be noted here is that we are not striving for one universally valid idea of playing research, but rather we are enouncing that the understanding of the game relates also toward the prevailing concept of how it should be played in the context of research. Hence, when Aarseth argues that games are

> and should be researched as formal systems he also implies a certain type of playing research. (Karppi & Sotamaa, 2012)

In my research on pervasive games, this kind of a contextual approach has been present. In an article outlining how to research such cultural forms, we discuss the relevance of an academic background in approaches to pervasive games, the game as played and game as designed, the unforeseen effects of playing in public, and the by-stander experience (Stenros, Waern, & Montola 2012).

For the work contained in this dissertation, the only proper instance of using playing as a method relates to the substudy of *Conspiracy For Good* presented in Chapter 6 as well as Articles V and VI.[21] I participated in two live events of *CFG* as a player; however, I cannot be described as an expert player. Although I have extensive experience in pervasive games and larps, I did not throw myself at the game. Even if I had had the expert skills to dominate *CFG*, I would not have played it at an expert level. Such an approach would hijack the singular instance of *CFG* and 'taint' the larger event. For more information on the participation, see Article V (see also Stenros, Waern & Montola 2012).

Other than *CFG*, this dissertation does not discuss specific games, but seeks to address games and play on a more abstract level. However, even though playing as a method and specific games are not in focus, they have been instrumental in the construction of the theory presented on these pages. I have played a plurality of games while doing this research, and the gaming literacy amassed is both the background hum and the scaffolding for the work. This 'playing for context' was particularly important for

[21] This dissertation does not feature a ludography that would list all the games and play forms mentioned along with their publishers, developers, designers, and years of publication. Such lists are sometimes used in game studies to help assure that a reader may retrace the steps of an analytic work, and hopefully come to a similar conclusion. However, considering that this dissertation focuses more on playfulness and play than on games as designed systemic artefacts, such a list would give the wrong signal. Although the systemic artefact basis is important for a game, the artefact is not the game-as-played. Furthermore, some of the games cited have been staged only once and are unlikely to ever be restaged. Even if they were, the context would be very different. Accessing these ephemeral events is not possible after they have concluded. Such a list would also force me to decide which play forms merit inclusion. Obviously *chess* would be on such a list, as would *Conspiracy For Good*. But what about the more paideic expression? Should such a list include *chasing*, *exploring*, *drunk driving on a dare*, and *masturbation*? Inclusion and exclusion on such a list would seem like a value judgement, one that prioritises complex and commercial games over spontaneous playfulness. The choice of leaving the ludography out is not easily made. However, in most of the play forms discussed a line akin to "*The Dozens* (trad.)" would not greatly add clarity, but would only function as an academic gesture.

developing the typology of games based on the social interaction they foster (presented in Article III and Chapter 5); playing different sorts of games helped foster a preliminary model, which then helped in identifying games that still need to be played in order to further develop the model.

My entry into games, and indeed game studies, has mostly happened through role-playing games. I have played tabletop role-playing games for approximately a quarter of a century and live action role-playing games for almost twenty years. I have been a part of the Nordic larp scene for fifteen years, and have been involved in the analytical and later academic discussions about larps in the Nordic context for almost as long. I would consider myself an expert player of larps, but also an insider in relation to the Nordic larp culture. These games – especially their character as intensely and explicitly co-creative and ephemeral – and the culture around them have had a strong impact on the way I approach all games. My work has also had on impact on that scene.

In regards to other types or genres of games I consider myself neither an expert player nor an insider. In some areas my gaming literacy is decent (pervasive games, board games, card games, Facebook games, digital and non-digital party games), in some areas it is mostly academic (sports, MMORPGs, digital indie games). It is worth noting that unlike most game scholars (Montola 2011), I would not characterise myself as a (digital game) gamer. It is my belief that my view of games and play through role-playing and larp instead of through digital games enriches game studies.

2.3.4 Methods from Social Sciences

The last important input into the hermeneutic spiral have been case studies of ephemeral games. My thinking and the conceptual model developed here have been influenced by numerous such studies (e.g. Stenros et al. 2007; Stenros & Montola 2011; Paavilainen et al. 2013), although only one such study is included in the dissertation proper. These studies were carried out with methods originating in social sciences.

The study of *Conspiracy For Good* (Article V, Article VI, Chapter 6) was approached with ethnographic methods (Metsämuuroinen 2006, 214-217). The study used data gathered by participant observation, analytic autoethnography, and semi-structured interviews. Player-created online resources were also analysed. In addition, these qualitative methods were supported with player surveys and log data from the technology used.

Emphasis was placed on the runtime of the live events, but the production team was interviewed a few times as early as during the design period, and semi-structured interviews were carried out not just with players, but also with members of the production team (most importantly the so-called interactive actors). The analysis of the collected data followed principles originating in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), where the data was sorted using open coding, specifically the affinity diagramming method (Holtzblatt, Wendell & Wood 2004).

The research on *CFG* can be approached as a case study (Flyvbjerg 2011) and as exploratory research in field trials (Montola 2012, 126-133; Reid et al. 2011). Both approaches highlight how ephemeral play is situated and unrepeatable, with emergence as a key driver behind findings. The study of *CFG* was used to map out a phenomenon that was previously undocumented (a hybrid between larp and ARG) and undertheorised (runtime game mastering with instructed 'interactive actors', or *ractors*), to validate earlier, similar research (relating to pervasive games in public settings, parasocial relationships with simulacra people), to generate theory (ractor functions), and to tease out design insights (practical tips for staging larp/ARG hybrids). Furthermore, *CFG* functions as test case for thinking and a generator of theory. According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2011), case studies can often be used as a basis for generalisations, for example, in the case of falsifications: "If just one observation does not fit with the proposition, it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected." This is one way in which *CFG* has been used; not just to map out existing phenomena, but to disprove and probe a developing theory. This is also a key way in which other play and game experiences have informed the development of the thinking reflected in this dissertation. The theory developed must have been continually revised to account for all the play and game instances encountered in literature and in the wild.

2.4 Conclusions

This dissertation addresses playfulness, play, and games. It is situated on the larger field of game studies as well as the smaller field of ludology contained within game studies, both of which emerged around the turn of the millennium. The former is a multidisciplinary field that centres on a shared subject, games. The latter studies game and play activities as themselves. However, this work also builds on and weaves together earlier, often disconnected, takes on games, as well as other research traditions looking at play, games, and sports.

The work builds on and contributes to constructionist ludology. Founded on realist social construction, this approach builds a conceptual framework that describes the construction and meaning of games and play.

The method used in the work takes the form of an iterative spiral of analysis that uses numerous inputs. The key inputs into that process have been systematic literature reviews (building syntheses of earlier research), playing (both the kind of playing that is akin to analytic autoethnography, and playing for contextual understanding and gaming literacy), and methods from social sciences (most importantly participatory observation and semi-structured interviews of ephemeral play).

3 Playfulness and Play

> If he [Tom Sawyer] had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a tread-mill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 1876)
>
> Unfortunately, both "work" and "play" are words which have become conventionally associated with different kinds of activities irrespective of the states of minds of those taking part, and often this convention runs counter to the way that the activities are experienced. (Apter 2007, 41)
>
> Any action can be practiced as an art, as a craft, or as drudgery. (Nachmanovitch 1990, 10)

There is a long history of discussing play in academia. As with so many foundational discussions, this one can also be traced back to Plato. He argued in *The Laws* that as part of one's training, a child should play at whatever profession they were aiming for: "The most important part of education is right training in the nursery. The soul of the child in his play should be guided to the love of that sort of excellence in which when he grows up to manhood he will have to be perfected." Before the late 19th century, play was seldom directly discussed, but during the past 120 years that has changed dramatically. Play and playfulness are addressed in numerous contexts from psychology to anthropology and they have been framed in countless ways, as activities, as mindsets, as forms, as behaviour, as social communication, or as a basis for culture. Indeed, the interest surrounding play seems to be undergoing an upswing at the moment, with numerous volumes on the topic being published every year. However, due to the plurality of conceptualisations of play, the term remains amorphous and paradoxical.

In this chapter a framework for understanding playfulness and play is built. In the following I weave together disconnected discourses on play. Emphasis is placed on scholarly contributions that look at play *as* play, since those are particularly relevant for the project at hand. Once there is an understanding of play itself it is possible to address

its applications. I shall attempt to bring about analytical clarity in the discourse by clearly divorcing play and playfulness, as well as separating play from games. Furthermore, I seek to bridge divides by addressing both play that is culturally considered positive, as well as those aspects that are often viewed in a negative light. None of these analytic moves is new on its own, but the combination presented is. This new combination is a framework of play compatible with constructionist ludology.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First there is a discussion on the foundations of play and playfulness, both in terms of classical theories, but also in relation to the biological genesis of play. This is followed by the analytic moves of separating play and playfulness, and then unifying 'good' and 'bad' play. The first section concludes with a presentation of an original synthesis combining thinking presented in literature on play, grounded in reality, and able to account for not just the play exhibited by human adults, but also the play of children and animals other than humans. The second section considers play and playfulness in use. There is a review of the different functions of play proposed, both for the individual and for a species. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship of play and culture: how does play relate to creativity, innovation, art, beauty, humour, and civilization? The chapter concludes with an updated synthesis, one that considers the function of play as well. This chapter is an alternative, more meticulous, take on Article I.

3.1 Foundations of Play and Playfulness

Contemporary understanding on *play* within game studies is built upon the work of Dutch philosopher, historian, and anthropologist Johan Huizinga. In his 1938 book *Homo ludens – A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Huizinga conceives of play as the driving force not just in culture, but as a prerequisite to it. He describes play as a

> free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the players intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga 1938, 13)

Huizinga's formulation has been very influential, not just in game studies, but in all study of games and play. In game studies particularly his conception of play as separate from ordinary life has been discussed extensively. Most of the characteristics of play he lists – not serious, lacking material interest, separate time and space, progressing according to its own rules and hence orderly – are somehow present in contemporary definitions of games, although all of them have also been questioned and closely scrutinised. Indeed, Huizinga has been called "a pop icon in game studies" and sometimes the interpretation of his work has been seen as jingoistic (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, 227).

Particularly important is the first word of the above quote, 'free'. Building up to the definition Huizinga (1938, 7) writes: "First and foremost, then, all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it." This part has been criticised as well (e.g. Juul 2005, 33-36; Sotamaa 2009, 42) as being idealistic and overly simplistic account of human motivation. It is also seen as a clear indication that, although he does not reference Immanuel Kant or Friedrich Schiller directly, Huizinga's conception of play is linked to the tradition of idealistic philosophy; play is a fundamental aesthetic category, and beauty and freedom lie at the heart of it (Lauteren 2007, 3).[22] The idea of play as something free and liberating continues to be influential today. Huizinga (1938, 2) also underlines play as phenomenological ("what play is *in itself* and what it means to the player") and (ibid., 7) contextual. Activity that in one context would be play, is not in another if the surrounding situation or the player's perception or attitude has changed.

French sociologist and philosopher Roger Caillois builds on Huizinga's work in his *Les jeux et les homes* (1958; Eng. *Man, Play and Games*; see also 1950). This book is another classic in game studies (e.g. Sotamaa 2009, 36-41). Caillois sees Huizinga's definition, the one quoted above, as both too limiting and too broad. For him, it concentrates too much on competition, leaving out games of chance and money games, while including numerous areas of life not usually considered play. As a result, Caillois offered his own take; he considered play to be an *activity*, which is essentially *free* and voluntary, *separate* and defined in space and time, *uncertain* in outcome, *unproductive* (though property may

[22] Hannah Arendt (1958, 131-132) has stated that it is the transformation of how labour and work are conceived that has led to the uniform idea that work and play are each other's opposites. Everything that is not directly related to earning a living is a hobby. She connects this opposition to a deeper one, the opposition between necessity and freedom.

be exchanged), *governed by rules*, and *make-believe* instead of real life. (Caillois 1958, 9-10).[23] Furthermore Caillois noted that some games have more structure than others. He saw this as a sliding scale, from structure- and rules-heavy *ludus* to free-flowing *paidia*.

> At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term *paidia*. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain or attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component *ludus*. (Caillois 1958, 13)

Though Huizinga and Caillois are often discussed in relation to game studies, they both wrote mostly about the broader category of play. Huizinga was Dutch, where there is no division between play and game, one word standing in for both (see also Klabbers 2006). The same applies to French, Caillois' language, as well as other languages, such as Russian. Thus both definitions need to be, and have been, considered both when trying to understand play and when attempting to grasp games. Caillois' continuum from playful paidia to game-like ludus helps bridge this division,[24] although in game studies play is often seen just as the activity of engaging with games.

In the field of game studies, the characteristics of play as outlined by Huizinga and Caillois, especially those that are externally visible and can be approached as structural elements of play, have eclipsed other key points of the books. For example, Huizinga's main argument about the role of play in culture in general has received much more interest in other fields such as anthropology and philosophy. Similarly, even Huizinga's characterisation of play is not always appreciated as a whole. The final part of the description of play, where he underlines the social nature of play, going so far as to note

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[23] It is interesting to compare these to the basic qualities of performance that Richard Schechner (1988, 8-19) lists: special ordering of *time*, special value attached to *objects*, *non-productivity* in terms of goods, *rules*, and usually special non-ordinary *spaces*. He was drawing from play, games, sports, theatre, and ritual.

[24] Caillois' use of the term 'ludus' to describe something that is rule-bound instead of playful and negotiable instead of having serious repercussions, and thus disregarding such historical games as Ludi Romani, have been criticised by Aarseth (2011).

that play binds its players together in social groups, is often ignored. Indeed, though the above quote appears in most discussions of play (and games), it is not uncommon for the quote to be cut off before the last sentence. Yet the communities of play are central not only to the argument Huizinga is making with the book, but to social play in general.

Caillois took issue with Huizinga's formulation of play as building secret societies. He did not object to play creating social bonds, but questioned whether secrecy can be part of the definition of play (Caillois 1958, 4): "In a word, play tends to remove the very nature of the mysterious. On the other hand, when the secret, the mask, or the costume fulfils a sacramental function one can be sure that not play, but an institution is involved."[25] It would seem that Huizinga and Caillois approached the issue of secrecy from different angles. Huizinga observed the feeling of secrecy, of being apart together, as something produced in play. In saying "This is for *us*, not for 'others'," he exemplified the act (Huizinga 1938, 12). Callois saw play as stripping away secrecy as the player learns the secret while playing, which is a description of the same act, just from a different point of view. Indeed, play can be described in wildly different ways depending on whether it is experienced as participant or observed externally (see also Frasca 2007, 192; for another take on the secrecy of play see Brown 2013).

These classics of play, *Homo ludens* and *Man, Play and Games,* continue to be an interesting starting point as they lead to numerous directions followed in different disciplines, while at the same time being a little too vague and idealistic. As descriptions of play they are first-rate; they help in forming a structural notion of what play is like, and they chart the connections between play and culture. However, they do not explore the very foundation of play. Huizinga (1938, 1-7) opens his book by pondering that play precedes humans, and sees a continuation from animal play. He rejects reducing it to physiology or a psychological reflex, as well as all assumptions that craft a biological purpose to it that is directed outside of play. Nor is he trying to grasp the whole of play, concentrating instead on the social manifestations of adult play.

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[25] This formulation is surprisingly similar to how Turner (1982, 44-51) discusses *communitas*. Communitas usually means standing outside of society together in a way that ultimately strengthens the community. In some ways communitas and play are very similar, but it is also possible to argue that communitas is about conformity, whereas play is about transformation (Henricks 2006, 92-93).

How 'surprising' this similarity is can be debated. Even if similar ideas and formulations are expressed in disconnected fields without citation, possibly even seemingly without knowledge of each other, this does not mean that there is no connection between the authors off the page. This is particularly true in relation to works on games, rituals, theatre, and performance, as the studies of these topics have cross-pollinated each others in numerous ways.

> Play as a special form of activity, as a "significant form", as a social function – that is our subject. We shall not look for natural impulses and habits conditioning play in general, but shall consider play in its manifold concrete forms as itself a social construction. (Huizinga 1938, 4)

This dissertation picks up many of the threads that Huizinga touches on, especially looking at play as a social construction, but the underlying impulses cannot be ignored. They form the very foundation for all that comes after.

3.1.1 Biological Genesis of Play

In the framework of constructionist ludology it is important to locate and explicate the foundations of play and games. Although the complicated forms play takes are results of social construction, they are not just social. Underlying brute facts of biology figure into the process. The impetus to play is older than language, older than culture, and even older than humankind (Fagen 1981). The tendency to play is found not just in human animals but mammals in general, and possibly even a much greater number of animals. Furthermore, human play is continuous with the play of animals other than humans, and in order to understand human play, the play behaviours exhibited by other species need to be taken seriously (Burghardt 2005). Play is so ingrained in us humans that we are not only able to recognise (at least in some cases) when species other than humans play, but we are able to play with members of other species. Play is often visible and shared.

The idea that human and animal play are continuous goes back at least to philosopher Karl Groos, who published two books in late 19th century on play: *Die Spiele der Tiere* (1896, Eng. *The Play of Animals*) and *Die Spiele der Menschen* (1899, Eng. *The Play of Man*). In the former, Groos argues that the biological significance of play is that it prepares a youth for an adult practice for which its instincts are not adequate. Although later refuted, Groos (1896, 67) famously wrote: "The animals do not play because they are young, but they have their youth because they must play." In the latter he extends his thesis to humans. In addition to a biological component in play (instinct), he adds a psychological one (an activity performed for its own sake), both of which need to be present for an activity to be recognised as playful in a complete sense (Groos 1899, 78).

Obviously much has happened in the field of study of animal play in the century since Groos. Today there is wide agreement about the continuity of play from animals to humans, and that there is some kind of a biological, evolutionary basis. However, the

unifying category of play has also been questioned. As ethologists are not able to access the mental processes of animal players, the idea of innate playfulness and the common source for the very different play behaviour exhibited by different species in different environments have been discussed as an anthropomorphization (e.g. Rosenberg 1990). Yet the view that play is a viable category, and that it is most reliably described as activity performed for its own sake, is quite widespread (e.g. Mitchell 1990, Burghardt 2005, 72-73), although debate continues on how to identify play (e.g. Burghardt 1998), and whether there is a singular source of play, or a number of interconnected and disconnected sources.

Once the category of play is recognised, it can be further divided into smaller segments. Different sorts of divisions are so common that listing even the most widespread ones would be needlessly wearying. However, one particularly useful grouping (or, actually, a family of grouping, although only one version is presented here) in contemporary ethological studies divides animal play into three categories: *locomotor play* (play with the body, such as jumping and flying), *object play* (also with conceptual objects), and *social play* (play with others) (Burghardt 2005, 81-110; Bekoff & Byers 1998; also, Myers 2010). These different types of play are not exhibited by all animals who play, and many species manifest only one or two types. The three types seem to be derived from different behavioural systems, and the exhibited play types and patterns result from the evolutionary history of a species, the environmental conditions, and the normal behaviour of the species, as well as individual life histories (Burghard 2005, 150). [26]

The impetus to play is biologically coded in humans, and there are some forms of playing that are found in most human cultures (cf. Hirn 1916, 60-65). Furthermore, many other animals have this playful impulse as well, and some even enact basic forms of social play (e.g. chasing and hiding), even if the literature remains inconclusive on the ability of animals other than humans to engage in more complex forms of play.[27] A key

[26] For example Reiss (2004) identifies 16 basic intrinsic motivations. Using his template, locomotor play, object play, and social play are all based on different motivations. Social play is rooted in desire for social contact, locomotor play in physical exercise, and object play in desire for power. Desires for order and vengeance (winning) are relevant as well.

[27] The cognitive capability to understand other beings as separate functioning entities is a key consideration. Human children become able to engage in pretend and social play during their second year as this capability develops (see Rakocky 2007, 56). Furthermore, the brain areas associated with the theory of the mind (relevant for self-awareness and other-awareness) is also associated with pretend play – and it is unclear which one is the more basic process (Whitehead 2011; Whitehead et al. 2009). In this light it is quite interesting that certain simple forms of play, both pretend play and

difference between animal and human (adult) play is that humans not only play, but they are *aware* that they play. As humans we can discuss and reflect on playing, and consciously and intentionally design our playing. We construct the concepts of 'play' and 'game', and these cultural ideas have become preconceived notions that easily guide our study of animal and human activities, and dictate what becomes recognised as play. Overcoming that idea and attempting to get at the behaviour and experience is difficult. In regards to human play, esteemed play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith has pointed out that as a concept, play is very broad and has inspired numerous approaches. There is not only a plethora of play forms and experiences, but also a number of diverse scholarly methods of play. In his book *The Ambiguity of Play* he writes:

> For example, biologists, psychologist, educators, and sociologists tend to focus on how play is adaptive or contributes to growth, development, and socialization. Communication theorists tell us that play is a form of metacommunication far preceding language in evolution because it is also found in animals. Sociologists say that play is an imperial social system that is typically manipulated by those with power to their benefit. Mathematicians focus on war games and games of chance, important in turn because of the data they supply about strategy and probability. Thermonuclear war games, it appears, can be either a hobby or deadly serious. Anthropologists pursue the relationships between ritual and play as these are found in customs and festivals, while folklorists add an interest in play and game traditions. Art and literature, by contrast, have a major focus on play as a spur to creativity. In some mythology scholarship, play is said to be a sphere of the gods, while in the physical sciences it is sometimes another name for the indeterminacy or chaos of basic matter. In psychiatry, play offers a way to diagnose and provide therapy for the inner conflicts of young and old patients alike. And in the leisure sciences, play is about qualities of personal experience, such as intrinsic motivation, fun, relaxation, escape, and so on. (Sutton-Smith 1997, 6-7)

Sutton-Smith (1997) identifies seven rhetorics that have been used to make sense of play: play as progress (as in children's play), fate (gambling), power (contests), identity (communal celebrations), imaginary (improvisation and creation), self (hobbies) and frivolity (foolish activities). Ultimately he tries to bring all these together in a biology-based reading and comes up with the metaphor of *adaptive variability*. He concludes that

> play potential is analogous to neural potential; that play's psychological characteristics of unrealistic optimism, egocentricity, and reactivity are

social play, can be enacted with some animals other than humans – at least if humans have taught the animals (Rakocky 2007, 57; see also Holopainen 2008).

> analogous to the normal behaviour of the very young; and finally that play's engineering predicaments model the struggle for survival. (Sutton-Smith 1997, 229; see also Sutton-Smith 1999)

Jan H. G. Klabbers (2006, 27-28) has criticised Sutton-Smith's attempt to present a coherent discourse of play. According to him, the problem is that Sutton-Smith positions himself only as an external observer. Though Sutton-Smith was aware of this (1997, 16-17), he did not incorporate the rhetoric of the experiencing player. The reasons for the lack of a first-person perspective on play are historical; much of the study of play used to be conducted from the point of view of an external observer, be it an anthropologist collecting play patterns of a foreign culture, a psychologist observing children playing, or an ethologist studying animal play behaviour. From the position of an external observer it is possible to study numerous interesting aspects of play, to note down patterns and rules of play, to account for their role in a larger social and cultural fabric, speculate on their function and meaning, and so on. Yet the inside view on play is missing.

One example of the difficulties brought on by the external vantage point is the confusion between play and *exploration*. In the context of game studies that connection may not seem obvious,[28] but for (child) psychologist and ethologists (e.g. Weisler & McCall 1976; Fagen 1981, 8-12; Burghardt 2005, 57-60; also Koestler 1964, 509-512) distinguishing between the two without ambiguity can be challenging as the difference can be subjective and not necessarily visibly communicated. Consider a child coming into a new room filled with unfamiliar artefacts. At first there is exploration, and then play – but at what point does the shift occur?

If play and exploration are both conceived of as behaviours, then exploratory behaviour consists of a relatively stereotyped perceptual-motor examination of an object, situation, or event, the function of which is to acquire information and thus reduce subjective uncertainty. Exploration is triggered by external stimulus. Play, on the other hand, can be characterised as consisting of intrinsically motivated behaviours and behavioural sequences that are organism-dominated rather than stimulus-dominated. It has even been suggested that exploration and play should be studied as one thing. (Weisler & McCall, 1976; cf. Ellis 1973, 80-111).

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[28] Though it must be said that from the point of view of ethology and psychology, Bartle's (1996; 2003) typology of MUD players as achievers, socialisers, killers and explorers is shown in a different light.

Burghardt (2005, 59-60) separates the two, though he concedes that "exploration and curiosity may be components of play". Furthermore, he has even suggested a link between exploration and risky play (see below). He links exploration with arousal and novelty – aspects that, although not required for play, can clearly be linked to play.[29]

Where exploration can be difficult to separate from play from an external vantage point, some observers have been tempted to boil play down to the observable. Based on observation in a zoo, Gregory Bateson (1955, 315-317; see also Eastman 1948, 15-17) came up with the concept of *metacommunication*. This metacommunication sets the frame of the activity, and in the case of play carries the message "this is play." As the 'meta' implies, this is communication about communication (and not a higher form of communication). The metamessage of play is: "These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote." Bateson's example, which is a minor classic in itself, is play-fighting; it is possible to play at fighting so that it looks like fighting, yet it is clear that it is not-fighting.[30] However, according to Bateson (1955, 315-317) (social) play is only possible if the participating organisms are capable of metacommunication. Although such communication is central to shared, social play, it hardly accounts for all kinds of play.

An example of this play signal is the 'play bow' dogs often perform, which is interpreted as signalling 'this is play' or 'what follows is play' (the signal can be repeated to ensure that this is still play). Yet although Bateson's notion of metacommunication is inspired by observation of animals, identifying a unique play signal in different animal species has not been successful. The signalling, even in animal play, is more complex than just the communication of a unique play signal. (Burghardt 2005, 90-96).

However, if play is conceived of as intrinsically motivated behaviours and behavioural sequences that are organism-dominated rather than stimulus-dominated (as conceived of by Weisler & McCall 1976), then play is, in essence, doing for the sake of doing. Play activities are performed for their own sake, not for an external purpose. It may look like

[29] Apter (1991, 18-20) certainly discussed similar aspects in relation to the paratelic mindset; he sees exploration and negativism both as psychological strategies that raise arousal – and possibly the pleasure of play.

[30] Richard Schechner (1988, 7) has further pointed out the double negative: in essence, play fighting is also not not-fighting. However, Schechner was discussing theatre and adult play. This reframing of meaning does not necessarily apply to animal and children's play.

some other activity, but it is not it. A nip is not a bite, nor a framed bite, but a nip. It just happens to look like a bite.

In studies of play from an external vantage point, the personal motivations driving it are beyond reach.[31] In play there is a player. However, regardless as to how play is conceptualised, there is something underneath it. There is the brute fact of animal playfulness, of animals engaging in seemingly pointless practices such as jumping up and down, moving sticks and stones around, and engaging in fight-like behaviour that is not a fight. Moreover, humans are not an exception in this; we also engage in these activities.

Gordon M. Burghardt looks for the answer to these questions in his 2005 book *The Genesis of Animal Play*. According to him, Sutton-Smith's adaptive variability is on the right track. Burghardt (2005, 175) notes that play does seem to generate raw material for natural selection to work upon. However, he hastens to add that most play is not random, but quite bounded and species-typical. Even so, play as process generator is an important notion:

> [P]lay can be viewed as both a product and cause of evolutionary change; that is, playful activities may be source of enhanced behavioural and mental functioning as well as by-product or remnant of prior evolutionary elements. (Burghardt 2005, 121)

Yet Burghardt (2005, 121) reminds his readers that play probably did not evolve "in order to provide such advantages". Furthermore, a review (Burghardt 2005, 381-385) of play patterns in vertebrate animals seems to show that there are gaps in play behaviour. Certain animal groups do not manifest play even if the phylogenetic (evolutionary development) tree would suggest such behaviour. Either they never played, or they have lost the ability along the way. Did play emerge separately in different parts of the phylogenetic tree? While it certainly is possible that play evolved numerous times, as seems to be the case with the eyes of vertebrates and invertebrates, it is also possible that there is a common source. Burghardt suggests a common genetic source, since even the eyes of mice and flies are controlled by similar genes. The genetic toolkit, as Burghardt puts it, is "conservative".

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[31] Ludologist Gonzalo Frasca (2007) has picked up on this thread. His definition of play, geared towards the understanding of playing games and adult play, includes the idea that play is subjective:

> Play is to *somebody* an *engaging activity* in which the player *believes* to have active participation and interprets it as constraining her immediate future to a set of *probable* scenarios, *all of which* she is willing to tolerate. (Frasca 2007, 50)

> [A]lthough play arose many times in evolution, it may have been the result of common environmental contexts that activated a suite of retained homeotic hox genes which, although they may have other functions, could be repeatedly co-opted in the service of playlike traits. (Burghardt 2005, 384-385)

With a widely shared genome Burghardt (2005, 165-180, 385) forwards a *surplus resource theory of play.* It postulates that there are four necessary, but not sufficient, factors that need to be in place for animal play to occur. These are: sufficient metabolic energy to sustain activity (energetics), a situation of protection from immediate threats (ontogeny), a need for species-typical stimulation or optimal arousal (psychology & sociality), and a varied lifestyle in a complex environment (ecology). For example, play diminishes when there is a shortage of food, and thus energy. Species with long juvenile periods and extensive parental care seem to play more – possibly to avoid boredom and raise arousal in relatively safe environments. Play, especially object play, is particularly common in predators and scavengers that move in varied environments. The suggestion is that these four factors, along with a species' behavioural repertoire, activates the genetic processes.

More research is needed to truly determine the genesis of animal play. Until more evidence for other theories accumulate, it seems plausible enough that all play originates in the same playful biological tendency, and that genetic tendency is the brute fact on which play and games are constructed. Such a view is adapted in this dissertation.

3.1.2 Playfulness as a Mindset

Playfulness is a subjective experience for the player. Studying the experience and the (possible) awareness of playing is difficult with animals and children, but with human adults such limitations do not exist. Human adults are able to separate instances where they are feeling playful while participating in a play activity, from activities that are socially recognised as play even if they do not feel playful while participating. It is possible to separate the mental state of *playfulness* from the social fact of *playing*. That analytic separation is considered next.

Differentiating between the phenomenological personal mental experience of playfulness and the socially shared (and culturally recognised) activity of playing is a move advocated by the psychological study into play. This move enables recognition of the experience of playfulness in a context that is not marked as play, and the corresponding situation of playing feeling like work. A key work in this is psychologist

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's influential book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975). Although mostly discussed in game studies due to its introduction of the concept of *flow*, which has proven to be quite useful in relation to digital game design, the research and theoretical work underpinning flow is of supreme interest. Csikszentmihalyi (ibid., 10) uses the term *autotelic* (*telos* means goal or purpose in Greek) to describe activities which "require formal and extensive energy output on part of the actor, yet provide few if any conventional rewards." Autotelic activities are *intrinsically rewarding*. It is a type of autotelic experience that he terms flow (ibid., 36), one that can be experienced when an actor's skills are in balance with the challenge provided by the activity (ibid., 49).

Csikszentmihalyi identifies the following characteristics of flow: opportunity for action, centering of attention on a limited stimulus field, feelings of competence and control, unambiguous and immediate feedback, and merging of action and awareness (transcendence of ego boundaries) (ibid., 78-87). Games and play provide structure for flow and are thus strongly autotelic, yet they do not have a monopoly on flow. Everyday contexts can be flow-inducing if a person is able to mentally restructure it correctly. According to Csikszentmihalyi, artists, poets and, scientists are able to 'play' almost everywhere (ibid., 53, 193-4). For him, games and play are structures that have the function of inducing flow (ibid., 191) and playfulness:

> By downplaying the structural distinction and emphasizing the experiential one, we are better able to deal with the *espirit de jeu* that Huizinga, Caillois and many others have held to be the central issue of the phenomenon of play. Yet the same scholars have been unable to study this "spirit of play," because they well back on the obvious structural distinction and looked at games instead of the experience of playfulness. Playfulness, or flow, is not limited by the form of the activity, although it is affected by it. (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 185-6)

It is important to note that although this quote gives the impression that flow and playfulness are synonyms, that is actually not Csikszentmihalyi's thinking. Later he has elaborates:

> Flow describes a process of involvement in a given reality, while playfulness refers to one's attitude towards the reality in which one is involved. One can experience flow in a routine activity whose goals and rules are consistent with the paramount reality; in such a case there would be flow without playfulness. Or one could shift one's perspective on what goals and rules applied in a situation, without experiencing the intense involvement that characterizes flow. (Csikszentmihalyi 1981, 24)

For Csikszentmihalyi (1981) play is to be understood "in terms of an individual's stance towards reality." The experiences and choices of a player are important; he also discusses the (socially) constructed nature or reality and play, referring to Batesonian framing. Thus we see a division into three parts: the personal experiences of playfulness and flow influenced by attitude, the (personal or shared) structure of an activity such as play, and the context or settings such as ordinary everyday life.

Csikszentmihalyi's call for concentrating on the spirit of play has been taken up by Michael J. Apter (1991; 2007; also Kerr & Apter 1991), who has developed a general approach in psychology called *reversal theory*. Within that framework Apter (and others) developed a structural-phenomenology of play. Since people can experience playing a game as frustrating and work-like, while on the other hand working can feel like play, Apter (1991, 21) firmly believes that "[p]lay cannot be defined externally by reference to objective criteria; it is a phenomenological state."

Apter's (2007, 7) structural phenomenology underlying reversal theory "deals systemically with the nature of experience itself at a given time and the changes it undergoes over time." At the core there is a drive to explain the arousal in relation to experienced hedonic tone. Traditional arousal theory postulates that as arousal level rises, the experience moves from boredom to excitement, relaxation, and finally to anxiety. Reversal theory sees two possible paths, one from boredom to excitement and another from relaxation to anxiety (see Figure 1), depending on the *metamotivational* state one is in. These metamotivational states are *about* motivation; they organise and help interpret motivation. Arousal-avoidance and arousal-seeking are a pair of metamotivational states in this bistable system, which tends towards two different states (relaxation and excitement) depending on the metamotivational mode. Reversals between the modes are possible and frequent, as the name of the theory implies.

In relation to play, reversal theory identifies two ways of 'being in the world' (Apter 2007; 1991): two mindsets, the pair of *telic* and *paratelic* metamotivational states. Telic is a goal-driven, serious mindset, where the activity is engaged in for a purpose. It is future-oriented, aiming at the pleasure of achieving a goal at a later moment in time. Long-term ambition is valued, while arousal, risk, and anxiety are avoided. Paratelic is a playful state, and it is characterised by being present-time oriented. The activity is itself the goal (or, as in games, a secondary goal is adopted in the service of the primary activity). Other characteristics of the paratelic mindset include: emphasis on immediate gratification, fun, emphasis on process, passion, spontaneity, freedom, willingness to experiment,

disposition towards make-believe, and the tendency to prolong the activity if possible. Boredom is to be avoided.

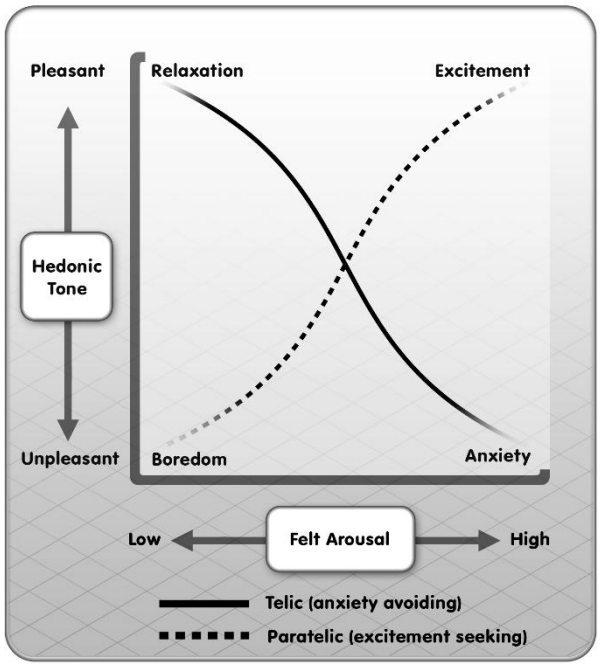

Figure 1. Telic and paratelic metamotivational states (Apter 1991, redrawn image quoted from Montola, Stenros, & Waern 2009, 107)

As a person engages in an activity, it is possible to oscillate between these metamotivational stages:[32] indeed, the reversal theory approach in psychology was largely developed to account for the challenge that identical seeming behaviour can have conflicting experiential motivations behind it (Apter 2007, 2-3). Furthermore accounting for playful intrinsic motivations, the paradoxical nature of play, and the challenges of distinguishing between work and play in professional sports was also important (Kerr 1991a; 1991b). Similarly Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 5-8) has stated that a

[32] Reversal theory is a 'grand theory', attempting to explain motivation, emotions, and personality. Thus there are actually four motivational domains that reversal theory addresses: means and ends (telic-paratelic), rules (conformist-negativistic), interactions (mastery-sympathy), and relationships (autic-alloic). Means and ends are the focus in this discussion of play and playfulness, but rules also come up (see below). Apter (2007) discussed these two domains as *somatic emotions*. The domains of interactions and relationships form *transactional emotions*, and they are mostly ignored in this work.

central impetus behind his work has been the inability of behaviourism to cope with anything but extrinsic rewards.[33]

Both flow and reversal theory are based on a phenomenological approach, as opposed to more social or developmental approaches. An interesting case example is offered by sexual activity. In both reversal theory and the flow model sex is mostly understood to be play, to be engaged in while in a paratelic or autotelic mindset.[34] Although sex has an extremely important biological function, and can be explored as a social interaction ritual (e.g. Collins 2004, 223-257), it is mostly sought out and experienced for its own sake and for the immediate pleasure. Furthermore, approaching sexual interaction only as work, in a telic mindset, can rob it of any pleasure, or even prevent it from being performed fully. (Apter 1991; Frey 1991).[35]

The works of Csikszentmihalyi and Apter both support the notion that there is a phenomenological mental state, whether it is called autotelic or paratelic, which can be characterised as playful.[36] This personal playfulness is separate from the externally visible (structural) activity of play (or playing).

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[33] Note also that interesting comparisons can be found from animal play. Burghardt's (2005, 61-65) discussion of stereotypical behaviour of animals (such as tongue play exhibited by caged calves) notes that it is possible for animal behaviour to start as play, only to become repetitive and unvaryingly compulsive – and devoid of play.

[34] D.W. Winnicott (1971, 69, 54) has an opposite take on play. For him bodily excitement threatens playing (at least in children, although Winnicott claimed that his take on play applies to adults as well). According to him "[t]he instincts are the main threat to play". Obviously the question about the relationship of instincts to freedom has been debated in philosophy for a good long while.

[35] Groos (1899, 73) disagrees. For him foreplay (or "caressing contact") can be thought of as play "when it is an end in itself, which is possible under two conditions: first when the pursuance of the instinctive movements to their legitimate end is prevented by an incapacity or ignorance; and, second, when it is prevented by an act of will on the part of the participants." For him sex is not play, but it is possible to play at sex. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to disregard sexual play in discussions of play – even if one of the meanings of the term 'play' is recreational sexual activity (cf. Frank 2013, 83; Weiss 2006).

[36] In contemporary research on human motivation there are implications for play and its function. Carrying out actions 'for their own sake' has been further analysed in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to SDT, all activities fall somewhere on a continuum from highly autonomous to fully controlled, and from totally intrinsically motivated to completely extrinsically motivated. SDT "addresses the factors that either facilitate or undermine motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic" (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski 2006). SDT explains autotelic or paratelic activity as due to "satisfying internal conditions that occur when doing an intrinsically motivated behaviour" (Deci & Ryan 2012). These satisfactions derive from experiences of *autonomy* (volition), *competence* (effectiveness), and (to a lesser extent) *relatedness* (social connection). These three experiences happen to be the three basic psychological needs humans possess according to the theory. These needs are empirically derived as being necessary for health. Play, obviously, is a key example of intrinsically motivated behaviour:

The idea that playing as an activity is characterised by performing an action for its own purpose, one often associated with a mental state characterised by playfulness, is pervasive in literature on play. As we have seen, both Groos and Huizinga offered such observations, and they abound in at least psychology and philosophy (e.g. Dewey 1910, 162; Lieberman 1977; Suits 1977; Morgan 2008). Any clear separation of a playful mindset and the socially recognised activity of playing is less common, especially outside psychology. Alex Makedon (1984) represents a less common voice. He notes that play and game do not completely overlap either conceptually or experientially. A thorough discussion on games is saved for the next chapter, but although Makedon uses different terminology, he is expressing similar ideas to Csikszentmihalyi and Apter. It is possible to participate in a game (to follow the rules of a game) without being playful, or without it being play in the sense that the participant is in a playful mindset, just as playing does not need to have the formal structure of games. He offers the term *playful gaming* as a way of referring to an instance where both play and game are present (cf. Suits 1978, 144).[37]

> In play, children are often wholly absorbed in activities, experiencing a sense of interest and joy as they manipulate objects and explore their environments. As this occurs, their basic psychological needs for competence and autonomy are likely being met as they self-organize their actions and experience effectance. And through play, the children are learning. (Deci & Ryan 2012)

As the last sentence of the quote reminds us, self-determination theory is about motivation – and about harnessing motivation for certain ends. It is not a theory about play, even if a nice place is found for play in it. It does not tell us what play is even if it does offer an explanation as to how play works. That said, the concept of autonomy is not only intriguing, but possibly enlightening in relation to play. A key tenet in SDT is that external motivations can be internalised. There are different levels of internalisation (introjection, identified regulation, and integrated regulation) and when properly integrated (as in the two latter of the three categories), these internalisations are discussed as autonomous or self-determined extrinsically motivated behaviour. This has interesting implications for socially constructed play patterns, such as games, which contain rules that need to be adopted for the activity to come about. Indeed, the continuum of autonomous motivation can be surprisingly well superposed on Caillois' continuum from paidia to ludus.

SDT has been discussed in relation to digital games (e.g. Ryan et al. 2006; Przybylski et al. 2009) more than in relation to play. However, one of the more interesting applications comes from Sebastian Deterding (2013, 379), who, based on SDT, argues that the lack of consequences in and the nonfunctionality of play is not a defining quality but a facilitating factor. Because playing is organised as inconsequential, and sanctioned neither negatively or positively, it does not generate external motivations and is thus closer to the autonomous end of the spectrum. Furthermore, Deterding argues that the concept of autonomy "not only is able to integrate and explain the various facets of the voluntariness of play, but also to make sense of the 'work versus play' dichotomy in gaming."

[37] Bateson & Martin (2013, 13) have written a whole book on *playful play* and its connection to creativity and innovation. For them, what separates playful play from general play is "a particular positive mood state in which the individual is more inclined to behave (and, in the case of humans, think) in a spontaneous and flexible way."

Makedon further argues that (playful) play is characterised by its voluntariness, spontaneity and desirability for its own sake. He points out that these requirements are all rooted in the player and that they are part of a personal attitude. "Play is subjective and grounded in the player, whereas game is objectively grounded in the game rules." (Makedon 1984, 32; see also Riezler 1941) Performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (1988, 4-5, 16) makes a similar distinction when he discusses *play acts* as something that can be analysed according to structure, process, experience, function, ideology, and frame, whereas *playing* is "a mood, an attitude, a force", which either erupts, or into which one falls.

Even Burghardt's method for identifying play in animals shows traces of separating play from playfulness, even if that is very hard for an external observer. Burghardt (2005, 68-72) offers five criteria for labelling an observed activity as play: limited immediate function, endogenous component, structural or temporal difference, repeated performance, and relaxed field. The first criterion is that the behaviour should not be fully functional; meaning that it should include elements that "do not contribute to current survival". The second criterion outlines play as "spontaneous, voluntary, intentional, pleasurable, rewarding, reinforcing or autotelic". This criterion requires interpretation on part of the observer. The third criterion aims to separate play from "serious" activities and offers a list that includes possibilities such as exaggeration, awkwardness, and incompleteness. The purpose of the fourth criterion is to separate play from exploration; it happens more than once. The final criterion stipulates that play behaviour happens when an animal is relatively relaxed, meaning "adequately fed, healthy and free from stress". The play behaviour Burghardt outlines is not complexly oriented towards a survival-related goal (first criterion), it is paratelic (second criterion) and enacted while in a safe environment (fifth criterion). This lines up very nicely with Apter's formulation. The two other criteria relate to identifying play behaviour and delimiting it from other, very similar-looking activities. Expressed in Apter's terms, Burghardt's play is play activity that is carried out in a paratelic metamotivational state. It clearly rules out activities that look like play, but are not carried out in a playful state (such as exploration and stereotypical behaviour).

In game studies, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmermann (2004, 304) have defined play as: "free movement in a more rigid structure". This definition attempts to take into considerations all possible interpretation of the word 'play' in English, but does not

consider all the possible rhetorics of play identified by Sutton-Smith.[38] They also visualise play and playing games as concentric circles: the broadest category and largest circle is *being playful*, which refers to all typical play activities as well as being in a playful state of mind. Examples include dressing in a playful manner or insulting in a playful tone. The middle category is ludic activities, which includes not only games, but also all activities generally recognised as "play", such as tossing a Frisbee back and forth, or a kitten playing with a ball of string. The narrowest category is *game play*, which is "formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play." One problem with Salen & Zimmerman's take is that it does not draw a clear enough distinction between being playful and play, which lowers the usefulness of the terms.[39] Their use of the term game play is also revealed to refer to the act of acting in accordance with game rules, which Makedon shows need not be playful, yet they situate this under the header of play.

The term playfulness has recently been used in game studies by Miguel Sicart (2014, 1-34; see also Heljakka 2013, 191-235). On the surface his conceptualisation seems to be very similar to the one forwarded in this dissertation: "The main difference between play and playfulness is that play is an *activity*, while playfulness is an *attitude*." However, there are three key differences in Sicart's project. Firstly, he sees play as primary and autotelic, and playfulness as a projection of it (and not autotelic, but appropriative) (cf. Deterding 2013; Lieberman 1977, 23). Secondly, Sicart is explicitly not interested in the biological foundation of play, *only* in its cultural expression. He also goes for a romantic account of play. He is interested in the transformative aspects of play (including bad play), but pays very little attention to the repetitive and orderly play. Thirdly, playfulness is mostly used as a term that helps us think about design. Thus, regardless of the surface similarities, his conceptualisation is different from the one under development here.

Play can be viewed both as internal to the player and as externally visible. However, both of these cannot be adopted as a starting point. Analysing the externally visible manifestations of play is important and fruitful, yet the experience of playing and being

[38] Salen & Zimmerman's definition, widespread in game studies, bears a striking resemblance to Erik Erikson's definition from 1976: "free movement within prescribed limits".

[39] This is also something that Frasca (2007, 50) struggles with in his definition: "Play is to *somebody* an *engaging activity* in which the player *believes* to have active participation and interprets it as constraining her immediate future to a set of *probable* scenarios, *all of which* she is willing to tolerate." He sees play both as a state of mind and an activity (p. 52).

playful should not be ignored either. In this dissertation externally visible play is seen as originating – at least historically – in an internal playful state.

3.1.3 Bad Play

There is a tendency in the discourse surrounding play to see play activity and playfulness as inherently positive (e.g. Bateson & Martin 2013, 15-16; Caillois 1950, 159). This is particularly prominent in developmental approaches to play, but not restricted to them. For example, J. Nina Lieberman (1977, 4, 59-60, 80) struggles to separate pro-social and antisocial play and playfulness from each other analytically. Why they need to be separated is not entirely clear. If play is seen as rooted in a biological impulse of playfulness, then such arguments are revealed as normative. Indeed, Huizinga (1938, 6) noted: "Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. Although it is a non-material activity it has no moral function." [40] Brian Sutton-Smith and Diana Kelly-Byrne (1984) have also questioned such *idealisation of play*. They criticise the tendency of scholarly works about play (and children's play especially) to nurture idealised notions of what play is like. They question whether play is truly voluntary, of positive affective value, egalitarian, flexible, and functional.

Their formulation of play as at times obligatory is inspired by anthropologists' accounts (especially Turner 1982, 20-59) of societies where a distinction is drawn between an activity being sacred or profane, not on it being play or work. Indeed, the same concept of play is not applicable in all (historical) contexts. Play (as separate from playfulness) is a social construct, and it is subject to change over time (cf. Connor 2005). Additionally children's play that contains teasing and bullying is not free for all parties involved. However, the central aim of Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne's article seems to be in casting play as not nice. They convincingly parade examples of play that have a negative affect, are not egalitarian or flexible, and that are dysfunctional. They conclude:

> We have sought to counter the idealization of play which on the everyday level is expressed by saying that the child's play is its work, or that sports build

[40] Notice that although today play and playfulness are often seen in an overly positive light, a century (and more) ago it was not uncommon to see play mainly as suspicious, trivial, and morally suspect, as something that should prompt censure (cf. Dewey 1922, 160-164). Both approaches are misguided; playfulness is neither inherently good nor bad, although its innumerable expressions can fill the gamut from deplorable to sublime.

> character, and on academic level by finding the essence of play in voluntariness, positive affect flexibility and socialization. These characteristics may be present in some play in some circumstances. Unfortunately the opposite characteristics of obligatoriness, negative affect, rigidity and dysfunctionality are also characteristic of some play in some circumstances. (Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne 1984, 316)

It is interesting to ponder what 'bad play' can reveal about play – especially if the mindset and the activity are separated. This creates a possibility for one-sided play. For example, if flirting can be seen as play, then are at least some instances of sexual harassment play from the point of view of the harasser? A bully who later justifies her actions as 'merely play' may also have been engaged in one-sided play (see also Henricks 2006, 6; Groos 1899, 68-72; Farr 2009), and especially older siblings can harm, hurt, or humiliate their younger siblings as part of playful encounters in the form of bullying (Sutton-Smith 1971, 104). Guards have mistreated prisoners for thousands of years – and taken joy in it (Burghardt 2005, 388). Though we are hesitant to call it play when carried out by humans, one-sided social play in animals is recognised as teasing and harassment (Burghardt 2005, 87). Even though such actions break norms and may even be illegal, they probably are play in humans as well. Carnivores, including humans, can play with other, usually smaller, animals. This predatory play is akin to object play; the other animal is treated as an object (Burghardt 2005, 85).

The idea of play as 'bad' has since been taken up by numerous scholars (cf. Sutterby 2009). David Myers (2010) concentrates on computer games in his book *Play Redux*, but offers a different contextualisation of play that seems to have wider relevance. The book offers a formalist analysis of play based on biological naturalism, looking for a shared form of (human) play. Myers discusses how 'bad play' – play which is transgressive, disruptive, disrespectful, and rule-defying – is central to the understanding of play in general. Attempting to break rules is important in order to understand the limits of the setting and thus facilitates free play. In computer games changing the rules can be difficult. But an interesting point of comparison is offered by psychologist Jean Piaget's (1932, 9-72) research of various groups of children playing the game of marbles: the last stage of a child's development in regards to rules is the understanding that rules are not eternal and unchanging, but socially negotiated and open for experimentation. Indeed, for Piaget play is improvisation that deemphasises reality (Gilmore 1966; also see below). In 'bad play' the rules are just one more thing to play with.

The proper incorporation of 'bad play' into the general theory of play casts approaches that want to see playing as learning in an odd light. Furthermore, many definitions of play, such as Salen & Zimmerman's formulation of play as free movement within a more rigid structure, become definitions of 'good play'.[41] Play that is transgressive, illegal, transformative, or harmful seldom fits within those definitions (a possible reformulation would be 'free movement within *and challenging* a more rigid structure'). No matter what rigid structure attempts to surround play, that structure can be played with as well (see also Chapter 5). Sutton-Smith (1999), in an elaborate "footnote to *The Ambiguity of Play*", argues that play has a "universal equilibrial-disequilibrial structure". After reviewing conceptions of play in biology, neurology, anthropology, and psychology, he concludes that play has a tendency to both redundancy, repetition, hierarchies, and rules (*equilibrium*) as well as to quirkiness, disorder, lability, and fantasy (*disequilibrium*). Since Sutton-Smith introduced the concept of adaptive variability, many have argued that it is indeed the transgressive and transformative 'bad play' that creates (e.g. Sutton-Smith 1999; Burghardt 2005; Myers 2010, 162; Henricks 2009). No wonder that society attempts to limit and hinder such disequilibrial play. Indeed, not only is play a threat to a conservative, games are a technology for attempting to contain and control their power (Makedon 1984, 40-43; Csikszentmihalyi 1981, 24).

> Playfulness is a volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence, which cultural institutions seek to bottle or contain in the vials of games of competition, chance, and strength, in modes of simulation such as theatre, and in controlled disorientation, from roller coasters to dervish dancing-Callois' "ilinx" or vertigo. Play could be termed dangerous because it may subvert the left-right hemispheric regular switching involved in maintaining social order. Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, of freewheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious, "bread-and-butter," let alone "life-and-death" processes of production, social control, "getting and spending," and raising the next generation. (Turner 1986, 31)

Playfulness can be connected to power structures and it can be especially useful as tactical (cf. de Certeau 1984) undermining of existing power structures. The so-called *illicit play* of pupils in school is an example of this: doodling, note-passing, mocking, making faces, sneaking candies, and other such activities are a way for the children to express their disdain (King 1987; Josephson 2009), in addition to being fun. Sutton-

[41] Indeed, Zimmerman (2014) has later questioned his own conceptualisation of play as too formal and structural, one that hardly describes an "engine of creativity". He has even called it a "dehumanizing reduction".

Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984 311, 319-320) went so far as to say that the 20th century illustrates the gradual socialisation of children's leisure: from folkways to adult-influenced recreation, sport, and play.[42] Indeed, such is the danger of play that they playfully conclude that the whole idealisation of (certain types of) play is an elaborate way of confusing the functions of play with those of normative learning.

'Bad play' has been discussed outside traditions that approach play in relation to learning and development under numerous terms, emphasising different aspects of norm-defying play. *Deep play* (Bentham 1802, 106; Geertz 1973, 432-433; Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne 1984, 314-316, Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 74-101) is playing where there is a very high risk involved, either psychological, physical, or monetary. Examples include illegal extreme sports, having unsafe sex for kicks, and drunk driving on a dare. *Dark play* (Schechner 1988, 12-14; also 2006, 118-120) "subverts order, dissolves frames and breaks its own rules – so that the playing itself is in danger of being destroyed." This is similar to Myers' bad play (or *anti-play*), although Myers holds that play is paradoxical by nature and always survives the paradox – thus even if you play darkly with something, he believes that the play survives. In sociology, high risk leisure activities that require particular skills are sometimes discussed with the curious term *edgework* (Lyng 1990; 1991). *Forbidden play* (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 477-481) is taboo-defying play, such as kissing games, defined as such by the 'proper' social context that surrounds playing. Without those norms the playful expressions would not be forbidden, they would just be play. There are numerous terms for such contextually taboo play, usually related to sexual play. *Edgeplay* is used in BDSM communities to refer to sexual activities that tend to cause immediate and thorough convulsion in people (Moser 2006; Weiss 2006). In *unplaying* (Flanagan 2009, 33) children play in ways that oppose the adult accepted scripts (cf. Heljakka 2013, 336-347). *Dirty play* (Fine 1986; 1988) refers to immoral and distasteful preadolescent play, for example aggressive pranks, vandalism, sexual talk, and racist remarks.[43]

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[42] Beal (1998) offers an interesting window into a playful activity in the process of formalisation, as she discusses the symbolic inversion in some skateboarding subcultures.

[43] See also Turner (1986) for a discussion of play that can deceive, betray, beguile, delude, dupe, hoodwink, bamboozle, and gull.

Additionally, although *brink play* does not comfortably fit under the header of bad play, it can be illuminating to consider it in this context as well. In brink play (Poremba 2007) the social recognition of an activity as play (or a game) is used as an alibi to be able to do things that would otherwise be socially difficult (for example getting physically close to another person in *Twister*). In brink play norms are played with, but not necessarily broken.

The structural-phenomenological approach to play in reversal theory also has room for bad play. Many of the strategies Apter listed (1991, 18-20) as increasing arousal can be used in a transgressive manner, the most obvious one being *negativism,* characterised as deliberate and provocative rule-breaking. This kind of play "involves taking pleasure in the feelings which accompany acting in a way which contradicts internally or externally imposed directives and norms" (McDermott 1991, 98). The description bears similarities with deep play. In Apter's book from 2007, negativism and conformity have graduated to the level of being a metamotivational pair between which one can reverse, and indeed it is possible to pair negativism with both telic and paratelic states. He also teases out two different factors in negativism: proactive negativism (active provocation and mischief-making) and reactive negativism (characterised as vengefulness, bitterness, and vindictiveness). Although it is possible for negativism to become pathological, it has been stressed in reversal theory that negativistic play is not only widespread and common, but that it is a normal part of human experience (Kerr & Apter 1991). Apter (2007) goes so far as to note that "the power of negative thinking" is fundamental to progress.

Dark play, deep play, illicit play, negativism, bad play, edgeplay, forbidden play, anti-play… I shall use the term bad play to refer to all of these norm-defying bouts of play, as that term so clearly explicates that the contents of that category are chosen on moral grounds. The need to have a specific category for playful acts that many would rather not consider play at all underlines the need for their inclusion. After all, if one seeks to fully understand play, one simply cannot turn a blind eye towards its darker expressions. Play can be aggressive, destructive, and disruptive, it can be joyous, mirthful, benevolent and beneficent, something that builds character and prepares for the slings and arrows of life. In a social setting it can be coercive, manipulative, used to ostracise and to humiliate, yet it can also be used to overcome conflicts, to establish common ground and a feeling of togetherness, to create social cohesion, and to strengthen relationships. Sometimes play is many of these things at the same time, and often it can be difficult to estimate from the outside what it feels like for all participants – let alone guess what the outcome of an act of play will be. Play is many things, and it cannot be nailed down in any one moral category.

3.1.4 Synthesis

It is time to put forward the first elements of the framework for understanding playfulness and play in constructionist ludology. The term *playfulness* (or paratelic) is used to describe a metamotivational state, or an attitude, in the Apterian sense. It is innate to the player, and characterised as being voluntary, spontaneous, and wherein the activity itself is its primary goal. It is present in the moment and can be sparked in an instant, change drastically at any time, and can disappear without warning. Although it is possible to foster and harness playfulness, it cannot be fully tamed. Playfulness is often visible and its tone is usually (meta)communicated to others present in a situation – and this communication can even carry from one species to another. Playfulness does not have a moral dimension; it is neither good nor bad in itself – it simply is.

Play refers to an action or an activity. It is visible and can be carried out alone or it can be socially shared. Although usually discussed with the noun play, it might make more sense to approach it with the verb *playing*, as it is actively created in a moment. Play is rooted in a playful mindset, but as humans are aware that they are playing, it is influenced by social and cultural constructions. The concept of play, although influenced and rooted in the brute fact of playfulness, is in itself a construction. Its meaning varies from one culture to the next and it can change over time. Furthermore, since play is influenced by the surrounding society, it is not always free or voluntary. The situationally relevant expectations and norms can guide, structure, and limit play. Yet this situational grounding is also the basis for transgressive play; without norms there would be nothing to transgress.

The division of mental playfulness and visible activity of playing is an analytic one. Obviously these two parts are deeply intertwined in practice. But this analytic separation hopefully allows for a more nuanced understanding of play. Play can be further divided into different types, such as locomotor play, object play, and social play, although these forms are often co-present in an activity. When discussing human play, especially adult play, the emphasis is often on object play and social play, and as these play forms become more established discussion turns to pretend play and rule-based play, usually discussed under the header of 'games'. Indeed, there is a continuum from play to games, marked by an increase in complexity of social construction and rules, and a decrease in the need for a phenomenological experience of playfulness (more on this in the next chapter).

It is possible for a person to oscillate between a playful and unplayful mindset quite fast, resulting in a dual consciousness of a social situation, viewed both as play (playing) and

non-play (not playing). Play, playing, and playfulness need not be socially shared, although such instances of play can be perceived as inconsiderate, vulgar, transgressive, harmful, or illegal.

Constructionist ludology is, like Searle, realist: nothing exists that does not exist. The social and institutional facts need to be built on something (Searle 1995, 80). The brute facts underlying play are biological. Play is ingrained in humans and many other animals. The exact nature of this biological foundation can be debated, but the widespread presence of behaviour deemed to be play in human and other animals cannot be denied, any more than the phenomenological experience of playfulness. This ontologically subjective fact is based on a mental state. The human (adult) awareness of this playfulness, the human consciousness, and (collective) intentionality (cf. Searle 1995, 227-8), make it possible to construct the social and institutional facts of playing, yet playfulness is not reducible to intentionality and consciousness – or human representations. Furthermore, once the form of playing (or game playing) has been set, it is possible to engage in the activity devoid of a playful mindset.

The framework of the foundation of play and playfulness for constructionist ludology offered here, as all models, obviously contains normative choices. In this case there are three key choices that can be questioned and objected to, and thus need to be addressed.

First, the conceptualisation of playfulness and play offered is very wide. In comparison to numerous earlier accounts of play presented in relation to game studies – such as Suits (1977) and Salen & Zimmerman (2004), or even Huizinga (1938) and Bateson & Martin (2013) – this one attempts to incorporate not just all animal play, all good and bad play, and the whole gamut from individual paideic play driven by sensation to play in highly formalised games, but to also include all activity done for its own sake. Why do I want to find "play under nearly every rock in the social landscape", as Suits (1977) put it? Would not a more narrow definition, one where games are not lost in the noise of children trying to lick their elbows and cats toying with mice, be more useful and easier to operationalise? Perhaps so. However, in this work I have chosen to adopt a broad view, to be inclusive and promiscuous in what counts as play. I have chosen to view play as a broad category of numerous expressions, a fundamental condition in human and animal life.

The reasoning behind this choice is that such a wide conceptualisation of play lets us explore and discover, see connections and juxtapositions, and improvise and play with

the theory of play. I feel that game studies has not, to date, paid enough attention to playfulness, play, and the history of the study of play. In order to develop a viable concept of play, one that is able to bring about analytical and conceptual clarity, first one should remaining sensitive to a wider range of human play activities. Thus the approach selected in this work aims at building bridges to other disciplines and traditions studying play, and in situating games and game studies on a larger map. However, the separation of playfulness and play is important for this inclusive approach to bear fruit. On the whole I believe this approach has helped in taking a step back, and in approaching numerous game-related topics with fresh eyes, as Chapters 5 and 6 as well as the articles show.

The second choice relates to the first one. What if the unified foundation of play does not exist, for is it not just a social construct? The starting point of the framework in postulating a shared foundation of playfulness is a choice. However, this choice is made in light of evidence. One key reason why this conceptualisation of play is so inclusive is that there seems to be substantial evidence coming from ethology and evolutionary biology that supports the idea that the behaviour that we recognise as play has a common genetic foundation – even if numerous factors from the environment to ontogeny play an important part in how (and if) it manifests.

Yet there are two problems here: obviously there is disagreement amongst researchers as to whether this is the correct interpretation of the experiments and observations reported. More importantly, even the ethological studies rely on a human interpretation of what counts as play. Perhaps all that animal play is in the eye of the beholder. Where is the brute fact all the social construction is built on, if that turns out to be the case? If play as a conceptual category in the study of animal behaviour were to be retired due to new evidence or a model that better explains the observations, then human play would still be built on the experience of playfulness. The playful mindset would still remain an ontologically subjective, yet representation-independent phenomenon. The scope of the model would diminish, but the model would hopefully survive.

The conceptualisation offered here obviously necessarily navigates between an external realism independent of representations and social constructions. However, there is no claim made that some special scientific contact unmediated by language is achieved with the phenomenon underlying the subject under scrutiny. Yet just because we cannot leave language behind does not mean that analysis must be founded on the ordinary usage of language (see Morgan 2008). Thus it must be acknowledged, on the one hand, that the

brute foundational facts are not untainted by language. On the other hand it is important to note that ordinary usage of language cannot be seen as a cage either. Bullying and even sexual harassment may not be called play, but they can still correspond with all the features of object play, just as a professional athlete playing *football* can actually be working. The distinction between the experience of an individual and the social recognition of an activity is obviously important for this analysis.

The third choice relates to this very separation of playfulness and play. The analytic separation of playfulness as a metamotivational stance and play as an activity is important; although this division has been carried out before, previous conceptualisations have tended to take a moralist view on play as positive, or have construed play as the opposite of the serious, of work, or of everyday life.[44] These are ultimately false dichotomies. Although play and playfulness tend to be associated with frivolous activities, playing can be serious; play is part of everyday life, and playing can be work – for example for kindergarten teachers. Nor is playfulness incompatible with seriousness or work; indeed, the idea behind gamification is to prompt a playful mindset while engaging in goal-oriented activities. Even playful play can produce relevant results, even if it does not feel like work.

However, as stated above, this separation of playfulness and play is analytical. The two parts cannot completely be divorced from each other.

> It seems that pure play can occur only when all extrinsic consequences are eliminated and the behavior is driven solely by intrinsic motivation. Pure play

[44] Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has criticised the idea that play can be understood by approaching the playfulness of the player. The problem is based on the seriousness of play – and the suspension of seriousness:

> Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. […] The player knows very well what play is, and that what he is doing is "only a game"; but he does not know what exactly he "knows" in knowing that. (Gadamer 1989, 102)

However, playfulness and seriousness are fully compatible (cf. Riezler 1941; Jørgensen 2014) – unless seriousness is defined as goal-oriented. And even in that case Apter (1991, 16-17) notes that most playful activities do feature goals, but these goals are adopted *in the service of* the activity (compare this to internalised, integrated external motivations). The metamotivational state counts as paratelic if the activity as a whole is the purpose, and not just a way of reaching a goal. Philosopher Bernard Suits (1978) has also addressed this issue. For him the acceptance of the rules of a game, being prepared to try to achieve a goal through only the means permitted by the rules, is a central requirement for the constitution of games. This *lusory attitude* is different from Apter's mindset in that it is actively chosen, and thus it is more a means to strive for a paratelic mindset than a different expression of it.

> is probably only theoretically possible and striving for a pure definition only makes sense in that context. (Ellis 1973, 111)

Why then such as separation, especially since such a division has not been particularly useful in either studies of children's play or animal play, Burghardt's (2005) checklist for identifying play behaviour notwithstanding? I believe that the first person experience of playing is key in understanding play. External observation is obviously important as well, but it is not enough. The phenomenology of playing brings nuance to the picture that is sorely needed – and this division helps in constructing a model that makes sense of the grey areas of professional sports and transgressive play. The aforementioned 'pure play', like pure anything, may not be found in the wild. Yet reversal theory and the flow model both succeed in finding something that might be characterised as pure play, at least momentarily.

Furthermore, such a division helps overcome some of the apparent paradox of play. For example Klabbers (2006, 25) thinks that it would be fruitless to provide a purely functional explanation of play. According to Turner (1986, 31-32) play is liminal or liminoid, betwixt-and-between all standard taxonomic nodes, essentially elusive and is dangerous harmlessness for it has no fear: "As such play cannot be pinned down by formulations of left-hemisphere thinking – such as we all must use in keeping with the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse." Myers (2010, 9) believes that "the elusive characteristic of play is its characteristic form". The division of play and playfulness will not do away with all the paradoxes relating to play, but it is a step in the right direction.[45] Otherwise we are stuck with a concept of play that exists both as a component of interacting with games and toys, and as an overarching category that encompasses gameplay among many other activities.

With the thinking underlying the conceptualisation of play presented here now laid bare through these three choices, it is time to move on to contextualising this model in relation to others presented. That is the task of the next section.

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[45] For example, Fry (1963), building on the work of Bateson (1956), even invokes Russell's paradox and Kurt Gödel's proposition of paradox as unavoidable to lay the groundwork for insisting that paradoxes are fundamental for play (and humour), as things that are real and unreal (fantasy) at the same time. This line of thinking leads to all fiction (cf. Walton 1990) being paradoxical, which is perhaps overstating the dilemma. When it comes to humour, 'incongruous' is perhaps a more useful term (Martin 2007, 62-75; see below).

3.2 Play in Use

This formulation of the foundations of playfulness and play in constructionist ludology describes how play and playfulness come about and what they are. However, it does not address the function of play, or the forms it takes on in culture. Why do animals play, what purpose does it ultimately serve? How are play and creativity intertwined? Functions of play and play as the foundation of culture are both ways to chart play through its impact, be it on an individual, a species, or a culture. In these theories there is also the inherent idea that once we know what play does, we will be better at controlling it, whether this means guiding, taming, or strengthening its effects.

3.2.1 Function of Play

A key open question relating to the function of play: what is play for? Play consumes energy and playing can place an individual at risk, yet evolution has not weeded play out (Bateson & Martin 2013, 28). Thus, according to the theory of evolution, play must have some kind of benefits for the individual or the species. In addition to Burghardt's surplus resource theory of play discussed above, over the years numerous theories have been forwarded in an attempt to tackle either the motivation of an individual player (personal benefits of play), the function of play for a species, or both.

J. Barnard Gilmore (1966) has summarised the classical theories of play emerging in psychology before the First World War: *surplus energy theory* (play exists to expend surplus energy in an organism in goal-less activity), *relaxation theory* (play caused by a deficit of energy, which helps replenish energy, and dissipates inhibitions created by fatigue from practising tasks novel to the organism), *preexercise theory* (exercise of emerging innate instincts), *growth theory* (facilitation of the mastery of skills relevant as an adult), and *ego-expanding theories* (building up of cognitive skills and reality-mapping) (cf. Ellis 1973, 23-48). These theories are not interested in the contents of the play or individual players, but in its emergence and inferred purpose. There is also scarce research data to back any of these theories up, although there is at least some evidence to support each one.

Michael J. Ellis (1973, 49-79) continues Gilmore's work and summarises later theories on play. He identifies task *generalisation and compensation theories* (in generalisation theory adults choose leisure activities similar to their satisfying work experiences, and compensation theory suggests that leisure activities are chosen to compensate for a lack

of satisfaction in the work setting), *cathartic theories* (play is a way to express frustration, usually specifically aggression, in a socially acceptable way), *psychoanalytic theories* (play is a way to work through unpleasant experiences in a piecemeal way, moving from passive experiencing to active mastery of a situation), *developmental theories* (a child's thinking develops through set stages and play, assimilating reality to one's own ideas, facilitates that as well as is conditioned by it), and *learning theories* (play as learned behaviour). These theories, for the most part, came about in relation to research that was not primarily interested in play, and are (ibid., 49) "concerned with the actual form of the play behavior and attempt to link the antecedent and subsequent events via causes and effects."

Many of these theories, or versions of them, survive today. Especially the ideas of researchers who have otherwise been particularly influential, even if the focus of their work was not in play, still circulate. Let us take a closer look at some of the theories – ones Ellis would group as learning, psychoanalytic, and developmental theories.

Psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1933), building on the works of Groos and the early works of Piaget, developed a theory on the role of play in a child's development. He argues that play is not the predominant type of childhood activity, nor is it just characterised by pleasure. However, he sees it as a leading factor in development, a combination of recollection and imagination, where it is "as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour." Vygotsky sees play as rule-bound activity (for example, pretending to be a 'sister') that has a purpose (such as winning) for the player. Vygotsky's key interests were child development and the relationship between language and thought, and this is also apparent in his thinking on play.

> From the point of view of development, the fact of creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought. I think that the corresponding development of rules leads to actions on the basis of which the division between work and play becomes possible, a division encountered as a fundamental fact at school age. (Vygotsky 1933, 553)

In Vygotsky's thinking, although the play for a child is free, this freedom is illusory. Play actions are governed by definite (social) meanings, and the child learns to not only become conscious of her actions, but of their meanings.

A particularly influential researcher of children's play, Jean Piaget, considers play as an important element as well as indicator of the cognitive development of a child. Curiosity

and inquisitiveness fuel children's learning, with a balance being struck between the processes of *accommodation* (imitation) and *assimilation* (play). The former refers to repeating or copying something the child has seen without variation. Thus the child accommodates the environment. The latter, assimilation, is free play. The child improvises using elements that have been introduced. (Hartle 2009; Gilmore 1966; Piaget 1951)

In the psychoanalytic tradition, dating back to Sigmund Freud, the play of children is seen as "a significant window on a child's emotional life" (Patrouch 2009) – and a coping mechanism: "In the play of children we seem to arrive at the conclusion that the child repeats even the unpleasant experiences because through his own activity he gains a far more thorough mastery of the strong impression than was possible by mere passive experience." (Freud 1920, 28) The child works through experiences through play, especially anxiety, aggression, and sexuality (Herron & Sutton-Smith 1971, 107-109). Play is seen as mitigating conflicts and providing (temporary) solutions, and helps in adjusting to the surrounding world (Peller 1952). However, the psychoanalytic tradition, especially its older contributions, tends to mostly be interested in dramatic play, and there used to be a tendency to approach children's play through adult reflections on childhood. In this tradition D.W. Winnicott offers an interesting variation. Although Winnicott's (1971, 51-57, 68, 138) conceptions are in line with the psychoanalytic emphasis on the relationship between the mother and the infant, and he connects play to the facilitation of growth and health as well as the formation of relationships, he also sees it as universal. Play underlies cultural experience and it "has everything in it". It is a form of communication, and the analyst can use that creativity and communication in therapy. Indeed, for Winnicott play is a tool, a goal, and a background – for psychotherapy is about the analyst and the patient playing – and if play is not possible, the analyst is directed at helping bring play about.

Ellis offers one more collection of theories of play in his book from 1973 (80-111). These theories foreground play as *stimulus-seeking and effectance*, and seek to find the hidden motive for unmotivated, i.e. playful, acts. Stimulus-seeking boils play down to an activity that is motivated by elevating the level of arousal towards what is optimal for the individual. These activities, as they are novelty seeking (driven by *neophilia*), prepare the organism for future endeavours. Effectance (exploration and manipulation of the environment) adds to this the idea that an organism is driven to produce effects to the surroundings – an addition meant to explain repetitive behaviour. These theories have clearly influenced the works of Csikszentmihalyi and Apter, discussed above, although

the emphasis in these earlier theories is not on the experience of the individual. Likewise, it is possible to see Sutton-Smith's idea that adaptive variability is the evolutionary force behind play, as building on the thinking in the stimulus-seeking theory.

Today there is wide consensus that play must be somehow beneficial, yet there is no agreement on what that function might be; furthermore, there is no irrefutable proof that equifinal developmental results could not be reached without play, even though animals that engage in more play while young do seem to have better chances of survival in the wild. Play has also been suggested to be key to creativity and innovation, helping in abandoning the local optimum for a higher peak (see below). Evolutionarily, once there is sufficient surplus energy and food to play, it may be possible to discover new beneficial behavioural patterns, spread them to other members of the species, and have the individuals with a predisposition to such behaviour be more successful in survival and passing on their genes. The play of young animals have been said to train certain key skills and abilities, possibly in a relatively safe context. It is also said to provide physical exercise, agility, and musculature, and to help in learning the environment in its topography and objects, to help cope emotionally with the unexpected, and develop problem-solving capabilities, providing the aforementioned adaptive variability. (Bateson & Martin 2013, 28-54.)

Indeed, Sutton-Smith's formulation, and Burghardt's extrapolation of it, seems to currently be the most agreed-upon working model for the function of play. The cultural implications of playfulness as the engine that drives creativity are discussed in the next subsection.

For constructionist ludology the function of play is not very interesting, but the *assignment* of function of play is central. Functions are never intrinsic; they are observer-relative (Searle 1995, 14). The assignment of function, along with collective intentionality and constitutive rules, is important for producing an account of the social reality. Searle (1995, 14-16) uses a heart as an example. A heart pumps blood, but saying that the function of a heart is to pump blood makes sense only in relation to prior assignments of value. When the function of a heart is seen as pumping blood, then it is possible to talk about heart failure and malfunction. Obviously functions are quite important for how humans experience the world: when we see a chair, a car, a lecture hall, or a Haggis

(containing a lamb heart that no longer has the function of pumping blood), we are not just experiencing things that are materially there, but their assigned functions as well.[46]

The function that a theory assigns to play, either explicitly or implicitly, is thus quite important for understanding what play is as an element of the social world. Yet often that function is not addressed, or it is reduced to "fun", "stimulus", or "learning". The other alternative is to concentrate on the function and to show a striking disregard to the phenomenology of play experience – as is characteristic of the theories considered in this section. This lack of widely agreed-upon specificity of function, one of the three building blocks of social reality, may be one reason why defining play has proven so difficult. Constructionist ludology embraces this uncertainty. Play has numerous functions from adaptive variability to personal pleasure, depending on the frame of reference and the observer. Playfulness remains, regardless of the function assigned to it, but the social and cultural understanding of play is tightly coupled with the purposes attached to it.

3.2.2 Play and Culture

Huizinga's (1938) idea that culture is created in and as play, although less discussed in game studies, has been quite influential. His notion of play is deeply connected to humour, folly, ritual, festival, and beauty. However, he argues that play not only generates culture, but that historically the connection was stronger. He felt that at the time of writing the influence of play was growing weaker. This possible change may well be a romanticising of the past on Huizinga's part. Such a change has not been shown – indeed even the generative quality of play remains unproven (Henricks 2006, 23). Huizinga's romantic notion of primordial pure play, all but lost now (in the 1930s when he wrote *Homo ludens*) but something that once flourished in ancient Greece, has been harshly criticised as ignoring the world outside Europe, and ignoring women and children (Nagel 1998; also Fuchs 2014). Although Huizinga's arguments about the foundational aspects of play – as rooted in history – may not completely hold up, animal play provides a firmer basis for similar argumentation. The connections between play

[46] This has been discussed relating to the evolutionary biology of play. In order to have a sensible concept of play, one needs to first explicate what is the function of the behaviour termed play – even if it is doubtful that there is not just a single function for play, just as there is no single function for the mammalian hand (Rosenberg 1990). For one rebuttal of this view, see Mitchell (1990).

and culture, as well as play and creativity, innovation, improvisation, and dreams, are certainly interesting to speculate and theorise about.

According to musician and psychologist Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990, 9), building on the work of Huizinga, art and creation are about improvisation – be it music, theatre, writing, dance, or life in general. And Nachmanovitch sees improvisation as rooted in the "free play of consciousness". As such, Nachmanovitch's conceptualisation is closer to playfulness than to play, it is the spark underlying all creation. For Nachmanovitch, playfulness is an attitude:

> Play is the free spirit of exploration, doing and being for its own pure joy. Game is an activity defined by a set of rules, like baseball, sonnet, symphony, diplomacy. Play is an attitude, a spirit, a way of doing things, whereas game is defined activity with rules and a playing field and participants. It is possible to engage in games like baseball or the composing of fugues as play; it is also possible to experience them as *lîla* (divine play), or as drudgery, as bids for social prestige, or even as revenge. (Nachmanovitch 1990, 43)

This formulation is in line with the concepts of playfulness and play as used in this dissertation. Playfulness is the spark underlying not just play, but creativity and improvisation in numerous other forms of expression. Yet it is possible to engage in these activities without the spark of playfulness, in a telic manner. The trick, according to Nachmanovitch, is to surrender to the moment and see where playfulness takes you.

Nachmanovitch's book is not a theoretical account of free play, but a practical one (for a more academic take, see Bateson & Martin 2013; also cf. Winnicott 1971, 67; Lefebvre 1996, 171-173). Drawing from anthropology and Eastern philosophy, he sets out to describe improvisation in order to understand how to invoke and jump start it in life. The book features numerous exercises and practical examples that may benefit a person seeking to tap their creativity. In many ways it is a more general account of the works that discuss improvisational theatre and exercises relating to that (cf. Johnstone 1979; Spolin 1963; 2001). Nachmanovitch's (1990, 115-125) account also is representative of literature, especially popular literature on creativity but also academic ones relating to things such as divergent thinking, that writes longingly about children's play; if we could all just see the world as children do, in play, we would be happier and more creative (see also Chapter 6). Schooling and training are seen as robbing the individual of the spark of free play. As is common in such romantic accounts of the freedom of children's play, the reasons behind societal limits placed on creativity are not weighted. Although social

reality may be constructed in play, it will place limits on further play. Creating rules makes complex social worlds possible, but complex social worlds require equifinal foundations.

Let us take one of the siblings of play Huizinga mentions: humour. John Allen Paulos (1980, 1-10,104-105) has condensed, based on a review of earlier analyses of humour and his own work, the formula for humour as "a perceived incongruity with a point, in an appropriate emotional climate". Humour is incongruous in that it juxtaposes different interpretations: expectation and surprise, balance and exaggeration, or propriety and vulgarity, for example. However, as all things are incongruous in some sense and in some context, context is also relevant, as is the appropriate emotional climate. This context (or mindset, cf. Apter 2007, 162) must be playful, or at least involve the invocation of a play frame (cf. Bateson 1955; Paulos 1980, 52-53; Coates 2007; Everts 2003; Eastman 1948, 15-17; Alford 1981). The playful frame of, for example, joke-telling can be metacommunicated in numerous ways (e.g. the tone of voice, a smile, phrases like "have you heard the one about…"). William F. Fry (1963, 148) defines a joke as "play with a climax – a process presented in a special context, engaged in with a special mood, constantly oriented toward a particular termination point (known here as the punch line)". In psychology, Rod A. Martin (2007) has characterised humour as "essentially an emotional response of mirth in a social context that is elicited by perception of playful incongruity and is expressed through laughter" (ibid., 10; also 62-75). He stresses that humour has a biological basis, is associated especially in social situations with laughter, is based on (social) play, and that there is an emotional response to humour. This emotion does not have an agreed-upon name, but Martin prefers to call it *mirth* (ibid., 5-10, 15). Martin (ibid., 11-15) furthermore divides humour into three groups: jokes, spontaneous conversational humour, and unintentional humour.[47]

Though humour is associated with the experience of an emotion experienced as positive – mirth – this does not mean that humour is always a positive experience for all involved. Indeed, prior to the 18th century, laughter was mostly seen as malicious, negative, and aggressive, or resulting from a perception of superiority towards the person being laughed at; as recently as in the mid-19th century, laughing in public was impolite in the United States (Martin 2007, 20-26). Humour can be used in personal attacks such as in scorn, bullying, and teasing, and a connection between aggression and humour has historically been common in psychology (this is referred to as the superiority theory).

[47] Note that humour can be unintended. This recalls the subjectivity of Frasca's (2007) definition of play: "Play is *to somebody* an engaging activity…"

Similar to the situation between good and bad play, a thorough understanding of humour should account for both the aggressive and sympathetic humour.

Some forms of humour, jokes for example, have a clearer structure than others.[48] Paulos, a mathematician, has written about the connection and similarity between humour – especially jokes – and mathematics:

> Both mathematics and humor are forms of intellectual play, the emphasis in mathematics being more on the intellectual, in humor more on the play. To a great degree, combinations of ideas and forms are put together and taken apart just for the fun of it. Both activities are undertaken for their own sake. Ingenuity and cleverness are hallmarks of both. (Paulos 1980, 10-11)

Even in relation to humour, there is this idea that it is just a piece of the larger puzzle of playfulness and intellectual work. Arthur Koestler (1964) goes a step further when he claims that art, science, and humour are connected, as the creative insights in these separate fields are not actually that different. Insights are created through *bisociation* (Koestler 1964, 35; 1967; Fauconnier & Turner 2002, 37; cf. *cognitive synergy* in Apter 2007, 150-164), by considering something through two incompatible frames of reference; it is the "emotional climate" that differs. These insights can be humorous (the haha reaction), intellectual (the aha reaction), or – and this third one is less clear – passivity and catharsis created by art and beauty (the ah reaction). Comparing the intellectual and the comic, Koestler lists numerous surprising combinations of science, such as Kepler's unification of the motions of the moon and the motions of the oceans.

> The history of science abounds with examples of discoveries greeted with howls of laughter because they seemed to be a marriage of incompatibles – until the marriage bore fruit and the alleged incompatibly of the partners turned out to derive from prejudice. The humourist, on the other hand, deliberately chooses discordant codes of behaviour, or universes of discourse, to expose their hidden incongruities in the resulting clash. Comic discovery is paradox stated, scientific discovery is paradox resolved. (Koestler 1967, 646)

The act of looking at things from a weird angle, from a space slightly removed from yet connected to everyday life, is an idea that unites play, creativity, art, humour, and science. If play is indeed at the basis of this double vision (see also Groos 1899, 80), then

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[48] Interestingly, the employment of formulaic jokes may be connected to gender. Based on her review, Coates (2007) says that men prefer "more formulaic joking and women sharing funny stories to create solidarity". Note also that "amusing stories ending in a punch line" are sometimes referred to as *canned jokes* (Martin 2007, 11).

Huizinga's idea of play as *the* element from which culture is derived has some backing (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1981). In ethological terms this would fall under the header of object play, or playing with conceptual objects.

What unites many of these concepts is that they are an act apart, a view from the outside. Nachmanovitch (1990) points out that improvisation is also known as extemporisation, literally "outside of time" or "from the time". The step away from the ordinary, everyday, quotidian, allows one to look at life from a different angle – just for the sake of a different take of the matter at hand. And in this sideway glance, one is not constrained by everyday morality. Play as a basis of culture, as a source of creativity, and as something that reflects freedom in a fundamental fashion, is not possible without the transformative aspects of bad play. Or, as Victor Turner put it:

> [S]ince play deals with the whole gamut of experience both contemporary and stored in culture, it can be said perhaps to play a similar role in the social construction of reality as mutation and variation in organic evolution. (Turner 1986, 33)

It is important to note that although play represents a disconnect from the everyday, it also exists in connection to it and in relation to it. As Turner notes, it is the mutation to social construction, not something that is wholly separate. Thomas S. Henricks develops this theme:

> The essence of the idea of marginality and distance is that people stay connected even as they find themselves separated. To play is to know there is a wider world – with all its obligations and complexities – just beyond the gates of the playground. Furthermore, this wider world is needed to give play its sense of urgency and meaning. (Henricks 2006, 219)

Earlier, Henricks (1999) even defined play as an activity where a subject is exhibiting effort "to control or transform the conditions of its existence" in a bounded situation. For him, play is ultimately about transformation and separation – and this is what sets it apart from work, ritual, and communitas (more on the boundedness of play in Article II and Chapter 4).

Figuring out the exact connections between play, creativity, innovation, culture, art, science, beauty, and humour may not ultimately be as interesting as simply considering these notions together, or playing with them. It certainly is possible to consider science and art and humour *as* play, being rooted in the same spark as games, but worked in

human culture into separate categories after being cross-pollinated with less playful elements.

Game scholar Casey O'Donnell (2014, see also Malaby 2007; Pearce 2006) has called for broader and deeper ways of conceptualising play. He underlines that play and games are not just reflections of culture, but that they are in/as/of/through culture. O'Donnell builds his argument in reference to the works of anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Claude Lévi-Strauss,[49] and advocates overcoming a division between nature and social construction, and looking at play as a complicated mess. Approaching play from this angle shifts the focus from considering the foundations of play to its contextual expressions. Play could be a concept similar to 'culture' in anthropology. Edward Norbeck (1974), another anthropologist, approaches this the other way around. He views play as having a genetic basis, and posits that since much of what is called culture in anthropology serves to control behaviour originating in primal urges such as belching, sneezing, excretion, and sexual activity, play should be included in this category.

This approach to play is seductive. Although it seems play is indeed connected to creativity and innovation, revolution and art, this does not mean that all play is uplifting, generative, or even destructive in a creative fashion. Play, including adult human play, is also embodied and it can be repetitive. For example, foreplay and sex, athleticism, extreme sports, and drug use could all be considered under the header of locomotor play – play with the body – where embodied sensations are a key aspect of the playing. However, that angle would hardly explain the multitude of expression related to these activities. Yet such a grouping emphasises that adult play is neither just intellectual object play nor social play. Additionally, in studies of animal play repetitive activities that emerged in play are not considered play, but what about in humans? Can adult play not be routine, like grinding in digital games or a weekly hour of playing *squash*? [50] If the

[49] Geertz (1972) described Balinese cockfighting and the gambling related to it as deep play and uses that as an example to see into its originating culture, whereas Lévi-Strauss (1962) contemplated the differences and similarities between games and rituals. Games are disjunctive, creating a difference where there was none before play commenced, whereas ritual conjoins two previously separate groups.

[50] Theodor Adorno, in criticising Huizinga's notion of play, does not mince words when he wants to underline play as not only repetitive, but work-like:

> The element of repetition in play is the afterimage of unfree labor, just as sports – the dominant extra-aesthetic form of play – is reminiscent of practical activities and continually fulfills the function of habituating people to the demands of praxis, above all by the reactive transformation of physical displeasure into secondary pleasure,

creativity of play if foregrounded, routine becomes an aberration. Indeed, it has been argued that familiarity is a key ingredient in play (Lieberman 1977).

Burghardt (2005, 399-402), teasing out the implications of his theory of play, suggests that "societies with a class of players may be the most successful." This is because those who enjoy leisure have resources to devote to play, and this leads to breakthroughs in architecture, sports, arts, learning, technology etc. However, that does not mean that many individuals in the middle and upper classes would not squander their resources. On the contrary, there is quite a bit of waste. Yet this wasteful play seems to be necessary for innovation. Concentrating on just the creative play would render it not play. Crowning 'creation' as the function of play would be a disservice to both play and creativity.

This is the position of constructionist ludology adopts in relation to play and creativity. Play can certainly be generative, an engine of creating new expressions. However, that does not lead to a romantic notion of all play as creative. Play can also be repetitive, mundane, and boring.

3.3 Conclusions

The idea of play as socially constructed on the foundation of the brute fact of playfulness, although concrete, is ultimately more about form than content. It tells how play comes about, but not what it is. The challenge is that actual play is polyphonic and plural, it is many partly overlapping social constructions. The process of birthing play is easy enough to point out, but the contents change.

Playfulness is autotelic; it is its own reward. The expression of this innate playfulness is influenced by numerous factors relating to both the species and the individual. The phylogeny of the species, the past and present environmental factors, individual genetics, ontogeny, and energetics all play their parts. With humans, the awareness of playing (and of the very concept of play) muddies the waters. The expression of playfulness happens not just in an environmental context, but in a social and cultural context as well. Not all expressions of playfulness are recognised as play, and some

> without their noticing that the contraband of praxis has slipped into it. (Adorno 1970, 318)

actions that share the form of past expressions of playfulness, even though they are no longer carried out in a playful mindset, are called play. Understanding of what play is varies between groups of people and situations, or between different areas and times. On the whole, 'play' and 'playing' are associated with contradictory characteristics such as free, voluntary, spontaneous, autotelic, safe, unserious, separate, absorbing, uncertain, unproductive, rule-governed, trivial, creative, wasteful, fun, familiar, joyous, repetitive, regenerative, cathartic, preparatory, mirthful, childish, disruptive, dangerous, uncivilised, and fragile.

These different conceptualisations of play can be understood as a collection of sets, like Venn diagrams, they overlap partially. There are numerous activities that are recognised by some conceptualisations as play, while disregarded by others. The core of play, the part that most conceptualisations agree upon, can be called *playful play*. It is voluntary and positive for all participants, and there is a relative uniform understanding amongst participants as to what they are doing together. It does not overly challenge contextual social or cultural norms, at least not in a way that makes anyone uncomfortable. Such play is engaged in by children and particularly playful adults (like artists).

This core of playful play is surrounded by numerous groups of activities that are ruled as not-play by some conceptualisations of play. The following list is not comprehensive, indeed it could not be as ideas of play change, but it serves to showcase the plurality of play. Also, these groups overlap each other. (See Figure 2.)

Play to order. Playing can be work for the participants. Examples include kindergarten teachers and professional athletes. Children can also be forced to participate in playing, for example in school. In play to order the aim is to create activity that is play.

One-sided social play. It is not necessary for all who participate in an activity to experience or interpret it in the same way. Bullying, teasing, and mistreatment can be playful for the perpetrator, if not for the victim. Notice that there can be multiple participants on both sides.

Using a system. Systems that emerged in playful playing or which were designed as play or games can be used instrumentally. The aim can be to find out about playing (play testing, game research), optimisation, or using play for external purposes (impress others, gambling, learning).

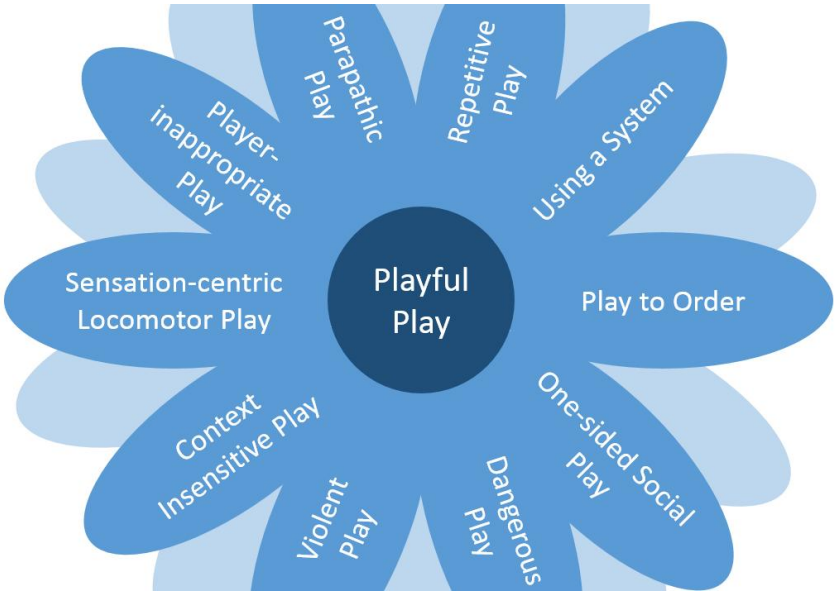

Figure 2. The Flower of Play. Different conceptualisations of play may remove some or all of the petals.

Repetitive play. Playing that is composed of routine and grind – in animals, the term stereotypical behaviour is used – can be seen as lacking an element of play. It may look like play, but it is not it, at least not anymore. Terms like abnormal, compulsion, and addiction can be used.

Context-insensitive play. Play that would be play at some other time or in some other place, but which just is not play in the here and now. For example, play in serious contexts like court rooms, operating theatres, and funerals. All norm-defying and illicit play could be called 'context-insensitive' by someone.

Player-inappropriate play. Activity that would be recognised as play if it were engaged in by an appropriate player. Certain types of play may be deemed unfitting for example for people of a particular age, class, ethnicity, gender, profession, religion, or background.

Sensation-centric locomotor play. Play where the aim is to create a pleasurable sensation (*ilinx)* for oneself is often forgotten, especially in adults. Thrill-seeking, riding the merry-go-round, and masturbation all fall into this category.

Dangerous play. Play where there is a sizeable risk to the player's life, reputation, or resources. Play that has potentially a very large impact on the player's everyday life.

Violent play. Play where the player inflicts damage or pain on another being as part of playing. The violence can be consensual or non-consensual.

Parapathic play. Play that is not fun and does not make the player feel 'good'. Play where the player feels emotions often characterised as negative – and indeed plays in order to feel those feelings. Examples include horror video games and dystopian larps.

The list could go on. The largest conceptualisation of play includes all activities rooted in playfulness and all activities culturally recognised as play, yet most notions of play tend to be tighter and less inclusive. The point being made here is that all of these things are play according to some conceptualisations.

However, the framework of playfulness and play outlined in this dissertation, inclusive as it is, is carved for the needs of constructionist ludology. This can hardly be considered a thorough investigation of play in general. As almost all scholars of play have noted at one point or another, play is complex and paradoxical. It is studied in numerous disciplines, the studies are often disconnected, and mastering even one of them can add up to a life's work. For example, on the pages of this dissertation many aspects of play that are less relevant to the task at hand have been brushed past fairly fast (such as the relationship between play and ritual, the development of children's play) while others have been all but ignored (such as the 19th century philosophy of play, or how different design constructs entice play). Yet this discussion is an important one for game studies, as play has not received much attention in that context – and correspondingly, the view from game studies has not often been brought to bear on play.

The project of constructionist ludology tends to be reductive, identifying the elements that build play and games up. However, to understand the experience of play and its contextual meaning, the complex cultural conception of play and its interrelations with other notions needs to be unpacked. The theoretical framework of constructionist ludology provides a solid foundation, but as the constructions become more complex, analysis must remain open for a polyphony of signals.

In the next chapter a step is taken from play to games. There is a continuum from free play to rule-governed play, and the experience of playing and the attached cultural

expectations morph as one moves on that continuum. Activities recognised as play can have structure even if they remain closer to spontaneous playfulness, whereas games have gone through much more construction and allow for less playfulness. Indeed, games devoid of play are not only possible, but commonplace. As such, the delimitations of games are both easier and harder in comparison to play. On the one hand they are more visible and explicit, and thus easier to pick apart. On the other hand they are tied to so many spheres of the human experience that analysing them apart from other parts of human culture can ultimately prove barren. Such exceptionalism can be easier, but as the discussion on play as culture shows, a wider conception of games in/as/of/through culture can turn out to be much more fruitful.

4 Games

> [T]he essence of a game is rooted in its interactive nature, and there is no game without a player. (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005)
>
> Are games such as *Monopoly* not to be considered games at all unless they are, at the moment of that determination, played with proper effort? (Myers 2009)
>
> Play […] is an act of appropriation of the game by players. (Sicart 2011)

Roger Caillois' (1958) conceptualisation of a continuum from free play (paidia) to rule-governed games (ludus) implies that the difference between play and games is not strict but gradual. Games have more structure, more rules, they are more uniform between play sessions, they are more institutionalised, more forethought goes into them, they are more prone to be sold as products, et cetera. These 'mores' add up.

Games as activities are formalised and institutionalised play, up to and including the point where they contain no trace of playfulness. The connection to playfulness can be simply historical. Yet they are also artefacts. They are procedural systems that have been consciously designed or which have developed over time. This division in the meaning of 'game' is visible both in the definitions games that have been discussed during the last century, but also in the debate in game studies during the last decade.

This chapter first reviews numerous ways to conceptualise what a 'game' is. Around 50 definitions and descriptions are considered to reveal both the central features games are thought to have, but also to show how understanding of games has changed over time. The close neighbours of games from sports to puzzles are also briefly discussed, before some preliminary conclusions are drawn. The second section concentrates on summing up the discussion in game studies between the analytical approaches, even schools of thought, of considering 'game' as a systemic artefact and as negotiated social activity. The role, or indeed the roles, of players are also addressed. The third section considers the boundedness of play and games, and finally explicates the approach of constructionist ludology to games as artefacts and games as activities. This chapter incorporates and contextualises Article II.

4.1 Conceptualisations of Games

Delimiting an area of 'game' is important for a field called 'game studies'. This field is organised around a phenomenon. It seems that the most accurate and honest definition of game, as it is understood in deciding what game studies actually studies, is "whatever is labelled a game in common parlance" (Elias, Garfield & Gutschera 2012, 6). However, that definition is not seen as exact enough, even if Ludwig Wittgenstein might approve.[51] Currently game studies is organised around the grudging approval of the definitions offered by Jesper Juul, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (see below), although most researchers seem to have a point or two of criticism they want to voice. These definitions have worked quite well in staking a wide and inclusive area of interest for game studies, even if they may not serve very well as analytical tools. Of course, we do not need definitions to discuss games. They can, however, bring about clarity by reducing vagueness and ambiguity.

The definitions reviewed here are quite varied. Most of them attempt to provide a useful way to delimit games from non-games. However, in addition to there being better and worse definitions, there is no wide agreement on what phenomena should be included in a definition. There is no ideal group of games that different researchers attempt to define with increasing precision, but the groups to be included changes from one scholar to the next. Thus, although there is a drive towards an *essential* definition, one that captures the essence of games, it remains elusive as there is no brute fact essence to them. Most of the definitions are *nominal* or *descriptive*, attempting to explain the meaning of the term in a way that is in harmony with its existing usage. Some are *explicative*, following the central existing usage, but being *stipulative* (and thus lacking commitment to earlier usage) in relation to rarer cases. A few of the definitions are *persuasive*, simply attempting to influence attitudes and frame discussions. Some of the definitions opt for being *strict*, and concentrate on leaving non-games out even if some games are also tossed to the side, whereas others aim for being *loose*, trying to be inclusive of as many games

[51] More specifically, Wittgenstein (1958, 31-32) used games as an example of 'family resemblance', of a group of things that share a linguistic connection (all are called games), but which may not have anything in common with each other. Of course, Wittgenstein was writing in German, so he did not have separate words for play and game. However, the examples he lists – board games, card games, and Olympic games – are all games rather than play.

According to Bernard Suits (1978, ix-x) Wittgenstein did not take his own advice and "look and see whether there is anything common to all" games (see also Myers 2009b). This friction between nominal and essential definitions (cf. Tavinor 2009) of games has persisted in game studies (see also Arjoranta 2014).

and game-like phenomena as possible. It is common to list features that games have, but it can be unclear if all listed features are necessary requirements for something to qualify as a game, nor if fulfilling all listed requirements is sufficient for being a game. It seems that many of the definitions that contain numerous listed characteristics are in fact following the logic of *cluster* theory; the more listed features a phenomenon possesses, the more likely it is to be a game. This may not be clearly explicated, but discussion of 'core games', 'limit cases', or 'borderline cases' implies that there is a continuum from a hard core to ambiguous limits.[52]

The aim of this review of different characterisations of games is to show the history of thinking about what counts as a game and the changes that have taken place. This helps in contextualising a contemporary understanding of what games are.

4.1.1 Games as Activities

The older definitions of games tend to see games as an extension of play. This is obvious in the definitions of Huizinga (1938) and Caillois (1958), since they did not make a linguistic difference between the two (see Chapter 3). Indeed, these two definitions are translated as definitions of play – but they are also discussed in relation to definitions of games. This makes sense, as they attempted to grasp a phenomenon larger than games, but one that also includes games. Even so, reading their definitions as relating specifically to games has been considered a source of some of the problems that current conceptions of games have (e.g. Sotamaa 2009, 41-45; Malaby 2009, 96).

Per Maigaard, the researcher who called for a subdivision of sociology called ludology to be formed in 1951, similarly included a wide range of activities under the umbrella of 'games', from role-play to ballet, and from hopscotch to reading literature. He uses the word 'game', but based on his examples he might as well use the term 'play':

> Games in the most extensive sense of the word are all sorts of activities which are not "real work" for livelihood or common physiological functions – e.g. connected with digestion and sexual life. Games are performed from mere desire. But as activities connected with the exceptions mentioned above also may arise from desire, it is difficult to draw a definite borderline. (Maigaard 1951, 364)

[52] On definitions, see Gupta (2014), Tavinor (2009), Swartz (1997), and Arjoranta (2014).

Games are based in biology for Maigaard, or as he puts it, "based on instinct for activity". Yet he is not just talking about a general human predisposition to play, but individual inclinations towards, say, athletic or intellectual pursuits. Thus for him games are performed while thinking that they are unnecessary.

Clark C. Abt (1970, 6-9; see also Abt's earlier definition, quoted in Ellington, Addinall & Percival 1982, 9), social scientist, systems engineer, and a pioneer of games and simulation for learning, also offers a particularly broad definition for games: "Reduced to its formal essence, a game is an activity among two or more independent decision-makers seeking to achieve their objectives in some limiting context." His conceptualisation is not just connected to play, but to numerous other activities. He notes that "most real-life activities involve independent decision-makers seeking to achieve objectives in some limiting context". Locating and explicating some difference between play and other activities was not Abt's goal; on the contrary, he looks for learning in games. He has a long list of activities that can be viewed as games: war, political and social situations, elections, international relations, personal arguments, and almost all business activities. Yet not everything is a game. Abt lists things such as noncompetitive processes (e.g. production lines) and predetermined procedures (e.g. simulations of traffic flow) as examples.

The researchers defining games in the 1970s and earlier tend to approach games as activities. However, where Huizinga, Caillois, Maigaard, and Abt (see also Mead 1934, 151-154; Lévi-Strauss 1962; Kelley 1988, 49-52; Maroney 2001; Frasca 2007, 70) see games as a continuation of play, many scholars view games as an activity distinct from play. For example, Elliott M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith, in *The Study of Games* (1971, 7, see also 405), after making clear that they are reluctant to nail down any kind of definition of a game, offer one. They see a game as "an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrial outcome." This is still relatively close to play, which they define as an "exercise of voluntary control systems".

Curiously, later in the same book Avedon (1971, 419-426) explicitly asks the question as to what games are: are they artefacts, behavioural models, vestiges of rituals, or what? He notes that the structural elements of games have not previously been mapped and then, building on the work of mathematicians and social scientists, proceeds to building a list of seven common elements in games:

1. Purpose or *raison d'être*.
2. Procedures for action.
3. Rules governing action.
4. Number of required players.
5. Roles of participant.
6. Participant interaction patterns.
7. Results or pay-off. (Avedon, 1971, 422)

This synthesis does not work as a definition of game, nor is it meant as one, but it is helpful in considering some common elements in games. It also anticipates many such feature-based definitions that would proliferate later. Bernard Suits (1978) walks on similar ground, but his take on defining games is more sophisticated. In *The Grasshopper*, a philosophical dialogue about the nature of games, he offers the following:

> to play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs (prelusory goal), using only means permitted by the rules (lusory means), where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means (constitutive rules), and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity (lusory attitude). […] [P]laying a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. (Suits 1978, 41)

For Suits the elements of games are goal, means, rules, and lusory attitude, but what frames these four elements is the active 'attempt'. Games are activities for Suits; he even phrases his definition as activity: "to play a game". However, he not only clearly differentiates between play and games, but considers the use of the term 'play' in relation to games often as just metaphoric (Suits 1977).[53]

Amongst the early conceptualisations of games, there are two particularly interesting variations from the activity approach. The first one comes from Kurt Riezler (1941), who conceptualised games as clearly separate and different from play. For him games are contexts, and a single game is "a little cosmos of its own", brought on by the rules of the game the players follow. Erving Goffman (1961, 27), directly building on the work of Riezler, aligns this take on games with the activity approach. He declared that

[53] Duke (1974) also belongs in this group of definers who see games as an activity distinct from play, as do Nachmanovitch (1990), and Dempsey et al. (2002).

games are "world-building activities" – and then expanded the idea to serious social activities as well. The idea that play and games set up a site disconnected from the non-play is a common one, usually traced back to Huizinga (1938), and will be covered below. However, few have defined games as being that bounded space.

The second one originates in the field of *game theory*, a subject of mathematics, and it is a radical departure from the idea of games as activities.[54] In game theory the players are abstracted and games are studied as formal, rule-bound systems. In the founding text *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour*, John Von Neumann, and Oskar Morgenstern (1944, 49) write: "The rules of the game [...] are absolute commands. If they are ever infringed, then the whole transaction by definition ceases to be the game described by those rules." A player can adopt different strategies, but the rules do not change. Similarly, for them a game is an abstract concept and a play is an individual playing or an enactment of that game, and moves are abstract possibilities and choices – something a player makes when picking a move.[55]

4.1.2 The Systemic Turn

In the early 1980s, a clear shift in the conceptualisation of games took place. This *systemic turn* seems to be connected to the rise of digital games, but also to the proliferation of research into serious games and simulations. In game studies, game designer Chris Crawford's book *The Art of Computer Game Design* from 1984 has greatly influenced later definitions. He identified four fundamental elements of games: representation, interaction, conflict, and safety. About representation he writes:

> a game is a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality. […] By 'closed' I mean that the game is complete and self sufficient as a structure. The model world created by the game is internally complete; no reference need be made to agents outside of the game. (Crawford 1984, 4)

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[54] Another interesting take on games comes from Marshall McLuhan (1964), who writes: "Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism." The comparison to institutions is particularly interesting, both from the point of view of constructionist ludology, but also in comparison to the game theory approach.

[55] In game theory it is believed that games have four necessary and invariant elements: number of players, rules, result, and play strategies. Curiously, though game theory foregrounds the systemic nature of games, strategies are not part of the system; they are something that the player brings. (Avedon 1971, 420)

This conceptualisation, which seems to combine Riezler with game theory, views players as part of the system. The players need only to stay within the internally complete world, that is, follow the rules – unless the game is poorly designed. The players incorporated in such a system are not the human, social creatures that play games, but idealised, rational decision-makers (Björk 2008).

An interesting point of view to definitions of serious games is provided by *operational gaming*, the use of games for systems analysis in behavioural sciences (Ståhl 1983a). Originating in military use and dating back to Prussian wargames (cf. Peterson 2012), in this context games are used for purposes such as forecasting, testing, and training (Shubik 1983).[56] In this tradition Ingolf Ståhl defines a game as an "institutional model of a game situation". The model, unlike in game theory, only accounts for institutional assumptions, and not for the behavioural assumptions relating to player actions. 'Game situation' is understood as a strategic situation involving two or more decision makers. Ståhl uses *chess* and *Monopoly* to illustrate this; according to him they are crude representations of "a battle in Persia in the first millennium BC and real estate dealings in Atlantic City in the 1930s." Though both are historically incorrect, these examples are illuminating.

Operational gaming is not so interested in the game (the model), but the gaming, and what can be learned through it. Ståhl (1983b, 30) defined gaming as "an interactive simulation, involving more than one player, of strategic game situation." A further interesting division is to *rigid-rule gaming* and *free-form gaming* (ibid., 37; Shubik 1983). The former refers to gaming where the rules of the game, exactly specified by the game constructor often implemented as a computer program, do not change after play starts and "every possible combination of players' decisions is thus exactly defined". The latter refers to situations where the participants supply some of the game rules, possibly inventing them as the game is played.

Operational gaming is particularly interesting in its emphasis on instrumentality. Entertainment games, "in which all positive results derived from the game are obtained during the playing of the games", is only one subgroup of games, the others being educational, experimental, research, and operational games (Ståhl 1983b, 32-34). Playing is defined as a particular type of human manipulation of the game. A player manipulates

[56] Already in the early 1980s, it was felt in operational gaming that computer simulations were gaining ground rapidly in simulation and forecasting.

a role in the game; she may not be aiming for an optimal solution, and the manipulation of roles is interactive with each other (ibid., 29). In game studies games are, unless otherwise stated, usually assumed to be entertainment games. Games that have external goals, i.e. *telic* games (or *allotelic*, Klabbers 1999), are discussed with specific titles such as serious games or games for learning.

The idea of a game as a systemic artefact, however, need not be connected to either digital games or simulations (see also Crookall, Oxford & Sanders 1987). David Parlett (1999, 1-3), a card and board game researcher and a historian as well as a designer, sees play and games as basically the same thing ("one is a noun and the other a verb"), yet wants to distinguish between formal games and 'playing around'. His definition is also clearly in the games-are-artefacts camp, concluding with: "Every game is its rules." This approach is not surprising as he does study the history of game artefacts – so the player is only present as an abstraction.

4.1.3 Designer Games

Crawford and Parlett are not the only game designers who have taken a stab at characterising games. Indeed, often the formulations offered by designers (or designer-researchers) emphasise very different aspects than the ones crafted by researchers. Consider the ones offered by Greg Costikyan and Sid Meier:

> A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal. (Costikyan 1994)
>
> A game is a series of interesting choices. (Meier, quoted in Rollings & Morris 2004, 61)

Both of these foreground gameplay as an activity: playing a game is about making interesting decisions.[57] When faced with three choices, none of which seem like clearly the best choice, the player is seen as being faced with the central essence of games. (Note also that Meier is talking about successful game design and his statement is very

[57] In *Patterns in Game Design*, a game design book written by game researchers Staffan Björk and Jussi Holopainen (2005, 7), the authors do not define game, but they do "present a framework for describing games based upon the activities you as a player perform within them." Also, compare Meier's characterisation of game to Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams' (2003, 201) elaboration of the sentiment: "One or more causally linked series of challenges in a simulated environment."

much a persuasive definition and a qualitative statement about good games.) Costikyan also includes the demand that games are art in his definition.

Costikyan (2002) updated his definition eight years later. Although the new article has largely the same structure and reiterates many of the same points more eloquently, the definition itself has changed quite a bit. Costikyan's new definition of game reads: "An interactive structure of endogenous meaning that requires players to struggle toward a goal." This definition shows a clear shift towards the systemic approach by building around an 'interactive structure'. Yet Costikyan still considers player agency important; indeed, he goes so far as to say that the reason game design is difficult is because games are interacted with:

> But actually, [game design] is among the most difficult creative disciplines, precisely because we're creating structures that people are going to use in every possible way, and use in ways we cannot anticipate. Games are an artform unlike any other, because the product is not passively received, it is not something specified to the last splotch of paint and every comma. Rather, a game, as it is played, is a collaboration between the developers and the players, a journey of mutual discovery, a democratic artform in which the shape of the game is created by the artist, but the experience of the game is created by the player. (Costikyan 2002, 32)[58]

Another game designer who has offered a very interesting take on play and games is Bernie DeKoven. Grounded in the work (and play) he did in the New Games Movement (Fluegelman 1976), he writes about the *well-played game*. DeKoven's (1978) starting point is not a game as an artefact or as an activity – though he addresses those as well – but the community of players engaged in playing games together. This is a very different approach; with the community of players as focus, the game-artefact becomes only a tool for achieving the well-played game.[59] For DeKoven (2002, 147-150; 2011) playing

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[58] Probably most designers feel that theirs is "the most difficult creative discipline", as the designers are not present when a thing is used, be it a book, a game, a building, or a powerdrill. Thanks to Annakaisa Kultima for pointing this out in conversation.

[59] As an aside it is interesting to compare DeKoven's emphasis on the play community to the thoughts of social behaviourist George Herbert Mead (1934, 151-164), who discusses children's play, playing games, and the distinction between the two as the social conditions under which the self arises as an object. The child that is moving from the (role taking) play to an organised game needs to take into account *the generalised other*, the attitudes of the other individuals, in order for thinking to occur. For Mead, games are illustrations of situations out of which an organised personality arises.

For Mead, who is discussing children, sensitivity towards other players is essential for being able to play a game at all. DeKoven, who addresses both children and adults, sensitivity towards other players is essential for a *good* game.

a game is the path to *coliberation*, striking a balance between being too absorbed in the self (alienation) and too absorbed in the group (conformity). DeKoven's (1978) account includes two aspects that rarely come up in game definitions: firstly, playing games should be enjoyable for all participants; after all, that is the reason for tweaking the rules. This emphasis on enjoyment comes up surprisingly seldom in definitions of games even if in the games industry's "games are fun" is a truism (however, see Aarseth 2007, 130). Secondly, DeKoven's underlines how games are created by the participants.

The characterisations of games drawn up by designers tend to emphasise the friction between the designed artefact and the activity of the player. DeKoven takes this furthest with his emphasis on the players' possibility to alter the game rules and hence the game as an artefact. Yet Costikyan also discusses unanticipated player actions, and even Meier's epigram places agency with the player.[60] The friction created between the formal elements and the activity of the players is where the beauty of play, or at least one aesthetic element of play, is located (Sicart 2014, 62).

4.1.4 Games in Game Studies

In game studies today it is not uncommon in regards to the definition of game to refer to the syntheses created by Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman (2004) and Jesper Juul (2005), criticise them, and then move on. After all, Salen, Zimmerman, and Juul did pull together numerous previous definitions, scrutinise them, and construct their syntheses.[61] Both definitions follow in Avedon's footsteps as lists of characteristics and have been greatly influenced by Crawford's formulation. These definitions prioritise the systemic nature of games:

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[60] Miguel Sicart (2009, 37, also 54) clearly separates the game object ("a system designed to be interacted with in order to achieve an experience that is entertaining and absorbing") from the activity of playing a game as he considers the complex ethics of engaging with digital games. Annika Waern (2012) addresses the system/activity schism head-on. For her, "the particular strength of digital game studies lies in its ability to uncover the relationship between the structure of a game and the way people engage with that system." She is very mindful of both the game artefact and the activity of engaging with it. For her game is a system, but it is a system that is either intended to be played, or it has emerged in play practice. Douglas Wilson (2012), another designer-researcher, has also advocated that game studies should pay more attention to the relationship between the designed artefact and the practice of play. Shinji Matsunaga's (2014) definition is also worth quoting: "Games are the things that (are intended to) produce autotelic and aesthetic (sensitivity-requiring) actions."

[61] Arjoranta (2014) calls this method of reviewing earlier definitions in order to find problems and then building a synthesis that attempts to rectify those problems *common core approach*.

> A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 81)
>
> A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable. (Juul 2005, 36)

Thus, according to these widely quoted definitions, the important aspects of games are that games are *systems*, they have *players* who feel attached to the outcome, they are *artificial* in the way that they are separate from (or at least have negotiable consequences for) ordinary life, there is a contest or more generally a *conflict* of interests, they have *rules*, and there is a *quantifiable outcome* such as winning or losing. Indeed, the definitions pull together most of the key elements of earlier definitions in to a sort of "best of" collection.[62]

Though these definitions are sometimes paraded as proof that games are systems and that Salen, Zimmerman and Juul are all formalists, that is hardly a fair assessment. Salen & Zimmerman do include the words "players engage" in their definition and they also devoted half of their book *Rules of Play* (where this definition comes from) to discussing games as play and games as culture, while Juul not only recognises the limits of his definition – which he terms the *Classic Game Model* – but he later (Juul 2008a) has been critical of approaches that leave the player out of the picture. However, both definitions do emphasise the artefact over the activity.

These two definitions seem to have been grudgingly accepted as a good enough starting point in game studies. As such they even seem to have helped foster a growing field of game studies with their broadness. However, the hunt for different points of view on games as well as an essence of games has continued.

The systemic approach was taken to its logical conclusion by David Myers (2009), who, based on a similar review of earlier definitions, set out to construct what he calls a minimalist, foundationalist, and essentialist definition of (video) game. Myers reviews the same definitions that formed the basis of Juul's definition, but set out to cut out references external to what he considers game, basically eliminating players and the activity of playing a game as culturally relativist (cf. Björk & Juul 2012). Myers presents

[62] The format on listing characteristics has been popular in relation to game definitions. See for example Whitton (2009, 22-23), Oxland (2004, 8-22), and Prensky (2001, 118-124).

four essential characteristics of a game: "prohibitive" *rules* (based on Suits' definition), *goals* (such as the most important ones, the winning conditions), *opposition* (antagonism provided by the game rules), and *representation*, or a falseness that is contrary to the real.

The formalist, systemic approach has been challenged, of course. For example, Thomas Malaby (2007) has stressed the connection between play and games, though he regards the way play is conceived of in game studies as problematic. He (ibid., 96) criticises a concept of play which is separate from everyday life (see Article II; on definitions see also Frasca 2007, 70), safe, and pleasurable. Malaby (2007, 102) seeks to build a definition of game that is "an empirically informed account of what games are as a form of universal human activity" and "must see them as socially created artefacts with certain common features". Building on practise theory (see Ortner 1984), Malaby (2007, 102-103) stresses that games are *processual*. As a game is played, it "always contains the potential for generating new practices and new meanings, possibly reconfiguring the game itself." Games are grounded and constituted by human practice, and thus "always in the process of becoming". Malaby calls this the *recursive quality* of games; new practises and meanings arise and can subtly or fundamentally transform games. He is very sceptical of definitions that are built on strict rules or taxonomies as they fail to capture the dynamic nature of games.

> Rather than appealing to an abstract blueprint of what any given game is, a processual approach to games recognizes as a first principle that games are, like many social processes, dynamic and recursive, largely reproducing their form through time but always containing the possibility of emergent change. This point bears reiteration: I am not claiming that games are not, on the whole, reproduced in consistent practices and meanings, but it is just this reproduction that can fool researchers into adopting a formalized theory of what games are […]. Instead, we must always recognize that however apparently stable, games are capable of change in this way. From this insight, it becomes possible to identify the universal features of games as a set of processes, without sacrificing their connection with other aspects of experience. (Malaby 2007, 104)

The definition that Malaby (2007, 96) offers is quite different from the others discussed here: "A game is a semibounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes." Malaby does not see rules as a good place to start – the rules of a game are not designed to reduce unpredictability, but to foster predictable and unpredictable outcomes. This he brands *contingency*. He also stresses that games have a capacity for open-ended meaning generation. Importantly, he is not just

interested in the end state, but all events gameplay produce. However, notice that Malaby does allow for design and pre-created rules in his definition as he talks about *contrived* contingency. As Malaby is critical of typologies and strict rules, his definition does not function as a delimiting tool for determining what is and is not a game. It is better at telling us how games are.

A particularly interesting characterisation of games comes from Jussi Holopainen (2008). He is interested in games as expressions of the underlying human (or mammalian) biology. In many ways his approach would be much more at home in the discussion of play in the previous chapter, as most game scholars emphasise the cultural aspect of games. Nonetheless, Holopainen finds that some game structures become more understandable in light of modern philosophy of the mind and cognitive neuroscience. Thus he positions that "games are caricatures of intentional activities".

A key challenge in coming up with a definition – or even a description – of games is that the relatively stable systemic artefact and the socially negotiated activity are confused. Games are not one of these things, but both; "the term 'game' covers two modes: the material(s) and the live performance" (Crookall et al. 1987, 159). However, cramming both aspects into the same concept or definition is problematic. An analytic separation is needed. For example, Sebastian Deterding addresses (among many other things such as informal games) both games and gaming (see also Crawford & Rutter 2006; Mortensen 2009, 9-18). This is his definition of formal games:

> [F]ormal games are socio-material stabilisations and institutionalisations involving player communities, game equipment, and formalised representations of the constitutive rules of a game. Playing any formalised game means to align oneself in a mutually intelligible manner both with the specific constitutive rules of the game, and the general constitutive rules of 'playing a game'. They continue to be reproduced-and-changed as people continue to bring together people, inscriptions, and game equipment in framing a situated encounter of doings, sayings, events and experiences as 'playing game X'. (Deterding 2013, 177; see also 237)

Deterding's conceptualisation of the game artefact is particularly interesting in its relation to rules. If there is one element of games that most definitions agree upon, it is that games have some kind of rules. There is, obviously, disagreement on what rules are, whether games are their rules, and how those rules come about. Deterding does not just accept rules, but explicitly addresses what they are, where they come from, and how they

are enacted. Playing a game and following its rules requires cultural understanding of what 'playing a game' means.[63]

4.1.5 The Not-Games, the Almost Games, and the Sub Games

Considering how influential digital games have been in game studies, up to the point of being the prism through which all games are viewed, it is surprising how few definitions of digital games or video games there are (e.g. Juul 2005, viii; Tavinor 2009, 26; Gee 2008, 23; Deterding 2013, 178-182; cf. Björk 2013). Indeed, elsewhere I have argued that the importance placed on digital games has resulted in a *digital fallacy* (Stenros & Waern 2011).[64] Different genres or types of games from role-playing games to casual games and pervasive games to zero-player games can be and have been defined, but usually these definitions are constructed in relation to a specific idea of games – which can go unexplicated.

One way to approach the concept of games is to take a look at its neighbours. Play and playfulness have already been covered thoroughly in the previous chapter, but there are other relevant terms. Concepts such as puzzle, toy, playground, simulation, and sport are briefly considered next.

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[63] This is particularly interesting as there is some evidence that simply framing an activity as a game will make the activity more pleasurable (Lieberoth 2014).

[64] As digital games are not in the focus here, those definitions are not discussed. In relation to the digital fallacy, we outlined (Stenros & Waern 2011) seven tendencies of digital games that tend to set them apart from non-digital games: computer-based games are often *simulations*, as that is something computers are good for (Aarseth 1997; 2004; Sicart 2009, 15). The *facilitation of playing* is handled by the computerised system (cf. Stenros & Sotamaa 2009; Mortensen 2009, 1), which makes *establishing house rules difficult* (cf. Sicart 2009, 27). Obviously the rules can still be changed (through social rules, mods and patches), but the materiality of the game product as something difficult to alter has a large impact on how games are conceived, and seems to shift emphasis from playing to the game product. Furthermore, digital games are *often single-player games* (cf. Article IV; Mortensen 2009, 24), a significant difference in comparison to non-digital games, although during the last decade multi-player digital games have become much more common. Digital games also often set up *fictional worlds* that can also act as platforms for storytelling (Juul 2005, 121-162). This helps in making those *games of progression* (Juul 2005, 72-73), a type of game that is much more uncommon in non-digital games. In digital games, most actions leave a trace, as many game-related actions need to be mediated. This seemingly makes *social play and sociability around the game have been easily separated from the 'game'* (cf. Article IV). To this list can be added that digital games are almost always visual, they are *based on a screen* (Tavinor 2009, 26-27).

Sports are often used as examples in game studies literature. Yet it is not apparent that sports are simply a subgroup of games like, say, board games. Bernard Suits has argued the case both ways. In an article from 1973 he firmly states that "sports are essentially games" and that each game of *physical skill* with a *stable* and *wide following* would count as a sport. Fifteen years later he had changed his mind. He argued that sports, play, and games are three separate things that partially overlap each other (Suits 1988). Athletic performances (e.g. diving, gymnastics) complicate the matter as he felt that they did not amount to games. Suits saw them as aspiration for ideals of performative excellence, and not bound by constitutive rules. His later description of sport reads as follows: "competitive events involving a variety of physical (usually in combination with other) human skills, where the superior participant is judged to have exhibited those skills in a superior way."[65]

The other problematic area for sports, aside from athletic performances, are professional sports. The challenge, as always, is that they are not seen as play, but as work. For example Waern's (2012) definition of games explicitly and purposefully excludes professional sports. For her professional *football* is not a game, but amateur *football* is.

In comparison to studies of games, studies of sports emphasise certain different areas. Skills and skill-generation are one important area. Others include performativity, body and embodiment, competition and contest, fair play, and player modification (especially performance enhancing drugs).

Puzzles are challenging problems that conceal a non-obvious answer (Danesi 2004, 1) or static challenge structures (Karhulahti 2013). They can take numerous forms from riddles to jigsaw puzzles, crosswords to double acrostics, and labyrinths to Rubik's Cube. Historically, puzzles have connections to mysticism and divination, teaching and learning, recreation and pleasure, and philosophy and mathematics. Marcel Danesi (2002, 27-36, 226-227) has written about puzzle-solving as insight thinking and has postulated a *puzzle instinct*, the "observation and contemplation of recurring patterns". According to Danesi no other animals share the human need for engaging puzzles, mysteries, or suspense and he wonders if it might be connected to humour. Danesi,

[65] Obviously there are other definitions; for example Klaus V. Meier (1988) has argued, contra Suits, that all sports are indeed games and that even athletic performances have constitutive rules.

following Paulos (1980, see previous chapter), sees humour and puzzles as sides of the same coin – and as connected to play.

One way to characterise the difference between puzzles and games is that puzzles are static, whereas games are interactive (Crawford 1984). A Rubik's Cube does not actively respond to the solver's moves. Games can be a basis for puzzles (like chess puzzles, or puzzles as minigames in digital games) (Crawford 1984), and if opposition is added, then a puzzle can become a game (Myers 2009). For example, a competition between two people as to who completes a *Sudoku* first would be a game.

Another way to distinguish games and puzzles is through the outcome. Puzzles can be solved, whereas games have competing strategies. Puzzles are static, while games have strategic or kinaesthetic challenges (Karhulahti 2013). Once a puzzle has been solved, there is little point in revisiting, whereas games are supposedly 'unsolvable'. Indeed, games that have a dominant strategy – a playing style that always leads to victory – are basically games that have been 'solved', and usually are less fun to play.[66] *Tic-tac-toe* always ends in a tie with two competent players. The most well-known non-trivial game that has been solved is probably *checkers*. In 2007 a research group (Schaeffer et al. 2007) announced that after almost two decades of computations they were able to show a dominant strategy that ensures that *checkers* will always end in a tie – something that grand masters had conjectured for decades. A game that is an atemporal "solved" artefact (Björk & Juul, 2012) is perhaps a game and a puzzle.

The distinction between puzzles and games is at its haziest when considering single-player games such as solitaire card games and relatively static digital games such as *Zork*. Early text adventure game *Zork* is, in effect, a large puzzle as it does not really react to what the player does (Costikyan 1994, 22-23).[67] Indeed, to a degree *games of progression* (Juul 2005, 67-73) are puzzles; once they have been played through (with or without the help of a solution, i.e. walkthrough), there is little point in revisiting the game.

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[66] Popular science writer James Gleick reports in his book *The Information* (2011) that Ada Lovelace, in a letter to Charles Babbage, expresses an interest in putting the game *Solitaire* into a "mathematical Formula" and then solving it. The idea of expressing a puzzle game as mathematical formula and coming up with a formal solution was novel. The letter is dated February 16th, 1840, and thus predates George Boole's first published work by seven years (Toole 2012). Lovelace has been called the first computer programmer, but it seems like she was also the first computer game researcher.

[67] Although, since *Zork* is a *fragile puzzle* (Karhulahti 2013), meaning that it is possible to take actions that will result in the puzzle being unsolvable, and since only expert players would have a complete view of the puzzle, it can certainly be experienced as a game.

Toys and *playgrounds* are similar to games in that they are designed to foster playfulness (cf. Ellis 1973, 134-139). Like games, both toys (things, artefacts) and playgrounds (environments, sites)[68] can direct play through *affordances* (Norman 2007, 66-69; also 1988, 423; Gibson 1986, 127-143), but they are looser; toys and playgrounds have fewer limitations and the user is freer to manipulate them according to her whimsy (Crawford 1984). Toys and playgrounds may be interactive, but they have no built-in goals: a ball is a toy, whereas *football* is a game, and a Rubik's Cube is a puzzle as it encourages solving. Of course, such divisions are quite arbitrary; there are numerous categories of play aids that bleed into each other: toys, playgrounds, puzzles, art supplies (Heljakka 2014), costumes, sporting equipment, and so on.

It is also worthwhile noting that while animals do play with objects, humans are "the only species known to fashion objects for use in play by its offspring" (Fagen 1981, ix). Thus though object play is based in biology, constructing instruments meant for play – toys – is a more complex process. Any object can be played with and thus turned into a toy, but especially adults seem to prefer toys that are culturally recognisable as belonging to the constructed category of toys (cf. Heljakka 2013, 233).

The line between games and toys/playgrounds can be thin. According to Costikyan (1994, 23), Will Wright has called *SimCity* (of which he was lead designer) a toy as there is no intrinsic game in it. The objectives are defined by the player (see also Dansey, Stevens & Eglin 2009). Thus *SimCity* becomes a game as a player adds goals to it. Similarly, games can be turned into toys and playgrounds by ignoring the official rules and goals (see Chapter 5).

Simulations are a close sibling of games, especially operational gaming. However, simulations have a different relation to non-simulation than games have to non-game;

[68] I have grouped toys and playgrounds together as I have been unable to come up with a meaningful way to separate the two, unless toys are defined as physical artefacts and playgrounds as geographical sites. However, from the point of view of Gibsonian affordance, playgrounds are perhaps more like the environment, whereas toys are movable artefacts in that environment. However, this distinction can be observer-relative. Take a plastic slide about a metre tall made for toddlers. For a two-year-old the slide is a playground. For an older child it is a toy to be picked up and played with. For an adult it affords much fewer play opportunities. How many *Legos* does it take for a pile to move from 'toy' to 'playground'? The confusion seems even more difficult if mediated, representational spaces such as digital playgrounds (cf. Sicart 2014, 49-59; Jenkins 1998) are considered. *Minecraft* is a playground, a toy, and a game. As it seems to me that toys and playgrounds are similar enough cultural categories of designed artefacts I treat them together.

simulations have a function and they have a representational relationship with the world, whereas games need no such connection:

> A game is a formalized system in its own right, while a simulation is a formalized representation of another system: a game is a 'real' system, a simulation a meta-system. (Crookall et al. 1987, 161)[69]

In considering rules as semiotic forms, and looking at the relationship between play, games, and simulations, Myers (2010, 21-29) sees simulation as a strict category, where the rules are defined by a designer. The formal reference is reality, and the functional outcome is a model. Game is the next category, one that envelopes and expands the previous one. In games the rules are determined by player(s), the formal reference is subjective experience, and functional outcome is interaction. The third level, which again envelopes and expands on the two previous ones, is play. In play the rules point to the pointing (or representation) process itself. Thus the rules of play are determined by play. Formal reference is representation and functional outcome is pretence.

Simulations can be played and from a formalist or systemic artefact point-of-view it can be hard or impossible to separate them from games (for example, Myers (2010, 22) argues that *Microsoft Flight Simulator* is a simulator but *SimCity* is a game). Indeed, often it is the purpose of the activity and its societal framing that separates simulation from game.

At the end of the previous chapter the category of play was discussed as a group of partially overlapping groups. Games are a similar cultural category. The central core of games is a matter of taste – and politics. It is not just that games are social constructs, but the very idea of games is a social construct as well. Unlike for play, there is no brute physiological or material basis for the category of games. Individual games can be material and do exist independent of observation, but the cultural category they belong to is not independent of humans. Playfulness underlines playing, but playfulness need not lead to games (cf. Avedon & Sutton-Smith 1971, 3). Games are not the only category characterised as being socio-materially institutionalised playfulness. Sports, toys, playgrounds, puzzles, and simulations are all similar, yet culturally usually considered separate. The boundaries are porous, and indeed different conceptualisations of games draw the borders differently. Instead, it can be much more fruitful to ask what we can

[69] Klabbers (2006, 81-82) disagrees. He sees games as both social systems and as models of social systems.

learn by treating something *as* a game, *as* a toy, and *as* a puzzle, than by asking which one of these three categories it fits in best.[70] Furthermore, there are numerous other neighbours that could be considered, such as rituals, fiction, tools, competition, and performance, but which have been omitted due to considerations of space.

4.1.6 Game Definitions in a Nutshell

During the last 80 years there have been numerous approaches to conceptualising games. It is not possible to present a tidy history of those changes, as the definitions have been voiced in varying disciplinary contexts and for different purposes. However, certain groups and trends can be identified. The earlier definitions tended to view games as activities, either as play activities, or as activities distinct from play. There is also a long history in conceptualising games as artefacts in the form of formal systems. That the term game is used to refer to both an activity and an artefact has been a point of contention (and we shall look at it more closely in the next section), but game designers have tended to find an interesting quality of games in this friction between a system and the players. One way to capture games is as a cluster-concept, by identifying a number of characteristics that games share. Finally, there are definitions of games that foreground the practice of playing and dynamic changing of games as situated in a cultural context.

Considering phenomena similar, yet slightly different, to games can help bring about clarity in relation to games. Yet as all of these categories are manmade, the borders shift – and the choice of neighbours is also an act of definition. All the neighbours considered sometimes find themselves under the umbrella of games. Especially when presented in digital format, puzzles, playgrounds, simulations, and toys get lumped in the same category as games. The human capability for not only playing but for knowing that we are playing thus complicates matters. We have different conceptions of what counts as a game and what play is, and these cultural understandings shift from society to society and change over time. Our concept of game is culturally constructed.

[70] One possibility would be approaching categories such as games, toys, and playgrounds as sociosemiotic genres (Ridell 2006) of structured, playfulness-based artefacts.

This review has emphasised the stance of different game definitions towards games as activities and games as artefacts.[71] Other approaches would have been possible. An emphasis on the different conceptualisations of rules, for example, could have been very interesting. Rules, after all, are the one thing almost all definitions of games see as foundational for games. However, the different definitions have very divergent views on what rules actually are (we also return to this discussion in the next chapter).[72]

The emphasis on the division between games as activities and artefacts follows from current discussions in game studies. These are explored next.

4.2 Systemic Artefact and Negotiated Activity

Games are both constantly reproduced and negotiated, appropriative play-activities between players (and designers), and systemic artefacts that can carry meaning and may remain relatively unchanged for centuries. There are numerous valid approaches to games, though discussion in game studies has concentrated on the division between player and artefact, or activity and system. These are the two most relevant approaches when thinking of games *as* games, instead of cultural products, technology, objects to be sold, material culture et cetera. This is the dual nature of games, or at least the two meanings that the word has: a played game of *chess* and *chess* the game. As Frasca (2007, 40-41) has argued, any attempt to understand games will be severely limited, if it ignores either of these approaches.

Partly the distinction is connected to disciplinary lines. The artefact approach seems to fit humanist studies, whereas the activity approach is more in line with social sciences.

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[71] Thomas S. Henricks (1999) distils four ways to approach play: as form, as activity, as disposition, and as experience. In the previous chapter the metamotivational paratelic mindset was identified as playfulness – a disposition with elements of experience in Henricks' terminology. Play was discussed as a social construct having numerous meanings, mostly associated with activity and form. When games are considered, the approaches as disposition and as experience are rarely encountered (although is possible to argue that games are in effect discussed as 'gameful' dispositions in relation to gamification, but such discussions rarely withstand closer scrutiny, as discussed in Chapter 6). Instead, games are discussed in the literature mostly as forms of systemic artefacts and as negotiated activities.

[72] In an analysis presented elsewhere (Stenros 2014) of the same group of game definitions, I identified eight points of interest that different game definitions approach differently. These are rules (what are they), artefact or activity, separate or connected (to non-game world), the role of the player, purpose and function or lack thereof, productive or unproductive, relationship to conflict and competition, and stance towards goals and end-conditions. Metaconsiderations relating to how a definition is constructed were also identified.

Quite often this difference in approach is framed as a division between a game-centred view and a player-centred view.

It is unfortunate that we do not have separate established terms for these two ways in which games exists.[73] For example, in relation to simulations there is a distinction between *simulator*, which is the latent format, the form contained in a machine or a program, whereas *simulation* is the actualisation of the operation and experience of the live performance (Crookall et al. 1987, 153). The distinction was made in game theory, as discussed above, but unfortunately the terms they offered for these two, game and play, would create more confusion than clarity.[74] I shall discuss these points of views as *game-artefact* and *game-activity*.

In this section recent debates in game studies relating to games as objects and as activities are reviewed. At first there is a discussion on the conceptualisation of a 'player'. Do games exist without players – and can there be players without games? The second debate relates to the search for an essence of games – and the mess it ends up in. The third and final part deals with the attack of the 'play-centrists' on 'proceduralists'.

4.2.1 Players Implied and Embodied

A game implies a *player*. The term is used to refer to the actual people who engage with games, and in reference to the abstraction of a *player position*. In formal and systemic takes on games the player is abstracted. In game analysis there is a third conception: the *implied player*. This is also used as a design aid and it is an abstraction of the person who will play the game – but it is a participant who fits the game design as conceived by the designer. The concept of an *actor* is a fourth formulation; the abstraction of a person participating. In more sociological takes the players are those who participate as role performers (Henricks 2006, 8). Ethnography and player studies deals with actual *player-participants*, though usually their findings are abstracted. Finally, player is used to refer to someone who has played or will play a game – and as a marker of *identity*, someone who generally plays games quite a bit.

[73] Björk & Juul (2012) actually identify a third way "game" is used, as a "solved artefact". For that the term puzzle will do in this dissertation.

[74] Crookall et al (1987) offer the terms *game-base* and *game-performance* to correspond to these meanings.

At its most abstract the player is a structural position within the framework of the system of the game. Björk & Holopainen (2005), as part of their work on building a collection of patterns of game design, provide a perfect example of this approach. They have listed the structural components of games:

> The *game facilitator* is responsible for maintaining and synchronizing the game state, the *players* are entities that try to achieve their goals in the game by performing actions through an *interface*, and the *game elements* are components, which contain the game state. *Game time* describes how the changes in the game state map to real time. (Björk & Holopainen 2005, 23, emphases in original)

They have a very reductive view of the player. Players are (ibid., 24) "the representations of the different agencies that are competing (or cooperating) in the game to achieve their goals." Furthermore, they point out that this 'player' can be controlled by a number of people (playing the same character, playing as a team in *chess*), and that sometimes it can be useful for analysis and game design to think of entities controlled by the game system as 'players' (such as the ghosts in *Pac-Man* or the opposition in *Tetris*). Björk & Holopainen do not coin a term for the person participating in a game.

A particularly fascinating exploration of the topic comes from Björk & Juul (2012), who have explored what the term 'player' means by analysing *zero-player games*. They first identify numerous groups of zero-player games: games where player input is not possible after initial setup (setup-only games), games played by artificial intelligences, games where each and every possible session has been captured and solved through analysis, and non-existing and practically unplayable games (hypothetical games). Using these they tease out the player traits that are removed. These are continued agency, humanness, temporality, intentionality, and aesthetic preferences. They also add a sixth category of voluntariness. The question Björk and Juul propose is whether it is possible to lack all the listed traits, and to still be considered a player.

Erving Goffman (1961, 34-35) divides the participating individual into two. For him there is an *interest-identity*, *team* or a *side*, something that is not embodied, but is a function of the game, similar to the player position outlined by Björk & Holopainen. This interest-identity is the one that wins or loses due to the outcome of the game. The other part is player who is an agent-of-play, "who thinks and acts but does this for the side on which he is playing." Furthermore, Goffman (ibid., 38-39) rejects the model of the ideal rational

player, as the situation of playing is much more complex than the structure provided by the game (see Chapter 5). He writes:

> [W]hile the player's current position on a board often can be adequately conveyed by brief signals through the mail, evidence of his spontaneous involvement in the gaming encounter can be adequately conveyed only to those in his immediate presence. (Goffman 1961, 39)

This ties into the concept of *game state*. The term is usually used to refer to the position or state of each game element at a given moment. It is a useful term when discussing the position of each piece on a chess board, or even a situation in a digital game. In both examples the game state can be reproduced when needed if the description of the game state exists, and seemingly only a limited number of game states exist. However, the idea of a game state ignores the person participating as a player. This is underlined by the increasing uselessness of the term in games that are strongly embodied or have a stronger connection to the world around the game, such as *basketball* and pervasive games (see Montola, Stenros, & Waern 2009, 17). Reproducing a specific situation from a game of *basketball* is extremely difficult even if one were to discount the effect of stopping and restarting, the mental and physical state of the players, and the mood of the audience. Thus the concept of game state assumes that players are abstract positions and that the situation around the game does not have a transforming effect on the game.

The implied player has been discussed in game studies as a comparable to the 'ideal reader' in literary studies, and has been formulated "as a role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfil for the game to 'exercise its effect'" (Aarseth 2007, 132). The implied player is also a relevant and concrete design aid for game designers as it helps them picture the people who will be playing their creations. Jonas Heide Smith (2006, 23-24) has divided implied players into four models: the susceptible player, the selective player, the active player, and the rational player. We will return to the first two, which relate to the pre- and postgame activities of the player a little later. The latter two are relevant for the consideration of activities taking place during the game: the *active player model* conceives of a player who is actively "engaged with the game or gamespace in ways often not prescribed or predicted by the game designers", whereas the *rational player model* is seen as "optimizing her outcome within the game as defined by the objective goals". Importantly, Smith explicates that his model does not address the "player as a co-creator" (ibid., 23). Thus though both models of ideal players have agency, they have it only within the confines of the rules. The concept of *configurative player* has been proposed as an additional type (Sotamaa 2007, 67-69), to

make up for this lack, accounting for players who also tinker with the rules and set-up of the game. Also, *the transgressive player* has been highlighted as a required type to understand real player behaviour, to explain unexpected player actions that are not explicitly forbidden by the game system, but not condoned by the spirit of the game (Aarseth 2007, 132).[75]

Smith argues that while the idea of the rational player is hegemonic in design literature, the situation is different in game studies. Indeed, Smith sees the hegemonic position of the idea of an active player as problem: he criticises game studies as overemphasising player creativity and concentrating on the "unexpected, the complex and the resistant" (Smith 2006, 39, 239), and later concludes that rational player model and active player model are both right and wrong: "aspects of player behaviour is predicted by the game rules." Aarseth (2007) comes to a similar conclusion. According to him, during play the player is half-possessed by the implied player (of the rational player model), yet the moments when we break free of the possession are of supreme importance:

> These marginal events and occurrences, these wondrous acts of transgression, are absolutely vital because they give us hope, true or false; they remind us that it is possible to regain control, however briefly, to dominate that which dominates us so completely. (Aarseth 2007, 4)

Aarseth's longing for those special moments of pure play is reminiscent of Myers' (2010) conception of play, and also recalls the dynamic approaches to conceptualising what games are, presented by Malaby (2007) and Deterding (2013). For Myers only the expert player, after mastering the interface and the game, can start truly playing with the game (see Chapter 2).

It may seem tempting to look for a possible middle ground by reassessing what the rational player is trying to optimise. She may not be attempting to optimise her actions in order to succeed in the game, but trying to optimise her actions in order to have a best possible experience with the game. Often, but not always, that aligns with trying to

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[75] It is easy to suggest additional player types. Aside from the numerous player typologies that have been presented over the years (e.g. Bartle 1996; Kim 2003), there are the players with different amounts of experience and literacy in relation to games. These were already discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the advocating of *expert player* being the superior interpreter of games by Aarseth (2003) and Myers (2009a). In relation to casual games the concept of *virgin player* can be proposed. Often casual games are optimised for new and unexperienced players, and the number of players who make it through the tutorial are tracked with very specific metrics. These kinds of conceptualisations are very relevant in game design.

succeed. But it is also important to have a fair game, even if that means the better player needs to handicap herself (cf. Smith 2006). Alternatively she might also want to fail spectacularly and thus create a positive negative experience (e.g. Hopeametsä 2008; Montola 2010; also Vygotsky 1933, 549), challenge the game designer (Wilson & Sicart 2010), or tweak the rules to create a more interesting and better functioning game. Finding a model that fits all players all the time in all games may not be a very realistic goal.

Smith's (2006, 23-24) two other models of ideal players relate to extraludic activities. *Susceptible player model* approaches the player as a subject of the game. Her post-game activities are influenced, predictably, by the game. This view is common in media studies where the effects the game (or features of the game, say representations of violence) has on the player are central, and within game studies this model is adopted when claims are made about learning in games (Smith 2006, 25-27). *Selective player model* similarly originates in media studies, in connection to the uses and gratifications paradigm. The player chooses her games based on her needs and preferences. However, the emphasis is more on the choice of game than on the gaming itself (Smith 2006, 27-30).

Both of these formulations expand the idea of a 'player' outside of the game. A player is no longer someone (or an abstraction) who plays, but now someone who will play or has played. Aarseth has criticised these kinds of conception of players:

> Clearly, players cannot exist without a game they are players *of*. A generic *player* is an unthinkable, not merely ahistorical, figure. Games, on the other hand, can exist without actual, current players, as material and conceptual game objects ("texts"). While the game-without-a-player is a limited perspective, it does denote a hierarchical relationship: the historical player cannot exist without a game, but the game, at some point in its existence (e.g. before the first playtesting session in a development cycle), can exist without players, and always without one particular, historical player. (Aarseth 2007, 130)

Furthermore, building on Gadamer's work on play (1989), Aarseth concludes:

> By accepting to play, the player subjects herself to the rules and structures of the game and this defines the player: a person subjected to a rule-based system; no longer a complete, free subject with the power to decide what to do next. (Aarseth 2007, 130)

On the one hand the game is truly created by the act of playing by its players, yet it is the game (or the act of playing it) that constitutes players. "The player grasps the game,

but simultaneously the player is grasped by the game. While the former is often described as *action* and the latter as *immersion*, they both refer to the same event" (Karppi & Sotamaa 2012, emphases in original). To have players without the activity of engaging with a game requires a radically different model of games and players.[76] Yet the term player is, in practise, used also to refer to future players (especially in the context of game industry and marketing), past players, and as a denotation of identity. Player is not just a person who is playing right at that moment, but a label for a person who often plays games; an identity-marker.[77] Of course, this last group has become an ideal category as well, especially for marketers and game researchers.

These numerous ways of players are discussed can roughly be grouped into three categories, depending on how they are used and the fields where they are useful. Conceptual players are theoretical things to think with, especially in design and analysis. Actual players are people who use games. And players in culture are people outside of games who are still somehow connected to games, either by self-identifying as players, or by being designated as such.

4.2.2 From a Mess to a Point

Jesper Juul (2008a) discussed the relationship of players and games and the friction between game-artefacts and game-activities in his keynote at the Philosophy of Computer Games conference, talking about a *segregationist perspective* of games, which holds that games are structures that are separate from players, and as such structures that players can subvert. The other alternative is *integrationist perspective*, which holds that games are chosen and upheld by players, and as part of play the players create rule systems and boundaries.[78]

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[76] Elsewhere, together with Annakaisa Kultima, I have presented an Expanded Game Experience model, which attempts to capture not just the playing of a game but preparation and abandonment of playing a game (Kultima & Stenros 2010).

Sicart (2009, 122) has also presented a model for understanding the ethics of playing digital games and as part of that he has outlined numerous subject positions available to a participants as part of the ludic hermeneutic circle of playing a game: player subject, individual player, community player, and subject external to the game. These bring together playing a particular game, other games, player communities, and wider cultural values (cf. Fine 1983).

[77] It is interesting to note that the term 'gamer' is less shorthand for 'player of games' and more of an identity-marker for an active player of games, especially in relation to board games, tabletop role-playing games, and certain types of digital games (Clément 2014).

[78] Aki Järvinen (2008, 22) has made a similar distinction with the terms *systemic* and *contextual*.

Ian Bogost also addressed this issue in his keynote in DiGRA 2009. He noted that Juul's choice of the term segregationist is "vaguely derogatory" and the integrationist perspective holds that "games are really just limp skins that may exist, but only in lesser form, until they are filled out and activated by players." According to Bogost this point-of-view is

> a pretty straightforward adaptation of metaphysics after Kant's Copernican Revolution, in which things primarily or exclusively exist for humans, and that things may exist, but thinking of those things apart from their being thought is incoherent." (Bogost 2009)

Furthermore, Bogost eloquently claims that (video)games are a mess. Using the classic Atari game *E.T.* as an example, he sees the game not just as an activity and a system of rules, but also as raw data, source code, a flow of inputs and outputs by the user and the equipment, an integrated circuit, a plastic cartridge, a consumer good, intellectual property, a collectible, and a sign for the economic crash of videogames in 1983. Building on the works of Bruno Latour, Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Levi Bryant, Bogost argues for a *flat ontology*. All objects, be they corporeal or incorporeal, have the same ontological status. Thus the relationship between a human and the world is not exceptional, only particular. Bogost sums up:

> Likewise *E.T.* is never only one of the things just mentioned, nor is it only a collection of all of these things. Paradoxically, a flattened ontology allows it to be both and neither. We can distinguish the ontological status of game-as-code from game-as-play-session without making appeal to some higher-order notion of game as form, type or transcendental. (Bogost 2009)

Later Bogost extrapolated on this claim and went one step further; in *Alien Phenomenology* (2012a, 13-22) he ultimately rejects the structure of network, Latour's imbroglio, and even mess as too orderly, too disorderly, or too anthropocentric. Instead he argued for a singularity-like point of *tiny ontology*, as that gets rid of the need to consider the mapping of a flat ontology. Bogost (2012a, 21) writes: "If any one being exists no less than any other, then instead of scattering such being all across the two-dimensional surface of flat ontology, we might also collapse them into the infinite density of a dot."

Bogost's take on games as being many things in a messy, yet equal way is seductive. It sidesteps the issue of the essence of games in a nice way and leaves the field open for numerous valid takes on researching individual games. Obviously, this kind of an approach requires that researchers are crystal clear on what aspects of a game they are

addressing in their work. However, when discussing games on a general level, certain aspects become more relevant. Though *E.T.* certainly is a consumer good, a collectible, and intellectual property, these are not of primary interest when assessing it *as* a game – at least in the context of human societies and cultures. Although completely ignoring those other aspects can be highly problematic, the aspects of *E.T.* that are of primary interest within game studies are its systemic rule structure and the activity it fosters – for a human.

4.2.3 Against Procedural Rhetoric

Are games a medium? This question may seem inane to a person approaching the question from a videogame-business-informed, designer-centric, systemic point of view. If games are systemic artefacts and things (i.e. products), they have been created by an auteur-designer (i.e. developed by a large team), and they are able to store and convey data and meaning (i.e. tell a story, whatever 'story' means), then how could games *not* be a medium? Bogost has even coined a term for the special way in which games convey meaning: *procedural rhetorics* (Bogost 2007).

However, there are those who strongly maintain that games are not media (e.g. Lantz 2009, 246; Simon 2011). The people who maintain this view tend to approach games as activities. Games are played – negotiated, performed, inhabited, immersed in, explored, played with – by their players, they are not a channel through which the message of the auteur is consumed. When emphasis is placed on the social dimension of the game-playing encounter, then games are as much a medium as a dinner party is. Both are structured encounters where the procedure and props are mostly derived from an external source with possibilities for highly defined semiotic codes (game tokens and rules versus etiquette and food recipes). Of course, we can approach dinner parties as a medium for the host to communicate her social status, but at that point we are fairly far from the original meaning of the term.

Perhaps the clearest confrontations in game studies between the idea of games as artefacts and the games as activities is summed up in the debate between proceduralists and play-centrists. The debate was sparked on the DiGRA games network email list in March 2011 when A PhD course called "Against Procedurality" was announced to take place at the IT University of Copenhagen. The debate continued at the seminar the following summer, and later reached a larger audience when two of the organisers of the

seminar, Miguel Sicart (2011) and Doug Wilson (2012), published articles relating to the topic.[79]

Proceduralism in the context of contemporary game studies can be traced back to Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1998, 71-74), where she lists *procedural* nature as one of the unique aspects of digital environments. However, the chosen target of Sicart and Wilson was Bogost's thinking as expressed in two books, *Unit Operations* (2006) and *Persuasive Games* (2007).

> In the proceduralist tradition, play is not central to understanding the meanings created by (playing) games, since it is the rules that create those meanings: "(...) play refers to the possibility space created by processes themselves" (Bogost 2007, 42)

Bogost's take on play is similar to the one put forward by Salen and Zimmerman (2004). Play is what happens within a system, as part of a process. Transgressive or bad play is not considered as a central aspect of playing games. Sicart (2011) has questioned if the proceduralist rhetorics are able to address morality, politics, or cultural impact. His summation of the proceduralist take on games is this:

> Game designers are supposed to create play, that is, a particular behavior in players. Proceduralists believe that those behaviors can be predicted, even contained, by the rules, and therefore the meaning of the game, and of play, evolves from the way the game *has been created* and not how *it is played*; not to mention when and where it is played, and by whom. (Sicart 2011, emphases in original)

Sicart particularly questions the procedural rhetoric in relation to serious games and criticises the idea that the "meaning of games is contained exclusively in the formal system of the game". The word 'exclusively' is important here; Sicart is not claiming that the procedures do not convey meaning. Nor is he really even claiming that the proceduralists think that only procedures convey meaning in games. However, he is pointing out that there is a rampant proceduralist *rhetoric* that makes it seem like that is the case. For example, Sicart notices a proceduralist ethos in Mary Flanagan's book *Critical Play* (2009, 249); after mapping dissent and critical play during the last century

[79] The third organiser of the seminar, T.L. Taylor, had already made similar points in a less antagonistic style in her 2006 book, *Play between Worlds*. Treanor and Mateas (2013) have also connected the "Digital Fallacy" paper I co-wrote (Stenros & Waern 2011) as part of this discussion.

and a half, she locates the possibility for critical reflection in the designed game environment.

Indeed, it is relatively easy to construct a straw man of top-down proceduralist activism based on the design process for critical play that Flanagan (ibid., 254-259) introduces. The model incorporates "design for diverse play styles" and "subversion", but is worded in a way that makes the incorporated "subversion" better than spontaneous player subversion.[80] Also, the critical design needs to be tested in order to determine that the intended message of the work is coherent. Although both of these ideas seem to imply that there is a meaning implanted into the work that the player then extracts, branding Flanagan a proceduralist seems harsh, considering how much time she spends discussing transgressive play activities. Instead, I would approach her thinking in the context of the art world: the designer (artist-auteur-activist) and the meanings she intends have primacy in relation to the players' interpretations – even when a work is supposedly participatory (cf. Stenros, 2010).[81]

The problem with the idea that the meaning of a game is exclusively contained in the system is that it leaves no room for playing. The player can only fill the position designed for her. Sicart writes:

> Proceduralism, with its call for systems at the core of the essence of games and its disregard for expressive or ineffective play, turns the act of playing a game into a labor-like action, into work towards an externally decided, predetermined, and rational outcome designed by others than the players. Play becomes *external* to the player and the play context. (Sicart 2011, emphasis in original)

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[80] Frasca's discussion on the framing of emergence is an interesting point of comparison here:

> Technically, it is the same to argue that the proximity mine strategy "emerged" [in *Deus Ex*] from the rules of the game as arguing that it is a consequence of player creativity. Ideologically, it favors the system over the player and it gives to designers the illusion that player creativity is a consequence of the rules they authored, when it can actually be framed either way.
>
> […] [M]y intention is not to argue that these claims are technically wrong but simply to point out that they can also be framed alternatively. This is not about choosing sides between humans and systems but about being aware that each framing carries its own benefits and issues. (Frasca 2007, 66-67)

[81] However, Treanor and Mateas (2013) align the proceduralist project with that of New Criticism, which attempts to understand "how language can be *changed with meaning*, without relying on authorial intention, individual experience, or historial context." It is the rejection of the designer intention and the authorial intention that I find interesting in their positioning.

Sicart feels strongly that there needs to be room for play as appropriative and creative, not just in the practice of play, but in the theories thereof.

In a comment to a blog post Bogost (2012b) has replied that Sicart wants to "emphasise player behaviour over the apparatuses that inspire it. That's fine, and probably even interesting. But it's not a game vs. player problem. It's a matter of attention and aesthetics." Mike Treanor and Michael Mateas (2013) have also replied to Sicart. They note that Sicart has constructed a straw man to attack, then recognise the usefulness of such a straw man, yet opt for a different approach. They clarify the proceduralist position in regards to how system and play combine to create meaning in digital games, stressing that the game as mechanics (that do not change during play) is meaningless until it is played. Furthermore, they recognise two systems: one system is the system architecture (data structures and the algorithms that manipulate them), and the second system that the player encounters in operation before her. "Predicting how a player might encounter [the second system] is the most difficult problem of procedural rhetoric." Mark Nelson (2012b) has also written an interesting summary of the debate. He locates Sicart's target not in proceduralism in general as the names of the article and the seminar implied, but in proceduralist rhetoric specifically.

> Put differently, at times Sicart sounds like he's arguing that "proceduralism" has made a philosophical error, in that it erroneously claims game rules encode more meaning than they really do. But his concerns about instrumentalizing the player to convey didactic, moralizing messages seems to rest on the opposite view: that some games really do foreclose any real role for the player in meaning-creation. Sicart would prefer other games to be made in which that wasn't the case. But I think that's better phrased as a disagreement with certain uses of rhetorics, whether procedural or otherwise, rather than as a critique of the concept of procedural rhetoric. (Nelson 2012b)

This reading compares video games to texts and films and argues that they all tend to be unsubtle in conveying their messages. While the point is valid, the original criticism supposes an active reader; games are used or played, and this active engagement influences the reading. The thing being read is not the systemic artefact, but the player experience. In the proceduralist view it seems that the player experiences are treated as similar enough and predictable enough, whereas the play centrists see the players' contributions as having a larger impact.

Furthermore, Nelson speculates that Sicart's aim is actually to argue for interventions modelled on the art world, instead of propaganda. He offers a possible new formulation of the play-centric position:

> "Meaningful games" should not be modelled on rhetorical theory but on performance-art theory. Rather than attempting to convey meaning or persuade via representation of arguments in processes, one ought rather to design games aimed at setting up meaningful situations or effecting interventions. (Nelson 2012b)

Although there is still disagreement on the path to this argumentation, this seems to be a fairly fitting description of at least Sicart's position. In his latest book, *Play Matters*, Sicart explicates a clearly romantic play centrist position that directly builds on aesthetic theories developed for performance art (especially relational, dialogical, and participatory art).

> Game systems can only partially contain meaning, because meaning is created through an activity that is contextual, appropriative, creative, disruptive, and deeply personal. Games are props for that activity; they are important because they focus on it, not because they contain or trigger its meaning. Games are important because they are the privileged form of play, but they are only a form of play. (Sicart 2014, 87)

The discussion between proceduralism and play centrism is still going on in game studies (cf. Fassone 2014), although commonly it has been addressed outside of journals and books in conference panels and corridor discussions.

4.2.4 Discussion

The *game-activity approach* is primarily interested in the enactment of playing a game. The game-artefact can be a stepping off point, and most of the time the system of the artefact is reproduced in action. However, the players are able to renegotiate the game on the spot. In a way they appropriate the game-artefact as a proto-game, something they use as a basis for the enactment of game-activity.

This approach can be seen as idealistic, as overemphasising the agency and creativity of the players, especially since players discuss games and rule variations and then choose game-artefacts (as per selective player model) based on the expectation of the experience that they will deliver (cf. Bergström 2010). Although a possibility for rule changes and

the renegotiation of game-artefacts exists, that hardly means that the possibility is used. Thus the activity approach does not consider the artefact that frames the play enough. It is also interesting to note that the play-centric approach tends to be not only idealistic, but romantic in its approach to the players' ability to transgress against the system (or the designer). This is seen as creative and liberating.[82] However, transgressions against the other players – the actual transgression in a game-activity approach – is seldom seen in as romantic a light.

The *game-artefact approach* is much more useful when thinking about design. A game-artefact does not spring into being as players band together, but is the product of a conscious design process that is usually removed spatially and temporally from the site of game-activity. The player is present in this design process as an ideal player, someone who will use the game-artefact in the intended, or at least encouraged and afforded way. Different playing styles and playing contexts can be considered, but they are not seen as affecting the artefact too much. Actual play is the goal of design, but mostly considered in the abstract. The instances of play activity that an artefact inspires are seen as uniform enough – and if different sorts of play experiences are generated, then the play of expert players is seen as superior.

The artefact approach is also much better for thinking about the game as a piece of art,[83] as something that carries meaning, as a medium, whereas the activity approach is better as seeing it as a participatory performance, a dynamic social process, something that is experienced. The activity approach asks what is done with a game and the artefact approach asks what is taken (i.e. learned, understood) from a game. The artefact, taken to an extreme, is a puzzle to be solved, the activity more like exploring a toy or a playground.

This division of approaches to games is not limited to contemporary game studies, even if that is what the discussion has concentrated on here. In the field of philosophical inquiry into sport, a similar discussion has taken place. There it was framed as being between formalism and anti-formalism, a debate on whether rules are a game, or if a situational understanding of the ethos of a game is needed to enact a game (D'Agostino 1981; Morgan 1987).

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[82] Notice that Searle (1995, 48-49) underlines that the creation of rules creates the possibility for abuses and transgression.

[83] For some values of art. Not as fitting, say, for time-based art.

Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and they uncover, emphasise, and obscure different aspects of games. Constructionist ludology does not disregard either of the approaches for the other, but is conscious of both. The game-activity is seen as primary, but that does not mean that the game-artefact can be ignored. The next step is to see how exactly constructionist ludology carves its position in relation to games.

4.3 Games as Social Reality

To review and build on the previous chapter: playfulness is a brute fact. The tendency to play is deeply rooted not just in humans, but in many animals. Though there is debate as to how pervasive play actually is in the animal kingdom, the consensus is that at least most mammals play. As stated above, humans are aware that they are playful and they can structure their playing. This brings in social facts, as these forms of playing are shared and recognised in a community. As these forms of play become more formal, they become game-activities, and as their forms are codified they become game-artefacts.

It is possible that some fundamental forms of playing and even games are determined by biology. Play-fighting, chasing, racing (cf. Tylor 1879) are found in most human cultures, and probably there are other types of playing (foreplay, pretend play) that are at least close to universal. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the structures that games have are strongly reflective of the human cognition and, ultimately, biology (e.g. Myers 2010; Holopainen 2008). On the other hand, although games are ubiquitous in our culture, not all human cultures have games. Anthropologists have uncovered nongame cultures (both cultures that never had games and cultures that lost them). These gameless, if they indeed are truly gameless, cultures are generally quite noncomplex: they are usually tropic groups that tend to have "simple subsistence patterns, simple technology, low political organizations, no class stratification, kin-homogenous communities, and to have low stress in child socialisation" (Avedon & Sutton-Smith 1971, 3-4). Our current knowledge leaves a grey area regarding the extent of the biological and evolutionary determination of not just playfulness but forms of playing, yet it seems clear that at some point we move from brute facts to the intentionality and consciousness of social facts.

That said, cultural creations are limited by the human body and the brute environmental conditions here on Earth. Playing and games take place mostly within the framework of

our capabilities, be they physical (e.g. the number of limbs, relatively low quality olfactory facilities) or mental (e.g. size of the working memory, the emotional system). The gravitational field and air pressure on this planet are also relatively constant, although not uniform enough to prevent taking advantage of training for sports competitions (e.g. high altitude training). These are fairly strict limits on the games we can play. Though pushing these limits (both personally and as a species) is not only central but also very visible in numerous games, especially sports, most of the time we do not think about these limitations. Indeed, they are most visible when discussing *accessibility* of games for differently abled participants. Regardless, the limits are there for all of us.

In this section the question of how games as social facts are built on top of the physical brute facts is addressed. First there is a consideration of the boundaries that envelop play and games. This is followed by an explication of an approach to games from the angle of constructionist ludology. Searle's writings on the construction of social reality serve as a starting point. Finally, the discussion on games is summarised.

4.3.1 Boundaries of Games

Both play and games are constructed in a way that usually sets them apart from the ordinary, the everyday, or the non-play. Indeed, most definitions of games make some sort of a references to their nature as being separate (e.g. Huizinga 1938; Riezler 1941; Caillois 1958; Goffman 1961; DeKoven 1978; Crawford 1984; Shubik 1983; Crookall et al. 1987; Oxland 2004; Salen & Zimmerman 2004; Malaby 2007; Whitton 2009; Deterding 2013). Different authors articulate this boundedness of games in different ways: closed system, limiting context, separate, (semi)bounded, safe, framed, etc.

The most famous articulation of this boundedness is the metaphor of the *magic circle* (*of gameplay*). The concept originates with Huizinga (1938), but the current usage of the concept in game studies is closer to the formulation of Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman (2004; see also Article II; Zimmerman 2012).[84] The latter see magic circle as shorthand

[84] Both conceptualisations have faced fierce criticism. For criticism of Huizinga's *magic circle* see, for example, Ehrmann (1968), Anchor (1978), and Calleja (2012). For criticism of Salen & Zimmerman's *magic circle of gameplay*, see for example Taylor (2006), Malaby (2007), Lammes (2006), Pargman & Jakobsson (2008), and Liebe (2008). Some critics confuse the two formulations.

for the "the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 95).

Discussing the boundaries of games and play easily leads to emphasising the difference – and to exceptionalism. Yet there is no brute foundation for this division, no essential difference to be pointed out. The division is manmade. It is more useful to think the delimiting in terms of what is bounded inside (the playing, the game), than what is left out, and to consider how play is separate. These issues are addressed at length in Article II, "In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play". It reviews the history of the magic circle as a concept, as well as numerous other formulations of the boundaries that delimit play and games. This section is a condensed version of the central argumentation presented and the original synthesis formed in that article, as well as some commentary on the synthesis presented.

The criticism of magic circle and other delimitations of play usually target the idea that games and everyday life are not actually separate (Castronova 2005, 147-160; Taylor 2006, 151-155; Malaby 2007). Play is a part of the everyday life, and it is often mundane instead of magical (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008; see also Kinnunen 2013). The idea that games and play offer a safe place has also been questioned, in connection to the criticism of the exceptionalism of games (see Chapter 2). The metaphor has also been discussed as obscuring the context the everyday world provides – and a simplification of the relationship between the game and that context (Copier 2005; Lammes 2006; Consalvo 2009). Some have also questioned the concept in particular relation to digital games (Liebe 2008; Calleja 2012).

Regardless of the criticism, some of it very thoughtful and relevant, the concept of the magic circle persists. The idea that play is somehow separate, at least to a degree, has been discussed in numerous disciplines, at least in philosophy (Huizinga 1938; Riezler 1941), psychology (Moreno 1945; Apter 1991), psychoanalysis (Winnicott 1971, 69, 135-138), sociology (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 25; Caillois 1958; Goffman 1961; 1974; Henricks 2006, 192-208), religious studies (Letcher 2001), information science

Notice also that other terms for magic circle have been proposed. Juul (2008b) has advocated *puzzle piece* and Lammes (2006) has proposed *magic node*. If a new term was really needed, I would advocate the sufficiently preposterous sounding *temenos*. It is yet another word for the delimited space marked off from everyday life, from the Greek, meaning a sacred space where "special rules apply and in which extraordinary events are free to occur" (Nachmanovitch 1990, 75). However, I am quite happy with magic circle of play.

(Harviainen & Lieberoth 2012), performance studies (Schechner 1988) and the difference between game and not-game is recognised in both legal (Lastowka 2009) and ethical (Montola et al. 2009) systems.[85] Play *feels* separate, it is often socially treated as separate, and it is culturally sometimes officially and institutionally recognised as separate.

These different approaches to the boundedness of play and games do not discuss the exact same thing. Instead, the boundaries are divided into three analytic categories: an experiential, personal 'protective frame' (psychological bubble), the socially recognised contract that provides the shared constitution for the action of playing (magic circle of play), and the cultural space rooted in rules, conventions, and institutions where play is expected to happen (arena). These categories bleed into and imply each other, but can be analytically separated.[86]

The first category, the *psychological bubble*, is closely tied to the playful metamotivational state. Being in a playful mindset implies safety. A person needs to feel safe in order to be playful – although actually being safe is not necessary. Furthermore, playing in a playful mindset certainly can be very risky. According to Apter (2007, 50-53; 1991) the experienced protection afforded by the paratelic metamotivational state relates to the felt significance of events; in paratelic mode one tends not to pay attention to long-term effects and actions are felt to have little importance beyond themselves. He describes three different kinds of protective frames: the *confidence frame* is relevant in situations where there is a real danger, but it is not perceived as threatening (extreme sports, illegal urban climbing, and caving are all good examples). The source of the danger is recognised and the participants are aware of it – indeed it is the very source of excitement. The *safety-zone frame* is relevant in situations where the danger is not really perceived by the participants, who are swept away by the activity. Apter's examples include an addicted computer hacker, lovers with no consideration to other people, and the specific and rule-bound demarcated areas of games. Finally, there is the *detachment frame*, where the participant does not see herself as engaging in the action. She need not be detached emotionally, and identification and empathy can happen. However, as these are experienced in a paratelic mode, she can experience them in a pleasurable way.

[85] Systemic approaches to games also tend to view games as closed systems (cf. von Neumann & Morgenstern 1944; Crawford 1984; Marshev & Popov 1983; Myers 2009b).

[86] For example, according to Sutton-Smith (1971) the maintenance of socially instituted boundaries is related to the psychological functions of individual players.

Examples include watching a catastrophe unfold on television, or being present on a site of an accident. Most importantly Apter sees this in effect in relation to fiction; everything from epic poems to soap operas and from novels to tabloid newspapers are enjoyed in this frame. Arousal is raised by the events witnessed, but again the paratelic mode makes them enjoyable. Apter uses the term *parapathic* (alongside a feeling) to describe these strong, even negative emotions (such as horror and disgust) when they are enjoyable or exciting.

Apter's formulations are concentrated on danger and its psychological management. However, as the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 80-82) relating to the experience of flow shows, selective inattention is also relevant. When concentrating on a demanding task, it is not uncommon for a 'centring of attention on limited stimulus field' to take place. The formulation for this mental border proposed in Article II reads as follows:

> The Apterian *psychological bubble* is personal, a phenomenological experience of safety in a playful (paratelic/autotelic) mindset. If a person is playful alone, she need not negotiate or metacommunicate with others (though usually she does signal play unconsciously). There is a 'border' around her experience that guides her interpretation of the situation. A person needs to feel safe in order to be playful, though it is not necessary to actually be safe. (Article II)

The importance of safety is recognised by many (e.g. Schechner 1988; Weisler & McCall 1976; Crawford 1984). The psychological bubble is personal, and thus so is the interpretation of the situation as safe. The second category of boundaries is the *magic circle of play*, and it is a social contract. Safety is relevant here as well, but it is usually discussed from the point of view of trust (cf. DeKoven 2002, 12-13; Sihvonen 1997, 7).

The idea that play and games set up a distinct social context, a playworld (Riezler 1941) of some kind, or frame events in a particular way, is a common one. It is possible to negotiate, implicitly or explicitly, that an activity be understood in a way that is distinct. Gregory Bateson's (1955) idea of metacommunication (see Chapter 3) and frames that delimit meaningful action have been particularly influential, especially as further developed by Erving Goffman (1974; see also Deterding 2013). These social boundaries are closest to what has been discussed in game studies in connection to the term magic circle, and as some of the critics have pointed out, many of these formulations of 'encounters' (Goffman 1961) and 'special provinces of meaning' (Berger & Luckmann 1966) add nuance to such discussion. The formulation offered in Article II relating to magic circle is as follows:

> The *magic circle of play* is the social contract that is created through implicit or explicit social negotiation and metacommunication in the act of playing. This social contract can become societal as other social frameworks (law, economics) can recognize it. It is created when there is more than one person engaged in playful activity, though once established it is no longer necessary for everyone to constantly remain in a playful mindset. There is a connection between a playful mindset and play, but as a result of social negotiation and shared structuring of an encounter, it is possible to be in a telic mindset and still remain within the socially agreed borders. However, if enough participants slip into a telic mindset, then it can be questioned whether what is contained within the borders remains play even if it is still a game. The concept applies to the playing of single player games as well: though they can be played alone, they are socially recognized as domains of special meaning. However, the concept of a magic circle is more useful in relation to social play. (Article II)

From a sociological standpoint, it is possible to ask how these play spaces are different from other encounters – if they indeed are. Thomas S. Henricks (2006, 192-208; also 1999) provides one possible answer to this in his discussion of play, ritual, communitas, and work. Henricks maps these four forms of "expressive behaviour" on four continuums: transformative (assertive) to conformitive (compliant), instrumental (outside event) to consummatory (within event), contestive (opposition focused) to integrative (unity focused), and predictable (clear direction) to unpredictable (unclear direction). Play is characterised as transformative, consummatory, contestive, and unpredictable, whereas all the other forms have different combinations of characteristics. In this work emphasis has been placed on the paratelicity of play (consummatory in Henricks' terms), and indeed that is what separates play from work in Henricks' model. Yet it also separates play from ritual, which is characterised as instrumental (underlining Henricks' model as community-focused instead of individual-focused). Play and work both share the characteristic of transformativeness, which communitas and ritual lack. Henricks' other aspects are not addressed in this work, but it is interesting to note that certain games (as well as many other pastimes from spectator sports to festivals and picnics) certainly would fit better under the header of communitas in this division. Henricks' division shows that what I have called the magic circle of play can actually surround numerous types of encounters – some of which may not be branded as play. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, I have adopted a very wide concept of play.

The third category presented in the cultural site of play, is *arena*. This is the cultural space that exists before playing and game-activity start. The arena is most visible when game-

specific physical play areas are constructed, such as a baseball field or a dohyō. However, just as the difference between a playground and a toy is hazy, the same goes for physical arenas and game equipment. A chess set or a pile of *Jenga* blocks also culturally communicate a space. The rules of a game define the *game space* (Marshev & Popov 1982, 54), as all the possible configurations that can happen with a game. This is the *space of possibilities* (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 67) that the game-artefact sets up. The formulation of the arena from Article II:

> The *arena* of play is a temporal, spatial or conceptual site that is culturally recognized as a rule-governed structure for ludic action, or an inert game product. As the social negotiation of a magic circle becomes culturally established and the border physically represented, arenas emerge as residue of the playing (tennis courts, April Fool's Day). Alternatively a rule structure can be culturally coded as a game product, one with a designed game space. These sites are recognized as structures that foster play even when empty (and they can be constructed in ways that seek to foster playfulness), but they require use to be activated as the border of the magic circle remains social. As socially recognized cultural sites they have severed the need to be engaged in with a playful mindset. (Article II.)

An institutionalised game is culturally usually the default for a game-activity based on that game-artefact, and the framework in which the activity (and the site) is easiest to interpret from without. Whereas the mental psychological bubble is experiential and recognised only from within, and the social boundary of the magic circle of play is recognised both by the individual player and usually the bystanders, the arena is something that exists (and is recognised) in culture before play starts. The arena is tied to institutionalised ideas of not just games (and game-like activities) in general, but to specific game institutions. Obviously these cultural arenas can be recognised by other social institutions, such as legal systems, as legitimate domains.

The games that set up arenas, although usually relatively stable, can change over time. The players may be able to renegotiate some of the rules as they step into the game space, but such rule alterations (and the game space alterations that they imply) usually do not persist after the play session ends. Thus such alterations are better understood in the context of the social boundary and the magic circle of play. That said, the arena can change over time when the appropriate institutions so decree – or when a notion becomes otherwise prevalent enough in culture. However, the three boundaries certainly bleed into each other and the division is analytic, not actual. Even so, separating the three boundaries increases clarity. The magic circle does not travel with a product, but

is produced by the participants in play. It is not a line draw in the ground, although while playing takes place it certainly can align with such a line.

The boundaries are not impenetrable, on the contrary. The psychological bubble is rooted in a mindset and a feeling of safety, both of which can easily vanish. The magic circle is a metaphor for a social contract and that can easily collapse due to pressure either from the rest of the world or from the participants themselves. Social rules such as forbidding bringing external motivation into games or letting the game result affect extraludic relationships are constantly violated – although it is often polite to pretend otherwise. Passing through the border of the magic circle may result in resignification (Goffman 1961, 29-34; Harviainen 2012, 82-98). However, the events that take place within the boundaries are real, even if numerous frames may be in play. The arena has boundaries that can be tactically subverted in an instance of play, while remaining in effect outside that session. Arenas can be penetrated by other institutional bodies. For example, the legal system can intervene if playing becomes too violent, politics can harness the arena, or the meaning can be hijacked by cultural jammers.

These three bounded areas, the psychological bubble, the magic circle of play, and the arena, help bring clarity to play events. Play feels separate, and is often treated as separate, yet it is just as real and just as much part of everyday life as telic activities are. The final step in this chapter is to take a look at what is within those bounds when we call the contents 'game'.

4.3.2 Games in Constructionist Ludology

John R. Searle uses constitutive rules, collective intentionality, and the assignment of function to make sense of social reality (see also Chapter 2). Games are examples of social facts, created with collective intentionality. They are engaged in 'we intentionality', meaning that the participants are intentionally doing something together, not just side by side (see also Chapter 5). They also have constitutive rules, rules that must be followed for the activity to come about (cf. Suits 1978), although how flexible these rules are can vary. They also can have an assigned function that can be, for example, to have fun, to entice playfulness, or to learn – but this is not necessary. However, games are not just social facts, they are institutional facts. For Searle (1995, 87), the "test for the presence of genuine institutional facts is whether or not we could codify the rules

explicitly."[87] Often there is an institution attached as well (as in a publisher of a game product or a central governing body for competitive play like World Chess Federation), but that is not necessary. Searle (ibid., 89, 116) refers to both common law marriage and common law war (citing the wars in Vietnam and Iraq as examples of activities that are not officially and legally 'wars', but are recognised as such by the public) as examples of the grey area between social facts and institutional facts. Similarly with some games, especially if played by amateurs, hobbyists, beginners, or if played for the sake of playing, the rules can be bit more flexible, informal, and subject to spontaneous changes. Thus some games do not quite qualify as institutional facts – and play certainly does not.

Searle also discussed how it is possible to follow institutional rules without being conscious of them. People are, for example, able to handle money without understanding how the institution of money is built. Searle (ibid., 129) introduces the concept of *background*, which is defined as "the set of nonintentional or preintentional capacities that enable intentional states of function". I interpret this as integrated cultural knowledge. Searle (ibid., 137-147) uses this concept to explain how a professional baseball player no longer needs to think about the rules, and instead becomes an expert who has developed skill and abilities that "are sensitive to structures of intentionality without actually containing any representations or internalisations of those rules." Basically Searle argues that humans can be sensitive to intentional (rule) structures without being able to explicate all those rules. This may not be very relevant for non-digital games, which tend to require players to not only know, but to also uphold, the rules. However, in digital games (and other games where the rules are facilitated by something other than the players, say the games of reality television) this might be an interesting avenue to pursue.

It is also worth explicating, that for Searle, social process is prior to social product:

> It is tempting to think of *social objects* as independently existing entities on analogy with the objects studied by the natural sciences. It is tempting to think that a government or a dollar bill or a contract is an object in the sense that a DNA molecule, a tectonic plate, or a planet is an object or entity. […] Social objects are always, in some sense we will need to explain, constituted by social acts; and, in a sense, *the object is just the continuous possibility of the activity*. (Searle 1995, 36, emphases in original)

[87] Notice, however, Searle's (1995, 139) division of rule-governed and rule-described behaviour.

Searle (ibid., 56-57) explicitly uses games as an example of this. In his thinking, games are primarily activities, not artefacts that exist. Inert process is primary to objects. Game-artefacts are social objects. Even if they are consciously designed to be insulated from the rest of our lives, they are only intelligible in the context of other social facts. Thus Searle's games are precisely the 'limp skins' waiting to be activated and they do exist primarily for humans.

Constructionist ludology is built on John Searle's ideas of the construction of social reality. However, although Searle discussed games explicitly in his works and used them as examples in numerous places, it is clear that he is not a scholar of games.[88] His conception of what is a game is perhaps a bit too strongly influenced by formally institutionalised games such as competitive sports and *chess*.[89] This is understandable as his goal is to explain how social facts such as marriage, money, human rights, war and, yes, *American football,* are constructed, but it leaves the interesting grey area between social facts and institutional facts unexplored. Similarly, the minutiae of constructing a game in practice can be addressed more thoroughly.

Markus Montola (2011; see also 2012), in preparation to constructionist ludology, dissects the ontology of games. He has identified five common ways of thinking about what games are – and groups these under the headers of objectivist views and subjectivist views.

There are two objectivist views, which claim that "the game appears similar independent of the observer." *The Systemic View*, which is "focused around procedural, algorithmic and quantitative understanding of concepts like rules, goals, and game state." He identifies this view as common in studies of digital games, as they are algorithmic. *The Materialistic View* holds that there is an objective, physical reality and it is possible to have access to it in uncertain terms. This view is common to physical sports, where for example the victor of a race is clear, and the significance of e.g. waxing and weather need to be discussed in relation to skiing. There are three subjectivist views, which "acknowledge the subjectivity of readings and the need to negotiate them." *The Referee-Centric View* holds that an impartial agent has ultimate authority over the state of the

[88] For example Searle (1995, 103) apparently was not familiar with the works of Bernard Suits as he quoted a 'broken telephone' version of Suits' reply to Wittgenstein without knowing its source.

[89] Indeed, it is perhaps ironic that Searle (1995) refers to games the way numerous scholars of digital games refer to sports – as shorthand examples that are taken at face value.

game. This view is common in competitive sports. *The Player-Centric View* holds that each reader constructs her interpretation of a game. "Player-centrism prompts the question of whether two people are playing the same game if they interpret it differently." *The Designer-Centric View*, comparable to auteur theory, holds that the interpretation of the creator/designer/auteur of a game has ultimate authority. "This view is highlighted when developers publish rule changes or release software patches, overruling established play practices." (Montola 2011.)

The division between different subjectivist views is especially interesting. From a systemic standpoint, the referee can be seen as part of the structure of the game. However, the referee-centric view is revealed as negotiating between Juul's (2008a) integrationist and segregationist views; any problems arising in playing the game can solved with the extraludic process of asking the designer.

The division between systemic and materialistic views also underlines the problem in thinking about a game-artefact. In most academic approaches that consider the game-artefact, they are discussing an ideal of a system, and not so much the actual physical expression of that system. Printing errors, bugs in code, and other such things are part of the physical games, but usually they are not considered to be a part of the ideal system of a game-artefact. If problems of this sort do come up, they are addressed via the designer-centric view: the physical game is wrong, and the ideal game as expressed by the designer is right. The game-activity is usually based on the material, physical game – even if errata and hot fixes may be taken into account.

Even though Montola does not explicitly consider the effects of the player contribution in the discussion of these views, his analysis draws attention to the multiple approaches of trying to figure out how a game is constructed when approached as a process. Finally, Montola puts forward his own take on the subject and defines the social constructionist view on games. This view seeks to unify all of the above views:

> *The Social Constructionist View* on games is a holistic amalgam of the often contradictory perceptions presented above. A game is an intersubjective social process made meaningful by its participants, fundamentally rooted in the material reality. Even though all interpretations are subjective and unique, the shared cultural background allows participants to make sense of games in an equifinal manner. (Montola 2012, 15)

Notice that this is an account of game-activity, not game-artefact. At its core, this view tries to make sense how different players are able to play the 'same' game – even if they have divergent understanding of what the 'game' is. The importance of cultural *background* is very relevant, as Montola is using the term in Searle's sense. Equifinal sense-making is Montola's own addition (see also Montola 2004). It means that the subjective interpretations contain no explicit contradiction and produce indistinguishable consequences.

4.4 Conclusions

Attempting to produce a collection of factual statements in natural sciences is different from attempting the same in social sciences, as definitions have an influence on the phenomena under scrutiny. In Ian Hacking's terms (1999, 103-106) rocks and microbes are indifferent kinds, whereas games and labels like criminal and homosexual are interactive kinds. Games, like art, are created to challenge definitions. Indeed, the history of art during the last century can be written as a game between creating a definition and then transgressing it (Julius 2002). Let us also not forget that Wittgenstein (1958, 66-67) used 'games' as an example of a term that escapes precise definition.

Individual games, both game-activities and game-artefacts, are social facts and often also institutional facts in the Searlean sense. Creating a definition for a group of social and institutional facts is always normative in the sense that the choice of what a definition should and should not include is normative. People will also consciously seek to construct things in order to question existing definitions. Similarly, social constructionism seeks to reframe questions in a way that allows for new insight.

Play, when shared, is a social fact. As it becomes more rule-bound and carefully structured, it starts drifting towards becoming an institutional fact. Once the rules are clear and stable, an institutional fact has come about. This continuum from free playing (paidia) to structured playing (ludus) is a way to conceptualise the connection between the two. Yet the construction of games is still divided in two: there is the systemic game-artefact that can be designed or that can evolve over time. It is intelligible as a game only in relation to other social facts, institutions, and humans. Although essential brute fact elements uniting all (and only all) games do not exist, game-artefacts share numerous characteristics with each other, as reviewed in the first section of this chapter. The game-artefact can act as the basis of a game-activity, yet each game-activity is also constructed

when it is interpreted, modified, appropriated, and used by participants. Yet repetition and routine are important aspects of playing, and thus clear departures from the material at the basis of game-activity need not happen. This 'use' is usually termed 'playing', but it is also possible to use game-artefacts to engage in game-activity without playfulness.

The distinction between an artefact and activity is very relevant for the social construction of games. Game design is obviously a process during which a game product (or, increasingly, a game service) is created. However, the point that seems muddled is whether or not that process of becoming a game continues after the product meets the players and the players decide to play the game. It is trivial that the process of moulding the game continues in play. Whether 'trivial' here means 'obvious' or 'insignificant' seems to be a question of emphasis. In constructionist ludology the game-activity is in a state of becoming, even if heavily guided by the game-artefact and asserted institutions.

Constructionist ludology accounts for games as follows. Playfulness is a brute fact rooted in biology, something that is expressed in the paratelic metamotivational state of doing things for their own sake. Although it has its uses and functions, it cannot be reduced to other processes such as resignification or learning. The playful mindset is expressed in a personal boundary, a psychological bubble, which is related to a feeling of safety. Play(ing) is a socially negotiated activity (and thus a social fact) that is often engaged in under a playful mindset, but which can sever that connection. The negotiation sets up a magic circle of play, which is a separating porous boundary that allows for traffic, although usually anything that crosses the boundary is resignified. When the playing becomes more structured and rule-bound, it is referred to as a game, although game-activity would be a more precise term. Once the social negotiation is formalised, on the spot, due to historical processes, through an acquired designed artefact, or a combination thereof, and this form achieves a modicum of stability, a game-artefact appears. This game-artefact can be used to enact game-activity. As the rules become complete and clear, the game becomes an institutional fact. The game-artefact implies the boundary of arena and game space. When used, a magic circle of play aligns with the arena. Although analytically separated here, these processes are deeply intertwined. Different views, takes, and emphases can be applied, though the social constructionist view is a holistic amalgam that treats games as meaningful intersubjective social processes, rooted in material reality.

5 Social Play and Games

> "Strange," mused the Director, as they turned away, "strange to think that even in Our Ford's day most games were played without more apparatus than a ball or two and a few sticks and perhaps a bit of netting. Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption. It's madness. Nowadays the Controllers won't approve of any new game unless it can be shown that it requires at least as much apparatus as the most complicated of existing games." (Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, 1932)

> We never enjoy a playful attitude more than when making or changing the rules or conventions to which we submit. (Riezler 1941)

Scholars of animal play (e.g. Burghardt 2005, 83-110; Fagen 1981; Bekoff & Byers 1998) have divided play into three groups: *locomotor play* (play with the body, e.g. jumping and flying, also called locomotor-rotational play), *object play* (also with conceptual objects) and *social play* (play with others). The first two types of playing can be undertaken alone. It is possible to be playing with one's own body without cooperating with others, and with objects in an individual fashion, to assign meaning and function without sharing with others. The third one, social play, obviously, can only be undertaken with more than one player. It is the main topic of this chapter.

Drawing the lines between locomotor play, object play, and social play is problematic, as it is possible to engage in locomotor and object play with others. Clearly it is possible to engage in more than one type of play in a given moment. In this chapter play that has a component of social play is discussed mainly as social play.

The first section of this chapter discusses how social play arises from collective intentionality and how playing together can yield a sense of engrossment in doing things together. Yet not all play is social, and these instances of solo playfulness should not be overlooked in treatises of play in general. The second section further explores rules and goals as elements that structure the shared game activity. Once a picture of how socially shared play takes place is established, the third section considers how renegotiation and breaching of that social contract takes place, primarily through a model that juxtaposes

the metamotivational state of a player and the social situation as a context. This chapter incorporates and contextualises two original models that were previously presented in Articles III and IV.

5.1 Establishing Social Play

The division of play to locomotor play, object play, and social play implies that social play cannot be broken down to, say, co-located individual play. But does this idea that social play is irreducible to individual play hold? David Myers (2010, 119) has argued that at least in the context of digital games it does not. He argues that since digital games rely on interfaces, they filter the play experience through locomotor play. "[T]he experience of computer game play does not seem to necessarily emerge from social action, but rather become located within social action through purposeful game design."

An interesting point of comparison is offered by Herbert Blumer (1969, 7-10). In his discussion on the nature of social interaction, he outlines how *symbolic interaction* between people works.[90]

> To indicate to another what he is to do, one has to make the indication from the standpoint of that other; to order the victim [of a holdup] to put up his hands the robber has to see the response in terms of the victim making it. Correspondingly, the victim has to see the command from the standpoint of the robber who gives the command; he has to grasp the intention and forthcoming action of the robber. Such mutual role-taking is the *sine qua non* of communication and effective symbolic interaction.
>
> […] [A]s individuals acting individually, collectively, or as agents of some organization encounter one another they are necessarily required to take account of the actions of one other as they form their own action. They do this by a dual process of indicating to others how to act and of interpreting the indications made by others. (Blumer 1969, 9-10)

[90] Blumer (1969, 14) articulates clearly the view of the human being held in symbolic interactionism: "The human being is seen as "social" in a much more profound sense [than just as a responding organism] – in the sense of an organism that engages in social interaction with itself by making indications to itself and responding to such indications." Building on the work of Mead (1934), Blumer (1969, 15) notes that a person not only responds to stimuli, but first interprets the stimulus and then constructs the action. The internalised reflection enables the consideration of social repercussions even when alone.

The symbolic interactionist view would seem to go even further than Myers, as it posits that joint action can be divided into individual actions. In the frame of play, the participants need to recognise the actions of others and interpret them in a way that is fitting to frame. By doing so, and acting in a manner that validates the actions of another, the shared frame is upheld. Yet although the actions of individuals are different and possibly dissimilar, the intention that underlies the frame is shared. This implies that there is a shared something that cannot be divided to individual somethings. Erving Goffman has also discussed this with the concept of *spontaneous involvement*.

> When an individual engages in an encounter, his conscious awareness can bring certain shared things to life and deaden all other matters. By this spontaneous involvement in the joint activity, the individual becomes an integral part of the situation, lodged in it and exposed to it, infusing himself into the encounter in a manner quite different from the way an ideally rational player commits his side to a position in an ideally abstract game. (Goffman 1961, 38)

Furthermore, Goffman (1961, 39) points out that as the participants become engrossed in the game, become players, they become "worthy antagonists in spite of the triviality of the game, great differences in social status, and the patent claims of other realities." The step from the co-located individual doing things in parallel to joint action is not a clear one. Goffman has identified elements of social glue such as (joint spontaneous) involvement (1963, 33-42; 1967, 113) and has even postulated that involvement is a "psychobiological process" (Goffman 1974, 346; see also Deterding 2013, 50-54). Goffman talks about engrossment, but the formulation is not dissimilar to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow.

John R. Searle offers an elegant philosophical solution, which ignores the individual processes and symbolic interaction. He sidesteps the issue with the concept of collective intentionality:

> Many species of animals, our own especially, have a capacity for collective intentionality. By this I mean not only that they engage in cooperative behaviour, but that they share intentional stages such as beliefs, desires, and intentions. In addition to singular intentionality there is also collective intentionality. Obvious examples are cases where *I* am doing something only as part of *our* doing something. So if I am an offensive lineman playing in football game, I might be blocking the defence end, but I am blocking only as part of *our* executing a pass play. (Searle 1995, 23, emphases in original)

Searle argues, using games as his primary example, that "we intentionality", the collective intentionality of intending to do something together, cannot be reduced to "I intentionality" plus something else (such as the belief that the other will be doing the same). Instead Searle (1995, 24) sees collective intentionality as a "biologically primitive phenomenon that cannot be reduced to or eliminated in favour of something else". Searle and Goffman thus agree that there is some kind of a biological process that fosters engrossment in a joint activity.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, collective intentionality is a cornerstone of Searle's theory of the construction of social reality. He defines *social facts* as things that come about through collective intentionality, such as "we are now playing chess" (Searle 1995, 26). This applies equally to cooperative and competitive games:

> Even most forms of human conflict require collective intentionality. In order that two men should engage in a prizefight, for example, there has to be collective intentionality at a higher level. They have to be cooperating in having a fight in order for each of them to beat the other up. (Searle 1995, 24)

Here Searle again uses games as an example for how most human conflicts require a basis of cooperation; his two further examples are court of law and trading insults at a party. Indeed, even wars have rules. In Blumer's example, the threat of violence is used by the robbers to force the other participants in the encounter to construct a shared robbery. The fact that Searle – like Goffman – uses games as examples when discussing the basis of how social reality comes about is a testament to games' ability to render social phenomena visible, but also to show how that construction can be played with.

In a study that tested the applicability of the rational player model (see Chapter 4) on real players, Jonas Heide Smith (2006, 160-239) found that though most of the gameplay actions the players took did correspond with the rational model, the discussion the players carried on at the same time around the playing did not. Although players were competing in the digital game they were playing, they still offered verbal aid whilst doing so. In his conclusions Smith writes:

> Within the limits of the study it seems that players do seek to win but that this attempt is subjugated by social norms defining appropriate play. Outside the gamespace itself, the players mitigate and modify their "rational" behaviour to satisfy other priorities. […] In the competitive game, what happens instead is that the players display a willingness to help others by giving advice and sharing information. This indicates that the players find strongly competitive

> behaviour legitimate as long as it is accompanied by a desire to share relevant information with other players. […] This also shows, if indeed there were any doubt, that competitive gaming (at least in non-tournament settings) is in fact a *cooperative* phenomenon; it is an instance of agreeing to disagree. (Smith 2006, 242, emphases in original)

Not only are participants cooperating to uphold the competition within the game, they are sharing information (i.e. cooperating) about it. Partly this is a question of delimiting what counts as playing a game. Myers' notion that digital game playing does not emerge in social action, but is situated within it does not hold if it is the social situation that is defined as the site of playing.

5.1.1 The Gaming Encounter

The game-activity is embedded in a larger social situation. This is most obvious when there are people present in a social encounter who are not participating in the game-activity. However, separating the two can sometimes be difficult and any chosen delimitation of game-activity can be contested. According to Goffman (1961, 36), when analysing such a situation there will be a difference between approaching it as gaming and approaching it as an occasion for plays of games: "A play of a game has players; a gaming encounter has participants. A play is a special abstraction from the more concrete unit, gaming encounter, just as the concept of player is an abstraction from that of participant." Note that Goffman uses 'play' as a term for an individual and unique instance of playing a game and the term 'gaming' refers to not just playing the game, but all the other socialising that happens in that situation.

The delimitation of the game-activity from the encounter it is embedded in can be very hard. Play is not restricted to the formal moves in gamespace, but can manifest in all social interaction. The social situation usually thought of as framing the game can be an integral part of the gameplay, as in determining if a poker face of a *poker* player hides a bluff, and using social charm to ensure that a player who no longer has a chance to win picks you as the winner of the game (aka the *kingmaking* dilemma, see Gutschera 2009). Trash talk and heckling can take place around a game as well, as players tease and taunt

each other with name calling and belittling. Trash talk[91] is not an indication that cooperation about the playing has collapsed, but it does play with that contract. The goal with this 'psyching' and 'messing with the opponent's head' is to psychologically shake the player enough to gain an edge within the game. Sometimes 'playing the other players' even takes precedence as a goal (see Article III).

Juul (2009, 20) has termed games where the interesting thing happens not so much in the formal game but around it as *socially embeddable*. All multiplayer games belong to this category. Game designer Richard Garfield (2000, 16) calls these kinds of activities the *metagame,* "how the game interfaces outside of itself" (cf. Gee 2008, 24).[92] He believes that "it is hard to have a good game experience no matter how good the game is if the metagame is bad." As Garfield's choice of terminology makes clear, an expected traditional boundary of a game-artefact is still assumed. It is part of the cultural understanding of 'game' that it has limits, even if numerous games are not definitely bounded by those limits. For one to be able to play with the boundary, a group needs to agree that it exists. The rhetoric around pervasive games is another example of this (cf. Montola et al. 2009).

It is possible to make an analytic distinction between social interactions in a gaming encounter that have relevance for the game-activity (game-activity related *social play*), and interactions (even playful ones) that are irrelevant for the game-activity (*sociability*) (for an example, see Article IV; Salen & Zimmerman 2004). Such a distinction can bring about clarity, for example in relation to game design decisions – and players certainly usually operate with such a division in mind. Yet making such clear distinctions can be difficult in practice. With metagame, potentially all utterances in a gaming encounter can be conceived of as game moves.

The most common way of overcoming this problem is ignoring it. Either a clear distinction between the game activity and the encounter it is embedded in is adopted, or then no such distinction is recognised. The starting point can be a more general understanding of a situation.

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[91] Trash talking can be a game in and of itself. Dollard (1939) has recorded a game called *The Dozens* where the aim is (at times), by hurling possibly rhyming epithets, to try to make the other contestant lose his temper and thus lose the game. (See also Chapter 6.)

[92] Garfield's notion of the metagame has expanded over the years. It now includes everything from tournaments to discussions of game webforums (cf. Elias et al. 2012).

5.1.2 Interaction Ritual Theory

Sociologist Randall Collins (2004) has developed, based on the works of Émile Durkheim and Erving Goffman, a theory of radical micro-sociology: the mutual-focus / emotional-entertainment model, or *interaction ritual* (a term borrowed from Goffman). Collins (2004, 7) defines it as "a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership." People come together in social situations and relate to each other, and these interaction rituals birth solidarity, symbols, and shared norms, as well as emotional energy. The gathering of this energy is a central motivating force, it is found in abundance in stable, repeating rituals, which encourages (institutional) stability.

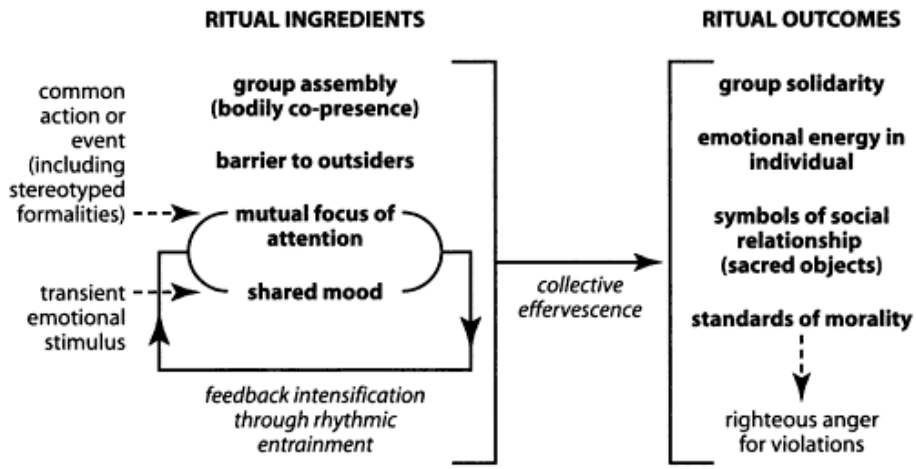

Figure 3. Interaction ritual. Quoted from Collins (2004, 48).

Collins lists four ritual ingredients and four ritual outcomes (see Figure 3; Collins 2004, 47-101). He stresses that everything in the model is variable. The ritual ingredients are as follows. *Group assembly* (bodily co-presence): two or more people are physically co-located affecting each other by their co-presence. Bodily presence is not mandatory, but it intensifies the ritual considerably. *Barrier to outsiders*: there is a boundary separating the participating social group from non-participants that is clear enough. *Mutual focus of attention*: participants focus on the same object or activity and through communication are aware that others are doing the same. *Shared mood*: the participants share a common mood or emotional experience.

The ingredients are not disconnected from each other, but through feedback strengthen or weaken each other. The last two especially form a rhythmic[93] coupling, which Collins (ibid., 75) sees as having a biological basis. Repetition, or routine, enters the ritual as "stereotyped formalities". A pre-existing structure of a ritual, however, does not mean that an enacted interaction ritual is a success – the formal ritual may feel hollow if it fails to spark the group interaction.

Collins' work is interesting for game studies as instances of playing games can be understood as interaction rituals. In this model games as practice exist as stereotyped formalities (and game artefacts possibly as sacred objects). He (ibid., 59) does discuss sports fleetingly, highlighting that "[g]ames are natural rituals insofar as they unconsciously or nondeliberately bring about the ingredients for a successful ritual." It is important to note that he considers a game-activity a ritual not just for the players (and the facilitators), but also for the audience. Indeed, the set-up and cleaning up related to, say, a board gaming session would be part of the interaction ritual (cf. Xu et al. 2011). Furthermore, it is interesting to compare the four ingredients to magic circle of play, collective intentionality, and paratelic metamotivational state.

The four outcomes of the ritual are as follows (Collins 2004, 47-101). *Group solidarity*: a feeling of membership in a group. *Emotional energy in an individual*: this emotional energy is expressed as a feeling of confidence, courage to act, boldness in taking initiative, elation, strength, and a sense of exalted moral good. Once experienced, the individual wants to repeat this experience. *Symbols of social relationship* (sacred objects): emblems that

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[93] Compare this to Hector Rodriguez's (2006) conception of playing. In his discussion of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, he concedes that it may seem like Huizinga is mostly writing about play as something purely subjective, but points out that usually in play a player encounters another player or some other obstacle – which creates a dynamic of to and fro, of move and counter-move, where the player is waiting for something to happen. This waiting, Rodriguez argues, is essential to play, and shows that there is something other, and thus play cannot be radically subjective, as the experience of the player is constituted by the moment of otherness:

> Playing consists in a trans-individual process of action and reaction, which often takes on a to-and-fro quality reminiscent of dance. It is the pattern of this movement, rather than *the psychological make-up of the individual participant,* which fundamentally characterizes the experience of play. (Rodriguez 2006, emphasis in original)

Rhythm and play have been discussed by numerous other scholars as well. An early opening on the topic came from Dutch behavioural psychologist F.J.J. Boytendijk, who discussed animal and human play as back and forth movement. Play is always with something – even if that other is oneself. Gadamer (1989, 101-110) has picked this up and extends it to not just animal and humans, but also considers the play of light. Boytendijk's works are not available in English, but Walz (2010) – who discusses play as kinetic extensively – offers a brief synopsis. See also Apperley (2010).

the participants – or at this point: members – feel strongly attached to. Members require that symbols be respected and defend symbols, even vehemently, against transgressors. *Standards of morality*: sense of rightness in the group and protection of group symbols against transgressors who become standards of impropriety and evil.

It is interesting to compare this list to Huizinga's (1938, 13) formulation about play: "It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means." Group solidarity[94] is present in Huizinga's text, and it is not much of a stretch to see the connection between secrecy and shared symbols. Indeed, game-artefacts can be seen as sacred objects. Likewise, stressing the difference to non-players is akin to a perceived rightness, but can also be connected to ideas of fair play. Emotional energy, however, is missing. Indeed, it is the most controversial aspect of Collins' formulation.

Collins' (2004, xv, 3-6) model takes situation as its starting point, not the individual. It is interesting to compare it with Apter's metamotivational states. For Collins, motivation always seems to be what Apter exemplified with games: activity that has a goal that makes the activity possible. Collins sees motivation to take part in an activity in order to get what the activity produces, or at least what it has produced in the past, not as an external goal. The goal is to snatch emotional energy, which can be seen as a metaphor for the paratelic. That motivation is produced in interaction ritual chains. In fact, Collins goes so far as to call the interaction ritual chain the individual. In this model, the emotional energy drives human interaction and is the glue of the social world.

Collins' model is less successful when it comes to object play and locomotor play or flow; at the very least the parallel between emotional energy and paratelic mindset seems weaker. Nonetheless, Collins' interaction rituals offer an interesting way to conceptualise social play (cf. Bergström 2012). Like Searle and Goffman, a biological basis for doing things together is assumed, but the processes involved are opened up in an interesting way – yet there are parallels to all of Collins' ingredients and outcomes in constructionist ludology.

5.1.3 Social Interaction in Games

[94] Bergström (2012, 25-30) has discussed this, specifically as influenced by Collins, as *togetherness*. For a different take on togetherness, inspired by Hannah Arendt (1958), see Wilson (2012).

All games are social to some degree. However, one key factor in shaping a game-activity is the number of player participants. In Article IV the social space of gaming is charted and game types are grouped based on the number of people participating. The amount of players has an important impact on the possible interaction patterns and their structuring. The original model presented in the article is explained briefly here.

It is possible to envision a continuum from a true single-player game (a game known and played only by the person who designed it) to a game that person in the world participates in, one that would be inseparable from everyday life. Five categories on game types are covered in the model: single-player games, two-player games, multiplayer games, massively multiplayer games, and massive single-player games. The number of participants influences what kinds of relationship and constellations of relationships are possible between the players, and what kinds of social interaction emerge (see Figure 4 for a summary).

It is important to note that single-player games are not devoid of sociality. In addition to language being social, the concept of game being a socially shared one, and the knowledge that others play the game as well, there are aspects of performativity (especially if others are present or the play is recorded), imagined competition, a feeling of being in a 'dialogue' with the game designer (Wilson & Sicart 2010), and gaming capital or literacy gained (Consalvo 2007; Malaby 2006; Walsh and Apperley 2009).

Two-player games add collaboration to competition and reflexivity. Two-player games can also be explicitly tiered, where single game instances can form a campaign or a tournament. Multiplayer games add co-operation to collaboration, working together on short term goals even if ultimately a relationship is adversarial.[95] When there are three sides or more playing a game the sociability around a game can have a particularly clear influence on the way a game is played in practice – something that designers have noted as important to keep in mind when crafting multiplayer games (cf. Gutschera 2009; Elias et al. 2012).

[95] For an alternative approach to competition and cooperation, see Henricks (2009).

	Players	Players' Relationship	Description
	Single-Player	Reflective, Competitive*	• Knowledge of others playing the same game makes the game more social • Social media have made single-player gaming more transparent • Play increases gaming capital, made visible through reward mechanisms such as achievements and trophies • Single-player gaming can be strongly performative
	Two-Player	Reflective, Competitive, Collaborative	• Two-player gaming has many forms in relation to time, place, and system • Communication channels include face-to-face, in-game channel(s) or 3rd party channel(s) • Competition is often tiered
	Multiplayer	Reflective, Competitive, Co-operative, Collaborative	• All players have direct effect on each other • Numerous communication channels (e.g. global, team, zone, one-on-one) • External communication channels such as discussion forums and wikis
	Massively Multiplayer	Reflective, Competitive, Co-operative, Collaborative, Neutral	• Macro-communities, micro-communities, friends • Complex communication channel hierarchy (e.g. global, groups, sub-groups, one-on-one) • Neutral players, players as tokens or props, playing "alone together"
	Massive Single-Player	Reflective, Competitive, Co-operative, (Collaborative,) Neutral	• Content sharing between players • Little or no real in-game interaction between players

*Single-player competes only via mechanics that are not part of the core game play experience.

Figure 4. Player relation table, quoted from Article IV.

Massively multiplayer games, in addition to having possibilities for numerous types of communication channels between different sets of participants, have so many participants that it is possible to have neutral relationships between players. The other players can be seen as tokens that provide a background and an ambiance, or as spectators that witness, but with whom a participant does not need to directly interact (see Ducheneaut et al. 2006). Massive single-player games, a concept that Article IV introduces in an academic context, are online games played by a significant number of people simultaneously, but where single instances are played by single people and the players can have only a very specific influence on each others' games (most early Facebook games fit this category). Although the communiqués between players do have an influence on the game, there is a tendency to incorporate elements familiar from the single-player game category that used to be outside of the game system (such as scoreboard that enables competition, or the explicit knowledge that others are playing the same game).

5.1.4 The Engrossment of Doing Things Together

The idea that participants become engrossed in doing things together has often surfaced in discussion on social play specifically. Collins' biology-based rhythmic coupling of mutual focus of attentions and shared mood, Searle's collective intentionality, and Goffman's spontaneous involvement are but three of the numerous attempts at describing and theorising this notion. Bernie DeKoven has discussed a balancing act of being too absorbed in the self and too absorbed in the group as *coliberation* (2002, 147-150; 2011), and Celia Pearce (2009, 130-134) has combined DeKoven's work with that of Csikszentmihalyi's flow and come up with *intersubjective flow*. Torill Mortensen (2003, 218-219, see also 266) uses the term *role-playing high*, originating from player interviews, to describe a trance-like state of immersion in character and its (social) surroundings – yet she reminds that "play needs the tension of immersion and distance, of the metaknowledge of 'only playing'". Miguel Sicart (2009, 86) discussed a *player of players*, a particular collective play subject that emerges when numerous players experience a game simultaneously. For George Herbert Mead (1934, 151-154), the difference between play and games for children is that in play you only take your own role and attitude, while in a game you take everyone's. To a certain extent even Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* (1982, 44-50; also 1969; Henricks 2006), the shared feeing of togetherness often connected to liminal or liminoid and which transcends role, status, gender, age, et cetera and creates "lucid mutual understanding", can be mentioned here.

Each of these highlights slightly different aspects of the phenomenon. I am particularly fond of Pearce's formulation, as her later work has emphasised the intersubjective flow as a source of emergent and even surprising play content.

> This *intersubjective*, fundamentally *social* process is one of the primary functions that fuels emergent behavior. In a state of intersubjective play, players experiment, push each other within the constraints of the game, and experience a heightened state of consciousness and unification in which the experience they are collectively creating, or in the case of role-playing games, authoring, takes on a life of its own. As a result, the player tends to find herself in situations that are often surprising and unexpected, to both herself and others within the group. This is a familiar experience to those who have worked in various forms of improvisation, be it actors, dancers or musicians. (Pearce, forthcoming, emphases in original)

The engrossment of doing things together is not only relevant for providing the foundation for the activity, but it continues to be relevant as the activity proceeds. Larp designer Mike Pohjola has discussed this as *inter-immersion* (2004, 89-90), how the fictional social reality of larp is made believable and real through a recursive cycle. "Seeing other characters, acting within the diegetic frame, observing diegetic reactions, experiencing the environment, these all help in enhancing the player's immersion." Pohjola's description is similar to how believability and coherence are built in the theatre. A queen need not portray a high status, if all those around her project a low status. Just like the robber and the victim in Blumer's example, inter-immersion shows that it is not possible to have – in a larp, a game-activity, an encounter – prisoners without jailers, kings without subjects, or rock stars without fans. (See also the discussion on reality hacking in Article I.)

As Pohjola's choice of a term implies, the engrossment of doing things together is tied to the concepts of immersion. Immersion is a particularly contested term with numerous conflicting meanings.[96] I shall not attempt to review all the previous literature on

[96] 'Immersion' has been used, for example, as a label for pretending to believe to be a character in a fictional setting (Pohjola 2004, 84), as a label for the experience of being transported to an elaborate simulated place (Murray 1997, 98), as shorthand for better graphics and larger screen (in popular digital game press), and so on. In addition to game studies, immersion has been used at least in the fields of communication, literature, visual art, human-computer interaction, performance, cinema, and theatre. Immersion has (or, actually, the various dissimilar 'immersions' have) been discussed as psychological, social, sensory, physical, and narrative phenomena, as well as an ideal of experience design – and sometimes the exact same discussions have been carried under the labels of engrossment, engagement, presence, copresence, telepresence, flow, and incorporation. Just in relation to games, numerous

immersion, but simply note that immersion is also a social phenomenon. Indeed, as ethnographer Gary Alan Fine has noted in the context of role-playing games, engrossment (or social immersion) is required for a game to be 'fun':

> For the game to work as an aesthetic experience players must be willing to "bracket" their "natural" selves and enact a fantasy self. They must lose themselves to the game. This engrossment is not total or continuous, but it is what provides for the "fun" within the game. (Fine 1983, 4)

I would substitute a more general term for fun (say, meaningful or worthwhile, or source of Collins' emotional energy), but what Fine writes is important. Role-playing games require the participant to become not only a player, but pretend to be a character. Montola (2008) has termed this the first 'invisible rule' that constitutes role-playing. However, just as important as pretending to be someone else, as noted above, is to pretend that the other participants are their fictional selves as well. Montola's second rule is the world rule. The participants need to pretend that the agreed-upon fictional world is real.

What all of these formulations are getting at is that the fictional world becomes a Searlean social fact when participants act as if it were real. Through engrossment in doing things together alternative play worlds are constructed. For the establishing of this fictive frame pervasive game researcher Jane McGonigal (2003) has coined yet another phrase for one aspect of engrossment in doing things together: the *Pinocchio Effect*. As players constitute the frame though collective effort the unreal becomes believable:

> Pervasive games, at their heart, are the dream of the virtual to be real. And if pervasive games are the dream of the virtual to be real, then they are also the dream of the players for the real to be virtual. (McGonigal 2003, 17)

Though McGonigal was writing about pervasive games specifically – and this effect is particularly visible in that context – the same happens in all coherent encounters, even if most encounters are not coded as 'not real' the way games are. Obviously, the shared frame can collapse. J. Tuomas Harviainen and Andreas Lieberoth (2012), in a nod towards McGonigal, have named "a moment where social and individual immersion breaks down because participants are not completely engaged in the game and also realise that neither are their peers" as the *Emperor's New Clothes Effect*.

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models have been built to explain immersion (e.g. Ermi & Mäyrä 2007; Harviainen 2003) and indeed there are whole books on the subject (Calleja 2011; Torner & White 2012).

The Emperor's New Clothes Effect is an expression for why a healthy player cannot become stuck in a fantasy world of social play, as has been postulated in popular press from time to time in conjunction with moral panic about games. In order for the socially shared fantasy world to persist, work is needed. When the participants cease to be players, and as they discontinue their engrossment in doing things together, the social frame unravels (unless, of course, the upkeep of the frame is institutionalised and facilitated by actors beyond the encounter).

If the shared understanding of what is happening is insufficient, the engrossment in doing things together does not happen. Indeed, much of the discussion if Articles V and VI deals with the problems of fostering an equifinal enough understanding of the game world and its function.

To sum up, in this work and in constructionist ludology social play is understood as people engaging together, via we intentionality, in an activity that has a connection to playful mindset and that is recognised as 'play'. This collective intentionality has a basis as a psychobiological process and cannot be reduced to individual co-located parallel activity. The social game-activity can be analytically broken down in numerous ways, for example, into game-activity and the social encounter that it is embedded in, or as an interaction ritual. Game-activities can also be divided into types based on the number of players, as that has an impact on the social configurations that can arise. The game-activity is an engrossing activity, one that requires ongoing equifinal understanding and commitment to the activity. The game-activity can and does break down when agreed upon – or when commitment to it falters, or is perceived as faltering.

5.2 Rules and Goals

Jean Piaget (1932, 9-72) and his team studied children of different ages, from toddlers to twelve-year-olds, playing the game(s) of marbles around Geneva and Neuchâtel. They noticed numerous areas of psychological development. The youngest children do not really play together, but in parallel. As they get older they start to follow rules given to them by an external source, but winning against someone else by following the rules is still a concept that they do not quite grasp. Operating the material marbles and achieving mastery over them can be central. Later the children start not just playing together, but playing the same game together. At this point the rules are often regarded as sacred – yet children playing in the same group may give conflicting accounts as to what those

rules are. Finally, the oldest children regard the rules as man-made and changeable, something that can be experimented with – as long as all participants agree. They may also be extremely interested in the cohesion of the system of rules, can debate them, and the participants in the same game can give quite similar accounts of the rules, even if they are quite complex.[97]

While children are capable of play and social play, younger children still lack the capabilities for playing certain games. This is largely tied to their psychological developments, but socialisation and enculturation play their parts as well. Understanding constitutive rules is beyond younger children as is collective intentionality regarding more complex social facts.

Piaget's study brings together in an interesting way rules and their equifinal understanding by the participants, the negotiation of the game-activity, and the importance of the material implements of play. Furthermore, it underlines that games are complex social constructions that require skills to participate in. These are the issues discussed in this section before adding one more component to the mix: goals.

5.2.1 Material Implements

Recently there has been a surge of interest in game studies aimed towards implements of play, such as dice and playing cards, as well as the chores that arise from them (Xu et al. 2011; Carter, Harrop & Gibbs 2013; Bienia 2013; see also game definition by Mortensen 2009), and hybrid games that combine implements of play and toys on the one hand and digital games on the other (e.g. Tyni, Kultima & Mäyrä 2013; Heljakka 2012). The design space between a digital artefact and the sociability (and co-creativity) of the players has also been fertile (e.g. Montola et al. 2009; Cheung et al. 2013), and there have been calls for more low-processual gaming (Wilson 2012). Many of these openings have come from studies of non-digital play such as role-play, toys, folk games, and miniature war games, but the materiality of digital games is also important and increasingly discussed (cf. Sotamaa 2014). These openings have started to question notions of efficiency, ease of use, and the importance of computation speed, which a view on games seen through the prism of digital games previously produced.

[97] Piaget divides the development into two tracks with three and four categories. I have not reproduced those here as the exact ages and categories have been criticised later (e.g. Brown 1994) – and are largely irrelevant for the discussion here.

If the efficiency of playing together and of concentrating on just the moves that have meaning as part of the game-artefact is a key consideration, then having a computer facilitate the playing (handle the set-up, rules, random elements etc.) would always be preferable to having players handle the system. However, this is not the case. For example, players still want to roll and count dice, even though it takes time, is cumbersome, and is far more unreliable than using software dice (Carter et al. 2013). In their study of chores in board games, Yan Xu et al. (2011) found that the chores – the facilitation of the playing – are an important source of rich social interaction:

> On the surface level, these social interactions were enabled because chores slowed the pace of the game and created time that players wanted to fill with other activities. But, deeper analysis of players' behaviors surrounding the chores showed evidence of enhanced physical co-presence with the group and an increased awareness of other's actions. (Xu et al. 2011)

They conclude that the work required for play to happen is integral to social play; as they order and structure the co-presence, mutual focus of attention, and synchronisation of emotions while playing the game.

The material arena and the circumstances of play help foster engrossment in doing things together. Rules help foster a shared experience, but without a reasonably equifinal cultural context (background in Searle's terms), the practices and materials are not intelligible (cf. Articles V and VI; Chapter 6).

Goffman (1961, 26-29) talks about equipment "having a social history" in a larger cultural context. The social worlds of encounters, of games and play, are not created from scratch on the spot. This has been discussed in game studies under many headings, such as the 'mangle' of play (Steinkuehler 2006), how (video)games are a 'mess' (Bogost 2009), and the 'assemblage' of play (Taylor 2009). Indeed, Taylor has questioned whether a catalogue of constituents of an assemblage should be forced on practice of play, instead calling for an ethnographic sensibility in a contextual analysis.

The intersection of digital games and non-digital games reveals how important many of the material implements of playing games are. Although it is tempting to think of a game-artefact as a clean and ideal system, the physical form the system takes is important as well. As with any artefact, a game can be a collectible, an identity marker, and a status symbol. In addition to focusing the participants in the interaction ritual through operating the equipment, using the game equipment can be pleasurable in itself (as in

pressing the pop-o-matic die container in *Trouble* aka *Kimble*). The implements act also as embodiments of rules.

5.2.2 Rules of Different Kinds

Markus Montola (2012, 32-47) has untangled how different sorts of rules come together in a game-activity.[98] His catalogue can be used as a basis to see what can be negotiated on a general level on the spot when play begins, what external regulation needs to be taken into mind, and what material realities are difficult or impossible to change.

The *formal rules* of a game can be negotiated and changed relatively easily if the game system is upheld and the game state monitored by the players themselves. Some formal rules are more ambiguous than others and the interpretation of rules is done on the spot. Similarly, what Montola calls *social rules* (e.g. rules that are about politeness, pace, and session-specific exceptions to formal rules) can be negotiated easily. Indeed, drawing a line between formal rules and social rules can be difficult. Personal, *internal rules* (cf. Dansey et al. 2009; see below) can be adopted in addition to other rules, and although Montola does not discuss this, these rules can obviously be in conflict with socially shared rules.[99]

It is more difficult to change *external regulation*, the terms of service offered by a service provider, or the legal environment in a given territory. A player or a player group can disregard this regulation – and such a decision can heighten the experience of playing as more is at stake – but altering such regulation is cumbersome, time consuming, and uncertain. What Montola does not discuss is social and cultural norms relating to the category of social action 'playing' (what counts as playing) and cultural norms in general. In his model, external regulation is probably the most fitting place for such systems of

[98] The simple games that some animals play also call into question the notion of 'rule', as Burghardt (2005) has pointed out. Many carnivores chase each other, have bouts of play fights, reverse roles, and perform self-handicapping. They express inhibitions as to what it is they will perform as part of playing. This is at least akin to following rules. However, if rules are understood as symbolic and language-based, then obviously animals other than humans do not carry out much rule-based play – at least if they have not been taught by humans to do so.

[99] In single-player games, both digital and non-digital, the idea of cheating is particularly interesting (cf. Consalvo 2005). What counts as cheating? What is the point of *solitaire* if one cheats? How much cheating is too much?

rules. Formal rules can be discussed as part of external regulation when there is an institutional body that oversees the application of rules.

Materially embodied rules relates to both physical materiality and software artefacts. Algorithms in digital games and equipment used in sports are both cumbersome for the player to alter. However, digital games can be relatively easily changed by the game developer (e.g. through patching, expansions, new versions) as well as by the players (e.g. through mods, hacks, extensions). Similarly, the equipment and the gaming area can be changed and modified. *Tennis* provides an interesting example as the player can choose, within limits, her own racket and fine-tune it (e.g. the string material, tension, pattern) and the court can be chosen based on the surface material (e.g. crushed and packed brick, acrylic, grass).

This group of rules also underlines the difference between, say, traditional *chess* and computer-mediated *chess*. With a wooden chess set the rules are much more flexible. In digital games the maintenance of the rules and the facilitation of playing are handled by the computer, and it is much more tolerant to players starting to goof around.[100] Although changing rules is easier in non-digital co-located play, upholding the rules by the players may be more important than in digital games where the facilitation of the play is delegated to the computer. Board game researcher Stewart Woods (2009) notes: "Yet whilst it is apparent from this research that some players see deception as an integral part of the play experience, the rules as codified in the printed ruleset appear to hold a far greater weight than do those of the digital game as prescribed by the algorithms which define the rules."

Recently in the digital game industry there has been a move towards service-based business models (Stenros & Sotamaa 2009). The game product used to be something bought as ready and final from a shop, whereas nowadays it is often a service one connects to or a locally hosted piece of software that automatically updates itself via the internet. The latest development, used especially in free-to-play online games, has been the parallel operation of different rules for different player groups in the same game – without explicating this to the player – in order to test and compare a rule in an ongoing process to optimise monetisation (Paavilainen et al. 2013; Nummenmaa et al. 2013; Cheshire 2012).

[100] Digital games often have alternative rulesets, sort of a list of social rules to choose from, that can be adopted. For example, various difficulty levels can be seen as an expression of social rules.

Montola's last group is *brute circumstances*. These are environmental circumstances that cannot be changed, such as a found physical environment, biological reality, and laws of nature. This rule category is defined by its resistance to transgression. All the other rule types can be transgressed against, but the rules in this group cannot be broken or negotiated. Yet even this category is not impossible to change. For example, advances in medicine have expanded the possibilities for action of the human body.

Another way of looking at rules is through the Searlean *status function* (Searle 1995, 40-43) of delimiting who has the authority to make judgements about rules. All games are created with constitutive rules. In many cases of actual game play, it is possible to negotiate between players how the rules are interpreted and if some rules need to be changed, added, or removed. Of course, there are exceptions. In professional sports there are official rules that, although they change over time, are stipulated by institutionalised, official bodies. In professional sports there is also more 'at play', since in addition to being games, they are also big business. The impact of spectators and the fan cultures they foster also require that fair rules are cast in stone even if the game is not enjoyable for the participants (cf. DeKoven 2002).[101] Indeed, the enjoyment (or playfulness) of the participants is not an issue in the construction of professional sports. In digital games the possibility of adding a layer of socially determined goals and rules is there, yet in practice the game rules are often seen as deriving from the status function position of the game publisher.

In comparison, in other types of games such as amateur sports, role-playing games (e.g. Stenros & Montola 2010), party games, digital games embracing low-process intensity (Wilson 2012), pervasive games (Montola et al. 2009), MMORPGs (e.g. Taylor 2006), and any game that fosters internal validation or internal definition of rules (Dansey et al. 2009), the status function of rule determination is not institutionalised, but player-driven. A continuum is implied. This continuum is similar to the one proposed by Roger Caillois (1958), who places play and games on an axis from free-flowing paidia to rule-bound ludus. However, from the Searlean social constructivist position this continuum is created not by the presence or absence of rules, but by the access to institutional authority positions that determine the status function of rules.

[101] That said, professional sports also need referees, a status function that enables decision-making when an interpretation of rules is needed (see also Montola 2012; Chapter 4).

The interesting thing about Montola's list of rule types is that it explicitly calls attention to how a strict, formal accounting of the rules of a game is difficult, how these rules are not completely shared between participants, and how the 'same' game is played with very different rules in different places, times, and player groups. They help make sense of the practice of playing a game and the social construction of playing, while highlighting how a strict and formal understanding of any specific game disappears in the practice of play. Even the most institutionalised games such as *chess* and different Olympic sports have referees and umpires and other human actors that interpret and enforce rules when conflicting readings emerge. Steinkuehler (2006) has noted that:

> The ways in which a game gets played out on the ground level are not easily determined a priori by the game design, rules, EULAs, or whatnot. They shift and evolve, often in unpredictable directions, seemingly holding still only when the "mangle" of designers' intentions (instantiated in the game's rules), players' goals and agency (instantiated in shared, emergent practices), and broader economic, legal, and cultural issues reach a (temporary) point of stabilization. (Steinkuehler 2006, 212)

In a way Steinkuehler's mangle approach is a more specific wording of the idea that game design is second-order design (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 168; see Chapter 6). The elements that Montola has identified are important, and their articulation shows that it is not uncommon for the different rules to be in conflict (say, the social rules and EULA), or for there to be player groups that have different interpretations of the rules. Steinkuehler notes, in relation to massively multi-player online games, that such rules are stable only temporarily. In addition to the shared rules, there are the private, personal rules. Goals are the most common example of this lot.

5.2.3 Internal and External Goals

Games that do not feature explicit goals for the player set by the designer easily fail to qualify as games when faced with a formal analysis.[102] A common way to separate game-artefacts from other formal systems is through goals and end conditions, and if a game-artefact does not feature these then it may not look like a game. However, in game-

[102] I'm thinking about simulation games such as *SimCity*, freer role-playing games (such as *jeepform* games, Wrigstad 2008), certain pervasive games in the mould of *SF0* (Dansey et al. 2009), *The Sims* (Sihvonen 2011), most virtual worlds that have fewer explicit game elements (like *Second Life* or *Minecraft*), party games like *Rock Band, DDR* and *Sing Star* (Frasca 2007, 160-177) – and even some games that feature so many goals that the player cannot follow all of them (like *FarmVille* circa 2009).

activity the goals are created (or in some cases chosen) by the player. In a way these game-artefacts are not properly games until the players have completed them.

Greg Costikyan (2002) has contrasted *SimCity* and *SimEarth*, two simulations by the same lead designer, who considers both as toys. The former is a successful and well-known game that is reissued every few years; the latter has faded into obscurity. According to Costikyan, though neither has goals and thus is not a game in his eyes, *SimCity* works because it is susceptible to so many goal-directed behaviours:

> *SimCity* works because it allows players to choose their own goal, and supports a wide variety of possible goals. *SimCity* is a game – at least when a user plays it as a game; *SimEarth*, despite the similarities, is not. (Costikyan 2002, 13)

Neil Dansey, Brett Stevens, and Roger Eglin (2009; cf. Deci & Ryan 2012) have covered similar ground in their discussion on game rules as created by the player and by the designer. They talk about *internal* and *external definition* of rules. External means that the rules are external to the player, that they are enclosed in the game system; correspondingly, internal means that the rules (and goals) are internal to the player. Thus their focus is on the player. The internal and external definition of rules is similar to Costikyan's discussion, but Dansey et al. take it a step further; they also discuss internal and external *validation* of rules. Many game systems take care of evaluating when a certain victory condition has been met. This means that the rule is externally validated. But in some games, say *SimCity* mentioned by Costikyan, the player does not only decide what her goals are, but also decides when she has reached those goals.

It is interesting to reflect on the different definitions of games discussed in the previous chapter. In game definitions, goals are mentioned almost as often as rules (e.g. Parlett 1999; Myers 2009; Whitton 2009; for an explicit exception, see Aarseth 2007), but they are discussed in game studies literature much less. One possible reason for this is that goals are sometimes, as with Dansey et al., seen as part of the rules. In definitions goals are discussed in three ways: goals within the game (kill all the bad piggies), goals discussed as preludic or extraludic (win the game), and goals that double as end-conditions (save the princess). Sometimes goals are specified in the game-artefact, and they are akin to rules. Indeed, when there are numerous goals to choose from, it can be difficult to separate goals from other rules in a game-artefact. Yet usually it is goals that are used as a divider between toys and games; toys can have clear rule-like affordances – even explicit rules (as in software toys), but they do not have in-built goals.

It is intriguing that we have terms for players who reject the whole game-activity, and for the players who reject the rules but not the goals, but no widely recognised term for a player that rejects or changes the goals, but not the rules.

> The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a "spoil-sport." The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle. (Huizinga 1938, 11)

This appropriative activity, playing with the game, would seem to be the easiest way to start undermining the social contract of playing a game. Rejecting the accepted goals within the game and neglecting trying to win or achieve a high score, and instead coming up with different goals is becoming increasingly common in digital games. It is especially common if the game-artefact already stretches the idea of a classical game, for example by being open-ended instead of having clear end-conditions. The most commonly noted expressions of this kind of appropriative play are grief play and trolling (see Chapter 6) – and goofing off. This person could be called an artist, a troll, a tinkerer, an appropriator, a trickster, or perhaps most fittingly an *explorer* (cf. Bartle 1996).

Without shared constitutive rules social game-activity cannot take place. Material implements encode and embody rules in a visceral fashion. Operating these physical implements as well as upholding the rules by players focuses the activity and creates a strong basis for the shared activity. Yet the understanding of the rules need not be identical on the part of all participants. Usually it is enough that the understanding is equifinal. Yet even that can be subverted with internal rules and goals. Once the framework of the rules, especially when encoded materially, is established well enough, in addition to playing the game the players can start playing with the game.

5.3 Breaking Social Play

The archetypical social play encounter is a situation where all participants are engaged in a common activity while in a playful state of mind, and they have an equifinal understanding of how that activity is organised. However, as games become institutional facts, and as their existence no longer requires each participant to commit to upholding the constitutive rules and striving for the acceptable goals, it becomes possible to start playing with the game itself, as well as playing with (or at the expense of) the other players. This is particularly visible in digital domains, where a computer is responsible

for running the framework of playing and the players are not co-located. When the arena and facilitation of play are upheld by a computer, the materially embedded rules cannot be discarded when consensus of how the playing is supposed to commence breaks down. However, abusing the shared understanding of the game is also possible when the formalised structure of the interaction ritual has emptied or was never really established by the participants. For example, it can happen in contexts where an institution exists to uphold the game, such as competitions, and games played as part of physical education is school.

Obviously games are not the only example of a shared activity located in an encounter, of the coming together of participants in order to create something with collective intentionality. Sites not meant for playing can be appropriated by misuse of the rules of the system. They can be played with.

In this section, the context of playing and the mindsets of individual players are considered first, paying special attention to cases when these are seen to be in conflict. After that, a discussion on different playful takes on a situation are considered, namely playing a game, playing a system, and playing other players. This section is a condensed version of Article III.

5.3.1 The Context-Mindset Matrix

The intersection between a personal mindset that is either playful or serious, and the socially shared context agreed to be play or not, is quite interesting. Although the mindsets and the contexts are intertwined, separating them analytically yields important insights. In order to understand social play, one must consider both the personal and the collective.

What the original model *the context-mindset matrix* makes visible is the negotiating and wilful breaking of the collective intentionality and the contracts of social play. The context of play and the mindset of playfulness are not bound together, and can be found independently. For understanding playfulness in general, it is important that we are also able to find it in places that are not socially recognised as play. The basic model of context and mindsets is built in the following way. Context is understood as a socially

shared and recognised situation. In Goffman's (1974) terms it is a framing or a keying.[103] The actions the participants take are intelligible in a context. The two possibilities of contexts considered here are those that are socially intelligible as either play or non-play ('ordinary everyday life'). Notice that the context is not determined only by those who participate in the activity, but also by other people present in the situation and the cultural understanding of said situation. Mindsets form the other axis, following one of Apter's (1991) division of metamotivational states, specifically that of telic and paratelic. To recap, telic refers to a goal-oriented mindset where the end determines the means, and paratelic to the motivational state where the activity is important in and of itself, although a goal may be adopted in service of the activity in order to make the activity possible (cf. Suits 1978).

The basic model is created when these two are considered together (Figure 5). The model presented here is the third, fine-tuned iteration of the one presented by Stenros, Montola, & Mäyrä first in 2007 and then in 2009. The quadrants of the model are considered next.

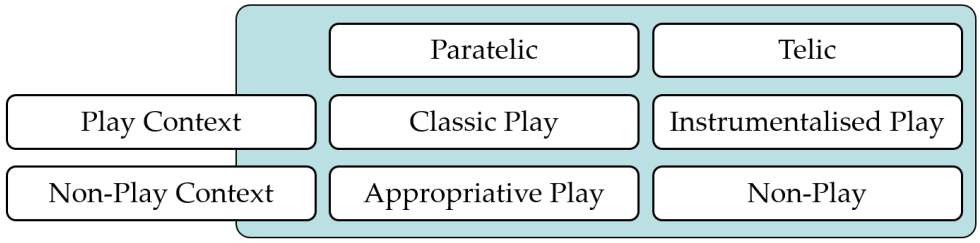

Figure 5. Context and Mindset Matrix, basic model.

Classic Play: An activity is considered Classic Play when all of the participants in the activity recognise it as playing (a game) and they are playing it mostly in a paratelic

[103] Earlier (Stenros, Montola, & Mäyrä 2007; 2009; Article III), I have discussed contexts purely as Goffmanian constructs, and treated the Apterian mindset as a useful extension of frame analysis. However, Deterding (2013) has pointed out that Goffman actually does discuss personal motivations (e.g. Goffman 1963, 19) and makes a strong argument that frame analysis actually does account for mindsets even without modification. Furthermore, Goffman's frames are based on the work of Bateson – and his frames certainly have a psychological component.

Context here should be understood as being based on Goffman's frame analysis – and especially the interpretation of it presented by Fine (1983) – and not an exegetic reading of Goffman's frames (were that even possible with Goffman). Also, it bears repeating that although the context and the metamotivational mindset are in practice quite inseparable, the analytic distinction can still be useful.

metamotivational state, engaging in the activity for itself. Another way of phrasing it is to say that there is a magic circle of play and the participants are in a playful mindset. Usually even a bystander is able to recognise this kind of play, though she cannot be certain of the mindsets of the participants. Solo playing can also be Classic Play if it is intelligible for a bystander either though metacommunication ('this is play') or through a culturally recognisable arena. Stereotypical examples of Classic Play include *peek-a-boo*, *Monopoly*, and *Angry Birds*, although one cannot be certain about the mindset of participants in these activities. Activities like *tag* for children and *foreplay* for adults are a little more reliable, though still far from certain.

Non-Play: An activity that is carried out in a telic metamotivational state by all participants and not socially considered to be happening in the context of play is no kind of play. An alternative title for this quadrant could be ordinary life, but that would imply that playing is not ordinary and not part of everyday life. Stereotypical examples could be buying groceries and voting in elections, but obviously some people can engage in these activities in a playful mindset – and it is possible to build elaborate games around these activities. Fleeing from danger and giving birth are more reliable examples.

Instrumentalised Play: When operating in a context of play in a telic mindset, the result is instrumentalisation. The activity recognised socially or culturally as play is harnessed for an external goal. For example, this is often the case in training, gambling, prostitution, and playing games for the purposes of conducting research or writing a review. Note that the pre-existing context must be associated with play for it to be intrumental*ised*.[104]

Appropriative Play: When a playful mindset is used in a context that is not defined as play, that context is appropriated for play. This is the case with most pervasive games as well as less rule-governed activities that use the city as a playground, such as *parkour*, *urban exploration,* and *cruising*[105] for sexual partners. Other examples can include *trolling*, *Bullshit*

[104] The term 'instrumental play' has come up earlier in game studies. For example, Sicart (2011) has used the term Instrumental Play (in reference to instrumental rationality of the Frankfurt School) to refer to proceduralist play that is subordinated to a game's goals, rules, and systems. T.L. Taylor (2006, 73-55, 88-92) has discussed instrumental actions in relation to play in connection to gaming styles that emphasise efficiency.

[105] In all of these cases, the affordances of the urban environment are important. Urban exploration requires something to explore and an entry point, parkour is very much tied to the physical environment, and the same goes for sexual activity in public places. Katherine Frank (2013, 76) quotes an informant who says that they have had so much sex in public places that they are able to "see" (based on e.g. urban planning, vegetation, lighting) places in a new city where people go to engage in sexual play in public.

Bingo, and *Google bombing*. Again, the pre-existing context needs to be associated as not-play for it to be possible to appropriate it for play.

The first two categories are often considered ideal cases. Games and definitions of games often come with an implied player attached – or at least an implied player position, one with a playful mindset. When the context and the mindset do not match, the latter two emerge as transgressive activities. However, there are numerous complications that need to be addressed when considering the basic model presented here.

First, activities as such do not belong to any of the categories, but vary from situation to situation. Take Classic Play: the strongest examples of activities that are both recognisable and intelligible as play, as well as reliably conducted in a playful mindset, are locomotor play (such as what Finns call *keppikänni* or *tukkihumala* (aka spinning until you feel dizzy and woozy), masturbation, and bungee jumping – basically Caillois' *ilinx*) and object play (assembling a jigsaw puzzle, *Tetris*, and play with dolls) – especially when done alone. As soon as there are other people present and sociability, let alone social play, enters the proceedings, the possibility for Instrumentalised Play is available. Even the most paratelic, least 'useful' solo activities can be performed *for* the sake of others. There is no form of activity that is always in all contexts and mindsets pure play. No form of playing is safe from colonisation by telic metamotivation. Or, as Goffman would have it, safe from keying. Thus each situation needs to be examined separately.

Second, the context needs to be considered both locally and generally. It is possible for something to be considered generally play but locally non-play. The institutionalisation of professional sports offers one example. *Football* can be played with the appearance of the same rules, equipment, and even in the exact same material location both in a way that is locally socially framed as play, and framed as work – all while being culturally recognised as a game (cf. Goggin 2011). Of course, professional *football* played in national leagues has much more rules and regulations than amateur *football*. Yet separating those rules relating to non-play life, league regulations, broadcasting and advertising elements, and labour laws from the rules of *football* can be difficult in practice. Furthermore, we are culturally encouraged to pretend that professional *football* and amateur *football* are on some fundamental level the same game. Considered locally, professional sports may even

fall in the category of Non-Play, whereas generally it can be considered under Instrumentalised Play (cf. Montola 2012, 45-46).[106]

Considered more widely, the different overlapping cultural contexts (or frames) and the possibilities for numerous differently motivated participant groups in a situation require more complicated maps to be rendered understandable. Based on this basic model it is possible to construct more elaborate and more specific context-mindset matrices.[107] One for pervasive games can be found from Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä (2007; 2009) and another, originally presented in Article III is summarised below.

5.3.2 Playing the System

[106] Making sense of games as a site for working while considering games as a negotiated activity paints a slightly different picture. Professional players have to accept very strict rules, which they have little power negotiating. These rules are often much more complicated than just what is commonly considered as game rules. For example, the *Laws of Chess* (FIDE 2008) used in tournaments detail the minutiae of the play situation, and professional athletes need to accept numerous rules that guide not just their participation in games, but also their everyday life. Thus the negotiation regarding games expands from the game to the surrounding social spheres and it is not just work that colonises games, but work-games that colonise the not-game. Basically, in order to be able to participate at all, the players need to agree to subject themselves to the external rule-structures – prompting Marxist criticism of professional sports (e.g. Henricks 2006, 45-52).

[107] Deterding (2013, 137-149) covers similar ground as the model presented here. He argues that attitudes and mindsets are not needed to understand phenomena such as working in game contexts; instead, Goffman's (1974) frame analysis can be used to address even the internal states of participants. Playfulness basically boils down to a keying in his model. Furthermore, he argues that the division of mindset and context, overt activity and covert attitude is too neat.

This last point I agree with. The division is 'neat' as it is an analytical sleight of hand. In reality the internal state and the social context are so intertwined that it would be hard to say specifically where one ends and another begins, yet it does help make sense of certain situations.

Deterding's take on frame analysis in games is worthwhile and inspiring for tackling human adult social play. However, as all models, that one also has its own problems: human adult play is disconnected from the play of children and animals, and playfulness in adults is seen as a descendant of earlier juvenile play. Indeed, following Bateson and Goffman, Deterding sees play as resignification. While his model does account for much of adult play, it falls short in relation to locomotor play and all play with a component of strong embodied unmediated sensation. Obviously it is possible to argue, as Collins (2004) does, that even embodied adult pleasure such as foreplay and fantasising are thoroughly socialised and subject to cultural influences. Yet it seems odd to disregard biological foundations completely. (It is also noteworthy that ethologists have failed to find metacommunicative play signals in many species. Yet Deterding is not talking about animal play generally, but only in relation to human adults.) Finally, the model struggles to account for private personal playfulness. It can only be explained away with a special frame that is quite unlike Goffman's other frames.

In an ethnography about tabletop role-players called *Shared Fantasy*, Gary Alan Fine (1983) introduced a specific rendering of Goffman's frame analysis. Fine identified three frames present in the role-playing situation: the primary frame of where participants are present as *people*, the frame of game context where the participants are *players*, and the frame of the game world where participants are present as their *characters*. The participants shift between these frames while playing, sometimes very rapidly. The activity becomes intelligible when it is interpreted in the right frame (see also Goffman 1961, 36).

Fine's model is designed and meant for understanding tabletop fantasy role-playing games in the mould of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and indeed it has been used for such purposes many times (e.g. Brenne 2005; Stenros 2008; Mackay 2001) and Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) advocate it as a model for analysing the situation of playing more generally. With some minor adaptations Fine's model can be useful in unpacking any game that has a fictional story world – and even in understanding activity around any system that structures a social world. The following version of the model was crafted with virtual worlds and online systems in mind.

The first level is the frame of the ordinary, which is the frame in which a person is a *participant*, someone who participates in a game or in the use of a system. This level is external to the other two, the one in which participation happens. The second level is the frame of the system, where the person is a *player* or a user. On the third level the person is a character or an avatar in the world set up by the system. These three levels, or frames, are seen as contexts (See Figure 6).

	Telic	Paratelic (Personal)	Paratelic (Shared)
Ordinary	Non-Play	Playing the Players	Gaming the Players
System	Using the System	Playing the System	Gaming the System
Game World	Instrumentalised Play	Playing a Game	Playing the Game

Figure 6. Context and Mindset Matrix, online play model, simplified.

The expected, norm-compatible combinations stipulate that a person is in a telic mindset while not in a game world (*Non-Play*) and is in a paratelic mindset while in play (*Playing the Game*). The transgressive uses are when one is in a telic mindset while in the context of a game world (*Instrumentalised Play*) and when a person is seemingly participating in the game world, but is actually just playing with the other players on an ordinary level, addressing them more as participants (such as grief play, *Playing the Players*).

The system as a context complicates matters. Using a system as it is intended, for a goal, is a telic endeavour (*Using the System*). Yet adopting a goal in service of an activity – to enable that activity, as in games – though it has telic aspects, is still considered paratelic by Apter (1991). Thus using a system to reach a goal is a telic operation and using a system to play is paratelic.

However, it is quite possible to disregard a shared understanding of an activity, say playing a game, and start playing in a different way, according to different rules. All systems can be played with; instead of using them in the manner they are meant to be used and for the intended purpose, it is possible to start playing with them (*Playing the System*). When the situation is materially stable, for example digitally mediated and processual, such playfulness is particularly easy as the system and the environment it engenders are kept in place even if no participant is abiding by their implicit rules. Playing with systems is not limited to environments that do not encourage playfulness, but can emerge in seemingly serious contexts as well (e.g. Google search results, Wikipedia, YouTube recommendations, tax bureaucracy). As such transgressive playing styles spread it is possible that the culture of playing changes or, more likely, that there are multiple competing playing styles due to different contracts of play. For example, if more people start to play with the system in similar ways, this can become an institutionalised and established shadow way of interacting with a system – and it can be possible to compete with others in abusing the system in particular ways (*Gaming the System*). Similarly, the harassing and playing of other players can become established, for example when there are online guilds that specialise in grief play (*Gaming the Players*). Indeed, it is possible to also play with games in the way that is shared by other players (*Paratelic: Shared*) and in ways that are particular to a specific player (*Paratelic: Personal*). Finally, it is also possible to ignore the goals and some of the rules of the game one is supposedly playing, and start playing a game of one's own invention (*Playing a Game*).

Steinkuehler (2006) has presented as account of the history of the rise of the adena farmers in *Lineage II*. These players were employed to farm adena, the ingame currency,

which would then be sold to players via eBay. As the practice started to disrupt the playing of the game, other players started making concentrated attacks on the adena farmers. This pattern has played out in virtual worlds and other social sites online many times. A smallish group starts to engage in activity that is acceptable by the formal rules, but seen as violating social rules. This is done for purposes other than just reaching the goal of the activity. Sometimes other groups then engage in activity acceptable by the formal rules, but seen as violating social rules in order to get the original transgressors to stop. This has happened not just with adena farmers and other gold farmers, but also with griefers and trolls (see Chapter 6).

5.4 Conclusions

In the framework of constructionist ludology the social fact of game-activity comes about through collective intentionality, constitutive rules, and the assignment of function. Collective intentionality is the foundation of all joint actions. Social play cannot be reduced to parallel individual play. There is a difference between doing something alone and doing something as part of a collective effort. Whether it has been called we intentionality, involvement, rhythmic coupling of mutual focus and shared mood, or something else, numerous scholars have speculated that this is rooted on a biological basis.

The engrossment in doing things together is an important element in creating social play and games. All games are social in some way, even single-player games. Even if the core activity of playing is solitary, there are secondary activities that frame the playing that are social. However, all play need not be social – although obviously most adult play is thoroughly socialised.

Constitutive rules are needed for games to emerge. Such rules of play, be they negotiated on the spot or appropriated as ready-made, vary based on their flexibility. However, not all things called 'rules' are constitutive rules, and the participants' understanding of the rules need not be identical, just equifinal enough. The material world obviously provides a basis for rule negotiation, and in more formal games there are institutions overseeing the constitutive rules of games. As the rules become more institutionalised and materially encoded, it becomes possible to transgress those rules either individually or as a new socially shared game. Indeed, the various rules of play can be in conflict and the same site of play can be used by groups of individuals who operate using different sets of

rules. However, to what extent they are 'playing the same game' depends on the definition of 'game'. They may be using the same game-artefact, while engaged in very different game-activities.

Established rules and norms foster a collective understanding of certain contexts; some are understood as sites for play, whereas others are not. However, the hegemonic understanding of the expected use of a site does not determine action. It is possible to transgress against expectations and appropriate non-play contexts for playful behaviour, and to adopt a goal-oriented mindset in a play context. The context-mindset matrix renders the juxtaposition of mindset and context visible, and makes sense of activities that otherwise are read only as aberrant from hegemonic positions. This can be discussed as assignment of function. The same activity or artefact can be construed as having very different functions. This can, obviously, start to erode the social fact of a shared game-activity. Over time it can even replace an older social fact with a new one.

6 Substudies on Social Play Practices

> I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidæ with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. (Charles Darwin in a letter in 1860, quoted from Darwin 2000)

> What connects games with reality is that they are lifelike. What separates them is that they are not for real. What unites them with the totality of experience is not just their metaphorical quality but the manner in which they are played. (DeKoven 1978, 2)

> But I don't think that we need to dethrone one reality only to substitute another absolute ruler in its stead. The point is not to demonstrate that play is more real than work, or vice-versa. After all, this kind of one-upmanship is a very old political game. Youth sees the older generation wasting its life in a pointless charade. Their elders complain that youth lives in a fantasy world. Radicals claim the establishment denies and represses true reality. Those established in a given system think radicals play at revolution. All such arguments assume that one reality is superior to all others; and, therefore, they are all equally suspect. (Csikszentmihalyi 1981, 18)

The three preceding chapters have outlined a foundational model of playfulness, play, and games in constructionist ludology. This chapter uses that framework and the analytical toolbox assembled to make sense of three substudies. Each of these substudies has previously been analysed in the articles included in this dissertation. The accounts presented here build on and expand these earlier takes on the subjects.

First, online grief play and trolling are discussed. Numerous approaches to these activities are explored before they are considered as expressions of playfulness and play that violate the formal rules of the context. This analysis is an expansion of the discussion in Article III and also builds on work presented at the DiGRA 2013 conference (Stenros & Paavilainen 2013). Second, the principles underlying gamification are analysed. What is the role of playfulness, if indeed any, in operationalising games for external goals? This argument is reproduced from Article I. Third, *Conspiracy For Good* is analysed as an example case of how social rules and goals are negotiated when a forum for such

negotiation is missing. Articles V and VI explore this one case example, and the analysis presented here is a shorter, slightly reframed account presented therein.

6.1 Substudy 1: Grief play and Trolling

Grief play, also known as *griefing*, is a collection of disruptive activities that are usually discussed as problematic, or something to be eliminated. Griefing is commonly construed as deviance, and the griefer is seen as an 'other' (Article III; Fink 2011; Webber 2013). A common point of comparison to online griefing is offline bullying (e.g. Bartle 2003; Gregson 2007; Chesney et al. 2009). However, increasingly this deviance, or transgression, is also celebrated as creative (cf. Aarseth 2007). The problem with othering griefing is that it mystifies the phenomenon. Approaching it through difference obfuscates the similarities.

Grief play is play (cf. Bakioğlu 2009), and studying by-the-rules play as play and grief play as a problem prevents understanding not only play in general, but also griefing and other types of online play specifically (cf. Article III). Grief play is bad play (Chapter 3), but it is play nonetheless. Furthermore, griefing is probably something many people partake in from time to time and not just an activity for a separate pariah group of griefers. Indeed, many players have multiple accounts, some of which are reserved for grief play (Lin & Sun 2005; see Phillips 2011 for a similar finding regarding trolling), and people report being both perpetrators and targets of griefing (Rubin & Camm 2013; cf. Thacker & Griffiths 2012). This means that in order to grasp the full spectrum of play activity, grief play needs to be considered as well. Yet it is important to note that griefing as a term is applied to a whole spectrum of activities ranging from the mischievous to the threatening and to dangerous, clearly illegal harassment. Considering even horrid acts of griefing as play is not meant as an endorsement; on the contrary, grief play is discussed as play in order to underline that play is not always positive.

In this section griefing and its sibling in non-ludic contexts, trolling, are analysed as appropriative play and as one-sided social play. Grief play and trolling are analysed with the toolbox assembled in the preceding chapters. Grief play is conceptualised as an activity rooted in playfulness, but one that stabilises in social and cultural contexts into recognisable forms. In order to build a constructionist ludological view of griefing, numerous different approaches are mapped and considered based on currently available literature. These views are organised into seven rhetorics of griefing in order to form a

more nuanced account of the activities. The view that grief play is indeed play is given special attention. Terminology stemming from the context-mindset matrix is used to help make sense of the phenomenon, as the people carrying out acts of grief play and trolling are being playful at the expense of other participants in a way that is not contextually appropriate.

6.1.1 Conceptualising Griefing and Trolling

In academic literature on games grief play used to be considered an undesirable side effect of multiplayer games, one that a designer needed to be aware of and try to manage (cf. Smith 2007). It is seen as social play gone awry. The discussion dates back to Richard Bartle's (1996; 2003) MUD player typology, where *killers* are discussed. This player type draws joy from causing distress to other players:

> Normal points-scoring is usually required so as to become powerful enough to begin causing havoc in earnest, and exploration of a kind is necessary to discover new and ingenious ways to kill people. Even socialising is sometimes worthwhile beyond taunting a recent victim, for example in finding out someone's playing habits, or discussing tactics with fellow killers. They're all just means to an end, though; only in the knowledge that a real person, somewhere, is very upset by what you've just done, yet can themselves do nothing about it, is there any true adrenalin-shooting, juicy fun. (Bartle 1996, 759)

The classic definition of a griefer has been provided by Jessica Mulligan and Bridgette Patrovsky (2003, 218). According to them a griefer is a player who derives her enjoyment not from playing the game, but from ruining the enjoyment of the game in other players.[108] As the discussion moved from game design to player studies, the emphasis started shifting from griefer as a certain kind of ideal player to griefing as a type of activity. C.Y. Foo and Elina Koivisto's (2004a) work is an example of this (also Lin & Sun 2005). Based on Mulligan & Patrovsky's definition, they identify three aspects of a

[108] Griefers have also been characterised as players who promote conflict and want to scam, cheat, and abuse (Adrian 2010), or simply as spoilsports (Dibbell 2008), and griefing as deliberately playing against the designers' rules (Lippman 2009), causing havoc (Taylor 2006, 35), or even simply as "negative behaviour" (Chesney et al. 2009).

griefer's activity: the act is intentional, it causes other players to enjoy the game less, and the griefer enjoys the act.[109]

Notice that the rules of the game are not mentioned in this characterisation of grief play. The act of griefing can be permitted by the rules of the game (or virtual world), or forbidden.[110] Similarly, it can be legal or illegal in relation to offline legislation (cf. Adrian 2010). The status of a seemingly similar act, say stealing from another character, can change not only between similar games in the same genre, but between different sections or locations in a single game (cf. Bakioğlu 2009). In addition, a move may be permitted by the rules of the game while still being illegal in some offline jurisdictions (Adrian 2010).[111] Thus griefing as transgressive play happens primarily in relation to the other players and the consensus regarding the rules of setting, not in relation to the actual explicit rules.

A similar activity to griefing is *trolling*. Both are rooted in an intent to disrupt the proceedings, to get a rise out of the other participants, and to draw enjoyment from this. The main difference between these two is that griefing happens in game (or virtual world) contexts while trolling is used in all online (and even offline)[112] social contexts (Kirman, Linehan, & Lawson 2012). The earliest definitions of trolls and trolling tie into performance and identity games. The term used to mean a person who works to pass for a legitimate member of a group in order to disrupt the proceedings of that group (Donath 1999; Dahlberg 2001; Hardaker 2010). Although this kind of role-play is still

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[109] The problematic aspect of trying to build a definition of griefing is intentionality. Usually trying to amass wealth or progress in a game is not construed as griefing, and the same applies to learning to play a game. The actions carried out might be indistinguishable from acts of griefing, yet it is the intentionality, the consciousness of the actions, that marks an act as grief play. And thus determining grief play from the outside can be difficult – unless two categories are constructed, one for self-aware and another for unconscious griefers (as proposed by Lin & Sun 2005). Notice also that griefing is not necessarily about concrete, measurable acts like killing another avatar (though that can be griefing as well and gave the name to Bartle's category) or stealing equipment, but can just as well be about emotional griefing and about holding power over another player (Yee 2005).

[110] Carter (2013) has proposed the term *ruthless play* to refer to unnecessarily disadvantaging another player in a multiplayer setting. The term is specifically positioned as separate from cheating and griefing and instead refers to games where this ruthlessness is a key component in their appeal.

[111] Special terms like griefing and trolling can be seen as creating a false dichotomy between online and offline acts of aggression (Phillips 2013a) – one that courts do not always recognise.

[112] Phillips (2012) has analysed the feedback loop between trolling and mainstream media. According to her, though the tactics and behaviour of these two are homologous, it would be misleading to brand corporate media or at least some of their most visible personalities as trolls. She believes that trolls should not be disconnected from subcultural identification.

an important part of the arsenal of trolling (and griefing, see Snider, Lockridge, & Lawson 2012), it is no longer seen as the defining feature of activity recognised as trolling.[113] However, they are still seen as connected, as indicated by Victoria Rubin and Sarah Camm (2013), who identify three types of deceptive strategies online: cheating (cf. Consalvo 2007), identity deception (cf. role-play; Turkle 1995), and some types of grief play.

Gabriella Coleman (2012) considers griefers a subset of trolls.[114] She connects trolls, especially their aesthetic sensibility and linguistic practices, to the tradition of (phone) phreakers and hacker culture. She draws attention especially to the hyperbole and ambiguity favoured by trolls; there is a tradition of knowingly making it difficult to both separate truth from lies and to attach clear meaning to acts (see also Montola et al. 2009). Coleman quotes a textfile[115] from 1984 called the "code of the verbal warrior,or, barney's bitch war manual", which seemingly instructs how to troll and grief:

> either take the bitching completely seriously,or do not take it seriously at all. if you find yourself grinning at insults thrown at you by your opponent,then either cut it out immediately,or try grinning even wider when you're typing your reply. the benefit of this is that you can't be affected one way or the other by any thing that your opponent says.if you're taking it seriously,then you just keep glaring at your monitor,and remain determined to grind the little filth into submission. if you're using the lighthearted approach,then it's pretty difficult to get annoyed by any kind of reference towards your mother/some chains/and the family dog,because,remember,you're not taking this seriously! (Original spelling preserved.)

This snippet still works, three decades later. Notice the importance of the power imbalance: keeping your cool grants you higher ground. Both griefing and trolling can be and have been discussed as bullying. Bullying is often defined as *repeated aggressions intentionally* carried out that target a person who is on the weaker side in a *power imbalance* (Olweus 1993, 8-10). Repetition is what turns an isolated act of aggression into bullying,

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[113] Ideas of what trolling and griefing are, are not only moving targets, just as with play and games (cf. Whelan 2013), but they are culturally specific as well. For example, there is no direct equivalent for the concept of trolling in use in the Chinese Internet, even if the activities gathered under the umbrella of trolling are found (de Seta 2013).

[114] Similarly Bakioğlu's (2009; 2012) work on griefing in *Second Life* builds a bridge between griefing in games and trolling in social media, while also considering the political aims of griefing as expressing and building dissent. She has noted (2009) that griefing in game worlds has less of an impact both economically and socially than in virtual worlds that lack clear and universal game structures.

[115] http://www.textfiles.com/100/warbitch.txt

yet a similar demand does not seem to exist for griefing or trolling. However, it has been claimed that the perception of an imbalance of power (between different user groups and also the developers) is what griefing stems from (Chesney et al. 2009; Bakioğlu 2012). One way to approach griefing is to view it as expert users asserting their dominance over the less skilled n00bs (cf. Chesney et al. 2009; Rubin & Camm 2013; Coleman 2012).[116] Describing oneself as a troll or a griefer is thus a boast; it shows that one holds oneself in higher esteem than the target (Fuller, McCrea, & Wilson 2013). The power imbalance is even included in some definitions (this one was created by surveying *Second Life* residents):

> Intentional, persistent and unacceptable behavior that disrupts a resident's ability to enjoy the online environment and which may have negative consequences for the resident. Such behavior tends to be mainly exhibited by those with expert power in the technical features of the online environment. (Coyne et al. 2009)

In addition to expert skills, anonymity has also been connected to the emergence of power imbalance as it makes the target feel powerless. The *online disinhibition effect* hypothesis (e.g. Suler 2004; Dooley et al. 2009) holds that people are more prone to both disclose secrets and to act out in "toxic" ways when they are anonymous.[117] However, Chesney et al. (2009) sum up in their review that anonymity does not necessarily lead to transgression. On the contrary, "deindividuated individuals tend to go along with group behaviour, whereas individuals who are identifiable tend not to go along with the norm so readily." Furthermore, anonymity stands in stark contrast to the culture of celebrity and personal branding. If the requirements for identity are lower, greater collective mentality can emerge. "The more people have to distinguish themselves to acquire a reputation, as on Twitter, the less reason the louder voices have to identify with the hoi polloi. Remove that path to prestige, as well as hard prestige measures like number of followers, and the collective, agglutinative character of a social space increases"

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[116] The requirement of a power-imbalance between the aggressor and the target is contested for cyberbullying (cf. Dooley, Pyzalski & Cross 2009) and griefing (cf. definitions cited above and Coyne et al. 2009).

[117] The ephemeral playfulness of griefing and trolling has a connection to anonymity. In his work on unruly anonymous imageboard 4chan, Lee Knuttila (2011) has pointed out that there is a core culture that "revolves around the idea of anonymity and anonymous speech" (cf. Phillips 2011; Manivannan 2013). He further points out that the ephemerality and anonymity of 4chan lower responsibility and encourage experimentation. As we have seen earlier, these features – safety, freedom, and negotiable consequences – have been connected to play and playfulness. Although the anonymity of 4chan is not absolute (for example, IP-addresses are logged), this ideology of anonymity (zero-identity) contributes to the experience of 4chan.

(Auerbach 2011). This is particularly interesting in the context of organised griefing, where a group transgresses en masse.

Indeed, griefing is not just one disgruntled player acting out, although that also happens. Griefing is often social and shared, and is enacted by people who come together in order to grief. It is organised and planned (cf. Knuttila 2011; Phillips 2011). Journalist Julian Dibbell (2008) has gone so far as to calling it a "full-fledged culture" (see also Bakioğlu 2009; 2012; Auerbach 2011). Dibbell traces the origin of the culture to "the members-only message forums of *Something Awful*, an online humour site dedicated to a brand of scorching irreverence and gross-out wit." In the terminology of the previous chapter, griefing and trolling are not just playing a player, but they are about gaming the players. In some contexts, such as *Second Life*, the culture of griefing and gaming the players has had a strong impact on the culture of the virtual world as a whole.[118]

A concise, contemporary definition of trolling is "the practice of behaving in a deceptive, destructive, or disruptive manner in a social setting on the Internet with no apparent instrumental purpose" (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus 2014). Following that, griefing can be defined as trolling in a context of game or a virtual world. Notice that the lack of instrumental purpose is part of the definition; the idea that trolling is paratelic is actually included in this definition. Yet this playful aspect, although referred to in passing or alluded to (e.g. Dibbell 2008; Donath 1999; Bakioğlu 2009; Dahlberg 2001; Auerbach 2011), is rarely analysed head-on (for examples see Anable 2008; Kirman et al. 2012; Snider et al. 2012; Karppi 2013).

According to Dibbell (2008), the impetus behind this organised griefing culture is to ridicule and make fun of everything: "[N]othing on the Internet is so serious it can't be laughed at, and that nothing is so laughable as people who think otherwise." Ben Kirman et al. (2012) draw a distinction between *mischief*, griefing and trolling rooted in a positive

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[118] At the time of writing there is an internet-based campaign called #gamergate going on, which is clearly connected to the culture of griefing and trolling. The campaign is supposedly about highlighting the ethics of game journalism, but in practice seems to be about reactionary anti-feminism and harassment. However, it seems to be much more goal-oriented and instrumental – and much less playful – than griefing and trolling. Whatever the outcome of the campaign turns out to be, it seems to already have had on effect on online gamer and player cultures. No doubt there will be significant academic attentions paid to this campaign in the coming years.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that numerous expressions of internet culture (such as meme images) that used to be strongly associated with 4chan (and to a lesser extent with trolling) have become much more widespread and even mainstream (cf. Burroughs 2013; Leaver 2013).

intent, and sociopathic griefers and trolls (cf. local norm violation and grief play in Smith 2004; casual griefing in Rubin & Camm 2013). They see mischief as an important part in negotiating social contracts online, forging societies through experimentation; as a tool for performative actions, serendipitous creation, and appropriation. They note that the key to mischief is an attitude of playfulness. In a nutshell, they want to differentiate between the relatively good play of mischief from the bad play of serious trolling which can be othered.

Evan Snider, Tim Lockridge, and Dan Lawson (2012) are interested in the strategies griefers employ while griefing and approach griefing as a rhetorical tactic (cf. de Certeau 1984). Based on interviews with first-person shooter griefers, they posit griefing as a style of play of its own, one that calls into question the constraints of a game, its genre, and the community of its players. "[G]riefing is a way of *being* in the game that extends beyond the game; it is an approach to the concept of play itself." In 2004 Julian Kücklich noted:

> In the real world, activities that prompt us to question the validity of our assumptions about the world we inhabit are often regarded as works of art. In game-worlds, such activities are mostly regarded as vandalism, unless they are non-disruptive[.] (Kücklich 2004, 9)

A few years later artist Joseph DeLappe started staging art interventions in digital games. He is probably most famous for *dead-in-iraq* (2006-2011), where he enters the online multiplayer first-person shooter game *America's Army*, stands still and types names, service branches, and dates of death of American service persons killed in Iraq. In similar vein he has performed *Fifty Shades of Black Ops* (2012), where he logged on to similar first-person shooter multiplayer game *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and read aloud and typed in the game messaging system excerpts from the erotic romance novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This work is rooted in playfulness, yet it is serious. It is play and it has been canonised as art, yet it is also griefing – both in the sense that the other players' enjoyment of the games is diminished, and in the sense that some players started thinking about the actual grief involved in the war.[119]

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[119] Higgin (2013) compares DeLappe's work to raids on virtual world where loose troll group Patriotic Nigras, organised via 4chan, use brown-skinned avatars to recolour and re-contextualise the virtual space:

> For players more familiar with [*World of Warcraft's*] lore and its story of racial conflict and imperial conquest, the slave auction also makes explicit the subdued historical referents—the Atlantic slave trade, the Great Chain of Being, scientific racism,

However, most trolls and griefers are not looking to *rationally* participate in a debate in public sphere (cf. Dahlberg 2001), at least not when they are griefing and trolling. The aim is usually not serious, but playful. Internet as serious business is something they mock. It is play and this play is not politically correct. It can be racist, homophobic, misogynist, and it often is (cf. Tucker 2011; Thacker & Griffiths 2012; Milner 2013). This is not at odds with their political message (cf. Anable 2008), but completely in line with their bad play. Trying to engage in a serious way with the trolls and griefers is very difficult. The folk wisdom on the Internet is that one should not engage – "don't feed the trolls" in the vernacular (cf. Herring et al. 2002). The reasoning is that one should attempt to identify which contributions are real and which are trolling. The next step is diminishing the enjoyment of the troll so that he will leave (Donath 1999). This advice has been criticised not only as victim-blaming, but also as accepting the troll's framing of the situation (Phillips 2013b).[120] A further complication is that trolls and griefers are not always perceived as problems – especially if they are entertaining. Instead of trolling, one may condemn a failed attempt at trolling. "A better troll would be admired for cleverness; the offense here was not trolling per se, but doing it so poorly" (Donath 1999). Of course, it is possible to troll the trolls, although it is hard. According to some accounts (Manivannan 2013; Higgin 2013), the leaking of 4chan culture outside the site has been condemned by the site's founder and long-time members. This is seen as ruining the insularity of 4chan. Expanding the magic circle of play of 4chan is an example of how once a play activity is formalised enough, it can be subverted.

Burcu Bakioğlu's work on organised griefers and planned griefing maps the cultural significance of the activity. According to her, griefers in virtual world *Second Life* select targets that take themselves (or their play) too seriously, and legitimise their activities as playing a game of their own. The griefers engage in cultural jamming, subverting meaning and creating semantic disorder, while celebrating their own style of crass humour and vulgar aesthetics.

> Because of their position of weakness, griefers adopt subversion as a form of play to systematically test the boundaries of the system in which they participate. By exercising tactical forms of power, which rely on poaching the environment or the medium, they are able to respond to the power being

> genocide, etc.—that form the foundations for the game world's allusions and metaphors. (Higgin 2013)

[120] James' (2013, 130, 136) advice is less specific: you should only cooperate on your own terms, but also find the right time to take your stand. Determining when the time is right is an art.

> exerted over them by Linden Lab. The inherent appeal for grief play is, ultimately, breaking the system by going up against it. (Bakioğlu 2009)

Most griefers seek to temporarily disrupt, not permanently destroy, the environment where they operate. Although their stated goal may be, say, to kill *Second Life*, achieving that goal would mean that griefing in that context would end as well (Bakioğlu 2009; also Smith 2007; James 2013, 161).[121]

Furthermore, trolling and griefing require some level of mutual trust in a setting (Chapter 4; see also Donath 1999; Herring et al. 2002) to operate, while at the same time they undermine that trust. As trolling becomes institutionalised, this trust suffers and the ground trolling thrives on withers. As trolling has become more widespread and awareness of it has proliferated (and as the concept of trolling has become recognisable), trolling has become more difficult. The idea that internet is a "toxic" environment is fairly common is popular analyses. It has been noted (Fuller et al. 2013) that "[t]rolling has perhaps displaced pornography as the obscenity which underwrites the demand that the Internet be brought under control."

Later Bakioğlu (2012) has documented how people identified as and who self-identify as griefers have used, among other methods, griefing techniques to engage in a political struggle over the governance of *Second Life*: "[G]riefing has developed from a set of trolling practices that manifests itself as offensive language and tasteless pranks into political initiatives with hacktivist undertones." There is a long history of using play in subversive ways in connection to political struggles – but it can be questioned how playful the political griefing Bakioğlu describes really is when external goals become clearer (also Coleman 2011).

Trolling and griefing are phenomena that have attracted increased attention during recent years. Depending on the angle of approach, they are rendered in very different ways. The complexity of the phenomenon, bringing together internet culture, identity,

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[121] Thus griefing can be constructed, at least in an explicit game environment, in the terminology of Carter et al. (2012), as *paragaming*. Paragaming is that which is performed peripheral to but alongside the game-as-intended. This game-as-intended is then the *orthogame*. Carter et al. further note that *paragame* is distinguished from the *metagame* (that which is external to the orthogame but both accepts it and influences it) by being contingent on the participant's desires and motivations, which can be in opposition to the orthogame and thus redefine the purpose of play. Paragaming is another way of expressing that the griefers are gaming the players; there are numerous dissimilar game-activities going on in the same site at the same time.

entitlement, bullying, power relations, play, gender, and creativity, makes tackling it difficult.

6.1.2 Grief Play Rhetorics

There are numerous griefing related taxonomies, mostly relating to types of griefing and the motivations of griefers (e.g. Foo & Koivisto 2004). However, the rhetorics surrounding griefing have received less scrutiny. Fink (2011) has presented a threefold division of rhetorics in the talk of *Second Life* residents: griefing as crime, as personality disorder, and as play (cf. Sutton-Smith 1997). I have identified seven rhetorical approaches to the topic in academic literature on grief play and trolling, and these are outlined here. Partially, these approaches and ways of writing about griefing and trolling can be explained according to the academic field that they originate from – obviously game scholars, cyberpsychologists, and cultural critics have different points of departure and discourses – but not completely. Note also that the rhetorics identified are ideal types and most articles on griefing contain a mix of rhetorics.

Cyberbully. The first rhetoric originates in psychology and is still very much connected to that discipline. In this framing griefing and trolling are seen as online bullying, abuse, and harassment: cyberbullying. The similarities and differences between online and offline bullying receive attention, with the key interests being in understanding the special quality of the technology-based environment in comparison to offline bullying, the dynamics of the situation (repetition, power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target), and in identifying elements that contribute to the environment that makes cyberbullying easier to commit (such as anonymity, disinhibition, deindividuation, and group dynamics).

The phenomenon is usually defined in terms of its impact on a target: if someone feels that they have been harassed, then cyberbullying has taken place. Impact, especially long-term impact, of cyberbullying is a key point of interest, up to and including its connection to suicide. Controlling and lessening griefing is a key goal. For examples of this rhetoric, see Dooley et al. (2009), Coyne et al. (2009), Chesney et al. (2009), and Menesini & Nocentini (2009).

As a subset of this rhetoric there is the frame of popular psychology, where psychological terms are used especially to describe the perpetrator. He (for he is usually male) is

portrayed as deviant, possibly as sociopathic, even psychopathic (e.g. Dibbell 2008; Fink 2011). Sometimes diagnoses are also forwarded, such as Asperger's syndrome (as reported by Myers 2010). This profiling of the griefer is rare in articles written in the field of psychology proper, although recently a study was published that did find a link between trolling and sadism (Buckels et al. 2014; see also Graham & Gosling 2013). In popular articles about griefing such profiling is quite prevalent – and this kind of rhetoric has been embraced and celebrated by trolls and griefers themselves (e.g. Phillips 2012).

Problem user. The second approach paints the perpetrators of griefing as problem players and trolls as problem users. The emergence of griefing and griefers is an undesirable side-effect of multiplayer games, and detrimental to the intended game experience created by the designers. Similarly, trolling is thought to be performed by people that are misusing a system (Herring et al. 2002). Both are something that should be minimised through better design, reporting systems, third-party tools, karma systems, and community management. Alternatively, griefing and trolling are social problems (Smith 2007).

Griefing can be compared to cheating and using exploits – and even though these conflicts that are created are extraludic, different game designs seed different types of conflicts (Smith 2004). This point of view is found in design literature and some social science approaches to game studies. Griefing and trolling is something to be managed (Foo & Koivisto 2004) and something the non-griefing player community needs tools and knowledge to deal with (Gregson 2007). The developer has a responsibility to promote ethical play (Warner & Raiter 2005; Sicart 2009, 121-122), just as libraries should adopt rules of conduct to create harassment-free environments (Rubin & Camm 2011). At the very least the trolls and griefers should be ignored and excluded (cf. Fuller et al. 2013).

A subset of this rhetoric is one where the label of 'troll' is discussed as an exercise of power to discredit the target (as pointed out by Sindorf 2013). In the discussions analysed the trolls are seen not just as problem users, but problem individuals (cf. Whelan 2013; Tkacz 2013). This is a metarhetoric as it tends to question such labels.

Criminal. The third way of discussing griefing and trolling originates in jurisprudence. In this discourse the relevant questions relate to understanding online acts in relation to offline legislation. What constitutes a crime? How are theft and Ponzi schemes understood? How is the monetary value of something determined? How are violations

of End User Lisence Agreements settled, and can EULA and the rules of the game supersede national laws? What about harassment and violations of privacy? For examples, see Adrian (2010) and Fink (2011).

Transgressive player. The fourth approach sees transgressive acts of play as something to celebrate. Indeed, it has been argued that games are a way to tame and harness the exuberance of play (Makedon 1984, 40-43), and that creative playing is required to escape the "prison-house of regulated play" in games (Aarseth 2007, 133). In this discourse, which is common in game studies that have a humanist bent, transgressive playing of games, be it cheating or griefing, is seen as creative and liberating, even if its romantic bent is recognised (see also Chapter 3). This discourse is quite individualistic, and the experience of a single player struggling against the tyranny of a game is foregrounded. The agency of the player is celebrated:

> Transgressive play is a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subject to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself. (Aarseth 2007)

Cultural agent. The cultural studies view-point pulls back and situates the activities of griefers and trolls in a larger cultural and societal context. According to this view the griefers and trolls are locked in a cultural battle with mainstream media[122] (Phillips 2012), with attempts to treat the internet as serious business and the economic models that go along with that (Bakioğlu 2009), and with less internet-savvy newbies (Coleman 2012). These approaches are quite varied: at one end of the spectrum the trolls may just be regarded as finding entertainment in conflict and being disruptive and impolite in a group on purpose (e.g. Hardaker 2010), while at the other, trolling activities are regarded as a new mode of political interaction, the so-called *lulzpolitik* (Holmes 2013).

They are historically connected to other technological renegades, from phone phreakers to hackers (Coleman 2012) to cybertarians (Anable 2008) and the hacker ethic (Coleman 2012; see also Shachaf & Hara 2010; Manivannan 2013). They are activists negotiating virtual governance, and whose activities need to be considered in relation to civil disobedience (Bakioğlu 2012). They are "information tricksters" who raise hell for their

[122] Indeed, trolling can be quite beneficial to any company that hosts discussions that are prone to be trolled. Online revenue is driven by advertising viewed, and trolling can be interesting to watch – and thus directly generates returning visitors and page views (cf. Paasonen 2011).

own fun, but also to make the world a better place (Coleman 2012). They challenge the hegemony, voice their dissent, and engage in tactical use of power (Bakioğlu 2012), while at the same time engaging in cultural production of great interest and value (Webber 2013). They revel in boy-culture and attempt to protect their arena against non-white, non-heterosexual, non-male influences (Tucker 2011). The trolls are defiant "bad techno-subjects" and modern day hippies fighting an ideological war with memes and juvenile behaviour (Anable 2008). A subset of this rhetoric sees griefing and trolling as a manifestation of expertise. The power imbalance between experts and beginners is highlighted through acts that seek to reinforce the online pecking order (e.g. Chesney et al. 2009; Rubin & Camm 2013; Foo & Koivisto 2004).

Within the previous five rhetorics the griefer and the troll are often discussed as playing by their own rules, subverting the rules, doing it for the lulz, being mischievous and playful. However, as much of this activity is regarded as bad play it is rarely subjected to closer analysis as play. The new games that emerge in griefing are rarely regarded as games, and are therefore not analysed. This calls for a new approach to grief play as playing games. It is the rhetoric of *steadfast gamers* that has received the least scrutiny, and that benefits from the analysis this dissertation primes. This is explored in the next subchapter.

6.1.3 Games of Grief

Those who engage in grief play and trolling reject the social contract that enables shared play. They start to play by different rules without informing others present in the situation. As was discussed in Chapter 3, reserving the category of play just for the positive expressions of playfulness threatens the usefulness of the whole concept. This division to mischief and real grief, to good and bad play, needs to be overcome without valorising transgressive play. T.L Taylor (2006, 35-36, 50-51) has noted in relation to massively-multiplayer online game *Everquest* that the official rules of a game found in a manual provide only bare framework for how a game is actually played. The social practices of a game are learned in play, including what counts are cheating and griefing. Indeed, Taylor (ibid., 158-159) challenges game designers to be more open to the social labour of players in games when determining 'right' and 'wrong' playing. Each game played socially is moulded by its players. The griefers take this a step further without asking permission from the other participants.

Griefing and trolling take place within existing social systems. Understanding those systems well enough is a requirement for trolling as mistakes made and acting out by beginners are much easier to ignore. It is the wilful misuse of a system that is recognised as trolling (cf. Karppi 2013). In order to play a system one needs to know the system, and in many ways griefing is expert play. One goal of griefing is "lulz and win in relationship to seriousness" (Holmes 2013). Play and playfulness are the goal and they are the weapon. Yet what is being trolled, or griefed, need not be serious, as the mindset context matrix (Chapter 5) shows.

The approach to grief play I am proposing in addition to the ones listed above is to look at grief play as play and as the playing of new games. The kind of asymmetrical play where another participant is viewed as a target to be rattled is not new, and it certainly is not tied to just digital domains. However, computer-mediated communication, with its tendency to be recorded and available to large amounts of people, has made it more visible and has birthed new institutional forms of such play. Older forms have been marked down by academics and explanatory models have been proposed.

Brian Sutton-Smith discussed *games of order and disorder* in a relatively obscure speech from 1972. Games of order bring about order from chaos, mostly through rules, though it is common that orderly games break down into disorder – and that may be the fun part of a game. In games of disorder the disorder is enjoyed directly, although prolonging it can cause it to take an orderly form. Sutton-Smith's third group, games of order *and* disorder "contain both elements as a part of their explicit rule structure". He came up with this distinction when trying to account for an anomaly in game collections: classes of diversion, pastimes, and amusements that did not fit usual definitions of (orderly, rule-governed) games, such as *Ring a Roses*. These kinds of activities usually fall outside the scope of contemporary game studies precisely because they are very playful (paideic) instead of structured, ordered, and ludic. However, when considering the kind of play that takes place in online systems, Sutton-Smith's wider play-centric approach can be beneficial.[123] Grief play and trolling can be viewed as games of order and disorder. Although Sutton-Smith's examples are very different (he mostly talks about children's games), the underlying logic seems similar enough.

> This new category of order-disorder games raises more explicitly the question of the ways in which players develop their ability to constitute the original

[123] See also Henricks 2009 for a different take on the same topic.

> contract of co-operation to agree with the rules, which underlines all competitive games. (Sutton-Smith 1972, 23)

This is the core of grief play and trolling. All games, including competitive games, require collaboration in the larger frame. In order to compete the participants need to share collective intentionality and they need to recognise and act according to a shared understanding of the joint intention, be it a prizefight, a court of law, or a duel of insults at a cocktail party (Searle 1995, 24). What griefers and trolls do is ignore this shared intentionality – and further, they use the expectations created by it against the other participants. What in Sutton-Smith's examples was built into the game structures is dispersed amongst the players in grief play and trolling. In online environments much of the rule system is implemented in code; this means that even when the game-as-a-social-activity has collapsed due to the griefing participants no longer upholding the social gaming contract, the appearance of the game is still upheld by the digital environment (cf. Myers 2010, 144-157). Yet griefing and trolling do have underlying structures and a logic of their own that the targets (and bystanders) of griefing and trolling are encouraged or even forced to accept.

Sutton-Smith argues that games contain – in Victor Turner's (1969) terms – not just the structure, but also the anti-structure of society. In games of order and disorder, the disorderly aspects do not represent what is to be found in the surrounding cultural life. Histrionics, vertigo, and provocations towards impulsiveness are not in the normative order. Laughing at those who fall over, grimacing and leering, countering one's body, tugging each other's ears, and dunking players in water, are reversals of the normative order, not its exemplification. These are genuine anti-structures in Turner's sense. (Sutton-Smith 1972, 24)

Combining Sutton-Smith's approach with the idea that any system can be played allows us to think of grief play and trolling as things that are inherent at least in an embryonic state in all systems. Certainly the examples Sutton-Smith uses resonate with the stereotypical image of online trolling.

Indeed, Sutton-Smith (1972) offers a name for disorderly games where the aim is to make another person lose their cool (or, to use Goffman's 1974 terminology, *flood out*): *games of steadfastness*. His example is *Poor Kitty*, where one must not laugh until a certain signal is given, but grief play, where the aim is to make the other players visibly angry or get a rise out of them, certainly also fits in this category. Another example would be *The*

Dozens, a game of ritualised, often rhyming insults originating in African-American culture (Dollard 1939; Abrahams 1962; Ayoub & Barnett 1965). In the game players insult not only each other but each other's families – especially mothers. There are numerous variants of *The Dozens* under many different names, but at least some in some of them the aim is to get the other player to actually get angry.[124]

An interesting aspect of these non-digital games that recall griefing and trolling is that they tend to be less asymmetrical than the digital variants. A challenge can be issued that one might want to ignore, but an underlying cooperation is still needed for non-digital games of steadfastness to emerge. In digital realms griefing and trolling can function as boundary activities that divide the participants into those who get the playfulness and those who do not (Tepper 1997). Of course, even if one recognises the trolling, one might still prefer not to participate (or feel that one is not well-versed enough in the game being offered), and declining can be very difficult when faced with an overwhelming trollage.

Ultimately, Sutton-Smith rejects Turner's conceptualisation of anti-structure as a reworking of work-play dualism and offers his own formulation:

> Each system has different structural and anti-structural adaptive functions. The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure represents the latest system of potential alternatives from which the novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system requires it. We might more correctly call this second system the *proto-structural* system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (Sutton-Smith 1972, 25, emphasis in original)

Sutton-Smith further points out that this especially fits "dreams, fantasies, play, and art", but expresses uncertainty as to whether "games, humor, and ritual" are better served by the structure/anti-structure balance. Of course, he later developed a view of play as learning adaptive variability, flexible competences and repertoires (see also Sutton-Smith 1997, 214-231). Although Sutton-Smith's conceptualisation is very structuralist, it makes the idea that play and games are the source of ideas and culture a bit more concrete.

The idea that griefing is playful is a little different from the rhetorics discussed above under the header of "transgressive player". Although transgression can certainly be part

[124] Similar structured forms of playful insults and boasts are found in numerous cultures; indeed, even Huizinga (1938, 65) noted them.

of the playing, the emphasis is on griefing being playful play in and of itself. It uses elements from the context it is situated in, but it has a logic of its own. It does not merely subvert the play, but substitutes a new play-activity in its stead. As these play-activities become more established, they become games of steadfastness.

6.1.4 Entitled Assholes

Although griefing and trolling can be anchored and based in playfulness, and such acts carried out socially are play, it does not mean that they are nice or even acceptable in a wider social context. Indeed, griefing or trolling can be playful, transgressive, and creative as well as a culturally resistant, tactical activity, locked in a societal discourse – and still be undesirable, reprehensive, criminal, and abusive. Sufficiently advanced trolling is indistinguishable from real assholery. This leads to the seventh rhetoric of trolling and griefing: *entitled assholes*.

The rhetoric on entitlement is fairly prominent in popular discussions (especially online discourse) about trolling and griefing. Recently, academics have also started to use this rhetoric in public. In his popular philosophy book *Assholes: A Theory*, Aaron James (2013) forwards a constructive proposal on assholes.[125] According to him,

> a person counts as an asshole when, and only when, he systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people. (James 2013, 4-5)

James (ibid., 7-19) distinguishes between persons who have a stable trait (are assholes) and people who merely occasionally act out (in assholey ways). His theory is a moral one: the asshole feels that he is entitled to special treatment (such as skipping a queue or parking in a handicapped space) just because he feels it is justified. Thus in James' theory the asshole is a morally repugnant person, usually male, who imposes small or moderate material costs on others.

Although James describes numerous types of assholes, he does not discuss trolls or griefers specifically. Yet his theory fits quite well: griefers and trolls take special liberties

[125] Cohen (2014) has discussed the term *douchebag* in a similar manner, although his emphasis was more on race relations.

in regards to rules, they seem to believe that they are entitled to act the way they do, and pointing out the deviancy of the behaviour has little impact on said behaviour. Trolls and griefers are a subcategory of assholes. The concept of entitlement is particularly enlightening.

In ethological terms trolling and griefing, with their goal to elicit an emotional flooding out, can be seen as a move from social play to object play. The other (non-griefer) participants are not cooperated with as equal players, but they are treated almost as objects. This could be viewed as psychopathic, but such an approach would be misleading.[126] It is not that the griefers and trolls are unable to understand the interests of others, but rather that they feel that they need not care as they view themselves as entitled to special privileges.

This entitlement can flow from many sources. An expert player, someone who knows a game and its world inside out may feel entitled in comparison to new players just starting out. A person who knows his way around computers and the internet may feel entitled to play around with perceived newcomers, whether they are other people or businesses. An artist or a researcher[127] may feel entitled to ignore the rules of a game to make a point. This also explains why straight white men are overrepresented in trolling and grief play activities; they are more privileged. The fact that such an act of entitlement is recorded does not lessen its appeal, for the griefer is not afraid of getting caught. How could you get caught for something you are entitled to do? On the contrary: the stronger performative aspect brought on by an audience can enhance the entitlement. In a culture of candid camera, cable news pundits, and outrageous celebrities, the griefer may feel that he should be celebrated.

To sum up, grief play and trolling are often playful. They can be fuelled by special entitlement and the protective bubble of playfulness. They can take the form of social, shared play that has solidified into recognisable games, although they tend to leave most

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[126] Of course, it is possible that some griefers and trolls actually are psychopathic (cf. Buckels et al. 2014), but let us explore a more inclusive approach to trolling and griefing. As studies show that griefers and trolls are not a separate group, it is beneficial to understand what factors can encourage griefing and trolling. Of course, even the concepts of trolling and griefing are socially constructed and can be wielded as weapons (cf. Tkacz 2013).

[127] Academic trolling is hardly new. Alan Sokal (1996) submitted a nonsense article titled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" to journal *Social Text* and it was accepted. His aim was to expose problems in the humanities, but can certainly be viewed as trolling in the way Donath conceived of it.

people in the situation out of the shared play. In a way they are attempts to force others to play by one's own rules. They tend to be performed for the sake of performing them, but also for the enjoyment of others and for personal gain (such as status) in a griefer subculture. Griefing can challenge norms, sometimes in a creative manner, with possible tactical impact. It also exists in dialogue with community, society, and cultural values. However, it can also amount to harassment, abuse, and bullying for the target. For service providers and designers it is problematic behaviour. The seven grief play rhetorics are summed up in Figure 7.

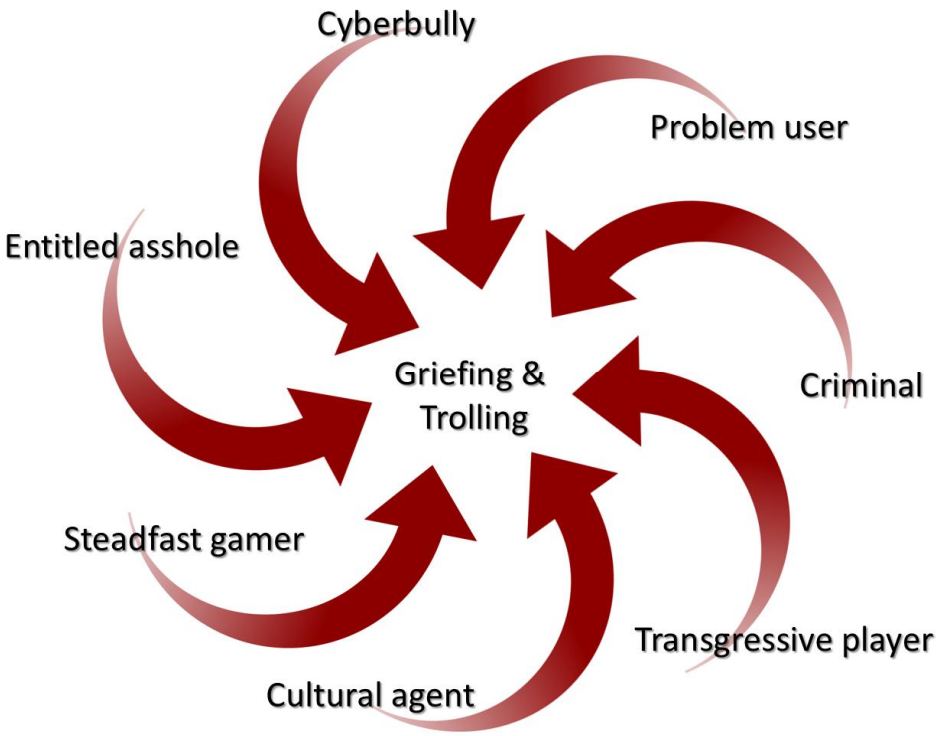

Figure 7. The Goatse of Grief Play. Grief play and trolling rhetorics summarised.

Trolling is also a boundary maintenance mechanism, drawing a magic circle that only the in-crowd can see. The play can take place in a Usenet group or a website like 4chan, for example, where the regulars are playing a game at the expense of the beginners. Different online cultures clash when trolling leaves a bounded area. One reason why trolling may have become more explicit during the last two decades is that when the user base was

fairly homogenous, the troll play could be understated. Now as users have very divergent backgrounds, trolling cannot afford to be too subtle or it risks being missed.

Griefing and trolling are increasingly seen as negative and they can be sanctioned, and even be illegal, but there are alternative social systems where such activities are encouraged and celebrated. Indeed, if one is part of the in-crowd, the trolling can be very entertaining – and witnessing trolling can be good for online business, as the (for some, playful) controversy creates clicks. When conducted in connection to a social context of fellow griefers, griefing is a playful game in itself, one that has rules and goals. Usually the goal is to get a rise out of other players. It can be organised and planned, meaning that these goals are shared by the griefers.

Griefers are not a separate group, but players who, in addition to playing the game according to the rules sometimes want to play with the rules, create completely new game-activities – at the expense of other players. Nor is there a strict line between griefing and not-griefing. All players act on that continuum, and slide between playing the game according to all the rules and playing with the rules and with other players.

6.2 Substudy 2: Gamification and Playfulness

Gamification, the idea of adapting elements found in games in non-ludic contexts, has received quite a bit of attention. It was first discussed in the service design industry and then increasingly in game-related academia. The notion of gamification is the latest manifestation of a long history of harnessing games and play for extrinsic purposes. The twist that gamification offers is that it is no longer whole games that are being used for goal-oriented purposes, but rather elements associated with games, as well as design insight from game designers. The idea of gamification has been celebrated and criticised, while its effectiveness remains unclear. One obstacle in adapting games and play for instrumental purposes is that often such endeavours lack a clear understanding of what games and play are.

This section offers a brief criticism of gamification and other instrumentalisations of games. This discussion is theoretically based, interrogating the subject from the point of view of games being grounded in playfulness. First, gamification is contextualised within a history of initiatives to develop and utilise telic games. This is followed by an

interrogation of the term *gameful* that is common in discussions of gamification. Finally, the stated foundations of gamification are evaluated in relation to the idea of playfulness.

6.2.1 History of Harnessing Games

Instrumentalisation of games, or harnessing them for external purposes, has a long history. In addition to instrumentalised play (Chapter 5), it is possible to craft artefacts and activities that use the forms, elements, and language of games and play for goal-oriented purposes. The current interest in serious games, games for learning, gamification, and other telic applications of games (for a categorisation, see Deterding 2014a) is only the most recent example of harnessing games. The current drive for telic games is marked by its primary interest in digital games. Although technological determinism, manifested as a dream of teaching machines (Jenkins et al. 2009) is only a few decades old, this latest drive is otherwise well in line with previous attempts. The serious games movement started to gain momentum in the 1950s and 1960s and strived to use games for purposes such as education, business analysis, and forecasting (e.g. Abt 1970; Fluegelman 1976; Ståhl 1983; see also Djaouti et al. 2011; Deterding 2014a).

During the 1990s and early 2000s there was a trend amongst management consultants to attempt to foster more fun at work. According to Mark J. Nelson (2012a) there were two driving ideas behind this interest: the attempt to elicit additional labour with non-monetary incentives, and the struggle to incentivise productivity that actually requires motivated and happy workers. Free labour that has been extracted under the cloak of play, especially online, has since been discussed as *playbour* (Kücklich 2005; Goggin 2011).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, both Turner (1986) and Makedon (1984) have pondered the idea that games are a way to bottle and control volatile play and playfulness. Similarly, Peter Fleming (2009, 58-59) has argued that management fun-sultants, mandatory play at work, and other top-down attempts to create "formalised informality" are partly about tapping the fun of employee-initiated, anti-authoritarian play. They are attempts to refashion the illicit play by the employees, which usually undermines the disciplinary realm of the office, into something useful for the corporation.[128]

[128] Similar patterns of illicit play are found in school environments (cf. King 1987) – and obviously there is also a drive to direct that play towards more worthy activities.

Again, the idea that the right kind of play can be an extrinsic reward that partly replaces money was not an invention of the fun-sultants. As capitalist monetary incentives were discarded in the Soviet Union, other incentives were needed. Competition (or 'emulation') and medals were one answer (cf. Lenin 1917; Stalin 1929). Nelson (2012a) sees Soviet workplace management as the most similar predecessor to current gamification – and its implementation as dystopian.

The idea of using games to teach has been particularly strong as well. Already a century ago there was reaction against the appropriation of games and play for learning. This was driven by a fear that educators and pedagogues, with their educational games, would destroy authentic children's play and play culture. Yrjö Hirn, an early Finnish scholar of play, expressed this idea eloquently:

> Regardless of their seemingly trifling smallness, children's games have been able to stay afloat in storms that have shattered mighty and important institutions. It has been said that they have lived longer than republics and kingdoms, and one can assume that they will in the future manage a great many upheavals – if only one could be certain that they can weather the excitement ushered by educationalists who have recently started taking steps towards developing them to better fit this day and age, and to be more educative. For there is always something mysterious about children's play, and adults cannot much tamper with them without destroying their eternal elements by their touch. […] perhaps they have succeeded in hiding in the notes of ethnologists, before the well-meaning pedagogues have scared them to death. (Hirn 1918, 65, translated from Finnish by the author)

Norman Douglas (1931), who documented children's street games in London around the same time, was similarly distressed about the "standardisation of youth" done with toys and playgrounds. Hirn and Douglas are interesting not only because they show that instrumental play has been around for quite a while, but also as they are critical of serious games precisely because they threaten to ruin play. The criticism of standardised schooling and tools can also be found in numerous treatises on creativity and inspiration (cf. Nachmanovitch 1990, 115-125),

Reaching further back, war games are an example of telic play. They have been used to teach tactics to officers at least since the 18th century (Peterson 2012, 204-303) and that practice, though constantly evolving, continues today. Indeed, it is perhaps schools that have most successfully and pervasively instrumentalised play and games, although historians of play in school are divided on whether schools provided opportunities for

play (instead of working, children would go to school where there are opportunities for play) or if schools mainly regulate agency in relation to play (prefabricated sites and forms of play, surveilled by staff) (Finkelstein 1987; also King 1987).

Although the motivations behind instrumental games have historically varied, the foundational logic has remained the same: there is something worthwhile in games that can be harnessed, it is just the idea of what this elusive ludic element is that has changed. Partially this is due to differences in the conception of 'game' or 'play', but not fully. The explicit goals behind harnessing games have varied from creating a setting where one receives instant feedback (Ritterfeld, Cody & Vordeter 2009), to providing meaningful learning-related activities for pupils to engage in outside the classroom that resonate with the culture of gaming (Jenkins et al. 2009), and from providing risk-free environments for simulating real-world complexities (cf. Abt 1970; Ståhl 1983), to using the 'fun' created by game-like interaction to make a menial task rewarding (McGonigal 2011). It is this last camp that gamification falls into, and that is under scrutiny here.

6.2.2 'Gameful' Gamification

Gamification usually refers to using game elements or game design to enhance or to make more attractive services and products that are not ludic. The use of points, badges, and leaderboards to motivate users are typical examples. Commonly used examples include *Foursquare*, a location-based mobile social network application that encourages 'checking in' to locations such as cafés, shops, and train stations, and some customer loyalty programs where one not only gets points for shopping, but those points are visualised somehow.

Sebastian Deterding and others (2011) have defined gamification as: "the use of design elements characteristic of games in non-game contexts" (Deterding et al. 2011). This definition is quite intelligible in the context of this dissertation, as it discusses ludic contexts and cultural conceptions of games in a similar fashion. However, the definition clearly situates gamification in relation to games, not play, as it is mostly about ludic, rule-bound, goal-oriented play. Deterding later explicated this very clearly:

> *Game*-ification is an unintentionally apt term for these systems as they are strictly speaking not about play – the open-ended recombination of behaviors and meanings in a safe space of 'as-if' and 'what if'. Rather, they set up rigorous

> systems of goals, rules, and quantitative feedback loops – in a word, games. (Deterding 2012, 123, emphasis in original)

Another interesting definition has been put forward by Kai Huotari and Juho Hamari. Their work approaches gamification not just with game studies in mind, but also in reference to service design and marketing. They were the first to forward any kind of academic definition of gamification (Huotari & Hamari 2011), although this first attempt was too broad to be useful. The second one, however, is worth a look. According to them, gamification is "a process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support user's overall value creation" (Huotari & Hamari 2012). Whereas Deterding et al. were looking at a finished product or service, Huotari & Hamari emphasise player/user experience. The difference is that in one approach *Foursquare* is an example of gamification, and in the other *Foursquare* can be used to gamify going to a bar. Similarly, in Huotari & Hamari's view playing a Eurovision drinking game while watching the *Eurovision Song Contest* is a gamification of the song contest.

Both analyses of gamification adopt the term *gameful* (and *gamefulness*) from McGonigal (2011). Gameful is offered as a complementary term to playful. Huotari & Hamari (2012) do not define the term (neither did McGonigal), although it figures in their definition, offhandedly summed up as "an experiential condition unique to games". Deterding et al. (2011) use gamefulness to signify the experiential *and* behavioural qualities of gaming.

Note that playful is used in this dissertation to refer to the mindset that has a biological basis, not the behaviour. In fact the concept of gamefulness does not comfortably fit the model forwarded in this work as it cannot easily be constructed with the basic parts outlined in chapters 3 and 4. Gamefulness as a mindset would be a subset of playfulness, but bringing in behaviour moves it to a larger category. Supposedly, it is something akin to adopting strict rules and goals in order to constitute a playful activity (telic in service of paratelic) and the activity produced, but not purely paratelic mindset or activities related to it. It is similar to Suits' (1978) notion of lusory attitude, yet again it also includes action. Since "players often switch between playful and gameful behaviours and mindsets during play" (Deterding et al. 2011), one assumes that 'gameful' refers to following the rules and 'playful' to being more improvisational, expressive, and free with and within the rules.

The concept of 'gameful' is built on the shaky cultural conception of 'game'. Thus there is a difference between instrumentalised play (discussed in the previous chapter) and the kind of (oxymoronic) instrumental play (activity that has always been telic) that many gamification, fun-sultants, and other telic game designers are after. In instrumentalised play there is already some play or game activity that is being instrumentalised. In serious games it is just the concept of games and their cultural expectations that are instrumentalised. This conceptual instrumentalisation may easily lead to activities that just feel instrumental; there is no connection to anything that was once playful. Indeed, note that neither of the definitions of gamification discussed here makes any claims about the 'fun' of the gamified services.

Both Deterding et al. and Huotari & Hamari do build on the work of McGonigal (2011), which is rife with the idea that 'games make us better', and in both there is an implicit message that games possess something that other services and products do not. Indeed, there is an ideological stance found in much of the literature on serious games and gamification that posits that games and play are somehow inferior unless they are useful. "If only we could find a way to elevate these frivolous activities by using them for a lofty goal," is what many of these works seem to imply. Although finding ways to make tedious tasks more motivating is certainly a worthy goal, this kind of attitude implies a lack of respect for the underlying phenomena of play and games.

It is difficult to adapt an activity – or parts of it – if understanding of the activity is poor. For example, the idea that games and game play are somehow automatically intrinsically motivating (Ritterfeld et al. 2009) can be a shaky ground on which to build assumptions. The challenge for gamification is that it is quite difficult to separate game play as an activity from the use of other systems. Indeed, this was the problem with Huotari & Hamari's (2011) first definition, which discussed "a rules-based service system that provides feedback". The existence of a continuum between games and other systems is obviously important for adapting elements of games to non-ludic contexts: if the two were not similar enough, then adopting insights from one to the other might be much harder. Yet in order to understand how to move a service on that continuum towards game-like things, analysis of what makes games be game-like is needed.[129]

[129] There is scarce empirical research on gamification. What there is has been reviewed by Hamari et al. (2014), who found that the studies lend support to the usefulness of gamification, although with strong limitations. Context matters, as does the user/player: gamification works better in playful contexts and some people are more likely than others to be interested in it. Lieberoth (2014) has found

6.2.3 Directing Playfulness

The difference between a telic system and a paratelic game is not in the formal structure, but in the way a person, a user, a player engages with it, in the cultural understanding of it, and the history of the activity (see Chapter 4; also Jenkins et al. 2009). Game play certainly can be intrinsically motivating – performed for the sake of performing – whereas the services and products looking for a boost from gamification can be useful, but tedious. It is also possible for games to be boring for some users in some contexts and mindsets, while usage of the service can be rewarding in itself. One way to look at what gamification actually seeks to foster and direct is to look at playfulness. Understanding playfulness would then be central for any attempt to create telic playing, at least if the goal is to create something that is intrinsically motivating.[130]

The idea that play is intrinsically motivated and thus falls beyond the reach of behaviour modification through extrinsic motivations is hardly new. Indeed this criticism, in relation to play, was voiced by Michael J. Ellis in his 1973 book *Why People Play*.

> The current lack of critical analysis in the realm of motivation to play is startling by its absence. Play, or at least free-ranging activity, is an extensive behavioural category, yet researchers have shown little theoretical concern. Practitioners continue to base their work on the outmoded theories that abound in the field or to adopt an atheoretical approach. The problem is clear. There is little or no satisfactory body of theory concerning the motive to play, and hence what play really is, existing in the minds of those making decisions influencing the play behaviour of our people. (Ellis 1973, 6-7).

Of course, it is quite possible that whatever it is that motivates users of gamified services has very little to do with play and playfulness. Instead, it might make more sense to turn towards the psychology of motivation and of interest, and look for those other elements that are particularly prominent in games, but can also be found in other activities. One might follow the line of enquiry that interests Holopainen (2008) and look to mammalian cognitive neuroscience in relation to games, or concentrate on completing and collecting as key issues (Reiss 2004; Sotamaa 2010). However, it is the prism of playfulness that is looked through in this work.

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evidence that simply framing an activity as a game will make the activity more pleasant. He has proposed the term 'framification' to account for this.

[130] It is not uncommon to either sidestep playfulness completely, or to idealise it (cf. Juul 2005; McGonigal 2011). Playfulness can be treated as a constant, mystified as an unknowable, or its understanding reduced to 'fun'.

SuperBetter (McGonigal 2011, 135-142) is an interesting game-for-health to consider as an example. In it the player creates an alternative identity and goals for herself for the purpose of helping her recover from an injury or illness. *SuperBetter* follows structures and rhetorics familiar from games: the player takes on missions (e.g. recruiting help) and lists power-ups (things that make you feel better). The goal is not to just complete the missions for their own sake, but to entice the player into a playful mood, and to keep her positive. Following the rules of *SuperBetter* in a telic mindset makes it all seem trivial, patronising, and condescending. Yet if the game is able to shove the player into a paratelic mindset, that can make carrying out chores relating to getting better easier. Depending on the mindset *SuperBetter* is either fun and meaningful or a tedious chore. The impact of *SuperBetter* on its players has not been properly studied.

Huotari & Hamari (2012) make a similar point when they problematise the concept of game as experiential: "the existence of game is dependent on the subjective perception of the player/user." They argue that a non-game context cannot be gamified by adding game elements, as both non-game contexts and game elements are experiential. On this I rather disagree: cultural concepts and artefacts can be identified regardless of personal experience with any specific one of them. The concept of playfulness solves the issue. It is an experience of a playful mindset that the designer of games and gamifications is after. The difficult question is how to get there. One of the first things to accept is that the design choices that work for one player in one context may not work for another somewhere else.

Salen and Zimmerman (2004, 168) discuss game design as *second-order design*: "As a game designer, you can never directly design play. You can only design the rules that give rise to it." Even this fails to capture the whole challenge: creating something that can be culturally recognised as coded as play does not mean that the participants are successfully shoved into a playful mindset. It is possible that the situation simply uses elements related to play, like dice, colourful tokens, and game controllers – or leaderboards, progress bars, and merit badges. Encouraging playfulness is one way to measure if a game is successful. In gamified services this is particularly challenging, as extrinsic motivations need to be hidden behind intrinsic ones. If enticing a playful mindset fails, gamified services can seem like particularly monstrous versions of themselves; not only must the user carry out a task, she must also surrender her dignity by pretending that it is enjoyable and fun. This does not mean that playfulness cannot be used as scaffolding for a telic endeavour (see Article I), only that doing so cannot be automated by a system that is expected to produce the same results regardless of the player and the context.

Gamification is attempting to harness the positive experience of playfulness by adopting elements of games in non-game contexts. However, games are a cultural category, whereas playfulness is an experiential one. Tinkering with the former with no clear plan for the latter leads to success only through happenstance. Playfulness is paratelic, without external goals. Adopting the form of playing for telic uses risks losing, or never fostering, that mindset. Playfulness is not located in a system, a service, or an artefact, but in the player.

6.3 Substudy 3: Conspiracy For Good

Conspiracy For Good was a 'participatory drama' that was played online, on mobile phones, and on the streets of London in the summer of 2010. It was a multifaceted game event, combining elements of different types of *pervasive games* (Montola et al. 2009, 7-23, 31-45; see also Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 578-581; Dena 2009, 171-174), particularly *alternate reality games* (Martin, Thompson, & Chatfield 2006; Montola et al. 2009, 37-40), and *live action role-playing games* (Montola 2008), but which also had a component of downloadable *puzzle games* played on mobile phones. It drew from several different game design traditions, as well as from a number of relatively niche player cultures – all the while targeting a slightly more mainstream audience of players than was usual for pervasive games at the time. Due to its hybrid nature, its numerous gamer culture contexts, and arguable novelty for many of the participants, *CFG* struggled to have a unified, or even equifinal, set of game rules and a shared understanding of what kind of a game it was.

CFG launched as an online alternate reality game in late April 2010 with online videos. It culminated in July and August with four live events in London. In addition, three free puzzle games were available for Nokia phones, unlocking clues for the larger *CFG* storyline. The story of *CFG* was told not only in distributed form through the game events, as is typical in ARGs, but also through well-produced *webisodes* that summed up the story thus far and attempted to attract new participants. (For a more through description of *CFG*, see Stenros & Montola 2011b.)

In this section the case of *Conspiracy For Good*, in particular the live event part, is analysed as an example of how rules and expectations are negotiated and managed in novel games. The analysis is grounded in data gathered during the development and runtime of *CFG* (see Articles V and VI). In the following, the *CFG* project is first broadly described. This

is followed by a discussion of the varied player expectations. Finally, the role of interactive actors, *ractors*, in negotiating and facilitating different expectations is analysed. In this section, I concentrate on the live events of *CFG* and approach them as games. The marketing aspect is all but ignored, while some implications of *CFG* as a transmedia story are discussed.

6.3.1 Project Conspiracy For Good

It is difficult to say exactly what *Conspiracy For Good* was. Looking at it through the lens of ludology, it was a collection of games that came together to form a larger game, tied together by a distributed, transmedia narrative. It contained numerous parts that could be experienced separately. The three puzzle games on mobile phones, *Exclusion*, *Mainframe Liberator*, and *Inclusions*, could all be appreciated without the wider narrative context. These mobile games could easily be identified as mobile puzzle games, and their ties to any larger alternate reality game could be ignored. Each of the four live events (*Get Her In!*, *The House of East End*, *Following the Fallen*, and *Belly of the Beast*) in London, drawing heavily from different genres of pervasive games, was supposed to be constructed so that anyone could join. Here the execution of self-containment was not as successful as with the mobile games. Not knowing the story hindered comprehension of the live events, especially in the later events. Then there was the ARG framework, which supposedly tied the story together, but even that could be appreciated in smaller parts. Also, some of the stunts (such as the hoax of leaking 'real' government files to peer-to-peer torrent site The Pirate Bay), which were designed to pull in players, could be appreciated with minimum context as instances of trolling.

Furthermore, the cultural understanding of what makes something a larp, an ARG, or a pervasive game was not at a level where potential participants could know what it was that they were getting into. Each of these terms could be dissected and analysed on its own, and indeed even the meaning of these terms for devotees of each brand of playing has been in flux. For example, ARGs typically have a distributed narrative, and following them fully is usually something only the most devoted players are able to do. However, that narrative is usually (re)constructed on a site somewhere. In *Conspiracy For Good* this was done by the production team in the form of videos published on YouTube. Usually, the distributed narrative is a key feature in transmedia works such as ARGs, but in *CFG* the narrative was presented as a coherent whole by the production team. The hybrid nature of *CFG* meant that even those players used to larps, ARGs, or pervasive games

did not know what to expect. *CFG* was marketed by its producers with terms like 'participation drama' and 'social benefit gaming', which appealed to novelty, but did not clearly communicate what *CFG* was supposed to be.

In addition to the parts of *CFG* most familiar to ludology, there were elements that did not have strong ties to the ludic aspects or the diegetic story. The players were encouraged to be 'good', and to donate to certain charities, some of which were connected to the events of *CFG* and some which were not. *CFG* was supposedly benevolent gaming (cf. McGonigal 2011) – game playing that makes the world a better place. And indeed, the producers of *CFG* did make notable donations to charities, but the players did not report that the game had any effect on their charity work. It also tied into celebrity culture by hiring known musicians in key roles in the narrative, playing fictionalised versions of themselves. Also, after each live event there was a party. All the players were invited as were local party circuit people. There was an open bar, music, and artists. Often there was also merchandise given to the players, such as t-shirts, and – after the last event – even mobile phones. Although not part of the diegetic narrative of the *CFG* game, these events were very much part of the marketing push that was the reason for the existence of the *CFG*. The game, the parties, and the charity work were there to - in addition to getting people to play, to party, and to help – create publicity for Nokia.

Christy Dena (2009, 30-55) has discussed how artistic and economic concerns come together in transmedia productions. *CFG* is a clear example of this. There was a clear goal of telling an interesting story, facilitating fascinating game play, and more generally providing meaningful experiences. Yet the production was also driven by economic concerns: *CFG* was a collaboration between Nokia, Tim Kring Entertainment, and The Company P. For Nokia it was a marketing push to promote some of their services (such as then recently launched Ovi store and the new Point & Find technology), for Tim Kring (the man behind the American superhero televisions series *Heroes*, which had some transmedia spin-offs such as an ARG and comics) it was a way to get further into transmedia storytelling, and for The Company P a possibility to bring their expertise on pervasive games and Nordic larps to a wider audience and possibly to create a franchise.[131]

[131] Previously The Company P has both participated in building on existing franchises (they created the ARG *Dollplay* that tied into the television series *Dollhouse*) and they had kind of built one of their own. Previously, two research prototypes of pervasive larps, *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* (Jonssons et al. 2006; Montola & Jonsson 2006) and *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (Stenros et al. 2007; Jonsson et

> The promotional function of these commissions impose certain constraints on the design process (which are not specific to branded entertainment): including the choice of mediums, the need to appeal to certain demographics, the need to facilitate excitement around and therefore media coverage of the project (a "media event"), the need to direct audiences or players towards a product or service, and the need to integrate the brand(s) and brand message into the fictional world. An illustration of these influences in action is the need to integrate proprietary technologies within a fictional world. (Dena 2009, 46)

The three main bodies behind *CFG* not only had differing economic and artistic goals, but they also had different production cultures. The Nokia people had an understanding of marketing for users and developing mobile games for players, Tim Kring Entertainment had a background in broadcasting for spectators as well as some experience in transmedia franchises, and The Company P specialised in game mastering for participants (cf. Denward 2011, 163). This created differing views as to what was being done for whom.

Conspiracy For Good was a very ambitious project. It was an attempt to build a ludic transmedia franchise to facilitate meaningful experiences for its participants through game play, narrative, and charity work, while at the same time marketing certain Nokia services. It aimed to bring together mobile game players, ARG enthusiasts, larpers, London taste makers, fans of certain musicians, devotees of pervasive games, and many others in a new kind of participatory dramatic experience. As a game it attempted to draw on cutting edge niche play cultures and the latest research into pervasive games, and translate those into a form that was accessible and enjoyable for a more mainstream participant. *CFG* did not succeed in all of this, but considering the scope of the project, it did pull off a quite an interesting whatever-it-was.

6.3.2 Expectations and Participation

In the following I concentrate on one aspect of *Conspiracy For Good*: the live events organised in London and the player expectations of them. The live events each attracted 80-180 participants. The majority of the participants reported that they had previous experience with some form of pervasive games, yet afterwards they struggled to come up with a comparable game experience. Although the players reported that *CFG* was not

al. 2007; Nordgren, 2010), as well as the transmedia production *Sanningen om Marika* (Stenros & Montola 2011a; Denward 2011) were all tied together in a connected diegetic world.

a completely new experience for them, they had very different backgrounds to contextualise it in. Some mentioned television series (such as *24*), others drew on game cultures, while some compared it to participatory theatre. The most common points of comparison were pervasive game festivals such as Hide&Seek and the ARG/larp hybrids that The Company P had previously produced.

The expectations these different participants brought to the work varied greatly. Some expected to be entertained, as in a traditional theatre or a trade show. Others thought this would be participatory theatre, where the audience moves around or perhaps has even some small tasks to carry out. Others were looking forward to a technology-assisted street game, running around while using an application. Some thought of the event as a mystery to be solved, an interactive live ARG puzzle. Some treated it all as a live action role-playing game, where each participant has a specific role and they are to treat everything as part of the fictional world. There simply was no shared understanding of what the event was supposed to be.

Pervasive games, even technology-assisted ones like *CFG*, are different from digital games or traditional games as they allow for much more player action, since affordances need not necessarily be implemented in code. The players can use the environment, their resources, and their bodies to come up with solutions and approaches that the game designers did not anticipate. These so-called *infinite affordances* (McGonigal 2006) expand the agency of the participants, and the approaches players adopt can be widely divergent. This contributes to the lack of shared understanding of what the game is.

The players did have a shared understanding that *CFG* was to be played, but it was not clear what kind of a game it was supposed to be – or if indeed it was more of a performance. The different traditions that influenced the expectations imply different notions regarding realism, story logic, aesthetics,[132] the importance of coherence,

[132] One key difference regarding aesthetics is the idea of a coherent, uninterrupted work. This is the aesthetic of the stage and the screen, where the viewer is not given explicit instructions on how to interpret the work. The cues are included in the work itself. In games, players are given rules outside of the playing itself. Indeed, these rules help constitute the work. Without them the game does not emerge. (Digital games are a curious exception in this as the digital environment exists even if players do not know the rules. The task of facilitating the playing is given to the computer.) For more on the difference between the aesthetics of spectating/performing and *aesthetics of action*, see Stenros (2013), MacDonald (2012) and MacDonald & Stenros (2010).

participant agency, game mechanics,[133] and so forth. One participant might expect a team-based puzzle hunt with relatively clear non-interactive performances (akin to cut scenes in digital games), with a clear winner declared at the end, while another participant might be looking for a meaningful exploration of the theme of colonialism and corporate malpractice in a fully immersive role-play environment.

One design ideal that guided the creation of *CFG* was *seamlessness* (Montola et al. 2009, 144-145). The game was not supposed to refer to itself as a game, and the players were supposed to pretend that it was all real. This is a design ideal strongly linked to alternate reality games, where it is known as 'this is not a game' aesthetic (McGonigal 2006; Szulborski 2005, 19). There are different levels of seamlessness, with some having a winking relationship to reality, others having sites for discussing the game on a meta level, some do not tolerate any acknowledgement of gaming during runtime, and even projects that never admit to being games (aka *reality games*, see Montola et al. 2009, 44). Seamlessness has been featured in previous productions of The Company P (Stenros et al. 2007). The design ideal, when put into practice, is quite problematic. Aside from all the ethical problems of not clearly marking something played in the public as a game (Montola et al. 2009, 197-213; Stenros et al. 2007), it creates particular challenges for the playing.

Accepting certain shared constitutive rules is required for the social fact of a game to emerge. That is rendered very difficult if the players are denied the possibility of agreeing on, negotiating, and sharing the rules. Play can emerge, but games require at least some rules. Pervasive games that attempt to hide their ludic nature and seamlessly integrate into everyday life cannot easily establish a common enough ground for participants to have a shared experience – at least not unless there is a clear enough agreement before play commences. In *CFG* there was not. Even in games that have been fairly successful at creating a shared ruleset ahead of time, special circumstances not covered by the rules emerge – especially if games are played in a pervasive fashion integrated into the unpredictable fabric of everyday life.

[133] Cheung et al. (2013, 284) have discussed how to use explicit genre and name of the game to position a game. They use *B.U.T.T.O.N.* (Wilson 2012) as an example: it is marketed as a folk game and the full title is *Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally OK Now*. Neither the title, nor the supposed genre of *Conspiracy For Good* helped in managing expectations regarding gameplay.

Conspiracy For Good was not aiming for complete seamlessness. It wanted to bring in players unfamiliar with the genre and to create marketing buzz. The website had some instructions:

> 1) Suspend your disbelief! When you are in the story, it's for real. Take it seriously.
>
> 2) Don't peek behind the curtain! There is no point in checking sourcecode, hacking or hunting down inaccuracies that reveal the story as a fiction. We're not hiding that fact.
>
> 3) Select your own level of engagement. Join us to take action within your own comfort zone, meet like-minded people online and in person, and have some fun too. Lurk and watch, solve mysteries online, play casual games or go all in as a physical participant in the climactic London events that will take place in mid summer, 2010. But whatever you do, make your participation a part of the story. Post about the good work that you are involved in and help the Conspiracy For Good become real for all of us! (*CFG* website, quoted from Stenros & Montola 2011b, 58)

These instructions are about adopting the right attitude, but not about the rules of the game. In the ARG online play part and in the live events, instructions for what to do were given diegetically, within the fiction. This is problematic, since instructions given by a character cannot be trusted in the same way (the character might be lying), the character might have such a high status that players cannot ask for clarifications, the rules need to be conveyed in a way that fits the character (which lowers clarity), the character usually is not available for all players all the time for double-checking, some players do not know the genre of gaming well enough to recognise the double message of story content that carries game mechanics, et cetera. After the first videos *CFG* did explicitly recruit players to a game, and at the live events there was staff to handle sign-ups, help with the technology, and hand out t-shirts. Yet the rules of play were mostly given within the fiction.

The aesthetic of seamlessness in *CFG* did expand to cover player-player interactions. Although there was no official forum to discuss the game rules with the game organisers, it was possible to discuss the game with other participants. Indeed, players better versed in the game mythos ended up instructing some of the more casual players. Furthermore, the game organisers recruited some of these players as 'ambassadors' and thus did not only condone, but encourage such activity.

The participants at the live events of *CFG* did not have a shared expectation of the genre of the work, nor of the rules, when play commenced. Too much was left vague. Here, two areas have been considered: the lack of shared understanding of the framing of the work, and the lack of clear rules. There were other elements that created friction as well, especially relating to narrative coherence: friction between online play and live play, friction between narrative and gameplay, friction between genre expectations and actual play, friction between collective and competitive play, and friction between fiction and production. These are explored more fully in Article V.

Having the exact same expectations, as well as an understanding of the cultural context and genre and rules of the game is not a prerequisite for a functioning, enjoyable, or meaningful game. Participants invested in a shared experience will work towards overcoming discontinuities and technological problems (e.g. Drozd et al. 2001; also Aylett & Louchart 2003; DeKoven 1978). As discussed in the previous chapter, when the rules are broken down to their components, it might be that they are in conflict. In virtual worlds and other online environments there are very different play agendas taking place side by side. The 'same game' can be tweaked on the fly and be played by house rules. In pervasive games – especially alternate reality games – it is not uncommon to structure participation in such a way that different participants have completely different experiences.[134] However, although there is tolerance towards different sorts of approaches, playing the same games becomes increasingly challenging when socially shared rules are not established before play commences and there is no forum for negotiating the rules while play is ongoing.

6.3.3 Facilitating Players with Ractors

Conspiracy For Good was a complex structure of subgames, connected by a distributed narrative. Different parts had different rules – and to a large extent were played by different player groups. There were central resources, most important amongst them the webisodes that pulled all the parts together; however, there was room for quite a bit of player interpretation.

[134] For example, the list of participants involves those at the core of the experience – the most dedicated players who solve the hardest riddles – all the way to the spectators, to the person who participates a few times, to those who only read about the game in mainstream press. This *onion model of participation* (Montola et al. 2009, 120-121; Dena 2008) can have many layers and usually the inner ones create content for the outer ones – and try to lure them deeper.

To a large extent the designers of *CFG* were aware of the challenges brought on by varying expectations. They had built numerous structures to help players get on the same page. However, the aesthetic choice of building a seamless game and thus not having a separate time for explaining and learning rules, made that obstacle more challenging. Explaining the story thus far with the webisodes was helpful in letting the participants at least know the backstory. However, the slick, well-produced videos did not explain game mechanics or specific goals, and their style did not always guide genre expectations in the right direction.

Basically, the friction in the live events was between player agency and *CFG* organiser goals. The players did not have a clear image of what they could do and how their actions would impact the game. The organisers had a goal to create a certain kind of experience and a narrative and they had to keep the game moving in the right direction. The key element in doing this, in addition to technology, game design, webisodes, chosen physical environment, and genre conventions, was the use of *ractors*.

In CFG production lingo, ractor meant an interactive actor. *CFG* featured a number of characters the players could interact with. During the online ARG phase there were also *simulacra people* (cf. Stenros & Montola 2011a), fictional characters you could have a relationship with. During the live events, most of the characters introduced online showed up in the flesh. In addition, a number of other characters were introduced. These characters were played by ractors and they worked to foster a relatively unified playing style. (For a more in depth discussion on non-player characters and actors, see Article VI.)

Six functions of the ractors were identified in Article VI as facilitation, content creation, character work, entertaining, playing, and safeguarding. For fostering a coherent experience the most important was facilitation of play. The ractors would mentor the players, showing by example what was possible, providing a sort of tutorial. They would also manage runtime expectations in other ways by signalling what kinds of player contributions were most welcome and what actions fit the genre logic of the piece.

Thus, although the players could not negotiate the rules of the game directly and openly with game organisers, they could do so diegetically with the ractors. Interpreting the diegetic coded information was something the players had to learn – and in this the player ambassadors helped. Negotiation of the rules was not impossible during runtime, but just a bit more difficult, requiring a specific type of literacy relating to the logic on

seamless games. Teaching how to read diegetic information through diegetic methods was thus the crux of many of the problems in *CFG*.

Participants and ractors view events simultaneously as play and not-play. This bisociation helps navigate the boundaries of the game. For the players it is not constantly clear which parts are diegetic and what relates to the production. The ractors help with this: they stay within the fiction, but sometimes give answers that have one meaning in the diegesis and another one outside it. The ractors, on the other hand, need to assess the situation they are in constantly both from a diegetic and logistic points of view: the character needs to be consistent enough while the game must move in the right direction at the right pace.

Players also tend to like to play with the boundaries of the game fiction. They 'test' the ractors to see if they really know what the characters they play have been up to previously online and try to get them to trip over the various plot lines. The ractors have also reported that it is not uncommon for the players to try to get the ractor to drop their character. This is done by all kinds of players from the very dedicated ones (who to want to ensure that the production is flawless) to the ones who have been dragged into the game by their friends (who might just want to mess with the ractors). In a complicated game like *CFG*, it is quite likely that the players do not comprehend the total design. In playing the game they will also play with the game, looking for its boundaries and testing its limits. Even if players are not out to wreck the game by playing the system or griefing, by exploring the designed game space they will bump against its borders. This is the reason behind the second rule on the game website: "Don't peek behind the curtain!"

The rules of a game need not be ironclad at the moment play commences, especially if facilitation of the playing is not delegated to a computer system. It helps if the understanding of the rules (on the numerous levels of rules discussed in the previous chapter) is equifinal. However, if there is too much room for interpretation, then the social play starts to unravel – or never comes together at all. The agency brought on by pervasive play is one of the draws of this types of game, but few players actually enjoy a (relatively) free setting. The goal is not always to bring about a situation where everyone is playing the same game – and in pervasive games this is often a conscious design choice as the onion model of participation outlines – but expanded player agency brings about not just fun new content for all other players, but also the possibility for game jacking and playing the system. At the very least players seem to love looking for the edges of the design.

Based on the data collected, the six functions of ractors were identified as facilitation, content creation, character work, entertaining, playing, and safeguarding (Article VI). However, based on this data it is not possible to evaluate how well those functions were performed in *CFG*. It is apparent that the work of the ractors did have a major impact on fostering cohesion and focus in play situations. *CFG* shows that the problems created by differing expectations, the lack of equifinal rules, and the lack of forum to discuss them can, to a certain extent, be mitigated with the use of ractors.

6.4 Conclusions

The three substudies presented herein are quite different. The one on griefing and trolling is a review of existing literature on the subject and builds a synthesis by analysing the different rhetorics used. A contribution is made in the form of the synthesis built, but also by identifying an angle of approach that has not received as much attention as the others, one that benefits from the framework of constructionist ludology. The second substudy, the one on gamification and playfulness, is theoretically oriented. It questions, based on the framework built, basic assumptions of gamification in particular, and telic games in general. The third substudy is a case study based on primary data about a specific project, *Conspiracy For Good*, and brings clarity to the practical problems of player expectations, rule negotiation, and facilitation of play. The aim here is twofold: to better understand the practice of playing a game like *CFG*, and to tease out design insights for future use. Again, the framework introduced helps the analysis.

The analytical framework of constructionist ludology was not fully ready when the original articles were published. It was quite well developed when Article I (dealing with gamification) was written, but the analysis of the two other substudies emphasise different aspects from the ones highlighted in the articles. The largest change has happened between Article III and the analysis of griefing and trolling presented here. That is also the reason why that substudy is longer and more thorough than the other two.

These three topics were chosen, quite obviously, because they are present in the articles included in this dissertation. However, another reason for concentrating on these topics is that their differences highlight how the approach of constructionist ludology can inform different sorts of analyses. Thus these three substudies are conceived of as a taste of how the framework can be applied in analysis.

The three substudies presented here in this chapter, when compared to the versions published as articles, also tell part of the story of the work behind this dissertation. The analysis started with practical substudies and the drive to make sense of complex ludic phenomena. As the work progressed, the need for an underlying theory became apparent. A satisfactory ready-made, existing theory could not unearthed, thus one needed to be built. The constructionist ludology, as proposed by Montola (2011) and based on the work of Searle (1995) seemed most promising. It provided a useful framework for understanding the construction of games as social facts. Yet it was not foundational enough; more work was needed to understand the foundations of games in play and playfulness, as well as play and playfulness outside of games. As a result, this contribution to the framework of constructionist ludology was developed. Now in this chapter the process comes full circle as some of the cases that inspired the search for a foundational theory are analysed with the one that was found and built.

7 Contribution and Introduction to the Articles

> To think of congressmen or the general public hearing about scientists fooling around, boondoggling, telling dirty jokes, perhaps, at government expense, is to break into a cold sweat. In fact, the average scientist has enough public conscience not to want to feel he is doing this even if no one finds out. (Isaac Asimov, "On Creativity", 1959/2014)

The contribution of this work to game studies and ludology is threefold: Firstly, there is the foundational theoretical contribution. I have developed and presented a conceptual framework for understanding the foundational issues of playfulness, play, and games. Secondly, there are the contributions to mid-level theory. Two models for understanding social play were presented: one for understanding sociability in games based on the number of participants, and another for making sense of play situations based on the context and the mindsets of the participants. Thirdly, these theoretical tools were used to tease out insights relating to three practical substudies: grief play and trolling, gamification, and *Conspiracy For Good* – showing that the analytical tools developed can yield interesting findings.

The most important contribution in this dissertation is the presented framework for understanding playfulness, play, and games. The framework is built on an external reality: the foundations of the framework are provided by an understanding of humans and other animals, provided by psychology, ethology, and biology. The tendency of animals to engage in playful behaviour and the existence of a playful mindset provide the brute facts on which, aided by the awareness of playfulness and through social construction, the more complicated conceptualisations of play and games are built.

The framework draws together and builds on earlier research, but much of this earlier work has existed in a disconnected form. Indeed, building bridges between game studies and other fields, as well as positioning the current study of games in relation to other research efforts into games and play during the last century has been an important part of the synthetic work. The framework presented is an original synthesis that extends and elaborates earlier attempts. Although the framework has implications for all fields discussing play and games, the contribution is aimed at game studies. In that chosen

context, the analytical separation of playfulness and play as well as the incorporation of this division into the framework of constructionist ludology are especially important additions. My aim has been to provide a theoretical ground that delimits playfulness, play, and games without disconnecting them from the world around them. The boundaries surrounding play have also been untangled and the mental, social, and cultural boundaries of the psychological bubble, the magic circle of play, and the arena were clearly articulated.

As a whole, the framework is constructed to be inclusive rather than limiting: the framework handles animal play, children's play, and adult play; it can be used to understand games, both digital and non-digital, and there is room in the framework for enacting play in a goal-driven mindset. It postulates a boundary between play and non-play, but does not see play as exceptional, or as fundamentally detached from everyday life. It is not designer-centric, and can handle games both as artefacts and activities.

A key part of the framework is the separation of playfulness and play, or the mindset and the activity. This kind of division is seldom done as it requires experiential first-person access to the act of playing. When researching children and animals, such access is not available. This division is important in drawing out the analytical difference between the biological aspects of play from the socially and culturally constructed understanding of it.

The framework also tears down the barrier between good play and bad play. Play flows from playfulness, at least historically, and playfulness is not always proper. Sometimes it behaves rudely, destructively, and provocatively. This neutral attitude towards playfulness is important: too often values attached to the outcomes of play acts inhibit delimitation of play phenomena.

The dissertation has also presented further models that bring clarity to smaller issues. One of these is for categorisation of social play based on the number of participants. Again, the biological basis is discussed, this time in the form of the engrossment involved when doing things together. Sociability and social play in a gaming situation are postulated, as are the complex structures of rules of play and how they are negotiated. A model was also presented for instances where mindset and context do not align, or when more than one playful activity is operating in the same context.

The framework, as all frameworks, is a model. It is not what it represents, but a simplification. As such it is normative, even political. It is built on a realist ethological foundation, guided by research done in numerous fields such as psychology, sociology, and game studies. However, in the end it is a convenient model that fits the facts. Its usefulness depends on whether it helps make sense of and explain phenomena relating to play, if it generates interesting new questions and hypotheses, and if it can help designers gain a deeper understanding of the work they do.

The substudies presented in the preceding chapter showcase some of the analytical premise of the framework. The challenges faced by gamification and other serious games are reframed in the analysis as stemming from the confusion between game as a cultural artefact, and playfulness as a mindset that need not be connected to it. Grief play and trolling, on the other hand, show a side of play that is often seen as negative, even as not-play. The analysis here helps explain the creativity and enjoyment of acts of griefing without profiling the participant. The challenges in *CFG* were very much rooted in the lack of explicit game rules, but also in the lack of a shared understanding of what type of activity it was that people were engaging in together. Playfulness of different participants was channelled quite differently, since the technology for harnessing play—game—was not a unified construct amongst participants.

7.1 Introduction to the Included Papers

Next in this dissertation, this introduction is followed by six previously published articles. These articles either provide earlier versions of the thinking presented in this dissertation, or delve deeper into the topics that have been discussed in abridged form in the introduction, or both. In the following, each article is introduced and contextualised.

7.1.1 Papers on Playfulness, Play and Games

The two first papers form the foundation of the argumentation in this dissertation. They explicate the approach to playfulness, play, and games as well as the personal, social, and cultural delimitation of play. Both articles began life as chapters in the introduction of this dissertation, but were condensed into articles as the syntheses produced grew into original contributions. These two articles were written partly in connection to the

Creation of Game Cultures: The Case of Finland project, funded by the Academy of Finland, and partly due to two grants awarded by the Finnish Cultural Fund.

I Stenros, Jaakko (2015): "Behind Games: Playful Mindset as Basis for Ludic Transformative Practice." Forthcoming in Deterding, Sebastian & Walz, Steffen P. (eds.): *The Gameful World. Approaches, Issues, Applications.* The MIT Press; Cambridge. 201-222.

This article explains playfulness as a mindset and then tracks the effects of that idea for harnessing play for allotelic purposes. It was written, based on an invitation from the editors, for a book on gamification and the ludification of culture called *The Gameful World*. The book chapters have been through peer-review.

Behind Games was the last article included in this dissertation to be finished. It draws together many of the research strands that I have been working on over the years from live action role-playing games and online play to the ontology of play and its delimitation. In a way, this article is a coda for the dissertation, as seen through the prism of gamification.

II Stenros, Jaakko (2013): "In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play." *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, Vol. 1 No 2, 147-185.

The article reviews the numerous social, mental, and cultural boundaries related to games discussed in research literature and juxtaposes them with an analysis of the concept of the magic circle and its criticism. The article disentangles the interconnected experiential, social, and material aspects of playing and the related delimitations, and produces an integrated synthesis—as well as proposing a new meaning for what the metaphor of the magic circle stands for.

An earlier version of the article was published in the proceedings of the Nordic DiGRA 2012 conference (Stenros 2012).

7.1.2 Papers on Modelling Social Play

The second group of papers offers models of social play.

III Stenros, Jaakko (2010): "Playing the System. Using Frame Analysis to Understand Online Play". *Proceedings of FuturePlay 2010*, May 6-7, 2010, Vancouver, Canada. DOI: 10.1145/1920778.1920781

The article develops a theoretical basis for understanding play that takes place in online systems – using both designed ludic apparatus and participant-created play styles. It develops the idea of approaching a play situation as the combination of personal mindsets and social contexts, as originally outlined by Stenros, Montola and Mäyrä (2007; 2009), and specifically looks at situations where the common understanding and proceedings of a situation are intentionally broken.

This paper was written in connection with the Social Play among Casual, Cross-Media Contents (SoPlay) project at the University of Tampere. The project, funded by the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes), researched play in online social spaces, and focused on the so-called social games on Facebook that became hugely popular during the 2009-2011 research period (see also Stenros, Paavilainen & Kinnunen 2011; Paavilainen et al. 2013).

IV Stenros, Jaakko, Paavilainen, Janne & Mäyrä, Frans (2011): "Social Interaction in Games". *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, Vol. 4, No.3, 342-358. DOI: 10.1504/IJART.2011.041486

The article charts the numerous approaches games and playing, depending on the number of participants, can have on sociability around the game artefact, and the role social play has in the act of playing.

This paper was also written in connection to the Social Play among Casual, Cross-Media Contents (SoPlay) project, with an earlier version of the paper (Stenros, Paavilainen & Mäyrä 2009) published in the proceedings of the MindTrek conference. As the scientific leader of the project, Mäyrä shaped the questions asked and the analytical framework of the study. He also contributed to the writing of the original article. Paavilainen immersed into the world of social online games, and participated in theory formation and writing of the articles. Paavilainen was also the project manager for SoPlay. Stenros participated in all parts of the study, developing and contextualizing the model presented, and was the lead writer of the paper.

7.1.3 Papers on Practice: Conspiracy For Good

The two final papers report on the study of *Conspiracy For Good*, an alternate reality game heavily influenced by live action role-playing, which was played online and on the streets of London during 2010. The ephemeral game was documented for posterity and practical design insights relating to it were teased out.

> V Stenros, Jaakko, Holopainen, Jussi, Waern, Annika, Montola, Markus and Ollila, Elina (2011): "Narrative Friction in Alternative Reality Games: Design Insights from Conspiracy For Good." *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play*. Sept 14-17, 2011, Hilversum, The Netherlands. Also published in (2012): *SPACE–EVENT–AGENCY–EXPERIENCE*. Open Access E-Publication of the DREX Project. Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre.

This article describes the production of *Conspiracy For Good* (see also Stenros & Montola 2011b) and, based on extensive field work and participant interviews, charts frictions between different expectations relating to a project that combined online play (in the mould of alternative reality games) with on-street pervasive gaming that draws both from the traditions of live action role-playing games (especially of the Nordic variety, see Stenros & Montola 2010) and the genre of *smart street sports* (Montola et al. 2009, 40-41). In the article, five frictions are identified and discussed, and design insights elucidated.

The authors of the paper first collaborated as part of a three-and-a-half year EU-funded project, IPerG (Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming), which ran from September 2004 to February 2008. We reconvened for the study of *Conspiracy For Good* as it was the kind of game IPerG was interested in studying and creating, but the technology and the funding for a large-scale event like this had not been feasible just a few years earlier. Much of the theoretical framework for understanding pervasive games used in the paper was developed during IPerG, as summed up in the book *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design* (Montola, Stenros & Waern 2009; see also Montola 2012; Holopainen 2011; Ollila 2009).

The research design for this study was created in collaboration between the five authors. Jussi Holopainen was a participant observer in one of the live events; he conducted approximately a fourth of the interviews, was heavily involved in the coding and analysis of the interviews, and he participated in writing the article. Annika Waern participated in the discussions with the design crew before the event launched, conducted the online

survey, analysed it, and participated in the writing of the article. Markus Montola participated in the discussions with the design crew before the event launched, participated in the analysis of the data, and contributed to the writing of the article. Elina Ollila was a participant observer in one of the live events and conducted approximately a fourth of the interviews. Jaakko Stenros participated in the discussions with the design crew before, during, and after the event, monitored online player forums during and after the event, participated in two of the live events, conducted approximately half of the interviews, was heavily involved in the coding and analysis of the interviews, and led the writing of the article.

VI Stenros, Jaakko (2013): "Between Game Facilitation and Performance: Interactive Actors and Non-Player Characters in Larps." *International Journal of Role-Playing*, No 4, 78-95.

The last paper explores the practice of facilitating live and online play in *Conspiracy For Good* with ractors (interactive actors) who perform NPCs (non-player characters). Six functions the ractors carry out are identified and discussed.

Similar to the previous paper, this one also builds on the work conducted in connection to IPerG, especially relating to the prototype pervasive larp *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (Stenros et al. 2007) and runtime game mastering (Jonsson et al. 2006), but is also connected to work relating to Nordic larps (Stenros & Montola 2010) and hybrid forms of larps and ARGs, such as *Sanningen om Marika* (Stenros & Montola 2011a; see also Denward 2011). The research questions relating to facilitation of playing and performance of characters in *CFG* were earmarked for the author. The research material relating to *CFG* in general, discussed in the previous paper, provided context for the additional six interviews conducted by Stenros. A two-part interview, first via email and later in person, originally conducted in relation to *Sanningen om Marika*, was also used in this article – and the email part of that interview was conducted by Markus Montola.

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Articles

7 BEHIND GAMES: PLAYFUL MINDSETS AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES

Jaakko Stenros

To understand how a "ludic society" or "gameful applications" might function, we need to understand what playfulness, play, and games are. In current attempts of harnessing games for external goals, games, play, and playfulness are often treated interchangeably. Also, the emphasis is usually on game products as systemic artifacts. Yet psychology, sociology, and performance studies tell us that these things are very different, and that the activity of playing is deeply important. As will be shown, ignoring these differences means risking failure, and the activity of play holds many more interesting features untapped by a narrow view on games as artifacts. Therefore, this chapter analyzes concepts around play and games from the perspective of the player and breaks them down into experiential, social, and cultural parts. In a culture where playing games is ubiquitous and where games are seen as a model to be learned from in system design, it is necessary to separate the mindset, the socially negotiated activity, and the culturally recognized artifact. The analytical divisions introduced will be especially helpful in understanding the nature of playfulness and its role in harnessing games for external goals, such as learning, therapy, or advertising.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first discusses the analytical separation of a playful mindset, the socially constructed activities of playing and gaming, and the culturally recognized artifacts and sites of playing and gaming. The second part addresses two misconceptions surrounding play: idealization of play, and the conflation of brute playfulness and socially constructed play. The third part discusses harnessing playfulness for transformative practice.

Playfulness, Play, and Games

At the core of play and games is the mindset of *playfulness*. The impetus to play is older than language, culture, even mankind (Fagen 1981). Indeed, it is biological in nature. As this playfulness is shared, it becomes socially framed, *play* emerges, and as these shared forms are codified, we call them *games*.

The Spirit of Play

First, let us separate the playful mindset from the socially shared act of playing. This distinction is important for understanding how play, although rooted in biology, appears in many different and distinct cultural forms—and how those cultural forms can end up being devoid of playfulness. To understand how playing a game can be tedious work, for example in professional sports, and how work can become deeply and gratifyingly playful, as in research and art sometimes, we need to differentiate analytically the social from the psychological.

An observer can often identify when animals are playing and can sometimes even join in. Playing is often visible and shared, and the tendency to play is ingrained in mammals, possibly even a much greater number of animals. Human play is continuous with non-human animal play, and in order to understand human play, other species need to be taken seriously (Burghardt 2006).[1]

According to anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1955, 315–317; see also Eastman 1948, 15–17) (social) play is only possible if the participants are capable of *meta-communication*. The meta-message of play, the statement that makes play possible by framing it, is "These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote." Bateson exemplifies this with play-fighting: it is possible to play at fighting so that it looks like fighting, while it is clear that it is not-fighting. Furthermore, there is a double negative: play fighting is also not not-fighting (Schechner 1988, 7).

Playfulness and play(ing a game) do not completely overlap either conceptually or experientially: it is possible to follow the rules of a game without being playful just as playfulness does not need to have the formal structure of games (Makedon 1984; cf. Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 302–305). *Play acts* can be analyzed according to structure, process, experience, function, ideology, and frame, whereas what in this article is called *playfulness* is "a mood, an attitude, a force" that erupts or something one falls into (Schechner 1988, 4–5, 16; see also Riezler 1941; Makedon 1984, 32).

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 10) uses the term *autotelic*[2] to describe activities that "require formal and extensive energy output on part of the actor, yet provide few if any conventional rewards." He terms the intrinsically rewarding autotelic experience *flow*, and argues that it can be experienced when an actor's skills are in balance with the challenge provided by the activity (36, 49). Csikszentmihalyi notes that games and play are strongly autotelic, as they provide a structure for flow, but work can also provide a platform for such experiences. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that everyday life can be flow-inducing if one is capable of mentally restructuring it correctly. He gives artists, poets, and scientists as examples of people who are able to "play" anytime and anywhere (53, 193–194). Csikszentmihalyi sees games and play as structures that have the function of inducing flow (191) and playfulness (and flow) as separate from that:

> By downplaying the structural distinction and emphasizing the experiential one, we are better able to deal with the *esprit de jeu* that Huizinga, Caillois and many others have held to be the central issue of the phenomenon of play. Yet the same scholars have been unable to study this "spirit of play," because they fell back on the obvious structural distinction and looked at games instead of the experience of playfulness. Playfulness, or flow, is not limited by the form of

> the activity, although it is affected by it. (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 185–186)

Csikszentmihalyi is not the only psychologist who has made a clear distinction between play (a structure) and playfulness (an attitude or a mindset). Michael J. Apter (1991; see also Kerr and Apter 1991) has developed a general approach in psychology called *reversal theory* and a specific structural phenomenology of play. As people can experience playing a game as frustrating and work-like and sometimes working can feel like play, Apter (1991, 21) firmly believes that "[p]lay cannot be defined externally by reference to objective criteria; it is a phenomenological state." Reversal between phenomenological opposite states is what reversal theory is all about, and in relation to play the theory identifies two ways of "being in the world," two mindsets or meta-motivational states: *telic* and *paratelic*. Telic is a serious mindset, where the activity is engaged in for a purpose. Paratelic (cf. Csikszentmihalyi's autotelic) is a playful state, and engaging in the activity is itself the goal (or, as in games, a goal is adopted in the service of the activity). Other characteristics of the paratelic mindset include emphasis on immediate gratification, spontaneity, freedom, willingness to experiment, disposition toward make-believe, and the tendency to prolong the activity if possible.

Both flow and reversal theory are based on a phenomenological approach, and that establishes a clear difference toward more social or developmental approaches. For example, both models understand sex mostly as play, something we engage in while in a paratelic mindset. Although sex has an important biological function, it is mostly experienced for its own sake and for immediate pleasure—and approaching it as work, in a telic mindset, can rob it of pleasure, or prevent it from being performed fully (Apter 1991; Frey 1991).

Playfulness is innate to the player. It is present in the moment and can be sparked in an instance, change drastically at any time, and can disappear without warning. Though it is possible to try to foster and use playfulness, it cannot be fully tamed. Playfulness is often visible and its tone is meta-communicated to others present in a social situation—and this meta-communication can even carry from one species to another.

This leads us to a central paradox of gamification and other applications of playful activities for external goals: the mindset that gives rise to playing and games is deeply connected to being performed for its own sake. Playfulness is paratelic, without external goals. Adopting the form of playing or certain elements of games for serious, telic purposes always runs the risk of losing that mindset. Playfulness is not located in a system or an artifact, but in the participant.

Constructing Play and Games

The phenomenological nature of playfulness separates studies of adult human play from studies of child's play and animal play, as in the latter the first-person experience remains out of reach. Another difference between animal and human play is that humans not only play, but they are *aware* that they play. Human consciousness and intentionality (cf. Searle 1995, 227–228; see also Montola 2011) make it possible to construct, based on the brute fact of playfulness, the social facts and institutional facts of playing.

Play refers to activity. It is often visible and can be carried out alone or be socially shared. Though

usually discussed with the noun *play*, it makes more sense to approach it with the verb *playing*, as it is actively created, performed in the moment. It is rooted in a playful mindset yet influenced by social construction. It is possible for a person to oscillate between a playful and unplayful mindset quite fast resulting in a dual consciousness of the social situation as both viewed as playing and as not playing.

In this kind of thinking, games are a more formal version of play, when placed on a continuum. This has been most famously verbalized by sociologist Roger Caillois (2001/1958, 27–35), who discussed *paidia* (free play) and *ludus* (formal games). Before the systemic turn in game definitions, sparked by digital games and Chris Crawford's (1983) influential work, games were defined as activities. For example, Clark C. Abt (1970), social scientist, systems engineer, and a pioneer of games and simulation for learning, saw in games the possibility for a reunion of action and thought. He saw physically inactive thought and mentally inactive action as diseases of civilized man (4). Games, and especially serious games simulating social processes using role-play, can integrate action and thought. His definition of game is curious:

> Reduced to its formal essence, a game is an *activity* among two or more independent *decision-makers* seeking to achieve their *objectives* in some *limiting context*. (Abt 1970, 6–7)

This definition is purposefully broad. Abt (1970, 7) notes that "most real-life activities involve independent decision-makers seeking to achieve objectives in some limiting context." Instead of attempting to draw a clear distinction between games and other game-like activities, Abt chooses to emphasize this similarity. It fits his project of developing serious games that enable learning. He lists activities that can be viewed as games: war, political and social situations, elections, international relations, personal arguments, and almost all business activities (9).

This idea of approaching all kinds of situations *as* games underlines the similarity of game systems and other systems—a perspective omitting the element of playfulness.[3] In this, Abt is representative of a tradition of approaching games as formal activities (cf. Avedon and Sutton-Smith 1971, 7; Suits 1978, 41). Playfulness and games are two separate things: one is the form of an activity, and the other is a state of mind. It is possible to participate in games without a hint of playfulness. Yet there is a connection between the two: in a way games are technologies for prompting, fostering, and harnessing playfulness, yet they are often born out of playfulness even if over time that connection may have been lost.

Toys and playgrounds are similar to games in that they are designed to foster playfulness through *affordances* (Norman 2007, 66–69; also Norman 1988, 423). Toys and playgrounds are looser, have less limitations, and the user is, at least in theory, free to manipulate them according to her whimsy (Crawford 1983). Toys and playgrounds may be interactive, but they have no built-in goals: a ball is a toy, whereas *soccer* is a game. It is also worthwhile noting that while animals play with objects, humans are "the only species known to fashion objects for use in play by its offspring" (Fagen 1981, ix). Thus, though object play is based in biology, constructing instruments meant for play—toys—is a more complex process.

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1961, 20), who has studied games as part of the everyday life, writes that "games place a 'frame' around a spate of immediate events, determining the type of 'sense' that will be accorded everything within the frame." This concept of frame, which he adopts from Bateson

(1955), describes something that is social, shared, and provides meaning in an *encounter*, a social situation. Goffman sees these frames guiding our understanding of social situations not just in relation to play and games, but in all (face-to-face) social interactions (see also Goffman 1974). Goffman (1961) discussed how games are *engines of meaning* that enable events, roles, and identities to emerge that would not be understandable or meaningful in any other frame (e.g., offside in soccer, *atari* in Go)—only to show that this phenomenon is not limited to games but general. For example, only in the context of the street do terms like *pedestrian* or *motorist* become meaningful.

To sum up in the language of John Searle's (1995, esp. 63) social constructionism, inherent playfulness has a biological basis, and thus playfulness is a *brute fact*. Playfulness is not subject to intentionality and consciousness—or human representations—but is biological. This ontologically subjective fact is based on a mental state. Some foundational forms of playing seem to also be inherent to animal play, such as playing with the body, chasing, and hiding. More complicated forms of playing, say tag, require social construction.[4] Consciousness and (collective) intentionality make it possible to construct the social fact of play, and playing games. There is overlap between the biological and the social, but distinction is relevant. Furthermore, once a form of playing has been established, it is possible to sever the link between the mindset and the form of an activity.

The challenge for gamification is that it can be difficult to separate gaming as an activity from the use of other systems. Of course, this continuum between games and other systems is important for adapting elements of games to non-ludic contexts. The question becomes: how to foster playfulness?

Attempting to utilize the form of games and play for telic uses such as learning, therapy, or gamification of services or products typically means that one is attempting to direct playfulness. Understanding playfulness is thus central for any attempt to create telic playing. However, it is common to either sidestep playfulness completely or to idealize it in a way that can have serious implications for applications of games in nonplayful contexts (cf. Juul 2005; McGonigal 2011). Approaching games and play disconnected from playfulness often means that playfulness is treated as a constant. The ephemeral nature of playfulness can be paid lip service, while actually it is either mystified as an unknowable or its understanding is reducing to "fun."

Misconceptions Surrounding Play

Two ways in which play is commonly understood too narrowly are the idealizing of playfulness as a universally positive, liberating, fun, and character-building activity (cf. Henricks 2006, 2–7) and the labeling of playing the system as deviant. Developing a fuller understanding of play is important as both of these misconceptions lead to problems not just in theory but in practice when game elements are placed in nonplayful context.

Idealized Play

Play is not always nice. Numerous scholars have challenged the idealized notion that play is always

positive and respectful of other participants. Instead, play has been characterized as obligatory, of negative affect, rigid, and dysfunctional (Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne 1984). The division to playfulness and play is helpful in understanding the full spectrum of playing.

Playfulness gives rise to both "good" and "bad" play. "Bad play" is transgressive, disruptive, disrespectful, and rules-defying—and it is central to the understanding of play in general (Myers 2009). Indeed, deliberate and provocative rule-breaking (i.e., *negativism*) is a strategy for increasing both telic and paratelic arousal (Apter 1991, 18–20). This kind of play "involves taking pleasure in the feelings which accompany acting in a way which contradicts internally or externally imposed directives and norms" (McDermott 1991, 98; see also Alfrink's discussion on transgressive skateboarding in this volume). Though the psychologists associated with reversal theory note that it is possible for this kind of behavior to become pathological, they stress that even negativism is widespread and common—and a part of normal human experience (Kerr and Apter 1991). If play is to be understood, researchers cannot turn a blind eye toward its darker expressions.

The incorporation of "bad play" into the theory of play not only questions the approaches that want to see playing as learning, but also positions many definitions of play, like that of Salen and Zimmerman (2004) of play as free movement within a more rigid structure, as definitions of "good play." Play that is transgressive, illegal, transformative, and harmful seldom fits within those definitions (it would need to be, for example, more like free movement within *and challenging* a more rigid structure). It recalls Huizinga's (1938) idealistic formulation of play as free; no matter what rigid structure attempts to surround play, that structure can be played with. David Myers (2009) connects this transgressive and transformative play to Sutton-Smith's (1997, 229) *adaptive variability*—it is bad play that reinforces an animal's behavioral variability. Play can be revolutionary, creative, and transformative precisely because it is free, but that does not mean that everyone will like it. Play can be a threat to a conservative—and that containing play within the rules of games is a way to attempt to control it (Makedon 1984, 40–43). Victor Turner has made the same point:

> Playfulness is a volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence, which cultural institutions seek to bottle or contain in the vials of games of competition, chance, and strength, in modes of simulation such as theatre, and in controlled disorientation, from roller coasters to dervish dancing—Caillois's "ilinx" or vertigo. Play could be termed dangerous because it may subvert the left-right hemispheric regular switching involved in maintaining social order. Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, of freewheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious, "bread-and-butter," let alone "life-and-death" processes of production, social control, "getting and spending," and raising the next generation. (Turner 1986, 31)

Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984, 311, 319–320) went so far as to say that the twentieth century illustrates the gradual socialization of children's leisure: from folkways to the adult-influenced recreation, sport, and play. Indeed, such is the danger of play that they playfully conclude their article by suggesting that the whole idealization of (certain types of) play is an elaborate way of confusing the functions of play with those of normative learning.

"Bad play" has also been discussed as *dark play* (Schechner 1988, 12–14; 2006, 118–120) and *deep play*

(Bentham 1802/1894, 106; Geertz 1973, 432–433; Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 74–101; Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne 1984, 314–316). Deep play is playing where there is a very high psychological, physical, or monetary risk involved. Examples of this can be illegal extreme sports, having unsafe sex for kicks, or drunk driving on a dare. Dark play, in contrast, "subverts order, dissolves frames and breaks its own rules—so that the playing itself is in danger of being destroyed" (Schechner 1988, 12–13). Thus, though dark play is quite similar to what Myers calls "bad play" (or *anti-play*), Myers believes that play is paradoxical by nature and always survives the paradox—thus even if you dark play with something, he believes that the play survives.

We rarely consider teasing as a form of playing (as suggested by Henricks 2006, 6), though often the interrogated schoolyard bully will defend by saying that it was only play. Similarly, in gamification we prefer to look at instances where games have helped us take out the trash or vacuum, as in Chore Wars, and rarely consider that the playful applications are just as like to be used for, say, spreading the propaganda of the Israeli Defense Forces as they are bombing Gaza.[5] Playfulness can be creative, emancipating, and liberating, but it is also unexpected, disruptive, and destructive. Games can be a way to tame the force of playfulness, but not without the cost of losing at least some of what is so precious about it. However, it is important to remember that one cannot invoke just the "good kind" of playfulness, but must deal with the whole package.

Playing the System

The analytical separation of playfulness from play and games allows not only for the understanding of situations where games are devoid of playfulness, but also brings into focus playfulness that takes places in systems not recognized as games. Any system or procedure comprising formalized social action can be played if it is engaged with in a playful mindset.

Consider SuperBetter (McGonigal 2011, 135–142), a game where the player gives herself an alternative identity and goals that help her recover from an injury or illness. SuperBetter is structured in straightforward missions like recruit help and list power-ups (things that make you feel better). Yet the real goal of the game is to entice the player into a playful mood and to keep her positive. Following the rules of SuperBetter in a telic mindset makes it all seem trivial, patronizing, and condescending. Yet if the game is able to shove the player into a paratelic mindset, that can make carrying out chores relating to getting better easier. Depending on the mindset, SuperBetter is either fun and meaningful or a tedious chore.

The connection between playfulness and games can be rejected, both intentionally and by accident. Unplayful gaming, like professional sports, gold mining on virtual worlds, and boring serious games, can combine telic mindset with the social context of a game. Similarly, a serious social situation or an online system can be engaged with a playful mindset.

Social play is based on collective intentionality (Searle 1995, 23–26), which means engaging in a cooperative behavior where beliefs, desires, or intentions are shared. Each act by an individual is part of a larger collective activity. A player that rejects the collective intentionality of playing together with shared rules and instead, knowingly, begins to play by her own rules transgresses. I have written about this more thoroughly elsewhere (Stenros 2010a) but will condense the part of the discussion relevant for the topic at hand.

The player who rejects collective intentionality can *play the system*, meaning that instead of trying to achieve the explicit goal of the game (or other system) by the appropriate measures, she starts to interact playfully with the system, taking advantage of loopholes, bugs, hacks. This activity can be found both from games and from telic systems (e.g., taking pains to optimize character creation in role-playing games or creating a large amount of links to a webpage in order to raise its positioning in online searches—colloquially known as Google bombing). She might be trying to reach the goal by any possible means disregarding the artificial limitations of the game or she might be subverting the functionality of the system or game by choosing a new goal and then attempting to achieve that. She can also start to *play the players*; ignoring the game or system and its rules and simply start playfully interacting with the other players—without letting them in on the new rules of play. Usually, the goal of this kind of playfulness is to get a rise out of the fellow players. Heckling, griefing, bullying, trolling, and masquerading as a different person are all activities where one person is (often playfully) misleading other participants, fabricating (see also Goffman 1974, 83–123; Montola, Stenros, and Waern 2009, 257–278) the social context for the other participants. If numerous people share the same (new) goals and rules and start playing the system together, this creates an alternative social context, a new frame of playing. They start *gaming the system* together.

This phenomenon also questions how practical the idea of viewing games as objectively grounded in game rules is (e.g., Makedon 1984, 32). All participant may not be playing by the same rules even if they are interacting with the same game product. This is particularly true in digital games where the facilitation of the system is managed by a computer.[6]

All systems can be played, and indeed all systems are played by some of their users (case study 7.1). Nonessential systems, systems that have less of an impact on the participant's life, are probably played more, but playing the system is rampant from bureaucracy to online recommendation systems. Additionally, most systems give a possibility for playing other players, and as some players are more interested in following their own rules and disregarding official purposes, local norms, and good manners, it is very difficult to eliminate such actions without removing all possibilities of interaction. Neither type of playing requires any official gamification, as the paratelic playfulness is located in the participant. Furthermore, adding elements culturally coded as game-related into a telic system can encourage playing the system in ways not wanted by the facilitators.

Harnessing Playfulness

Playfulness offers a slightly removed perspective. It is possible to attempt to exploit playfulness for many things, such as enjoyment, learning, and personal change. Furthermore, it can render the constructed fabric of the social world visible and thus enable hacking reality. All systems can be and are played with, whether such actions are deemed positive or negative.

In this section, we will look at how playfulness has been harnessed for personal change and for social

Case Study 7.1

Playing Online Systems

Summary

Playing online systems is a disconnected group of activities users participate in when they are playfully using a system such as a search engine or a wiki in a way that does not line up with its stated purpose. The users play the system by abusing its rules and the possible bugs in it. The goal is to have fun, gain an advantage, or make a point, and usually such usage is detrimental to the effectiveness of the system.

Facts and Figures

There are no official figures on how much people play with online systems, as much of this toying around is personal and never visible to others. However, there are numerous cases where the results of such actions have become visible and gained attention (cf. Tatum 2005). Additionally, many online companies tweak their recommendation algorithms to combat reverse engineering and the optimization it brings (cf. Wesch 2008).

Gameful Design Elements

Telic online systems seek to prevent misuse (including unwanted playing) of their systems by hiding the rules. However, once the rules have been reverse engineered, they can be played with. Some examples:

- *Recommendation optimization* Any online system that uses a recommendation system, such as Google, Flickr, or YouTube, is subject to speculation as to how recommended pages, images, or videos are selected. If the algorithm is understood, it will be used to push one's own material—and to tease, bully, and smear.
- *Social engineering* Knowing how people tend to act helps in playing the system. For example, ensuring that the thumbnail of a video on YouTube has a bikini-clad woman on it gathers more clicks (Wesch 2008).
- *Rule abuse* Many rules can be abused if one is not trying to use a system for its designed purpose. In Wikipedia edit warring (cf. Sumi et al. 2011), the target is to have the page lock, as it does after three reverts, while reflecting one's opinions.

Issues

The challenge is creating a system that is easy to use and play with (in the encouraged manner), yet difficult to play with (in the unwanted manner).

Outcomes

Playing with online systems can be seen as pranks and vandalism, as tactical use of power (cf. de Certeau 1984), as a social movement (Tatum 2005), and a pastime. Yet as online systems are constantly updated, the results change. Playing with the system is a part of the online world, something that online companies take into consideration.

Related Cases

In online games such as World of Warcraft, analyzing the mechanics in order to gain advantage is called *theorycrafting* (Mortensen 2010). All systems are played, not just online systems, from taxation to Google. When playing the system becomes established and socially shared, it becomes *gaming* the system (cf. Stenros 2010a). Playing with players is also related: The idea is to use the system just to get a rise out of individuals, for griefing, trolling, and for online bullying.

change. To understand these better, it is helpful to look first at two examples of how foundational forms of play have been built upon.

Examples: Pretend Play and Embodied Play

Foundational forms of play, such as playing with the body (locomotor play), pretend play, and rudimentary forms of social play (chasing, hiding), are not just encountered in humans, but in animals as well. Such basic forms of play are not too reliant on abstract concepts, social construction, and collective intentionality.

Pretend play means pretending "as if" something was different than it is. In role-play, this "as if" is applied to pretending to be something one is not. Both are very common in human cultures, and already very young children engage in make belief (cf . Yardley-Matwiejczuk 1997; Paley 2004). Pastimes from theater to role-playing games, masquerades, and historical re-enactment are based on this.

Role-play is a fundamental activity for humans and a powerful way of communicating different points of view. Indeed, communicating certain types of instructions can be very difficult without relying on the concept of role-play, as giving the instruction of "you are a secret agent" without pretend play can show (Ericsson 2009, 242). The role-player can gain insights from adopting another perspective and possibly develops empathy for this role. Though obviously, the quality of the role-play as a simulation is greatly dependent on factors such as pre-existing knowledge the role-player has.

Instead of using role-play just for the paratelic fun of it, the pretend play mindset has been applied for all kinds of telic functional uses. Therapeutic psychodrama, based on the work of Jacob L. Moreno, has found its way into traditions of clinical psychological and psychiatric work. A number of socio-psychological role-play experiments of the past century have become infamous. Role-playing–based tools have also been packaged in the field of innovation, analysis, and design (e.g., de Bono 1985/1990). Different types of training simulations from customer service to military application are common. Less obvious examples include fake online personas used by brand management agencies to create the illusion of grassroots activity (i.e., astroturfing) and the fantasy scenarios offered by sex workers.

When role-playing is enacted bodily, not just as a mental exercise, there is an additional element (case study 7.2). The player inhabits the point of view as her body becomes the body of the role-played character or functional role. In live action role-playing games (i.e., larps),, this is called first-person audience (cf. Stenros 2010b). The player performs not just for others, but also to herself. Also, she only witnesses the things her character is present to witness. This visceral perspective-taking may further work to build empathy with other perspectives through embodied performative enactment—though there is no consensus in the research to back that claim.[7]

The relevance of the body of the player should not be underestimated. This chapter has adopted a player-centric point of view, focusing on the experience of the player and her state of mind; yet the player is not just her mind. Playing with the body, swirling, jumping up and down, dancing, masturbating, somersaulting, spinning until dizzy, farting, stretching, making faces, trying to lift just one eyebrow or to lick your elbow can all be very enjoyable. This kind of play, which Caillois (2001/1958, 23–26) termed *ilinx*, requires neither tools nor coplayers.

Case Study 7.2

Just a Little Lovin'

Summary

Just a Little Lovin' is a live action role-playing game, where approximately sixty participants immerse into and enact characters in a shared, fully scenographed setting. Just a Little Lovin' is about the beginning of the AIDS crisis in the New York gay community in the early 1980s. The larp lasts four days, and its central themes are friendship, desire, and fear of death. As part of the Nordic larp tradition (Stenros & Montola 2010) where larps tackle serious subject matters, emphasis is placed on the first-person experience of a participant and a believable story-world. Just a Little Lovin' offers an embodied and ephemeral peek into a specific time and place.

Facts and Figures

Just a Little Lovin' had been played three times. Originally created in 2011 by larp designers Tor Kjetil Edland and Hanne Grasmo, who have worked with HIV/AIDS prevention and LGBT issues, the larp has since been staged by other producers.

Setting and Mechanics

In two neighboring cabins in upstate New York, Independence Day is celebrated annually. A group of gay men and their friends party in one, and in the other a group of cancer survivors, many of who were hippies and swingers, gather to celebrate life. The larp comprises three acts, each portraying a consecutive Fourth of July party: 1982 is streamlined as the time before the epidemic, 1983 addresses the epidemic and the lack of knowledge about the virus, and 1984 shows a world where the HIV test existed but no remedy was available. Each party has a similar structure (arrival, barbecue dinner, assorted program, fireworks, sleep, breakfast), which provides a framework for playing out the drama (cf. Saita 2012). Each act starts around 5:00 p.m. and goes on until 11:00 a.m. the following morning. Between the acts, mechanics are used to determine who gets ill and dies, and the players negotiate what has happened during the year. In total, the larp lasts four days, counting the preparations and debriefing. It has mechanisms for simulating sex and playing scenes not set at the party.

Gameful Design Elements

Nordic larps often feature fully immersive environments with believable characters as interfaces. There is no script, though the characters and their motivations can be preconceived by the larpwrights, and game mechanics are often used to structure the action. Typical elements of Nordic larps are as follows:

- *Character ownership* Each player portrays a character fully by pretending to believe to be that character (cf. Pohjola 2004; Montola 2012). Each player is trusted to interpret the character and can improvise new elements provided that they do not conflict with established fiction. As Just a Little Lovin' is about the fear of death, permanent character deaths are frequent.
- *First-person audience* The character is the player's lens, performance, and private show. In Just a Little Lovin', the plurality of viewpoints enables breaking the timeline; along the main timeline there are pockets where alternative moments in time are played out in a black-box environment.
- *Inter-immersion* Larps are socially constructed and co-created in the moment. Participants do not just pretend to their fictional personas, but also that everyone else is who they claim to be.

Case Study 7.2
(continued)

- *Positive negative experience* Although a character's experience is negative, the experience of the player can be positive (Hopeametsä 2008; Montola 2010). Just a Little Lovin', with its strong themes and appropriate simulation techniques, helped its players feel in an embodied way lust and utter hopelessness, and perhaps even gave a glimpse of what it might have been like.

Issues

The Nordic larp community has been accused of snobbishness and taking larping too seriously with works that address cancer, immigration, and consumerism. Nordic larps are mostly played by privileged, well-educated, middle-class whites, and an element of misery tourism may be involved. Yet, such criticism can be leveled against most representations of serious topics in media. The first staging of Just a Little Lovin' specifically was criticized for romanticizing the past, as no participant had lived in New York in the 1980s or was HIV positive. In the second staging this was remedied. The larp was also criticized, before it was played, in Swedish tabloids (cf. Gerge 2012) for trivializing a serious issue.

Outcomes

Just a Little Lovin' is part of a long tradition of Nordic larps. It especially builds on work done with gender and sexuality in larps such as Mad About the Boy (2010) and *Mellan himmel och hav* (2003). It is too early to discuss the impact of the larp. Photographs of playing, paintings created for the larp, and character performances were exhibited at Oslo Central Station on World AIDS Day in 2011.

Related Cases

Numerous larps with similar techniques and aims exist. The activity of larping is related to role-playing in general, and similar activities include everything from improvisation to sociodrama, and from military training simulations to sexual role-play.

Further Information

http://just-a-little-lovin.blogspot.fi/ (official website)

The body of the player has not been very central to the discussion of play and games in contemporary game studies, though the rise of the mimetic interfaces of dance mat games, Nintendo Wii, exergames, and perhaps even smartphones using touch interfaces and accelerometers are starting to change that (cf. Márquez Segura et al. 2013). Yet the player always has a body and that has an effect, not just in pure locomotor play, but in all play. The possibility to derive pleasure from just performing the activity is not lost when these activities are placed in the context of game play.

In Nintendo Wii, where it is possible to carry out most actions on the controller with a small flip of a wrist, the players still choose to carry grand, iconic gestures when playing Wii Sports (Simon 2009). Mimicking body movements seems to be important to players. In Mirror's Edge, an immersive, single-player, parkour-themed game, for some players the feeling of vertigo it induces is part of the draw of that

game. Even in extreme role-playing games, where players consciously immerse themselves into disgusting situations, players frequently experience crying and feelings of nausea (Montola 2011).

Though play with conceptual objects can be very rewarding, the body should not be forgotten. In fact, it is quite possible to design games that take advantage of modifying the player's body (cf. Mueller et al. 2011). In professional sports, doping is obviously an issue, but it is treated as a problem and not as part of the playing. However, the genre of party games, such as SingStar and RockBand, benefits immensely not just from the physical co-location of players who perform as much or even more than they play for points, but from drunk players. Indeed, they are digital descendants of drinking games and drunken singing. If alcohol or other drugs seem too extreme, endorphins and adrenaline can do just fine as well.

These two examples, pretend play and locomotor play, show how fundamental forms of play have been and are harnessed for both telic and paratelic activities. Next we move on to look at using playfulness for transformative practices.

Playful Personal Change

Play, like art, is a step apart. It puts the participant in a removed point of view, enabling distance, reflection, and new angle of approach. Play also provides an alibi for pushing one's own boundaries, as it is "just play." Society tolerates more under the banner of play.

Play is also related to, or the basis of, humor. John Allen Paulos (1980) has defined humor as "a perceived incongruity with a point, in an appropriate emotional climate." Humor is incongruous in that it juxtaposes different interpretations: for example expectation and surprise, balance and exaggeration, or propriety and vulgarity. This juxtaposition creates insights as the same thing is considered in two incompatible frames. This has been called *bisociation* (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 37).

This bisociation of play lends itself to numerous applications. It is particularly apparent in play that takes place in public spaces (cf. von Borries et al. 2007; Montola et al. 2009; Walz 2010). Most public spaces are reserved for nonplayful activities, such as walking, driving, or selling. Playing with the city, for example by following the map of one city while being in another (as one version of the psychogeographers' *dérive* or *drift* would have it), is a prime example. Indeed, getting lost in a city in a playful way is something that has excited urban dwellers for a long while (cf. Alfrink, this volume). Contemporary smartphone applications like Drift build on the work of the Situationists in a very direct way. Yet the general approach of using the city as a playground is very common in mobile games such as Zombies, Run! and Shadow Cities as well as in parkour and geocaching.

Urban exploration, the activity of exploring man-made structures such as tunnels, ruins, abandoned industrial buildings, and catacombs just for the pleasure of it, is another example of this. Many urban explorers infiltrate places that they do not have the rights to enter; for them any open door or manhole cover is an invitation to an adventure. Indeed, interacting playfully with the city can lead to having "ludic glasses," meaning that the person is looking at the city as a playground.

Alternate reality games and other pervasive games (cf. Montola et al. 2009) that blur the line between the ordinary everyday world and a game world often superimpose a fiction on top of the ordinary world, in the form of scavenger hunts, campus assassination

games, locative smartphone games, and many others. These games encourage bringing a bit of the magic of games to the ordinary life, to look at the world as if it was a game, to try and perceive where playful possibilities lurk in the everyday life. Seeding a few ludic elements into the city is a useful game design to foster the emergence of this bisociation. Once players have noticed some clear invitations to play, they may be overcome with *pronoia*, the feeling that the world is conspiring to help them (McGonigal 2006; Montola et al. 2009).

Play can also be used as an alibi. Activities that would not be permitted otherwise can sometimes be acted out under the pretence that "it is just play." Cindy Poremba (2007; see also Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 478–481) has discussed this with the concept of *brink games*: games and play that feature a conflict between implicit game rules and implicit social rules. The classic examples of this are spin the bottle and Twister, where players get to do things that would otherwise be socially prohibited, but as it is "just play," it is acceptable. More recent examples are provided by role-playing games that use *bleed*, meaning that they knowingly break down the barrier between the player and the character (Montola 2010). And of course the reason these games are enticing in the first place is that you get to do the forbidden things. "Brink games not only force the awareness of explicit and implicit game rules, but of implicit and explicit non-game rules as well" (Poremba 2007). Thus games and play not only can foster an alternative view on the world and render its norms and rules visible, but can also actively encourage breaking said norms.

This brings us back to humans being aware that they play. We are able to use play and design play—and we also have a cultural understanding that play exists. Certain types of activities are recognized as play and as games, especially if they take place in locations created for such activities. As play is something that is culturally considered "merely" play (cf. Riezler 1941), as lacking something, one can get away with more under the pretext of play. In this jester function of play, which very clearly uses the play as an alibi, public political acts coded as play get away with more than they would if they were wholly serious. Street theater and public demonstrations have taken use of this for a long time. Such activities are probably not paratelic, but they may give the impression that they are—or invoke playfulness in their audience. For example, *zombie walks* (dressing up as zombies; see Montola et al. 2009) are playful for their own sake, whereas *slut walks* (demonstrations where some participants dress up as "sluts" to ridicule the idea that there is a connection between the way women dress and rape) use play instrumentally.

In public play, the question of audience is particularly important. Richard Schechner (1988, 5) points out that "play is performative involving players, directors, spectators, and commentators in a quadralogical exchange, that, because each kind of participant often has her or his own passionately pursued goals, is frequently at cross-purposes." The possibility to invoke playfulness in spectators and commentators is clearly one way to mark a thoroughly telic activity as "play."

Where the construction of a shared event between performers and an audience is outside the scope of this chapter, the co-creation by players is pivotal to the discussion. As numerous participants are engaged together in a playful mindset, the possibility for social play emerges. This shared social play does put restrictions on the expression of each participant's playfulness as one needs to take into consideration

the other participants, but that is the prize for shared play. A shared pretend play situation requires negotiation on how new elements are introduced into play and what are its rules (cf. Montola 2012).

In the context of larps, this pretending together has been called *interimmersion* (Pohjola 2004; Stenros 2010b). It means that each participant immerses in the character that is played and acts as if she was that character, but also that each participant pretends that other participants are the characters they are pretending to be. There can be no kings without subjects, no prisoners without jailors. This means that even if someone is not actively immersing on a given moment, the surrounding people will still treat that person as if she was the fictitious persona they know she is pretending to be. Thus, the illusion of a fictional world is supportive and self-perpetuating. This creates a very concrete situation of constructing a social reality—or a Goffmanian encounter. The players have agreed beforehand on a world they will build and they pretend that world into existence.

The same principle is in effect when imagining any shared fictional world into existence. The shared world need not even be strictly speaking fictional (whatever that means), but the so-called *temporary autonomous zones* (Bey 1985; see also *temporary tribal zones* in Letcher 2001; Harviainen 2012) follow the same logic. Indeed, there are numerous cultural sites where the usual set of rules are exchanged for another set: carnivals, parades, trips on cruise ships, vacationing in Las Vegas, Burning Man, and so forth. All of these are played into existence, though after they become culturally recognized, they may lose the soul of playfulness yet still maintain their alternative social rules.

To sum up, play helps perceive things from alternative angles and in different light. It helps us engage with our surroundings in a new way as we perceive and break norms and routines. In a playful state of mind, we can not only see the adventures that surround us, but we feel safe, possibly even *too* safe, to take that plunge. Play and games serve as an alibi: as they are perceived as being somehow less, we can get away with more. And finally, playing together we can create new and surprising social worlds that, as long as we all keep playing along, are as real as any other world.

Reality Hacking

Play makes rules explicit—and not just the rules of the game, but the rules of the social world. Playing with rules shows that rules can be changed. Once the constructed fabric of the social world is visible, it is possible to envision and create not just temporary play worlds, but a real change in the everyday social realm. This is the idea that lies at the core of reality hacking and benevolent gaming.

The social world is constructed, you can change who you are in it through your own action, and with concentrated effort with others you can change the world (Ericsson 2009, 243–245). Pervasive games have used this line of thinking to create alternate worlds in the midst of the shared reality, but usually these games have been staged in order for the players to have fun—or at least a meaningful experience. Using them consciously to enact social or even societal change has been rarer.

Political demonstrations and other performative projects are an obvious example of using play to bring about social change, but they usually operate with a division between players and an audience. Breaking down that barrier and enticing more people to participate is difficult. Augusto Boal's

(2002) Invisible theater is an interesting attempting to tear that division down. The performers put on a political show in a public place, but do not demarcate it as theater in any way—like *Candid Camera*. The idea is to push the "spect-actors" to participate, to make them think, and not just prank them for the benefit of a television audience.

One successful application of playful methods to effect social change comes from Bogota, Colombia, where philosopher-politician Antanas Mockus has served as mayor of the city. He has used unorthodox, and often quite playful, tools to enact social change. This is most visible in his use of more than four hundred mimes to embarrass pedestrians publically who ignore traffic regulations (Dalsgaard 2009; Hunt 2012). Allegedly, the reasoning behind this was that people are more fearful of embarrassment than fines. In a way, Mockus was using his position to troll the jaywalkers systematically.

There has also been a push to create clearly benevolent multiplayer games, such as World Without Oil (simulation of our world where the price of oil skyrockets; McGonigal 2011, 302–311), Evoke (World Bank–backed educational game about teaching social innovation; McGonigal 2011, 333–340), and the Nokia funded Conspiracy For Good (mobile phone–centric alternate reality game about battling corporate corruption; Stenros et al. 2011). None of these games have been able to show convincing evidence of their societal impact, though they may have changed the minds of some of the participants. In fact, they have been criticized as whitewashing for the corporations that finance them. For example, a critical satire of Evoke, called Invoke, billed itself as a crash course in saving capitalism and the World Bank. Instead of using playful methods to solve problems like hunger and poverty, it advocated using the free market system to do so.

If these games are attempting to wield playfulness and play for the benefit of bringing about positive social change, the question very much becomes who gets to decide what is positive (cf. Deterding 2012). One man's freedom-fighter is another's terrorist in a very real sense. Using Google bombing to tarnish the name of U.S. Senator Rick Santorum based on his anti-gay stance, as sex advice columnist Dan Savage did, is celebrated by some and seen as a low blow by others. Using larp mechanisms to foster nationalist pride (Mochocki 2012) is similarly a political question. And the privilege of affluent Westerners toying away on their smartphones in games that use the very real issues of colonialized countries either "raises awareness" or "trivializes"—or maybe both. Creating a political game, if successful, will usually prompt a discussion that questions the game and its designers' motives.

Using games and play to bring about real social change means using them for an external goal. This tautology is important to keep in mind when pondering the limits of using playfulness. The playful paratelic mindset is defined by doing things for the sake of doing them, not for an external goal. The process of cultural recognition of something as play or game can ensure the continuity of a structure even once playfulness has been removed, but it is a step toward the serious. Playfulness is thus used as scaffolding for a telic endeavor.

Coda: Playful Adaptations

If the importance of a playful mindset is not understood, then enacting the forms of play or inhabiting the arenas of games run the risk of being hollow. The very ingredient that is at the heart of play is missing. Just as risky is the idealization of play as inherently positive and beneficial to an individual or society. Playfulness can be liberating and emancipating, but it can just as easily be transgressive and disruptive. Deep play and dark play are never far away, and in many ways games are a way to harness and tame radical playfulness. Exploiting playfulness is possible, but if you open the door for playfulness, you are not letting in just the fun and positive aspects, but also the darker side. Griefing, trolling, and bullying are not unfortunate side effects of playfulness, they are part of its core. Constructing a totalitarian system that completely eliminates them also eliminates playfulness in general. It is possible to build transformative practices that use playful mindsets. Adapting the mindset for personal benefit, for breaking patterns and questioning norms, can have a remarkable impact. Using the same tool for social or societal goals is much more cumbersome—and involves questions of politics.

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Notes

1. One potential pitfall of studying play and games has been *exceptionalism*. While the ludologist call for studying *games as games* is commendable, there is a risk that moving games to the center of attention disconnects them from other similar activities (cf. Malaby 2007). This is particularly relevant for any discussion of gamification, as the very idea that certain elements typical of games can be usefully deployed in telic contexts requires that games are *not* exceptional, that lessons learned from them can be useful in other contexts.

If playing games as an activity is treated as exceptional, as unlike other human or animal activities, and this idea is taken as given, then we will be sorely restricted by our notion of "game," whatever it may be. The emphasis on the similarity and continuum of play goes back at least to 1932 when Dutch behavioral psychologist F. J. J. Buytendijk discussed the span of play from animals to human and from children to adults (Walz 2010, 39–49).

2. From Greek *telos*, meaning "goal" or "purpose."

3. Also forgotten is the endogenous meaning (cf. Costikyan 2002, 21–24; Montola 2012, 30) in a game, what Jesper Juul (2005, 41–43) discussed with negotiable consequences; basically, the separated, step apart quality of games.

4. The literature is inconclusive on the ability of other animals to engage in more complex forms of play. It seems that a central question is the cognitive capability to understand other beings as other persons, based on the observations on human children who become able to engage in pretend and social play during their second year as this capability develops (see Rakocky 2007, 56). Yet at least some simple forms of play, both pretend play and social play, can be enacted with some animals other than humans—at least if humans have taught the animals (57). Whatever the situation turns out to be with animals other than humans, at least humans are aware of their playing, and thus playfulness as a mental state and play as a social institution can separate.

5. See http://readwrite.com/2012/11/15/unbelievable-the-idf-has-gamified-its-war-blog.

6. Montola (2012, 20, 60–66) has criticized this kind of *objectivism* in game studies. See also the discussion on internally and externally validated and defined rules (Dansey, Stevens, and Eglin 2009).

7. The development of the theory of mind and perspective-taking have been connected to early pretend play. However, though the impact of pretend play on the development of children has been studied empirically for forty years, there is still no consensus. In a review article, Lillard et al. (2012; see also Yardley-Matwiejczuk 1997; Lillard et al. 2011) conclude that "evidence does not support strong causal claims about the unique importance of pretend play." On the effects of adult pretend play, empirical research is scarce.

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In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play

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INTRODUCTION

Magic circle continues to be a hotly debated term in game studies. The term is intuitively accepted, useful in describing the difference between play and non-play; a handy metaphor that acts as intellectual shorthand for a more complex set of social relations. However, if it is not clear what 'magic circle' is shorthand for, then the term can muddle thinking. For example, when taken too literally, it can cloud our understanding of how play is bounded.

The metaphor of magic circle stands for a border that delimits an instance of playing. However, it is only one of many formulations of a border that surrounds and envelopes play, a border that has numerous ethical, legal and practical implications, a border that functions as a design aid, and a border that is relevant for an understanding of what play is. In order to come up with useful theoretical tools, the personal mindset of the participant and the socially negotiated and upheld contract that yields a site of play, need to be separated. Though these psychological and sociological objects are interwoven, it makes sense to separate them for purposes of analysis (for example Montola et al. 2009, 257-278; Stenros 2010). The psychological border set up by adopting a playful mindset and the border set up socially through negotiation often coincide, but they are two different things. In addition, residue of these two, as well as established forms of rule-structured playing create game spaces, sites and artefacts that are culturally recognized as arenas of play – even when they are empty and unused. When playing an existing game the social negotiation often means accepting

a predefined set of rules. Confusing the three (mindset, social contract and game space) leads to muddled conceptions of playfulness, play and games.

In the following I shall review the history of the magic circle and its criticism; explore different formulations of the social, mental and cultural borders of play; and, finally, formulate a synthesis view of the boundedness of play.

THE TWO MAGIC CIRCLES

The concept of magic circle is traced back to Johan Huizinga (1938), who wrote:

> *All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the "consecrated spot" cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.*
>
> *(Huizinga 1938, 10)*

For Huizinga, magic circle is a space created for playing, a material or conceptual temporary world dedicated to the act apart. However, though the concept of the magic circle is usually attributed to Huizinga, and the above passage does capture the idea behind how the concept is used even today, he did not dwell on the subject for long. Indeed, the term 'magic circle' only appears six times in (the English translation of) *Homo Ludens*, and only three times in the chapter game scholars usually refer to: in the passage quoted above, once in the

metaphoric meaning it has since acquired in game studies (Ibid, 11) and once as an example of a sacred space (as opposed to playful space, though Huizinga stresses that formally such a distinction cannot be made, Ibid, 20). However, in the context of the whole book it is not just an example or a metaphor among many, but a core feature of the examples given (as pointed out by Calleja 2012, see Huizinga 1938, 77, 210, 212).[1]

In the book *Rules of Play*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004, 93-99) developed and defined the concept of the magic circle as it is understood in game studies today. Though the term and the central idea are adapted from Huizinga, the works of Apter (1991) and Sniderman (1999) also contributed to the framing. Zimmerman (2012) later clarified his view of the evolution of the term:

> *To be perfectly honest, Katie [Salen] and I more or less invented the concept, inheriting its use from my work with Frank [Lantz in the 1990s], cobbling together ideas from Huizinga and Caillois [1958], clarifying key elements that were important for our book, and reframing it in terms of semiotics and design – two disciplines that certainly lie outside the realm of Huizinga's own scholarly work.*
>
> *(Zimmerman 2012)*

This is important, as there are critics who question Salen & Zimmerman based on what Huizinga wrote, and vice versa (e.g. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2008, 24-25). The two terms are connected, but the formulations – and especially the ontological contexts of the formulations – are different. Salen & Zimmerman's (2004) *magic circle of gameplay* is entered voluntarily, it is self-sufficient, set apart from ordinary life in locality and duration, and it has rules that differ from ordinary life. These features it shares with Huizinga's conception. However, for Salen & Zimmerman's formulation the possible devel-

opment of culture from play is not relevant, nor the alignment of play and ritual. They describe the magic circle as shorthand for "the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game," (Ibid, 95) and go on to explain why they feel that it is a fitting metaphor; the circle is both finite and infinite, while the magic is in the transformation of meaning within the circle. In their formulation, the boundaries of play are fuzzy and permeable, but the borders of games are more formal (Ibid, 94-95). The magic circle is entered as play begins, or it is generated with that initiation (Ibid, 95). While within the magic circle, a temporary world is created where meaning is handled differently and rules of the game have authority (Ibid, 96). While in the circle, the players adopt a *lusory attitude* (Ibid, 97; see Suits 1978). The temporary world of the game is an open system and a closed system depending on whether games are framed as rules (closed system), play (open or closed system) or culture (open system) (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, 96-97). Salen & Zimmerman also provide examples of the blurring of the boundaries from live action roleplay and what later would be called pervasive games, when actions are indexical or the activity is not formally recognized as play (Ibid, 574-579).

Criticism of the Magic Circle

This conceptualization of magic circle has faced strong criticism, mostly because many scholars feel that the division between play and ordinary life is ultimately invalid. T.L. Taylor (2006, 151-155), writing in her book *Play Between Worlds* about exploring online game cultures, questions whether or not the division between game and life needs to be as strong as her reading of Salen & Zimmerman makes it out to be (see also Castronova 2005, 147-160). She sees the discussion about the division between game and life mirroring the discussion about the separateness of online and offline, and calls for non-dichotomous models. Her criticism is irrelevant if virtual worlds are not considered games but spaces where, among other things, play happens. Yet, even as she points this limitation out, she wonders whether or not this is

actually a problem with the definition of games.

Thomas Malaby (2007; 2009, 79-106) is on the same track, but words his criticism much more harshly. He questions if a clear division between play and ordinary everyday life exists at all.[2] He also does not target just the magic circle, but play itself as long as it is understood inherently as separate from ordinary life, *safe* and free of consequences, and *pleasurable* (cf. Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne 1984). This criticism is based on the work of virtual world ethnographers like Taylor and Malaby's own ethnography in Greece amongst *backgammon* gamblers. "[A]ny game can have important consequences not only materially but also socially and culturally," Malaby writes (2007, 107), and continues that this finding was very relevant also in non-gambling contexts when status and relationships are on the table in place of money. However, he does consider games "relatively separate," pointing out that the degree of separation is highly dependent on cultural context. He underlines (Ibid, 111) that games are socially constructed to be "separable to some degree from everyday experience."

Malaby's criticism is also reminiscent of what Marinka Copier (2005) wrote a few years earlier, when she drew attention to magic circle as a metaphor; Huizinga's circle was a sacred space whereas Salen & Zimmerman use a picture of a chalk circle to recontextualize the metaphor as child's play:

> *The visualization and metaphorical way of speaking of the magic circle as a chalk, or even, rusty circle is misleading. It suggests we can easily separate play and non-play, in which the play space becomes a magical wonderland. However, I argue that the space of play is not a given space but is being constructed in negotiation between player(s) and the producer(s) of the game but also among players themselves.*
>
> *(Copier, 2005, 8)*

Sybille Lammes (2006) has also criticised the magic circle metaphor; she sees it as a simplification of the relationship between the game and the world. Propelled by Bruno Latour's work on actor-network theory, she has proposed moving to the term *magic node*. Jesper Juul (2008) has advocated the term *puzzle piece* to underline how games interface with the world around them, and Edward Castronova (2005, 147) has proposed that *membrane* would be a better term for the barrier that separates synthetic (that is, online) worlds from the Earth. Others who have voiced this kind of criticism include Mia Consalvo (2009, 411), who has argued that the magic circle upholds a structuralist conceptualization of games and that it emphasizes form at the cost of function. Especially the context of play is lost, and often context is key in deepening the understanding of instances of play.

Much of the criticism of Salen & Zimmerman's magic circle seems to stem from their ill-worded explanation behind the choice of the term (2004, 95): "The fact that the magic circle is just that – a circle – is an important feature of this concept. As a closed circle, the space it circumscribes is enclosed and separate from the real world." The usage of the words *enclosed* and *separate* here seems unfortunate, as their larger description of the concept is hardly that closed. It is almost as if this passage has turned the concept of magic circle into a straw man. For example, Malaby's demand that the nature of games as socially constructed is not really in conflict with what Salen & Zimmerman wrote.

It is hard to find a scholar who has insisted on a strict border between play and non-play. Perhaps the most severe proponent of a clear division was Roger Caillois. He devoted a whole chapter in *Man, Play and Games* (1958, 43-55) to describing the corruption of games: if play ceases to be free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, regulated or fictive, he no longer sees it as play. A player who cannot properly stay aloof and separate play from non-play is corrupted. Upholding this

normative border was extremely important to Caillois: cheaters and professionals destroy play, and in general the corruption of play leads, he felt, to alienation, superstition, violence, alcoholism and drugs(!). Yet even Caillois does not claim that there is a strict division between play and non-play; on the contrary; he claims that there *should* be a division.

Daniel Pargman and Peter Jakobsson (2008) also attack the "strong-boundary hypothesis" of Salen & Zimmerman's magic circle, based on interviews and observations of hardcore digital gamers in their homes. Their findings make it difficult to conceive of a clear, closed-off border between play and everyday life. Their separationist reading of Salen & Zimmerman's model is unfair, yet their criticism hits home when it moves from the 'circle' part to the 'magic' part. Their interviewees rarely experience any kind of magic or enchantment when playing digital games. Quite the opposite; it is common to play and watch television, or to play for a short time while waiting for the pasta to cook. Though Salen & Zimmerman mostly conceive of the 'magic' to refer to the transformation of meaning within play, the connection to sacred is very much present in Huizinga's original work. Thus, it is more a criticism of the idealization of play than of the magic circle as a separate semiotic domain. Based on Pargman and Jakobsson's work, it seems clear that there are many instances of digital game playing that are better characterized as mundane than as magical. This is actually in line with Huizinga's (1938, 20) thinking that there is no formal difference between ritual and play, sacred and playful.

Michael Liebe (2008) and Gordon Calleja doubt the existence of magic circle specifically in digital games, since "the majority of actions possible are programmed into the game system and cannot be changed" (Calleja, 2012). There are three problems with this criticism: first, the interpretation of magic circle is quite narrow. For Liebe and

Calleja only the agreement on constitutive rules (what is possible) is relevant, leaving out interpretation of rules, extra-ludic motivations or consequences, player-created goals, etc. Secondly, the difference to traditional games is not as severe as presented here. There are numerous "rules" in sports that an athlete cannot ignore (like the weight of the equipment, law of gravity) (see Montola 2012, 32-47), and – as Calleja points out – digital games also have social rules. Thirdly, this view casts digital games in a narrow light: only the events displayed on a screen (or even just the events within a field depicted on a screen) are within the magic circle (and thus the game). The player and the controller in front of the screen are not considered.

Zimmerman (2012) addresses some of these criticisms in a popular article, and rejects the strong boundary hypothesis attributed to him and Salen. Zimmerman asserts that the core idea of a magic circle is that "games are a context from which meaning can emerge."3 Indeed, Jesper Juul (2008, 59) has pointed out that many of the critics of the magic circle (he cites Copier, Malaby, Pargman & Jakobsson) "claim to counter Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman by stressing the exact social nature of the magic circle that Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman also stress." Zimmerman (2012) also claims that the concept he and Salen put forward was mainly meant as a tool for design, and thus it should be evaluated based on its utility.

Despite the criticism, magic circle continues to be used.[4] It seems to be a useful, powerful metaphor, though it has not been exactly clear what it is a metaphor *for*. Some of the problems seem to be connected to the idea of games as pre-existing artefacts that players enter into, others to the concept of the magic circle as necessarily having a material form. A particularly lucid new formulation for magic circle has been offered by Markus Montola, who conceives of

> *the magic circle as a metaphor and a ritualistic contract. The*

> *function of the isolating contractual barrier is to forbid the players from bringing external motivations and personal histories into the world of game and to forbid taking game events into the realm of ordinary life. While all human activities are equally real, the events taking place within the contract are given special social meanings.*
>
> *(Montola et al. 2009, 11)*

This formulation takes a further step away from addressing the relation between play and culture and instead underlines the social nature of the play contract. Conceptions of such a social barrier between play and non-play are quite common, and numerous interesting formulations have been proposed without the term magic circle attached. We shall next review some of these formulations of social boundaries.

Social Borders

The boundedness of play has been postulated not just in game studies, but also at least in philosophy, sociology, psychology, performance studies, library and information studies and legal studies. Metaphors that have been used to encapsulate play or the border around it include: world, frame, bubble, screen, membrane, reality, zone, environment and net. Note that some of these metaphors highlight the border, others the delimited space, though most refer to both.

Philosopher Kurt Riezler (1941) makes two distinctions: a social division between ordinary life and what he calls *playworld*, and a mental division between serious and playful attitudes.[5] Playful and serious are opposites in his thinking, and there is a clear separation: "Though man's mood can move things to and fro over the borderline between play and seriousness, he can not move the borderline itself, which demarcates attitudes, not things." Riezler sees this playworld as separate from the ordinary, something you enter voluntarily:

> *An area of playing is isolated by our sovereign whim or by man-made agreement. Things within this area mean what we order them to mean. They are cut off from their meanings in the so-called real world or ordinary life. No chains of causes and effects, means and ends, are supposed to connect the isolated area of play with the real world or ordinary life. If there still are such chains they are disregarded.*
>
> *(Riezler 1941, 511)*

In the real world everything is connected in chains of cause and effect, but in the playworld the chains of causes and effects have limits. However, the game can have goals that are connected to the real world, as in gambling or professional sports. Note especially that Riezler also considers the playworld to be a social construct, a "man-made agreement." He introduces the playworld with these words:

> *I begin with the most simple case. We play games such as chess or bridge. They have rules the players agree to observe. These rules are not the rules of the "real" world or of "ordinary" life. Chess has its king and queen, knights and pawns, its space, its geometry, its laws of motion, its demands, and its goal. The queen is not a real queen, nor is she a piece of wood or ivory. She is an entity in the game defined by the movements the game allows her. The game is the context within which the queen is what she is. This context is not the context of the real world or of ordinary life. The game is a little cosmos of its own. (Riezler 1941, 505)*

This is the exact quote that sociologist Erving Goffman (1961, 27) cites before summing it up with the oft-quoted line: "Games, then, are world-building activities." But before discussing Goffman in detail, let us consider Gregory Bateson's conception of *frame.*

In the same essay where Bateson (1955) discusses metacommunication

and the signal "this is play," he also introduces psychological frames. These frames delimit what are meaningful actions and as such they are metacommunications. Bateson discussed the frames as psychological, but he also considers how they work in communication as messages – basically saying that they are also social. Though Bateson's formulation of frame is ultimately a little unclear – perhaps due to its function as a tool in psychotherapy – it has been hugely influential. The idea that there could be a metacommunicative frame that declares "this is play" has been picked up by numerous scholars.

For example, in their discussion of the idealization of play, Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984, 317-318) come to the conclusion that one of the few things that can be said about play is that it is always a Batesonian framed event. They go on to point out that it is essential for the participants to keep in mind that they are playing, "otherwise the activity will break down into anxiety or violence as indeed it often does." They also list numerous cues that can be used in keeping the playfulness of the frame at the forefront of everyone's minds: certain types of actions (e.g. exaggeration, repetition), objects, physical scenes, vocalizations (e.g. registers for iconic sounds for cars or babies), characters, and attitudes.

The most well-known extrapolations of Bateson's frame comes from Goffman (1961, 20): "games place a 'frame' around a spate of immediate events, determining the type of 'sense' that will be accorded everything within the frame." Frame is thus social, shared and provides meaning in an *encounter*, a social situation (whereas Bateson's frames are more akin to mental representations).[6] An example of how sense is made in a game context is provided by *the rules of irrelevance:* during gaming, the participants forswear interest in the value of the game equipment. For example a chess set can be made of cardboard, wood or gold, yet during the game it is treated in the same way. Similarly the players' background or social status should not influence the

playing of the game (Ibid, 19-26). However, certain characteristics of the player do influence the game (Ibid, 29-31) (couples do not play bridge together, age might determine the order of turns, social status might be translated to a 'better' character in an RPG). This incorporation of external elements is guided by what Goffman (Ibid, 33) calls *transformation rules*: these rules tell us what modifications take place as external patterns of properties, which are given expression within the game.

Where the rules of irrelevance tell what is left out of the game frame, Goffman uses the Riezler quote to tease out what is kept in the frame. Games are world-building activities, as they set an "engine of meaning," which makes it possible for events, roles and identities to emerge that would not be understandable or meaningful in any other frame (like *grounding out to third, atari* or *lawful-good half-elf warrior*). However, since Goffman's interests do not just lie in games, he uses them as a stepping stone to say something about the social world. Unlike Riezler, who conceived of an ordinary life outside playworlds, Goffman sees everyday life as similar to games: only in the context of the street do terms like pedestrian or motorist become meaningful (Ibid, 26-29).

Goffman (Ibid, 65-66) introduces the metaphor of an *interaction membrane* as the boundary around an encounter. The border around play is permeable; as the wider world passes through more than just application of the transformation rules takes place. Yes, some elements are ignored and repressed, others are transformed, but it is also possible for the external elements to endanger the transformation rules and thus the encounter itself. It is possible for play to be collapsed by external events.

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann have tackled the delimiting of play from non-play in their foundational text *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). They postulate a paramount ultimate reality that can

enclose "other realities" which are "finite provinces of meaning" (also Schutz 1945, 551-560; James 1890):

> *Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelopes them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from excursion. This is evident from the illustration already given, as in the reality of dreams or that of theoretical thought. Similar "commutations" take place between the world of everyday life and the world of play, both the playing of children and, even more sharply, of adults.*
>
> *(Berger & Luckmann 1966, 25)*

Berger and Luckmann, like Riezler, Bateson and Goffman, postulate a structure constituted by *meaning*. These other realities are commuted to and from, and play and games are by no means the only finite provinces of meaning of this type; art, theatre, religion and even dreams offer similar enclaves.

Goffman further developed the theory on encounters; in *Frame Analysis* he again begins by discussing Bateson's frames, and their application of it to games (1974, 7, 40-43). However, he discards most of the terms he introduced earlier, like encounter and membrane, and instead introduces terms such as framing and keying.

Instead of everyday life, Goffman discusses primary frame as the basis for our interpretation (Ibid, 21-39). Things that we say 'really' or 'actually' occur, occur in the primary frame (Ibid, 47); this activity is meaningful in its own right (Ibid, 560). The primary frame is itself also a construct, as culture, religion and cosmology influences it for social groups (Ibid, 27) – and Goffman makes a distinction between natural and social primary frameworks (Ibid, 21-22).[7] The

primary framework is not enough to make sense of what is going on; a transformation of meaning takes place. This is referred to as keying, and examples include make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical redoings, or copies (48-78). Once an activity has been keyed, it can be further transformed by rekeying. Furthermore, keying is not the only way that activity can be transformed. The other possibility is though *fabrication*, which Goffman defines (Ibid, 83) as "the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on."[8]

During play numerous frames are present, and the participant has multiple roles he adopts. Goffman (1961, 51) uses the example of a bowler who takes a bad shot, and when he turns back to face his fellow players, he makes a facial expression that signals that the shot was not representative of his skills. An ideal player would not need to send such a signal, but the human participant does so. It is not part of the system of the game, but of the social encounter. Indeed, good sportsmanship is not about playing the game, but about navigating the social frame around it.[9]

The conceptualizations of delimited spaces within everyday life capable of transforming social reality are abundant. For example in the realm of psychodrama, Jacob L. Moreno (1965) has proposed the concept of *surplus reality*, based on Marx's conception of surplus value. Surplus reality is a kind of alternative reality, a shared social space, where a group can act out or rehearse painful situations or relations from a participant's life. Andrew Letcher (2001) has added the concept of *temporary tribal zones* into the pot. Writing in the context of religious studies, Letcher makes observations about a temporary spatial arrangement. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) carnivalesque and Hakim Bey's (1985) *temporary autonomous zones,* Letcher proposes a temporary transformed space through the rules and conventions of a neo-tribe.

The transformation is so strong that it creates an illusion of autonomy, though does not actually achieve it.

J. Tuomas Harviainen and Andreas Lieberoth (2012) have compared rituals and games in the context of library and information sciences.[10] They build on the works of Huizinga, Letcher and Bateson, and discuss a *local information environment*, which both of these cultural forms share. It determines what parts of the real world are allowed to affect the participant's behaviour. According to them, the separation of the real world and the game or ritual is made possible, from an informational angle, by three key features: "resignification of elements within the situation, increased attention to shared intentionality, and the fact that during such activities, access to information outside of the activity is limited."

The resignification is very similar to Goffman's rules of transformation. However, notice that for Harviainen and Lieberoth (as well as for Riezler and Bateson) the border between play and non-play is not just social, but has also a strong psychological element in attention to shared intentionality. Next, we shall move on to considering the border as personal and mental instead of social.

Mental Border

Similar to the sociologists cited above, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) does not see games as exceptional. There is an important division, one that Riezler also made, of playfulness and play. Playfulness (a mindset), or *flow*, can take place not just in play and games (social setting), but also in work. However, it is interesting to note that Csikszentmihalyi's characteristics of flow are not dissimilar to those of the magic circle; in fact one of them, *centering of attention on limited stimulus field*, seems familiar in this context (Ibid, 80-82).[11] In Csikszentmihalyi's discussion of the experience of rock climbers, he writes that in contrast to

> *normative everyday life, the action of rock climbing is narrow, simplified and internally coherent. […] The physical and mental requirements involved in staying on the rock act as a screen for the stimuli of ordinary life – a screen maintained by the intense and focused concentration.*
>
> *(Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 81)*

Csikszentmihalyi also discussed the limitation of the stimulus field in relation to doctors performing surgery, and points out (Ibid, 131) how it is important for the surgeon "to adopt a neutral attitude toward the future of the patient's life." The playful activity, flow, is circumscribed from the experience of the normative everyday life.

For Michael J. Apter (1991) play is a phenomenological state. He discussed two mindsets or metamotivational states: *telic* and *paratelic.* Telic is a serious mindset, an activity is engaged in for a purpose. Paratelic is a playful mindset, with the activity in itself as the goal (or a goal is adopted in the service of the activity). In constructing a structural-phenomenology of play, Apter also talks about a border. He sees it as a *psychological bubble* and terms it *protective frame*.[12] The paratelic state is characterized by freedom and it being voluntary: there is a feeling of being able to turn off the television, to be able to walk out of the game, or packing away gardening tools.

> *In play, we seem to create a small and manageable private world which we may, of course, share with others; and this world is one in which, temporarily at least, nothing outside has any significance, and into which the outside world of real problems cannot properly impinge. If the 'real world' does enter in some way, it is transformed and sterilised in the process so that it is no longer truly itself, and can do no harm.*
>
> *(Apter 1991, 14)*

There is a private world, but it is not cut off from the real world. Like Goffman's interaction membrane, when properties from non-play world enter, they are transformed. Another important feature is that when a person is in a paratelic mindset, when she is within this psychological bubble, she feels secure and unthreatened:

> *[I]n the play-state you experience a protective frame which stands between you and the 'real' world and its problems, creating an enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come. Although this frame is psychological, interestingly it often has a perceptible physical representation: the proscenium arch of the theatre, the railings around the park, the boundary line on the cricket pitch, and so on. But such a frame may also be abstract, such as the rules governing the game being played. In the end, whether one is experiencing what one is doing as being within a protective frame or not, is a matter of one's own phenomenology.*
>
> *(Apter 1991, 15)*

The major difference, then, between the psychological formulations, and the social formulations, is that in the former the border and its construction are conceived of mainly as phenomenological and personal – even if it can take physical and other culturally recognized forms. This helps in explaining why different people have differing interpretations of playful situations – or even as to what counts as playful – as the protective psychological bubble is not uniform and shared, but personal. Considering these in relation to danger is especially illuminating: it does not matter if a situation is objectively speaking dangerous or not, the personal experience and perception of it (and the person experiencing and perceiving) is what influences the presence or absence of the bubble. This helps in explaining and understanding deep play and dark play (Schechner 1988, 12-14; Geertz 1973, 432-433; Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne 1984, 314-316; Csiksz-

entmihalyi 1975, 74-101).

Compare this to Bernard Suits' (1978) concept of *lusory attitude*. He sees it as one of the building blocks of games, even a requirement for the constitution of a game. A player with a lusory attitude accepts the rules of the game just because they make possible such activity as the game (Ibid, 41). Suits' formulation is interesting as he marries the social and the personal: games require rules, which – though they can be personal – are usually socially shared. But in order for the game to be possible, all the participants must accept the rules. This is a personal choice. The player can have ulterior motives (like being near someone else who plays the game, making money as a player), but they still need to adapt an attitude where they take the rules seriously in order for the game to take place (Ibid, 142-146).

The attitude Suits discusses is not directly comparable to Apter's bubble or Csikszentmihalyi's screen; it seems more like something that can help in achieving that phenomenological state. It is an attitude one can choose to have, not something one strives for. Yet it does underline how the player is knowingly fostering a playful approach, even if she may not be able to switch from a telic to a paratelic or autotelic mindset on a whim. Humans not only play, but they are aware that they play. Suits also notes:

> *It is true, of course, that some things do change with a change of attitude. If playing – rather than playing games – is activity which is always and only undertaken for its own sake, then 'professional player' is a contradiction in terms. On such a view we would be obliged to say that a professional athlete was not* playing*, but we would not be obliged to deny that he was playing a* game.
>
> *(Suits 1978, 144)*

The borders as postulated in psychology tend to be phenomenological and personal. These mental metaphors – though they describe a border around play – are ultimately different from the social construct of the magic circle. Like between playfulness and the act of playing, there is a connection between the psychological bubble and the magic circle, and that relation is not as clear as one might hope.

Accepting a lusory attitude, accepting the rules of a game or playing is a social process, yet often the rules are not created on the spot, at least not from scratch. The next section discusses the culturally recognized games and their boundaries.

Cultural Border

Huizinga's formulation of the magic circle is something that is in place as play begins. Salen & Zimmerman see it as something that is either already in place or is generated as gameplay begins. While play may generate its own space, the playing of a game can be seen as entering a pre-existing space.

There is a long history of conceiving of games as their rules, going back to at least John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (1944, 49), who write: "The rules of the game [...] are absolute commands. If they are ever infringed, then the whole transaction by definition ceases to be the game described by those rules." A player can adopt different strategies, but the closed formal system of rules does not change (cf. Suits 1978, 41; Crawford 1982; Makedon 1984; Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 81; Juul 2005, 36; Myers 2009). Rules are constitutive. They not only regulate the activity of play, but enable it.[13]

Games establish a correspondence with an external referent system, such as the world around them; as they simulate and model something they are representational (Myers 2009; Gee 2008). Furthermore, they take cultural forms (such as images, artifacts and abstractions), and

become semiotic domains (Gee 2007, 17-43; also Riezler 1941, 505), structures of interrelated sign systems. In relation to videogames Ian Bogost (2007, 241; also Gee 2007, 81-87) has argued that games are particular, embedded with specific cultural meaning: "The abstract processes that underlie a game may confer general lessons about strategy, mastery, and interconnectedness, but they also remain coupled to a specific topic."

In a discussion of the syntax rules of games, operational gaming researchers Vadim Marshev and A.K. Popov (1983) define *game space*:

> *In the course of the game, we must somehow allocate the pieces [real or virtual] in space. Usually, this allocation is well defined by the rules, and the exact places and order of the allocation is described in the rules for the initial step and for the process of playing. Thus, not only is the set of places for pieces set, but so too is the relation between them. Let us name the set of places "the game space" and the set of places, together with the structure of this space, the "scheme of the game space."*
>
> *(Marshev & Popov 1983, 54)*

When a game exists as a cultural artefact, for example as a designed, ready-to-play game, possibly with a physical arena attached, then initiating play is a step into the game space. The formal boundaries of the game have been set by the designer or by tradition. The same concept has later been discussed in game studies as *space of possibility* (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 67; see also Walz 2010, 92-119; Juul 2005, 164-167). Marshev and Popov further outline the role of the player:

> *Here we are defining the* right *to have a certain amount of pieces of different types with the positions taken by these pieces, the* duty *of the player to make a sequence of moves, the* obligation *to fight in order to reach personal goals in the game, and the* right *to*

> *have various sorts of information about the game. As usual, the access to information is implicitly defined for each player within the context of the game.*
>
> *(Marshev & Popov 1983, 54, emphases in original)*

Accepting the player position within the game (cf. a lusory attitude) the player produces and reproduces the game, its boundaries and its space. In *The Magic Circle: Principles of Gaming & Simulation* Jan H. G. Klabbers argues that games have a dual nature as social systems[14] (2006, 38-46), and that a system is always in place as gaming begins.

> [G]ames are social systems*, and moreover they represent social systems – real or imagined. They are also* models of social systems*. It is crucial to keep that dual position in mind. Even if a game involves one actor, that actor will always enter the magic circle with a social system, real or imagined, in mind. A player does not enter social vacuum.*
>
> *(Klabbers 2006, 81-82, emphases in original)*

It is worth noting that Klabbers' conception of the magic circle is mostly based on Huizinga's formulation, although he uses it primarily in the context of formal games and simulations, not spontaneous play. He conflates the magic circle as a social contract and the game as a formalized artifact of a social contract or cultural negotiation.

However, though games are recursive and reproduce their form through time, they do contain the possibility for emergent change (Malaby 2007, 104). The extent to which the rules are established before play commences is quite relevant. An established sport with official rules in a specific custom-built arena and a spontaneous bout of social play on a rainy street are both play, but only one of these is a pre-existing cultural artefact, and only one of these has a predefined game space.[15] Yet, as Montola's (2012, 40) discussion of the ball in

basketball as a materially encoded representation of formal rules show, the material (or virtual) pieces or sites used in playing a game are not the game space, but manifestations of the rules.

Another interesting thing to note about the borders of play as cultural entities is that they are often recognized by other cultural systems, such as legal systems. As Greg Lastowka (2009), a scholar of law, has pointed out, violence is legally accepted in a boxing ring,[16] and subjecting oneself to an "unreasonable risk of harm" is inherent to *American football* (Ibid, 386). Building on Huizinga, Lastowka notes that games are not just separate from the everyday, but they are ordered separate spheres that have their own jurisdictions and special rules; courts, for example, do not review the rulings of game referees (though they do uphold contract law) (Ibid, 385, 390-391). Games are not the only social sphere where there are special rules (compare dormitories, religious communities), but games can have rules that are in stark contrast with state rules. Often play where there is a very high psychological, physical or monetary risk involved (i.e. deep play) is legislated as in *boxing*, gambling and *bungee jumping* (Ibid, 388-389).

The fact that many state legal systems recognize games as happening in a different jurisdiction, of course, says very little about the border around play. Legal systems are social constructs just as games are, and there is no reason why one construct would not recognize another. However, what it does show is that on a cultural level that border is – at least up to a point – recognized and respected. Interestingly, Lastowka's main argument addresses the legality of real-money trade in virtual worlds: he believes virtual worlds are games and thus courts should not interfere in the upkeep of the rules in these separate spheres of jurisdiction (Ibid, 392-394). If virtual worlds are games, then that assessment makes sense. But, again, if they are sites where play takes place, but where also non-play happens, then the situation is more complex. Yet the end user license agreements of MMOGs have

explicit contractual statements that require the user to only use them for 'play,' whatever a legal duty to play might mean (Reynolds and de Zwart 2010).

SAFETY AND THE BORDERS OF PLAY

The border that surrounds play is most visible when it is questioned, threatened or played with. Transgressive play draws attention to the border – and even questions if any border exists. Yet without limits, it is impossible to push oneself past them. According to Juul (2008, 64) "the magic circle is best understood as *the boundary that players negotiate*."

Bad, dangerous, transgressive and harmful play seemingly challenges the idea of play as separate. Especially gambling has been used as proof that play is inseparable from everyday life and that play can have grievous repercussions for ordinary life. However, psychologists have no problem incorporating "bad play" within a framework of separate play. Performance scholar Richard Schechner has some ideas about that as well. For him the idea that play is dangerous is absolutely central:

> *A coherent theory of play would assert that play and ritual are complementary, ethologically based behaviours which in humans continue undiminished throughout life; play creates its own (permeable) boundaries and realms; multiple realities that are slippery, porous, and full of creative lying and deceit; that play is dangerous and, because it is, players need to feel secure in order to begin playing; that the perils of playing are often masked or disguised by saying that play is fun, voluntary, a leisure activity, or ephemeral – when in fact the fun of playing, when there is fun, is in playing with fire, going in over one's head, inverting accepted procedures and hierarchies; that play is performative involving players, directors, spectators, and commentators in a quadralogical exchange that, because each kind of participant often has her or his*

own passionately pursued goal, is frequently at cross-purpose.
(Schechner 1988, 5)

Schechner also recognizes that play sets itself apart in its own realm, behind a porous border – and he discusses both the mental and the social aspects of it. Later in the same article he describes playing as a creative destabilizing action that neither declares its existence nor intention:

> *I do not reject Bateson's play frame entirely – there are situations where the message "this is play" is very important. But there are other kinds of playing, like dark play, wherein the play-frame is absent, broken, porous or twisted. […] [T]he Batesonian play frame is a rationalist attempt to stabilize and localize playing, to contain it safely within definable borders. But if one needs a metaphor to localize and (temporarily) stabilize playing, "frame" is the wrong one – it's too stiff, too impermeable, too "on/off," "inside/outside." "Net" is better: a porous, flexible, gatherer: a three-dimensional, dynamic flow-through container.*
> *(Schechner 1988, 16)*

As an example of play that is not socially shared, metacommunicated, he points out dark play. He even goes so far as to suggest that the person engaging in dark play may not even be sure that she is playing; it is possible that the action becomes (dark) play in hindsight, in the retelling, reframing and narrativization of the event (Schechner 1988, 14; see also Denzin 1982, 13-14).

However, Schechner also points out that the players need to feel secure in order to begin play (also, Weisler & McCall 1976). Trust is a key element. Indeed, the idea that play and games are safe is deeply ingrained in the discourse of game studies and especially game design. It ties into the idea that play is separate from everyday life and actions

taken during play bear few consequences beyond the play session (see e.g. Caillois 1958; Rodriguez 2006). The typical way of framing that is by saying that games are a safe platform to practise. Game designer Chris Crawford has expressed this argument nicely:

> *Therefore, a game is an artifice for providing the psychological experiences of conflict and danger while excluding their physical realizations. In short, a game is a safe way to experience reality. More accurately, the results of a game are always less harsh than the situations the game models.*
>
> *(Crawford 1982, 12)*

Similarly another game designer Bernie DeKoven (2002, 12-13) considers trust among players and a feeling of safety (not risking more than we are willing to risk) as integral elements in establishing the intention of playing well together. This general argument has also received specific formulations. For example, in regards to role-playing games expert hobbyist Toni Sihvonen has written about what he calls the role-playing contract:

> *After the player makes a decision regarding the discontinuation of self in the beginning of immersion, it is no longer justified to draw conclusions on the player from the actions of the character. It is difficult to fully establish the role-playing contract – familiar faces and memorable characters leave their mark on players. The core of the contract is in trust. When a player trusts the contract, he dares to immerse even in activities the player would consider awkward or strange.*
>
> *(Sihvonen 1997, 7, translated from Finnish by the author)*

Basically the contract states that the participants should not make judgements about the player based on the character, or vice versa. There is a disconnect between the player and the character. Though

people do make such assumptions, the social contract makes it possible for role-players to take on roles that are very dissimilar from themselves (cf. Goffman 1974, 194-195, 275-284). What is interesting about Sihvonen's formulation is that it explicates the contractual nature of the border that is drawn between play and non-play; Crawford takes that contract as given.

What all these formulations have in common is, again, the idea that trust is built socially. Malaby (2007, 110) has called games *artifactual* to underline that they are not only manmade, but specifically socially constructed to be separate (to a varying degree) from everyday life.

It is also interesting to note that there are numerous games that take advantage of playing around with the borders of play. Either the borders are blurred and expanded, as in pervasive games (Montola et al. 2009), or the playing happens knowingly on the border, as what Cindy Poremba (2007) calls *brink play*. Though the metaphors are different, the phenomenon is the same: both use, as Poremba puts it, "the contested space at the boundary of games and life." For many players the central draw of pervasive games is that they create an ambiguous zone between play and non-play – and inhabiting this not-knowing is quite pleasurable for some players (Montola et al. 2009; McGonigal 2006).

According to Poremba, (2007) brink games[17] knowingly play with the metacommunicative statement "this is play." Players who engage in brink play[18] will be able to do things that in the normal social frame would not be acceptable, but are acceptable as they are "just playing" – but at the same time the possibility to be able to do those transgressive things for real is the reason they want to play. A game qualifies as brink play if a conflict between implicit social rules and implicit (or even explicit) game rules is integral to the playing (see also Consalvo 2005, 10).

Of course, it is also possible to use games to generate danger that spills outside its borders. Some sorts of dark and deep play do not so much use games as an alibi, but as an engine of strong emotional experiences. *Bleed* play (Montola 2010), where role-playing games are played in order for the player to experience some kind of shock, is an example of this.

The ambiguity produced by pervasive games and the winking at metacommunication in brink play presupposes a difference between play and non-play (or other play), or at least a friction between different frames or different sets of social rules. The rhetorics surrounding bleed play do this as well, though perhaps the social contract around such play is a little different to begin with.

Though it certainly can be questioned if the idea of play as relatively separate is a romantic notion in itself, at least this idea has been widely discussed and found useful in numerous fields of inquiry. Yet it is important to underline that play is not seen as exceptional in its delimited nature.

SYNTHESIS

Based on the review a synthesis of the boundaries of play is now constructed. There are three different boundaries of play: the 'protective frame' that surrounds a person in a playful state of mind (psychological bubble), the social contract that constitutes the action of playing (magic circle of play), and the spatial, temporal or ideal, rule-based cultural game space where play is expected to happen (arena). The clear analytic differentiation and articulation of these three boundaries is essential as otherwise the usefulness of the terms as tools is diminished.

The Apterian *psychological bubble* is personal, a phenomenological experience of safety in a playful (paratelic/autotelic) mindset. If a person is playful alone, she need not negotiate or metacommunicate with

others (though usually she does signal play unconsciously). There is a 'border' around her experience that guides her interpretation of the situation. A person needs to feel safe in order to be playful, though it is not necessary to actually be safe.

The *magic circle of play* is the social contract that is created through implicit or explicit social negotiation and metacommunication in the act of playing. This social contract can become societal as other social frameworks (law, economics) can recognize it. It is created when there is more than one person engaged in playful activity, though once established it is no longer necessary for everyone to constantly remain in a playful mindset. There is a connection between a playful mindset and play, but as a result of social negotiation and shared structuring of an encounter, it is possible to be in a telic mindset and still remain within the socially agreed borders. However, if enough participants slip into a telic mindset, then it can be questioned whether what is contained within the borders remains play even if it is still a game. The concept applies to the playing of single player games as well: though they can be played alone, they are socially recognized as domains of special meaning. However, the concept of a magic circle is more useful in relation to social play.

The *arena* of play is a temporal, spatial or conceptual site that is culturally recognized as a rule-governed structure for ludic action, or an inert game product. As the social negotiation of a magic circle becomes culturally established and the border physically represented, arenas emerge as residue of the playing (tennis courts, April Fool's Day).Alternatively a rule structure can be culturally coded as a game product, one with a designed game space. These sites are recognized as structures that foster play even when empty (and they can be constructed in ways that seek to foster playfulness), but they require use to be activated as the border of the magic circle remains social. As socially recognized cultural sites they have severed the need to be engaged in

with a playful mindset.

The difference between a socially constructed magic circle of play and a designed arena of game space can be unclear, as the cultural and social boundaries certainly imply and complement each other. The potential of the cultural is mediated by and actualized in the social. Yet keeping the two separate for analytic purposes is important. The magic circle does not travel with a game product, but is social, produced by the people present in the act of playing. It is not the line drawn on the ground, but the social contract attached to it. However, it does often align with the dormant possibility space provided by the rules of a ready-to-play game.

The players are rarely completely absorbed by the playing, which makes (meta)communication about play possible. It is possible to change the social contract during play – unless such changes are forbidden by the initial social contract (as in institutionalized games). Furthermore, the contract can be played with, which heightens its existence and its nature as a social construct.

The participants are supposed to treat the encounter within the borders of the social contract as disconnected from the external world and they are not supposed to bring external motivations or other carryovers from the non-play to the play, yet often they do. This can also be negotiated, or players can ignore it and pretend that they do not notice. As a contractual barrier is established, the events within the border are loaded with special significance. However, the border is porous and allows for traffic in and out, though passing through the border results in a re-signifying transformation – but it is also possible for the barrier to collapse due to pressure from the inside or out.

The events that take place while the contract is in effect are real, though their meanings may be altered. As the encounter is set up

through social negotiation and special signification, it is possible to have numerous overlapping social contracts and frames of signification. The participant is able to view and interpret the events that take place through these various frames. Though this formulation is written with play and games in mind, it may be useful for deciphering other social encounters as well.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of the magic circle has been widely debated in game studies. However, it makes sense to talk about magic circles, as the one described by Huizinga and the one introduced by Salen & Zimmerman are different in their meaning. This article has concentrated on the formulations of Salen & Zimmerman, and after tackling its criticism still finds the concept a useful metaphor. In order to determine what it is a metaphor for, various takes on the social, mental and cultural boundaries of playfulness, playing and games were reviewed and discussed. Finally, a synthesis of these works was offered.

The idea of a magic circle of play is that as playing begins, a special space with a porous boundary is created though social negotiation. The formulation presented at the end of this article of the magic circle is different from Salen & Zimmerman's formulation mainly in its explicit basis as social contract and its focus on play (not just gameplay). It is also clearly separated from the mindset of the participant and the rules of a pre-existing arena.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES

[1]Huizinga's critics have mounted a convincing case that his concep-

tions of play and seriousness as well as play and everyday life are muddled: Ehrmann (1968, 32-33) questions the lack of definition for "reality" or "everyday life", and how it is possible that reality exists prior to its component, play. Anchor (1978, 87) questions how Huizinga maintains both that play does not exclude seriousness, and that play and seriousness are two separate categories. Calleja (2012) points out that "[r]eality does not contain play; like any other socio-culture construction, play is an intractable manifestation of reality." See also Rodriguez (2006) and Lammes (2006). This article, however, concentrates on the formulation of the magic circle forwarded by Salen & Zimmerman (2004) and thus sidesteps these ontological criticisms.

[2]Malaby's criticism is aimed at digital games and game studies in the form that it emerged around the turn of the millennium. The permeability of the border surrounding play has been discussed by other scholars of games for a long while.

[3]Montola (2012, 30-31) has noted that the contexts discussed by Salen & Zimmerman are what Searle (1995) discusses as contexts if his formulation "X counts as Y in context C". Montola (2012, 52-53) also points out that there is wide agreement on magic circle being about *transformation*, not *isolation.*

[4]The concept of magic circle has been used in analysis of games and play especially when borders of play are discussed (e.g. Montola et al. 2009; Poremba 2007).

[5]Note that Riezler (1941, 508) writes about adult play. As he sees it, in child's play the real world and the play world have not yet separated.

[6]Note that the essay addresses "the kind of games that are played around a table" (Goffman, 1961, 8) as Goffman was mostly interested in face-to-face interaction. It is important to keep this delimitation in

mind though many of the concepts introduced there are applicable in a wider context of gaming.

[7]A more useful way of conceptualizing the construction of everyday life and primary frameworks is offered by John Searle (1995).

[8]In Bateson's terms, the difference between keying and fabrication is that in keying the frame is correctly meta-communicated to all actors and in fabrication some of the actors are intentionally misled.

[9]Though Goffman certainly does see play as taking place in a frame, the boundaries are far from clear. Frames within frames mean that there is a frame for the administration of a spectacle (such as rituals around a game) and then a frame for the game proper (Goffman 1974, 261-265; see also Fine 1983, 181-204). For example, he considers that all discussions about the rim of the frame between play and non-play lead to paradox; discussing the edge of the frame takes place in the framework (Goffman 1974, 249). The division between the social play in games and the sociability that surrounds them have been discussed also for example by Gee (2008, 24), Stenros et al. (2011) and Elias et al. (2012, 203-205).

[10]For a review and discussion on the magic circle as re-signifying and sorting information barrier, see Harviainen (2012).

[11]This has been discussed in psychology sometimes as "selective inattention."

[12]Though conceptually Apter's protective frame is similar to and inspired by Bateson's and Goffman's frames (Kerr 1991, 34), it is important to note that it is personal and not necessarily social. In order to avoid confusion I'll refer to Apter's protective frame with his own metaphor, *psychological bubble*.

[13]For an analysis of constitutive and regulative rules in games, see Montola (2012, 32-47). Note also that Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 96) wrote: "The magic circle of a game is the boundary of the game space and within this boundary the rules of the game play out and have authority." While this implies that magic circles are reserved for rule-based play, something that Staffen P. Walz has criticized (2010, 110), Salen & Zimmerman note that the framing of games as either 'rules', 'play' or 'culture' is relevant.

[14]This opens up a whole library of theory from social sciences, which is ignored in this article.

[15]There have been different ways to form categories on the continuum of play and gaming – such as Caillois' (1958, 27-33) paidia and ludus, Shubik's (1983, 17-19) rigid-rule and free-form – but an exact typology is not relevant for the discussion at hand.

[16]For an account of the development of modern *boxing* from *prizefighting,* and the role of courts and legislation in that, see Anderson (2001).

[17]Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 478-481) discuss the same subjects under the header of *forbidden play*, but I prefer the term brink play.

[18]Examples of brink play can be found in *spin the bottle, Twister, Pillow Time*, and the various kissing games (see Frasca 2007, 160-177; Sutton-Smith 1959).

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Playing the System.
Using Frame Analysis to Understand Online Play

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ABSTRACT
This paper outlines the different ways in which people play in and with digital games, virtual worlds and social media. People engage in play individually, yet it is often social. This paper explores combining the personal with the social and the connections between playfulness on serious social media sites and seriousness when in a game world. Viewed from this angle, grief play, for instance, is not so much a form of deviant play behavior as it is an alternative way of framing the activity of playing, and Google bombs and edit warring can be recognized as the playful activities that they are.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
K.8.0 [**Personal Computing**]: General - *Games*

General Terms
Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords
Frame analysis, play, playing the system, playing the players, social games, grief play, online play

1. Introduction
The internet abounds with opportunities to engage in play. Social networking and collaboration sites are filled with games, virtual worlds are often marketed based on their ludic features and play activities abound even in pre-web 2.0 sites such as IRC and web forums where there are no game products. These sites stimulate the playful tendencies of their users – or have simply rendered the human instinct to play visible. Indeed, even places that do not contain explicit games are being used as platforms of play. It is not just that games feature prominently on the lists of the most used applications on sites such as Facebook, or that they are used to lure players to sites devoted to something entirely different; people also play on Wikipedia, Google and any worthwhile system. Especially sites that are based on attention economics and collaborative wisdom are prime targets for the playing of the system.

FuturePlay @ Vancouver Digital Week 2010, May 6-7, 2010, Vancouver, Canada.

Game studies have mostly concentrated on looking at playing game products. The commoditization of game play activities into products and artifacts seems to render them interesting and worthwhile objects of study. Yet, there are numerous playful activities and folk games that are played by large groups of people. These activities are easily branded as a waste of time and pointless – both common features of play – yet they are meaningful to their players. Casting a wider net and looking at "the games people play" online instead of just the products can be beneficial also for developing the understanding of game products.

This paper outlines different ways in which people play online. Building on Erving Goffman and Michael J. Apter's works, a model is constructed which helps us understand the playful activities from playing games to teasing other players. After the model is introduced, it is applied to two example cases: playful activities on social media and grief play in virtual worlds.

2. Context and Mindset in Ludic Activities
Play is experienced and engaged in individually, yet it is social. If we are to understand play, both the personal and the collective must be considered. This model which combines psychological metamotivational states and social frames is based on work previously presented by Stenros, Montola and Mäyrä [43, 44].

2.1 Play in Frames
Anthropologist Gregory Bateson's concept of *metacommunication* is pivotal in understanding how the consensus of what is play and what is not play is socially constructed. He observed monkeys playing in a zoo and realized that they are playing at fighting. Bateson concluded that in play the actions that would normally be interpreted and understood to denote combat now denote something else. The context of playing is metacommunicated between the participants, and in Bateson's example, it is even metacommunicated to the observer who happens to be of a different species. [6]

Indeed, playing is something real that a person does; it is both separate from ordinary life and a part of it. Sociologist Erving Goffman [21] originally conceived of games as taking place within an *interaction membrane*, a metaphorical boundary that delimits them from the outside world. This membrane would select, filter and transform events, actions and properties outside of the game. As a result, for example, the material wealth of a player would have no bearing on the status of the player within the game and the material that the game pieces are constructed of, be it paper, wood or gold, would have no bearing on the playing with those pieces. Goffman [22] later generalized Bateson's metacommunication and used it as a building block in creating

frame analysis. Instead of metacommunication, he talks about keys and keying.

> [T]he set of convention by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called keying. A rough musical analogy is intended. [22]

The primary framework that he talks about here is the natural or social frame that is perceived as the ultimate serious context for actions. For example, swapping two adjacent cells in a game of *Bejeweled Blitz* (2009, Zynga) played on Facebook on a personal computer would be perceived as pressing down a button and moving a mouse by an entity looking at a screen. Keying these actions, for example into the frame of playing *Bejeweled*, "performs a crucial role in determining what it is we think is really going on" [22]. Once an activity has been keyed, it can be further transformed by rekeying. Furthermore, keying is not the only way that an activity can be transformed. Another possibility is through *fabrication*, which he defines as

> the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on. [22]

In Bateson's terms, the difference between keying and fabrication is that in keying the frame is correctly metacommunicated to all actors and in fabrication some of the actors are intentionally mislead. A practical joke is a mundane example of a fabrication, tax fraud being a slightly more elaborate one. The asymmetrical understanding of the social situation that fabrication produces is an important building block in explaining what is going on when users start playing systems.

Goffman originally conceived of frame analysis in connection with games [22]. Recently Goffman's frames have been popping up with increasing regularity in game studies (see for example [33, 11, 38, 14]). However, Gary Alan Fine [16] already built on Goffman's work in his ethnographic study of tabletop role-playing games in the early 1980s. He identified three major frames in effect around the gaming table: the primary framework where participants are *people*, the frame of playing where participants are *players* and the frame of the game where the participants are their *character*s.

Fine stresses that each level has its own structure of meaning. Engrossment in the game, in one frame, implies that the participant is able to ignore alternative awarenesses of the other frames. The participants are also able to shift from one frame to another very rapidly, "slip and slide among frames". Indeed, this is exactly what happens in a tabletop role-playing session, where a person is sitting by a table eating, while the player is throwing dice and the character is involved in a bar brawl. [16]

The possibility of the presence of numerous simultaneous frames was present already in Goffman's *Frame Analysis*. He called shifting between them *upkeying* (movement further away from the ultimate reality of events) and *downkeying* (movement towards the "real").

Fine was explicitly only talking about (fantasy) role-playing games, something he considered very different from other kinds of games as there is a frame in them in which the participants are their characters in the game world. In many games, it is impossible or pointless to separate the game world from the system. The distinction between person, player and character only makes sense in games that have an anthropomorphic character and a stronger emphasis on fiction than was common when Fine wrote his observation down in the early 1980's.

Yet, it is possible to conceive of the *social worlds* of games in general in a parallel manner. (These worlds are fictive in the way that they are made up, but also real in the way that they exist and events take place in them.) First of all, there is the ordinary frame (the non-ludic frame in the primary framework, marked by absence of play). In this frame, a person participates in a game (this is a slight adaptation of Fine's model). Then there is the frame of the system and playing, where actions regarding the game and its rules are carried out and negotiated. And finally, there is the frame of the game, where the person pretends that the (diegetic) game world is real. The person is simultaneously present as a *participant* in the primary frame, as a *player* in the playing frame, and as a *character* or *avatar* in the game frame (see Figure 1).

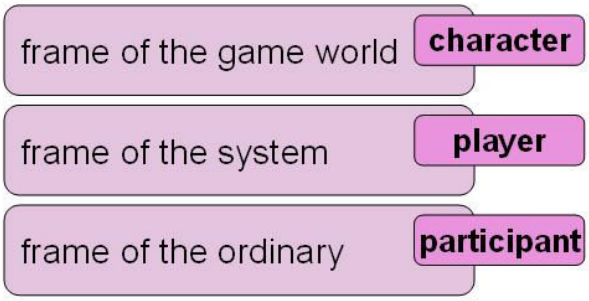

Figure 1: The frames present when playing in a game with a game world and anthropomorphic character constructs (Adapted from Fine [16]).

These are not the only frames present in a moment of playing. The player can be playing multiple games at the same time; she can slip into an organizational frame while scheduling upcoming play sessions. There are numerous frames of socializing, not to mention all the frames not related to the game at all. However, for the analysis here, these three frames will suffice.

2.2 Metamotivational States of Mind

Social frames are only one part of the equation of trying to understand play as it happens. Frames explain the social context in which playing takes place. They do not address the motivation and mindset of an individual taking part in a game. Indeed, this is a limitation of frame analysis. Throughout his career Goffman searched for an answer to the question "what is really going on here?" and that question is social in nature. The internal processes of a person are invisible.

Psychologist Michael J. Apter's reversal theory [3] holds that play takes place inside of a *protective frame* (not used in the same way as by Goffman), which "stands between you and the 'real' world and its problems" [2]. The concept of Apterian protective frame is similar to Goffman's socially determined interaction membrane and Huizinga's cultural magic circle [9], except that the protective frame is psychological in nature – and hence personal. A person inside of the protective frame is in a *paratelic* mindset and a person who is not protected is in a *telic* mindset.

> As the protective frame comes and goes in our experience, during the course of our everyday lives, so we reverse backwards and forwards between these contrasting ways of 'being in the world', the movement from one to the other producing a kind of systole and diastole of everyday existence. [2]

Apter [3] gives a way of determining if someone is in a telic or a paratelic state through a simple question: "would you give up what you are doing in exchange for having already achieved the goal of what you are doing?" In a telic state, where the activity is carried out in order to achieve an end, the answer would be yes. In a paratelic state, where the activity itself (like an afternoon of playing *tennis*) is the goal, the answer would be no.

These *metamotivational* stages roughly correspond to what are commonly understood to be a serious mindset and a playful mindset. Based on Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi [9], Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman [41] use the term *autotelic* to describe a motivation in very much the same sense as Apter uses paratelic. Bernard Suits [45] has also used the term *lusory attitude* to describe a similar state of mind where unnecessary obstacles – game rules – are accepted and more efficient means are replaced by less efficient means in order to make the activity of playing a game possible.

Combining the two, Apter's mindset of a player and Goffman's social context, yield a much more nuanced picture of what happens in a play situation.

2.3 Paratelic Mindset

Let us first inspect what happens when the frames outlined above are inhabited in a paratelic state. Figure 2 depicts the division.

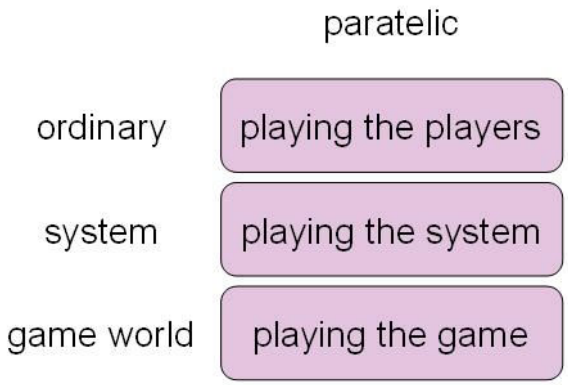

Figure 2: Paratelic mindset applied to the frames of playing.

When the participant is in a paratelic (playful) mindset in the game frame, she is *playing the game.* This is the classic understanding of how games are supposed to be played. Everyone is engaged in the same activity, there is a shared understanding of the social context, and they are doing so in a non-serious, separate-from-the-ordinary fashion.

However, if the player stays in the playful mindset, but moves on to the frame of playing, she starts *playing the system* instead of the game. This means that the player is not so much trying to reach the goal presented by the game, but tries to find loopholes in the structure of the game, attempts to subvert the rules, striving to reach goals she has set for herself by turning the system against itself. The same playful attitude that enables playing a game can be very disruptive when applied on the game system.

In digital games, this can be exemplified by hacking or creating cheats. There are numerous terms for this kind of rules-centered play in the role-playing game vernacular: *muchkinish* (doing everything, including bending the rules, to win) and *min-maxing* (carefully calculating the use of scarce resources to maximize relevant skills and to vulgarly minimize irrelevant skills) are two examples.[1]

When playfulness is taken one frame further away from the game, it becomes *playing the players*. This happens when a player no longer cares about the game and its rules, but starts to do her best to annoy, harass and trick the other participants. The target of these actions is not a game entity or even a fellow player, but the person in the ordinary frame who is participating in the game. Heckling, grief-play and pretending to be a different person[2] while participating in a game are all examples of playing the players. In a way, this is fabrication, but often the whole point is to force other participants to slip out of the game frame and even out of the frame of playing (downkeying). [3]

If numerous people share the same goals and start *gaming* the system together, this creates an alternative social context, a new frame of playing. Richard Bartle [5] describes four groups that approach virtual worlds differently in his classic MUD player typology: *achievers* see them as games, *explorers* as pastimes, *socializers* as entertainment and *killers* as sport. One might say that they inhabit different frames. Achievers are playing the game, at least some explorers who are interested in how the world (the system, if you will) works, are essentially playing the system, and killers may be targeting other players and thus playing the players.[4]

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[1] Similar terms for a person who engages in this are *twink*, *gun-bunny*, *rules-lawyer*, *power-gamer* and *combat-wombat* [13].

[2] There is a difference between role-playing a character and pretending that the person sitting at the keyboard is something she is not. The latter is often called *masquerading* [5]. It is worthwhile to note that masquerading need not be playing the players. Indeed, it can be a very serious thing (see the Raena case in Pearce & Artemesia [39]). That being said, telic and paratelic are not the most useful terms when attempting to understand socializing.

[3] In a way, this is similar to the divisions presented by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman in Rules of Play [41]. When talking about gaming and playing, they situate game play in the centre, ludic activities on the second circle and being playful on the outmost circle. The structure created by formal rules systems is at its strongest in the core and the further away one goes, the less structure there is. In Roger Caillois' terms ludus is at the core and paidia at the outer rim [7].

[4] In many ways the fourth group, the *socializers* transcend these categories: socializing can be either telic or paratelic, through a character and by the rules, or just through using the virtual world as an elaborate chat client, and in order to trick a fellow participant or very earnestly. For example social play as a character (i.e. role-playing a character) happens very much in the diegetic game frame (though it might mean bypassing, subverting or ignoring the game system), whereas socializing

Note that play can take place on numerous levels at the same time. Certain games that have a strong social element may encourage cheating as part of playing – which would mean that differentiating playing the game and playing the players would become impossible. Bluffing in poker is an excellent example of this kind of playing (sometimes called *meta-gaming* [49, 29]).

2.4 Telic Mindset

Approaching the frames of the game, the playing and the not-playing, with a telic (serious) mindset also produces three categories (see Figure 3). A serious mindset in the non-ludic frame sets the stage for ordinary everyday life (commuting to the office, changing a diaper). Actions are goal-oriented and there is no social context of playfulness. There are countless frames in ordinary life, but those are not relevant here.

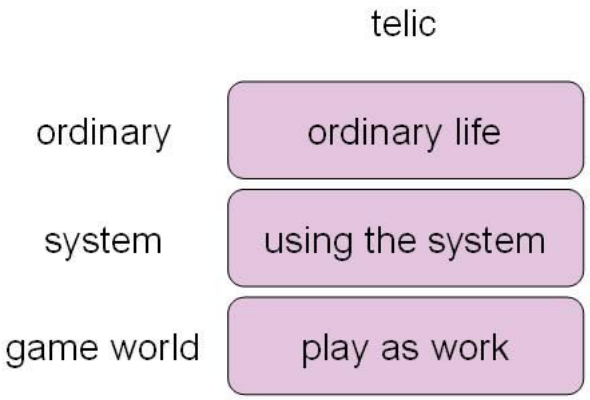

Figure 3: Telic mindset applied to the frames of playing.

Using a telic mindset in the frame of playing means using the system as it is supposed to be used. This could mean casual use or careful optimization according to the rules (searching on Flickr or using Microsoft Excel) or a completely serious and joyless usage of a rules system, such as a court of law. These systems could be played – and indeed in Huizinga's [24] broad definition the practice of law is considered play – but it is seldom that they are engaged in for their own sake. Note, however, as Caillois [7] points out in his description of *ludus*, that play can be tedious, require ceaseless practice, and considerable "effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity" and still remain play. It is the purpose and goal-orientation that mark the telic metamotivational state.

Finally, there is the possibility of being in the game frame while remaining in a telic mindset. This means playing the game for an external purpose, working in the game. Common examples of this instrumental play include gold mining in virtual worlds, professional sports, emergency simulations and perhaps professional gambling.

In the model presented here, it is important to note that both the frame of the game and the frame of the system are clearly ludic. There is a strict formal system in place in both – it is just that when playing in the game frame the goals and rules are shared, whereas while playful in the system frame, the purpose of the rules is subverted. Implicit rules [41] are not necessarily followed, only explicit ones. This is possible to be interpreted, from the point-of-view of an individual, as even more formalistic play than what is in this article conceived as game play. For example, David Myers has criticized MMORPG studies for putting too much emphasis on social play [35] and has tried to play these games purely according to their explicit rules [36]. Yet, when the implicit rules of a social context are ignored, the ignorer places himself in a different frame. That person is, quite literally, playing a different game. From a social perspective, the person who adheres only to the explicit rules is not playing by all the rules.

with other players need not have any connection to the game and can take place in the ordinary frame.

3. Case Example: Play in Social Media

The applicability of this model is not limited to games. It reveals playfulness in contexts not associated with formal games. Since playfulness is an attitude of the player, the systems need not be ludic. Norman Douglas, who catalogued street games played by children in London in the 1930s, has pointed out that toys and games only hinder the imagination:

> [I]f you want to see what children can do, you must stop giving them things. Because of course they only invent games when they have none ready-made for them, like richer folks have – when, in other words, they've nothing in their hands. [15]

Considering the numerous ways in which adults also play wherever they meet in social media, this applies at least partly also to grown-ups. Indeed, it has been argued that games conquer all new technological platforms [27, 31], but it would seem that this might be a conservative view: play conquers all systems.

S*ocial media* is an umbrella term usually used to refer to content creation, publication, sharing and collaboration tools, social networking sites, virtual worlds and tools that transform other sites in accordance with these categories [29]. In addition to these, some older technologies, such as IRC, web forums and discussion groups, seem to fit under the umbrella, though they are not mentioned as often. Social media offers tools and platforms for large, networked groups. Due to its digital nature, there is always a clearly defined system underlying social media – even if the exact functions of that system may be hidden.

Thus, looking at the system level of the model discussed above is particularly enlightening in the context of social media. Playing the system – being in a paratelic metamotivational state while using a system – is fairly common on the internet. *Google bomb* refers to the activity of trying to boost certain page as a search result on the search engine. It is often used for fun by attempting to prop up pages that are humorous or slanderous. *Edit warring* refers to attempting to edit Wikipedia to reflect one's point of view. Reverting a change made by another can only be done a few times, after that a user is blocked. The aim of this activity is to have the account of the "opponent" blocked so that the page will still show the "correct" version.

On sites like YouTube and Flickr users will attempt to have their creations feature high on recommendations lists. Users attempt to reverse-engineer the algorithms that the systems use, and use dirty tricks (such as inserting a provocative picture in the middle of the video, the frame that is used as the thumbnail of the video for

others to see) to try to get more people to click on their creations [47].[5]

On Flickr, there are official games, games and playful activities that users have created (without them being commoditized), and play with the system. Sigrid Jones [25], who has analyzed and catalogued different forms of play on Flickr, has gone so far as to suggest that it is Flickr's playability that has made it so successful.

The tendency to play the system is partly tied to attention economics; with so much content available on the internet and many systems set up to prop up the meaningful contributions, trying to beat the algorithms set up is what stands between a creator and an audience. However, some clearly engage in this activity for the sake of the activity itself.

Playing a game requires an explicitly ludic context. New user-invented games emerge in the context of social media, as well. As soon as they have a shared ludic rule system, they become (folk) games, even if they are not game products, and are covered by the previous section. If playing the system becomes formalized as a game, it can be called *gaming the system*. This is an example of the asymmetrical power balance that fabrication creates. When a system is played (or gamed), the same social situation is framed differently for different participants. *Gaming* is here seen as requiring a socially shared (even if the sharing only happens with some of the participants) structure and it is, according to the terminology of Dansey et al. [12], *externally-validated* and *externally-defined*. In comparison, *playing* the system and the players can be, and indeed often is, *internally-validated* and *internally-defined* – unless it is performative, in which case the validation can be external, as well.

The so-called *social games* (games played on social networking sites, mostly game products on Facebook) are especially interesting as these games reach out of their game frame by sending out information, recruiting new players or treating contacts as resources [26]). They blur the line between the ludic and the non-ludic frames. It becomes possible to start treating the whole system as part of the game. Different participants are operating in different social context – and in different frames. For some participants the social networking site that surrounds the game becomes part of the game (and part of the frame of game play).

4. Case Example: Griefers as Playing the Players

It seems that thus far most researchers have viewed griefing as deviance; something considered to be "other". Most research is carried out from the arguably hypothetical position of the "average player". Though descriptions of the activity have sought to be objective and even-handed, the tone is often unsympathetic. It is not uncommon to view grief play as a "problem" (see for example [19, 8]). Bartle [5] defines griefers as "[b]ullies prepared to use force or other unpleasantness to get their way or be noticed." These kinds of approaches hardly explain *why* anyone would be a griefer, why grief play is fun, or exactly which parts of it make it worthwhile. Indeed, it seems that grief play is mostly seen as a virtual version of teasing, bullying and harassment [23]. Looking at grief play through the model presented in this paper shows a form of play which many players may enjoy and regularly take part in.[6]

The definition of a *griefer* that most studies of grief play build on comes from Mulligan & Patrovsky [27]. They define a griefer as a "player who derives his/her enjoyment not from playing the game, but from performing actions that detract from the enjoyment of the game by other players."

This seems to be built on Bartle's [4, 5] work on player types in MUDs, where griefers are basically a new name for or a subset of *killers*, who enjoy imposing on others. The title killer refers to killing other players, one common act of griefing. Though Bartle's label did not stick, his description of what killers are like and what they enjoy, is still valid:[7]

> The more massive the distress caused, the greater the killer's joy at having caused it. Normal points-scoring is usually required so as to become powerful enough to begin causing havoc in earnest, and exploration of a kind is necessary to discover new and ingenious ways to kill people. Even socialising is sometimes worthwhile beyond taunting a recent victim, for example in finding out someone's playing habits, or discussing tactics with fellow killers. They're all just means to an end, though; only in the knowledge that a real person, somewhere, is very upset by what you've just done, yet can themselves do nothing about it, is there any true adrenalin-shooting, juicy fun. [4]

Foo & Koivisto [18] point out, based on the Mulligan & Patrovsky definition, that griefing holds three aspects: griefing lessens the enjoyment of the play of the other participants, the act of griefing is intentional, and the griefer enjoys what she does. As many have pointed out, the act of griefing and the player who griefs need to be separated. The problematic part here is that griefing is seen as an intentional act; if a person is not trying to

[5] Of course, playing the system is not limited to digital domains. It has long been possible to play the systems of bureaucracy or customer service. Often drawing the line between playing the system and playing the players (or, in this case, administrators, fellow users and other people generally) is fuzzy when systems are facilitated by human agents.

[6] We are hardly the first ones to take a more balanced view of griefing: Myers [34] is one of the exceptions, for example. His strive towards formalism prevents him from passing judgment on grief play and indeed, he has found "bad play" to be important and worthwhile. It has also been argued that an important part of the methodology in ludology is playing [1, 46, 32]: one cannot understand games without playing them. If this holds, then is it possible to understand grief play without griefing?

[7] It is interesting to note that Bartle [5] effectively divided killers into two categories: griefers and politicians. The people he called griefers were unaware of what they were doing unlike the politicians. This does not correspond with the way others have since then used the term griefer. It is also noteworthy that Bartle's [5] categories sought to explain how the engagement style of participants would change over time – something that is not considered in this paper at all – and that the killing of other players was something that many participants started with. This is not in line with the way others have thought of griefers – and it is not exactly in line with what Bartle himself wrote earlier [4].

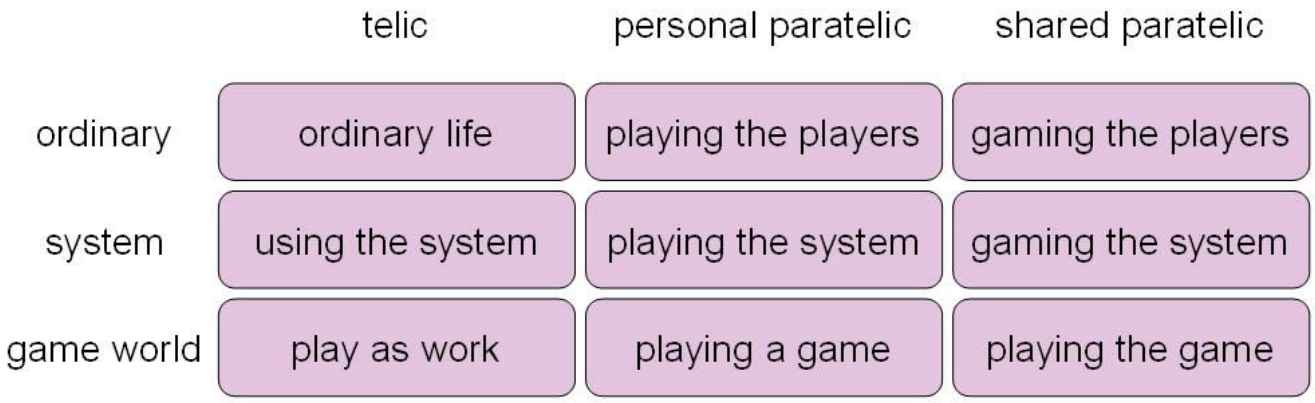

Figure 4: Mindsets and contexts of play.

bother the other players but is trying to amass wealth (i.e. *greed play* [18]), advance in the game rapidly, or is just learning how to play (see e.g. [30]), it is not "actual" grief play.[8]

According to this understanding, grief play can be understood as playing the players. The griefer is playful not within the rules, or in relation to the rules, but she is in a paratelic mindset while interacting with other players. This is explicitly stated by a member of a griefer pledge interviewed by Lin & Sun [30]: "You pay to play with unintelligent artificial characters, I pay to play you."

Griefers are players who gain their enjoyment of the game from teasing others. Yet, it is important to note that though a lot of griefing is paideic and in-the-moment, not all griefers crave instant gratification. In fact, they are willing to carry out long schemes in order to trick other players. As there are griefer peer groups who offer a context in which validation of griefeing efforts – when documented – can be archived, it can be argued that griefing can take a fairly ludic form, as well. Competing for social capital in the griefer community shows that structure is possible. Indeed, griefing can be very performative when documented – one might even go so far as to characterize videos of grief play on YouTube as relatives of candid camera (see also [43]) – another form of entertainment on the expense of unsuspecting bystanders who are tricked into functioning in a fabricated social context. There is a continuum of grief play from the spontaneous paideic fooling about to systematic, planned and informally competitive ludic grief play. If the former is playing the players, the latter may qualify as *gaming the players*.

According to Yee [48], a feeling of being in control is important to griefers. He writes that griefers "enjoy the power derived from dominating or tricking other players and the control this gives them over other players." There are those who simply want to kill other characters and make their lives miserable, but Yee also talks about *emotional griefing*, which he sees as actions where a player "seeks to gain control over someone's emotions by causing them distress, guilt or shame."

The friction between different social frames is partly what empowers the griefer. Her goal is downkeying other players. Yet, Yee's description does not really cover the griefer who aggravates fellow players and then posts the video of his fellow players' reactions online. The targets of griefing seem to be but tools in the creation of a video (in a way that is almost telic). Suddenly, griefing is a part of the paratextual industry [10] of games.

Playing the players is something that many people engage in and it can clearly be fun. However, it is perceived as detrimental to a gaming experience and often seen as a problem. It would be an intriguing design challenge to try to incorporate such structures into a game without the asymmetric power structure.

* * *

The full picture of the interplay between various mindsets and competing social contexts are presented in Figure 4. All the other parts of the model have already been explained except for *playing a game* (or just *playing*) and *playing the game* (which could also be called *gaming*). The difference between these is that, in the latter, there is a shared rule system and the former means just being playful in the context of the game, perhaps following additional self-invented rules.

5. Conclusions

As playfulness is a mindset, it is possible to play individually in a context where others are not playing. This gives rise to playing the systems, especially online. When more people start playing in the same way, the situation becomes differently framed for different groups of participants. It is possible that there exists side-by-side a formal (game) system, games some of the players have agreed to play, and individually motivated playful actions, plans, quirks and flights-of-fancy. It is important to be aware of the possibility of these competing contexts, not only to navigate them, but to take them into consideration when designing online social platforms.

Though these activities can be detrimental to the system that they are performed on, especially from the point of view of the service provider, the user-players may find them deeply meaningful. This

[8] The challenge with this definition is that only the griefer can define something as grief play as she is the only one who is aware of her own intentions. Thus, for example Lin & Sun [30] have widened their definition to include two kinds of grief play, systematic self-aware and occasional unconscious grief play. Indeed, to tackle this, most definitions of griefing actually mention that what counts as griefing is socially negotiated. For a further discussion on this, see Foo [17].

does not mean that all actions by all users should be tolerated – especially in a commercial context certain limits need to be set – but game studies cannot ignore these actions just as playing incorrectly or as not-play. Play has both a personal, motivational component and a socially shared part. Limiting analysis to cover only one of these angles easily obfuscates the complexity of the activity (see also [28]).

For the designer, the challenge created by this situation is two-fold: first of all, the designer needs to be aware of the fact that any system she creates will be used in ways that she did not intend. Secondly, these misuses are not always 'bad' or 'evil', and learning from them can benefit the system as a whole. There are games (or toys, or systems) that have let the user have a strong input into how they are played, *The Sims* series being the most successful example of this [42].

Playing games is fun, but playing by your own rules can be doubly so. As philosopher Kurt Riezler [40] so aptly put seven decades ago:

> We never enjoy a playful attitude more than when making or changing the rules or conventions to which we submit.

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Social interaction in games

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Abstract: Due to the popularity of social media networks and the games played on those platforms interest in the so-called social games has piqued. This article looks at those games in the context of general social aspects of game play. By approaching game play as an activity, it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of social interaction: the sociability players engage in around the game and the social play contained and mediated by the game. In charting the social space of playing, this article shows the inherent social aspects of single-player games – and the solitary aspects of social games.

Keywords: social play; sociability; social interaction; games; play; single player; multiplayer; massive single player; gaming capital; performance.

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1 Introduction

> Whereas the vast majority of games played all over the world are collective in nature (that is, they involve the participation of more than one person), practically all electronic games are individual (Zagal et al., 2000).

Ten years ago, playing digital games was *perceived* as a solitary experience (Zagal et al., 2000; see also Rouse, 2001). Although single-player games have a rich history (puzzles such as *peg solitaire*, numerous *solitaire* or *patience* games, *crossword puzzles*, etc.), historically most games have had more than one player (Parlett, 1999; Smith, 2006; see also Schell, 2008). Even if the early digital games, such as *Spacewar!* (1962, Steve Russell et al.) and *Pong* (1972, Atari) were designed for more than one player (Sotamaa, 2009a), in the context of the history of games, digital games have featured an anomalous amount of single-player games. However, today with the presence of massively multiplayer games, virtual worlds, elaborate music-related party games and other games with mimetic interfaces, as well as numerous games played online on social networking sites, digital game play is far from solitary.

Our starting point is that play is both a part of everyday life and apart from it. The metaphors that have been used to grasp the border – such as *magic circle* (Huizinga, 1938), *protective bubble* (Apter, 1991) and *interaction membrane* (Goffman, 1961) – tend to be permeable. Play does not exist in a vacuum, and games are not completely separate from other social spheres. Playing games is not just a combination of rules and conflicts resulting in quantifiable outcomes, but something that is really only manifested in action – and these actions have a social dimension. The numerous ways in which social interaction and play of (digital) games are tied together is charted in this paper.

But did even the single-player games of the past lack sociability? Both sociability and play are very diverse phenomena; thus, their combination is doubly challenging to describe and understand. Since humans are fundamentally 'social animals', almost everything humans do and think can be considered to be social. This extends even to our language as thought processes are influenced by linguistic and culturally transmitted contents. We learn to speak and act as humans in close, social relationships with other people; thus, all of our actions and concepts carry socially determined significations with them. For more on dialectical linguistics, see the works of Vygotsky (1978, 1986).

In more overt and explicit forms, sociability is related to interaction and communication between individuals. This is where the new technical capabilities also feature in an interesting light: gameplay and playful behaviours are set in more explicitly social contexts as various channels of communication are opened between users and players. As these sites of social media are mediated, the playfulness that takes place there is not only explicated but is automatically documented in a way that is uncommon in unmediated encounters.

The game industry has discussed these games as *social games*. Although the term is understood to refer to games played on social media networks, in practice, it is often used in reference to game products on Facebook (Järvinen, 2009; Paavilainen, 2010; Stenros, 2010).

2 Sociability and social play

Multiplayer games are generally considered social. Zagal et al. (2000) have noted that "it is hard to imagine playing a boardgame of any sort without engaging in idle talk with the other players, although it is possible". Playing multiplayer games online without some kind of back channel for chat seems similarly uncommon. However, the interaction between players is hardly 'idle' as it has a clear impact on the game. Communication around and about the game may be as important to the player experience as game events (Drachen and Smith, 2008).

In multiplayer games, the social interaction around the game can have a clear impact on the play of the game – and thus even extraludic communication around a game must be taken into account in the design. One example of such a dilemma is called *kingmaking*, where 'a player who has no chance to win picks the winner of the game from among those players who are still in contention' (Gutschera, 2009). If games are viewed as systems, as structures, as is common in game studies today, then a player who cannot win a game should not care who wins; however, in practice, she does. The social aspects of playing are important for the players and they have an effect on gameplay. When this social interaction impacts the game – such as bluffing in poker – it has been called *metagaming* (Zagal et al., 2000; also Mueller et al., 2009). Yet it is difficult to show which parts of the idle chat are metagaming and which are not.

David Myers has argued that "it is not clear that social play contributed to the experience of video gameplay as a unique aesthetic form" (Myers, 2009). Following Robert Fagen's classic division of animal play (Thompson, 1998), Myers divides play into play with body (locomotor play), play with conceptual objects (object play, digital games are most closely associated with this category) and play with others (social play). According to him

> it seems reasonable to construct explanation of social video game play as an extension of individual video game play rather than to characterize individual play as a fragmentary and incomplete version of social play. (Myers, 2009)

He considers object play to be primary in digital games and locomotor play and social play to be less important. After all, it is possible to play even the most massively multiplayer game alone. Earlier, he called for a reconceptualisation of social play as 'apparently derivative and potentially negative influence on the adaptive functions of individual and oppositional play' (Myers, 2007). (Note that Myers discusses digital games as 'a unique aesthetic form' whereas we see them as a subset of games: he seeks distinction, and we emphasise similarity.)

In this formalist approach, it is customary to discuss games as rules. Rules provide the framework for a game and instil actions in the game with meaning. Often these rules are divided into explicit and implicit rules (e.g. Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). The explicit rules are the operational rules that literally spell out how the game is supposed to be played. The implicit rules guide playing on a more general level; these 'unwritten rules' stipulate good sportsmanship and other social rules in the situation where playing happens. Some of these rules are game specific, but more often, they are general rules that are related to playing a whole subset of games (a move is made when you let go of a piece) or even to playing all games (you are not allowed to just leave a game even if you are losing).

Though Myers' stance certainly makes sense when looking at games as systems of explicit rules (games as artefacts), it seems to deny the importance of 'idle chat' to a gameplay experience. If the implicit rules, or 'social rules' of play are seen as having lesser value than the rules that are coded into the game system, then social interaction around the game (when not a direct symptom of the rule system) can be seen as a less important sideshow. The problem with this stance is that, in practice, play is social by its nature and a player who disregards the implicit social rules of games plays a very different game (compare Myers, 2008 and Smith, 2007).

Back in 2003, Markus Friedl was excited about online multiplayer games as they promised to bring more sociability into digital games. He wrote:

> A major driving force underlying a person's play activities is often a scenario in which the game itself plays a minor role and is only the initiator and context of a social event. The main motivational factors are socialization, communication, meeting each other, making new contact, and discussing game- and (more often) non-game-specific topics. Multiplayer online games bring this fundamental game quality back into the digital computer gaming world. (Friedl, 2003)

Friedl and Myers are talking about two different things. Friedl underlines the importance of social interaction in the playing as an event. Myers criticises the disruptive quality of extraneous sociality in game as personal object play. Recognising the difference between *sociability of the players* and *social play in a game* is mandatory in order to fully grasp the importance of *social interaction in a gaming situation*. Without such a distinction, it is difficult to navigate the conflicting readings of the importance, function and side effects of social interaction. (What we call social play has also been called gamer interaction (Lundgren et al., 2009), whereas Salen and Zimmerman (2004) call social play internally and sociability externally derived social interactions.)

The sphere of the game and the sphere of playing the game can be understood as *frames* (Goffman, 1974; see also Fine, 1983). Frames are social contexts that give meaning to activities. The queen overtaking a pawn in a game of *chess* could be perceived as a removal of a beautifully carved piece from a black and white chequered board and it being replaced by another larger piece from the same board performed by an entity. *Keying* these actions into another frame, a process of transforming the social meaning of these actions into something else – in this case into the game of *chess* – 'performs a crucial role in determining what it is we think is really going on' (Goffman, 1974; see also Bateson 1955).

The game is one frame and the *social play* in a game takes place in this social context. The situation where playing of the game takes place is another social context. This is where the extradiegetic activity happens and where the *sociability* of the players is placed. Juul (2009) calls games that encourage sociability *socially embeddable*; the interesting thing happens not in the game but around it.

A player usually moves between these two frames with ease and keeping them separate is usually unproblematic. However, since both 'game' and 'ordinary everyday life' are social constructs, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between the two. Nevertheless, the distinction between these two is useful; indeed, a border between game and ordinary has been postulated at least in philosophy (Huizinga, 1938; Riezler, 1941), psychology (Apter, 1991), sociology (Goffman, 1961, 1974), and it is recognised in many legal (Lastowka, 2009) and ethical systems (Montola et al., 2009). Even so, it does not mean that actions or attitudes are somehow inherently ludic or ordinary.

3 Social interaction in games

In this paper, games are grouped based on the number of participants and the interaction patterns they have. However, one should keep in mind that having more participants does not necessarily lead to more – or more meaningful – social interaction.

At one end of this scale, there is the true single-player game that is only played by the very person who created it. This game, e.g. a prototype being tested by a designer, is played by her alone, and there is no possibility for any kind of social interaction during play since no one else is present or knows about the game or the playing. But even this kind of playing may increase the social and cultural capital that the player has (she has invented a new game which she is able to talk about, and she may understand something about games through that exercise), and then there is the angle of dialectical linguistics: language is social.

At the other end of this scale would be a massively multiplayer game that every possible person participates in. A game played on such a scale would probably be indistinguishable from life in general, and thus the distinction of the activity as a game would lose its meaning.

We cover five different types of gameplay in Sections 3.1–3.5. Starting from single-player gaming, we present the different social aspects, which expand on each step as we move from the solitary player experience towards two players, multiplayer and massively multiplayer gaming. The last category, massive single-player games, twists the scale into a loop, and describes games with numerous players who have very little social interaction. Unless otherwise stated, issues presented in earlier types apply to later types as well. Table 1 summarises our findings.

3.1 Single player

Single-player games can be defined as games played by a single person at one time. Yet, aside from the above true single-player game, few single-player games are completely devoid of a social element. In game design literature, social interaction has been discussed mostly in the context of multiplayer games, ignoring the implicit forms of sociability in single-player games (e.g. Rollings and Adams, 2003; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004; Schell, 2008) – if it has been discussed at all. Yet with both traditional folk games and commoditised proprietary games, it is almost impossible to play without at least the knowledge that others play the same game; theoretically, just this knowledge that others also spend time engaged in similar activity makes the play social. And even if there are no others playing the game, the player can feel as if she is in 'dialogue' with the game designer (Wilson and Sicart, 2010). Playing the game increases the social capital of the player as she is able to discuss the experience of playing the game.

Single-player games that are played in the context of social media take a step further, as with these games, the player not only knows that other people may have played the same game, but also has knowledge that they are playing at the same time. For example, in the game distribution and multiplayer platform service Steam the player receives announcements when her friends start playing any kind of a game attached to the service and on the social networking site, such as Facebook, the player can see others' gaming habits in the shared high-score lists or in the status feeds. These disconnected, even hypothetical, other players provide a reflective context for the player.

Table 1 Player relation table

	Players	*Players' relationship*	*Description*
	Single player	Reflective, competitive[a]	• Knowledge of others playing the same game makes the game more social • Social media have made single-player gaming more transparent • Play increases gaming capital, made visible through reward mechanisms such as achievements and trophies • Single-player gaming can be strongly performative
	Two players	Reflective, competitive, collaborative	• Two-player gaming has many forms in relation to time, place and system • Communication channels include face-to-face, in-game channel(s) or 3rd party channel(s) • Competition is often tiered
	Multiplayer	Reflective, competitive, cooperative, collaborative	• All players have direct effect on each others • Numerous communication channels (e.g. global, team, zone and one-on-one) • External communication channels such as discussion forums and Wikis
	Massively multiplayer	Reflective, competitive, cooperative, collaborative, neutral	• Macro-communities, micro-communities, friends • Complex communication channel hierarchy (e.g. global, groups, sub-groups, one-on-one) • Neutral players, players as tokens or props, playing 'alone together'
	Massive single player	Reflective, competitive, cooperative, (collaborative), neutral	• Content sharing between players • Little or no real in-game interaction between players

[a]Single-player competes only via mechanics that are not part of the core game play experience.

3.1.1 Play as performance

Even though only one person plays, it is possible that there are numerous people present at the instance of play. In these situations, play can have a strong element of performance; the player is playing for an audience. Everyday examples of this include playing a console game in the living room with other people present or playing in an arcade with a small audience. Co-location, even if the people in the same space do not communicate and only one of them is playing, does mean that the people have at least a potential for interaction. This physical closeness, literal presence, contributes to the feeling of being together, camaraderie, of sharing time together. Already the first videogame patent considers spectator enjoyment:

> The game can be made more spectacular and the interest therein both from the player's and the observer's standpoint can be increased by making a visible explosion of the cathode-ray beam take place when the target is hit. (Goldsmith et al., 1948)

Viewed from this angle, there are no true single-player games in an arcade. Although games that require the player to move her whole body, such as *Dance Dance Revolution* (1998, Konami), make this performative aspect more visible, watching a seasoned player's play is common to all arcade games. Still, some of these games with mimetic interfaces feature elaborate graphics not related to core game play – but which add to the enjoyment of the spectators (Juul, 2009). Games that have been designed to be performances can cause conflicting play experiences; a duel in *SingStar* (2004, Sony) is also a duet, and a nice performance is often more important than getting a high score. The performance is scored not for points in the game but for social capital.

> Spectators that never become players in a game instance can still affect the outcome of the game. The most common form is by encouraging or discouraging specific players or teams, but some games such as *Who wants to be a Millionaire?* let Spectators [sic] give players advice. (Björk and Holopainen, 2005)

It is interesting to note that a quiz show with a host and a single player is a single-player game; if viewed systemically – the host merely 'runs' the game system. However, if games are viewed as activities, such a game is most certainly a two-player affair with the host challenging the player.

It is also possible that a single-player game is broadcasted on the internet for spectators. Some games allow players to record their game play as 'demos', which can be shared and viewed by others. Sometimes players compose game play videos from the demos. These videos usually feature game play highlights, bloopers or tutorials for others to see. Narrativised accounts of a game play in Facebook (Järvinen, 2009) can also be considered to be performances.

Finally, certain types of *paratexts* (Consalvo, 2007), such as *machinima*, take advantage of digital games and use them as a platform for creativity. Note that brilliant performances may have little to do with playing the game properly or to win.

3.1.2 Status and gaming capital

Most single-player games offer the possibility of competing with other players in a non-simultaneous manner. High score lists, which have been a common feature in digital games since the late 1970s, can be used to pit one player against another. The competitive aspect becomes explicit, especially in environments where a player has a personal relationship with the people listed on the scoreboard. Bogost (2004) observes that even if the persistency of a high score list in a game such as the arcade game *Asteroids* (1979, Atari), where the player could personalise the score with her initials, was limited to three digits; it 'transformed the game from a solitary challenge – man against rock – to a social challenge – man against man'.

Scoreboards and ranking lists turn the result of masterful play, a high score, into a source of *status*, whereas masterful performances, duets and machinima might result in status based on what the playing looks like.

Lately, numerous gaming platforms have implemented automatic scoring and achievement systems that work across game titles (see below). Some of these achievements are specifically tailored to make virtuosity in play (e.g. playing a game without dying, being the first to complete a task) visible to other players (Montola et al., 2009).

Another way to conceive this is as *gaming capital* (Consalvo, 2007; Malaby, 2006; Walsh and Apperley, 2008). Knowledge of how to play a game, where to find cheat codes and the connections to recruit unfamiliar players online are all dynamic and contextual forms of capital, resources for action. Gaming capital is also relevant in the wider context of social and cultural capital. The knowledge and skill sets, literacy acquired in the process of playing games, are relevant also in a wider societal context. Of course, it is possible to play a single-player game with more than one player, e.g. by alternating between two different players controlling the avatar (Newman, 2004).

Finally, single-player games in which a sole player considers the shared scoreboards and achievement points as important can be very competitive – and thus quite social. It can be questioned whether this kind of play can be considered single-player gaming.

3.2 Two players

Two-player games involve two human players who are engaged in the same play session. This simple, even tautological, statement holds numerous possibilities for different spatial, temporal and systemic configurations.

3.2.1 Spatial-temporal-systemic configurations

Two players can play in the same place or in two different places, can play at the same time, or at different times, and can play using the same game system, or with different systems. When players are co-located, then there is social interaction both mediated by the game and sociability outside of the game in the physical situation. Co-located play can take place, e.g. at home, in an arcade or on a golf course. Although it is possible to discuss the forms of co-located play, simultaneous play (e.g. shared screen, turn-based, hot-seat gaming), game design and game interface design are not the focus here. Game pattern analysis has produced the following terms to help navigate this cornucopia of play configurations:

> A game instance defines the complete collection of all components, actions, and events that take place during the playing of single game. A game session is the whole activity of one player participating in such a game. A play session is the uninterrupted stretch of time when one player is actively playing a game. (Björk and Holopainen, 2005)

Playing at the same location at different times usually means that the game instances are separate. However, it is possible to play non-simultaneous two-player games – or for the playing to take place in a *persistent world* (Bogost, 2004; Zagal and Mateas, 2007 call this *liveliness*), which blurs the borders of the concept of a game instance. Competing against another person through a shared scoreboard cannot really be grasped with these concepts as defined by Björk and Holopainen. These players are playing in two separate game instances, two separate game sessions and two separate play sessions; yet they can be competing in mastering the same game.

Co-located play need not be done using the same device. Networked play in the same game instance is possible at a single location as well: the tradition of LAN parties is an example of this. Naturally, it is also possible to play different games at the same location, producing *parallel play*. Playing at different places at the same time is possible over the network. The players connect to the same server and play remotely.

Depending on the configuration of the physical location of the players, temporal relationship of their playing times and the system used to administer the gaming, communication both within the game and outside of it can become quite complex. A part of it is mediated by the game: there is the direct interaction (shooting at each other, trading, talking) and indirect interaction (affecting the game world) (Friedl, 2003). These communications are a part of social play. In addition, many games offer the possibility to communicate via voice or text – and although this communication is mediated by the game system in digital games, it usually falls under the header of sociability around games. In addition, communication happens outside of the game. The sociability of playing co-located is clear, but remote play can also feature social interaction that is not mediated by the game system through the use of a back channel communication such as an instant messaging system, voice chat, IRC or telephone. The same applies to playing at different times at different locations, but on the same game system. It just means that the communication that does not go through the game is also non-simultaneous, taking advantage of systems such as e-mail and web forums.

Remote play where players do not connect to the same technological gaming system is also possible, though quite rare. In these cases, the game usually transcends technology; it may be partly mediated through technology, but it may not be constrained by technology. For example, playing remote *chess* via text messages, e-mails and letters would not be constrained to any one system. *Pervasive games* (Montola et al., 2009) are another example of this as it is possible for different players to play by different rules – but they tend to be multiplayer games.

3.2.2 Tiered competition

Game instances, game sessions and play sessions are useful labels when taking apart singular gaming events. However, the terms do not, for instance, capture a long standing competition for the best score in *Donkey Kong* (1981, Nintendo) – either among a certain circle of friends or globally. Competition against another player in mastering a game is an implicit way of gaming even if such a competition is not mentioned by the rules of the game or even explicitly established in a social context. Such competition can span space and time and the different gaming competitions bleed into each other as they become tiered. Campaigns and tournaments also structure separate game sessions into a larger framework of tiered competition.

If the game does not offer scoreboard functionality, co-located play can make this kind of a metagame competition easier as the acts of playing are visible – and so are the scores. Indeed, it can be difficult not to compete even when just playfully throwing darts.

The different tiers of embedded games and competitions, such as competing against a certain game, competing against another specific player through a certain game, competing globally with all players of a certain game, competing in mastering of gaming capital, etc., can become very complex to map. The recent emergence of codified metagaming systems, such as achievements on Xbox 360, steam rating on Steam, automatic status updates on Facebook games and trophies on PlayStation 3, has made these embedded games increasingly visible (Jakobsson, 2009):

> [Achievements] tap into the competitive elements of game cultures by providing new levels of competition. Achievements also work to make the scope and scale of player activities visible. In this respect they can both entail

> bragging rights and operate as building blocks of one's player identity. (Sotamaa, 2009b)

Achievements can also be found in non-digital games: e.g. a yellow shirt is awarded to the leader of general classification in *Tour de France* (Sotamaa, 2009b).

Tiering can also happen inside a game as a design choice. This is implemented by offering multiple metrics to measure a player's success – e.g. the Facebook game *FarmVille* (Zynga, 2009) offers levels, points, medals and farming skills related to individual crops, and it is the player who chooses what she will go after. The aforementioned party games with their duality of competing for points or favour of the spectators is another example of this. Finally, Dena (2008a,b) has written about tiering in alternate reality games, how both designers and players create different kinds of points-of-entry into these complex games. These different tiers suit different kinds of player/audience segments.

Tiered competitions show that games can have implicit levels in competitions that are invisible yet have social significance that is not immediately apparent. As such, many two-player games – and even single-player games – can be multiplayer games.

3.3 Multiplayer

In multiplayer games, there are three or more participants who can have a direct play effect on all other participants. The same spatial, temporal and systemic possibilities that arise with a two-player game are still available with multiplayer games – although now it is possible that there are *both* players who are co-located and remote, and the number of devices used for playing can be more than one and less than the number of players.

Multiplayer games also usher in a new important difference between co-located and remote games. Not only are the communications complex through one channel (e.g. typology, see Wright et al., 2002), but also multiple parallel possibly asymmetrical channels. In co-located games, other players, usually witness, whispered one-on-one interactions even if they do not know the contents of such exchanges. In remote games, it is possible to communicate one-on-one without other players noticing. Co-located *Diplomacy* (1959, various publishers, currently Hasbro) and play-by-e-mail *Diplomacy* are quite different in this regard (Bogost, 2004). These kinds of asymmetrical communication patterns are common in remote multiplayer games in general. For example, in team-based games, a player is often able to communicate with her teammates using channels that are not available when communicating with her enemies (Myers, 2007).

3.3.1 Competition, cooperation and collaboration

In a two-player game, the relationship of the players can be *competitive* (directly antagonistic) or *collaborative,* working together to reach a strategic long-term goal. In multiplayer games, it is also possible to have *co-operative* play where players band together to reach short-term tactical goals, even if their ultimate goals may be in conflict (Paavilainen et al., 2009; also Sánchez et al., 2009; Smith, 2006). A game that features two or more competing teams also features both collaboration (within the team) and antagonism (between the teams) (Zagal and Mateas, 2007).

Although at times it can be difficult to distinguish between sociability related to the game and the social play fostered by the game in practice, these distinctions can be made analytically with frame analysis. For example, the competitive or collaborative nature of interaction on these levels is independent of each other. Cheating and grief-play notwithstanding, on some level, all games require collaboration as the participants need to agree to participate and to play by the rules – even if those rules can be negotiated as a part of play (see also Montola, 2008; Smith, 2007). Juul (2009) also points out that managing the game experience and social consideration in multiplayer games can be quite central: you may, e.g. end up playing worse than you could in order to keep the game balanced, or to make a fellow player happy (Smith, 2006). A competitive game is competitive outside of the game only if extraludic meaning is attached to it (e.g. professional sports, gambling, duels to the death).

Within the game, the players can either play against each other or play with each other. There is also a middle ground of occasional cooperation when it makes tactical sense. Interestingly enough, the game mechanics themselves do not necessarily stipulate the style of play. Players are able to make these calls sometimes individually and sometimes collectively. For example, the different types of servers available for massively multiplayer games (player vs. player, player vs. environment) show that some games are not ultimately competitive or collaborative, but that this is negotiated in the social act of playing a game.

Long running games that have a campaign or tournament structure, or a persistent world, further complicate matters. It is possible to collaborate one day and to be rivals in another play session, although usually the short- and long-term relationships mirror each other.

3.3.2 Confusing ludic and extraludic

Neither social play nor sociability is necessarily inherently good. It is not automatically better (or worse) to play with others than to play alone, although these kinds of value judgements are sometimes attached to multiplayer games as Myers (2007) has critically noted. Indeed, if social play was always better than solitary play, then getting a backseat player in *solitaire* would be a cherished experience.

As the number of participants (or, actually, sides) climbs to three or more, numerous game design rules change (Gutschera, 2009; see also Smith, 2006). A game designer can do more with social play when, e.g. the switching of sides becomes possible. Yet, at the same time navigating extraludic sociability becomes more complex, and it is common for the border between ludic and extraludic motivations to blur. Many players enjoy these types of games, but they are often quite similar. Gutschera (2009) has listed common behaviours that emerge in such games like "[l]ying low so that other players do not perceive you as a threat" and "[c]ajoling, whining or begging other players not to hurt you".

This underlines the importance of differentiating between the sociability of playing and the social play inside the game, even if blurring that distinction is a goal of the game design. Games that are not *zero-sum games* (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004) are one way to tackle this problem. For example, *World of Warcraft* (WoW) (2004, Blizzard Entertainment) can be cooperative without an antagonistic undercurrent.

3.4 Massively multiplayer

In a massively multiplayer game, only some players have direct effect on some players, though all players can have an indirect effect on all players. In practice, this usually means that games which do not have an explicit player limit, unlike the typical online shooter games, which are usually limited to 32 or 64 players per play session. Usually massive multiplayer games feature dozens of server clusters which can hold up to thousands of players, playing simultaneously in the same play session.

3.4.1 Communication, community and copresence

Communication between players in massively multiplayer games happens in numerous ways. For example, in *World of Warcaft* there are private, one-on-one 'tells', group chat, guild chat, 'spatial' chat and 'zone chat' (which is divided into four sections) available to the players (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). In addition to this, players communicate via external chat channels, web forums, Wikis and blogs. Again, the social interaction channels mediated by the game are more likely to fall under social play and extraludic communication is more likely to fall under sociability. Still, the division in massively multiplayer games is hardly clear-cut: a lot of idle chat takes place within the game, and many of the sites devoted to discussing the game are constantly used by the players as resources that support play.

Yet communication is not necessarily about conveying information, but about forging or reinforcing the social ties between the participants. Virtual worlds, such as massively multiplayer online games and social networking sites, have been called *third places*, social arenas that provide a place to unwind and spend time together with others (third after home and work) (Rao, 2008). Playing can be an excuse to be together (Friedl, 2003). It seems that as long as enough people are playing a game, everyone present need not even actively participate.

Playing games together, even if it happens remotely and is mediated by the game system, creates a feeling of *copresence*. Research in the area of presence has shown that communicative realism is strongly dependent on the richness of the interface (this research goes back to at least Short, 1974). Interestingly, doing things together in a game can create an even stronger feeling of copresence than being in the same room:

> Higher levels of social presence may be attained between remote players who are continuously and mutually engaged in a collaborative game, than between co-located players who are each concentrated on attaining their individual goals without the need to interact or share. (de Kort et al., 2007)

Thus it seems that social play can be as strong a source of a feeling of copresence as sociability of playing. de Kort et al. (2007) conclude that gaming platforms can and should be considered as social presence technology. Multiplayer games are about collaboration even if one is competing in the game.

Similarly to the tiered competition levels, copresence also has different levels to it as there are different levels of interaction and sociability. Certain actions a player takes theoretically target the whole playing *macro-community*. Trading is an example of this. Collaborative play that aims at reaching both shared as well as individual goals is organised around a smaller group of people, e.g. a guild. This is the *micro-community*. Then there are the *friends* a player plays with, who share a common frame of reference in terms of meaning (Friedl, 2003).

This is neither the only way to cut the pie up nor is it static over time, but it shows that different levels of sociality have different purposes. It is also interesting to compare MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) and games played on social networking sites. Games played on social networking sites also have massive numbers of players, but the division into macro-community and micro-community is usually made automatically: on Facebook, one could play with anyone (macro), yet the usual model is that one is only offered the chance to play with the people one knows (micro). The people who actually play the game would then be comparable to Friedl's friends.

3.4.2 Players as tokens

In massively multiplayer games, the number of participants is so large that it becomes impossible to have simultaneous meaningful interaction with all coplayers. This leads to yet another category of player relationship: a *neutral* tendency towards coplayers. Basically, the other characters are now props or tokens, or at least on a level of non-player characters in their importance. This can be similar to parallel play, even if the playing happens using the same system. The non-zero sum nature, common in massively multiplayer games, makes it easier to disregard other players when they are not directly relevant to a mission.

In 2006, Ducheneaut et al. concluded that many players play *WoW* independently, without getting tangled up in social groupings. On average, the single players of *WoW* advance in the game faster. They have called this kind of approach to massively multiplayer games playing 'alone together'. Yet they also found that there are also certain player groups, specifically the ones that form the cores of guilds, that play more and play decidedly socially.

This shows that players can have very different approaches to the social interaction in massively multiplayer games. Even so, other players can serve a purpose even when a player is playing a multiplayer game 'alone'. It is just that this purpose does not have value in the explicit rules of the game:

> While many of WoW's subscribers play alone, we believe they prefer playing a MMORPG to playing a comparable singleplayer game because of a different kind of "social factor." Indeed, the other players have important roles beyond providing direct support and camaraderie in the context of quest groups: they also provide an *audience*, a sense of *social presence*, and a *spectacle*. We believe these three factors can help explain the appeal of being "alone together" in multiplayer games. (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, original emphases)

In a nutshell, the other players (or their avatars) are there to witness, to provide a feeling of an inhabited world and to be looked at. They contribute to the feeling of copresence just by being there. This is probably quite similar to using 'friends' or 'contacts' on social networking sites as game tokens and an audience to the progress of the player.

3.5 Massive single player

Massive single-player games are played by a large number of people simultaneously (sometimes even on the same system), but which are mostly played as single-player games. They feature little or no direct interaction with other players but use content

created and shared or sent by one player in a game played by another. The other players provide a context, something to measure against and a network of peers.

The term became common in the internet discussions and reviews relating to *Spore* (Maxis, 2008), an online game that creates a database of user-created materials. The playing is decidedly single player, but the same system enables a player to indulge in her performative side by offering a platform for spreading her creations, witnessing other people's creatures and fostering a feeling of social presence – even if the creation of creatures in *Spore* is not game play per se. To a lesser extent, the same principle applies to using level editors in games, such as *LittleBigPlanet* (2008, Sony) or *Boulder Dash* (1984; *Construction Kit* 1986, First Star Software) – and to modding in general.

Most social games also fit into this category, although instead of player created content, they often feature gifting, helping and sharing. Games, such as *FarmVille*, *Happy Habitat* (2009, ZipZapPlay) and *Mafia Wars* (2009, Zynga), are played by large crowds simultaneously on the same system, but each has an individual, almost a single-player game. Yet according to Rao (2008) and Järvinen (2009), these games are intrinsically and inherently social. Järvinen goes on to point out that the social networks where these games are played 'do not meaningfully exist without the users' social ties' and that the social network context does enable intuitive teaming of players.

That said, the social play is usually very controlled – players are able to send items or power-ups to each other. There is no game mechanic that forces a player on the receiving end of gifting to reciprocate – Björk and Holopainen (2005) have termed this *delayed reciprocity* – which creates a space for social play not mediated by the game. Still, opportunities for real collaboration are rare, though nominal collaboration happens e.g. in *Bejeweled Blitz* (2009, PopCap), which is principally a single-player game but friends share their top scores in a collective pool and this score competes against other 'teams' for special prizes. Cooperation is possible, e.g. by asking others for help through the social network.

Of course, there is all the sociability that a social networking site offers in these social games, and some of that does relate to the game, but the structure of the game is a curious combination of a (massive) multiplayer and single-player games – one that does not really seem have a non-digital counterpart.

4 Conclusions

The conclusions from our analysis point in multiple directions: first of all, the sociability around a game and the social play contained within a game need to be separated analytically not only to further our understanding of the social interaction centred around games, but also to help avoid the pitfalls of disruptive politicking in multiplayer games. Analytical rigor is called for in this endeavour: sociability is not a new feature, game category or a genre, but a smorgasbord of separate, yet partly interrelated phenomena that requires clear thinking to be unravelled.

Secondly, single-player games are more social than they are commonly given credit for. Although they lack direct simultaneous communication with other players either through the game or right outside of it, they are not disconnected from other players and are indeed connected to gaming culture in general. Playing alone does not mean that there is no social component, and this social component may prove to be non-trivial as it is possible to gain gaming capital, status as an expert player and literacy through playing

alone. Even the para-social relationships in which one party is a spectator for the other without active interaction are fruitful fields for sociability to emerge. A deeper understanding of the single-player experience is needed with the rise of 'social games' on social networking sites.

Thirdly, the third places offered by multiplayer, massively multiplayer and social networking platforms are built upon a feeling of copresence even when there is no direct interaction between the participants. In fact, many of these 'social online games' may not be nearly as intensely or deeply social as has been assumed – at least not for all players at all times.

Finally, a new category of social games, or massively single-player games, is emerging. Featuring a rather unique mix of single-player and (massively) multiplayer games' characteristics, these position the fellow players mostly as a context of gameplay.

As humans we are shaped by the social contexts we inhabit. We cannot fully escape these contexts, but play and games offer parallel worlds that give distance from the normal, everyday social rules, even if the mundane cannot be completely left behind. What games give us is a tool to consciously control, structure and delimit social interaction. That makes play so interesting to study – also from the perspective of social interactions.

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Narrative Friction in Alternate Reality Games: Design Insights from Conspiracy For Good

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ABSTRACT

Alternate Reality Games (ARG) tend to have story-driven game structures. Hence, it is useful to investigate how player activities interact with the often pre-scripted storyline in this genre. In this article, we report on a study of a particular ARG production, *Conspiracy For Good* (*CFG*), which was at the same time emphasising the role of strong storytelling, and active on-site participation by players. We uncover multiple levels of friction between the story content and the mode of play of live participants, but also between live and online participation. Based on the observations from the production, we present design recommendations for future productions with similar goals.

Keywords

ARG, transmedia, larp, design, pervasive, games, gameplay, narrative

INTRODUCTION

Alternate reality games (ARG) (Martin et al., 2006) have primarily been designed as storytelling vehicles. Being transmedia (Dena, 2009) productions, one of their main attractions lies in their ability to transport the players to a fictional world superimposed on the reality of everyday life and delivering an interactive narrative grounded in that setting. The play style is largely collective: Through locating content in the real world and online, players uncover, piece together and influence a given narrative.

The genre and play style that was novel ten years ago (Taylor & Kolko, 2003) is now well established, and it has by and large also met with success: there have been large-scale commercial productions, mostly in the advertisement sector, some of which have received critical acclaim. Certain patterns of gameplay have been well documented, in particular the way collective intelligence (McGonigal, 2003b; also Shirky, 2008) allows players to solve extremely difficult puzzles. What has been less studied is the interplay between narrative and gameplay in these games.

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In this paper, we focus on that interplay in a recent ARG production. The *Conspiracy For Good* (*CFG*) was explicitly designed to offer direct participation in a well-designed storyline. In fact, the designers consider it a *participation drama* (Whittock, 2010) rather than an ARG or a pervasive game, although it technically belongs to all three categories. The focus on telling a story and direct participation in the story makes the production a good candidate for uncovering the problems as well as potential of pervasive, participatory storytelling.

A particularly interesting aspect of *CFG* concerns the interplay between narrative and gameplay in conjunction with *tiered participation* (Dena, 2008). Almost all trans-medial productions make use of some kind of participant tiers, so that players are offered multiple entry routes and can choose their own level and style of participation. In comparison to most other ARGs, *CFG* had a particularly strong live play component, drawing upon the tradition of Nordic live action role-playing (Stenros & Montola, 2010, 2011). While online play followed the traditional ARG model of crowd-sourced, collective puzzle solving, the on-street players played in small groups and with a strong focus on interacting with the environment. *CFG* put the players on the streets, making them solve puzzles, dodge security guards and interact with hired actors, thus much more resembling the activities that you would expect in a computer game, only in the physical world (see Image 1). Our analysis shows that for multiple reasons, the live participation tier became distanced both from the overall storyline and online play.

Image 1. Player escapes from the Blackwell Briggs security personnel on Millennium Bridge in London.

This study is an analysis of the design challenges of combining strong narratives with pervasive street play, suggesting the reasoning behind these challenges, and offering possible solutions. In this paper we follow Tavinor's (2009) terminology and use *fiction* to refer to the diegetic story-world while *narrative* and *story* refer to a designer-directed storyline. As discussed in more detail below, the story was not scripted as a completely sequential structure, but fragmented into a set of *story beats* that to some extent could play out in varying order, and some of which could be influenced by player activities.

Although some story beats were focused on players uncovering events that already had happened, several of the key storyline events happened during the game and were influenced by player actions.

THE STRUCTURE OF A CONSPIRACY

Conspiracy For Good was a commercial pilot project in a potential series of ARGs created in collaboration by The company P, Tim Kring Entertainment, and Nokia, who sponsored the event to promote Nokia Point & Find technology[1]. *CFG* ran for four months online, culminating in four live events on the streets of London in July and August 2010. The focus on participation drama was largely shaped by the visions of the established TV series producer Tim Kring and apparent in particular in the online *webisodes*, short high-quality videos that were published online throughout the whole game and that communicated both the storyline and the progression of the players.

The first appearance of the production was through a viral teaser campaign with ordinary people as well as recruited celebrities claiming that they were "not members". Interested people were directed towards a web site where they could sign up and record their own "unmember" videos. This first teaser campaign was followed by a four-month long online game, with the primary purpose of introducing the storylines and characters, using mostly typical ARG tropes of distributed narrative and puzzle solving. Already during this period, there was an element of mobile gaming. Three free puzzle games for Nokia phones were distributed through the Nokia OVI store, targeting regular Nokia users that were unaware of the ARG. Playing the games unlocked clues for the alternate reality game (in the manner of *Chain Factor*, see Lantz, 2009). As the games were downloaded over 900,000 times, they served as one entry route to the game.

During the last month of the production, the emphasis shifted drastically in favour of live participation in the four London events. In order to ensure a sufficient number of players, the live events were publicised through local channels (such as club listings), and made available to anyone, whether or not they had participated in the ARG so far. Starting with the third event, live players also got access to a headquarters in London, accessible around the clock.[2] The live events lasted for approximately six hours each and had 80-180 participants each. Live players would frequently meet fictional characters played by interactive actors, *ractors* (see Stenros & Montola, 2011). During the course of events, these interactions required an increasing level of reciprocal role-playing by the participants. While the players were never cast as fictional characters, they still had to fit themselves into the fictional universe of the game.

Every live player group was equipped with a Nokia Point & Find-enabled smartphone. Point & Find retrieves location-specific information from the camera: by pointing the phone towards a distinctive object, you retrieve information related to the object or the location (see Image 2). This set the basic structure for the live events as a kind of treasure hunts. The players would go around, discovering clues and navigating their way through the game. Hence, this part of the game employed what Jenkins calls *environmental storytelling* (Jenkins, 2004), in that some plot material was uncovered through spatial exploration based on the Point & Find technology, propped places, and the interaction with actors.

Finally, the webisodes created a closed loop between the online content and the live events. The live events were filmed by a camera crews, and the activities edited together

into online webisodes that would communicate the progression to players who could not make it to the event. They also served as advertisements for upcoming events.

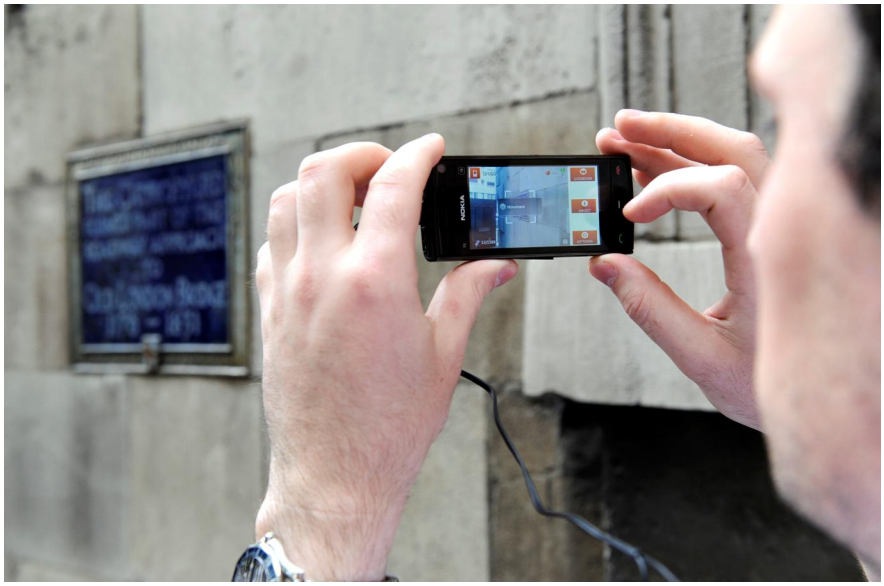

Image 2. Nokia Point & Find in use.

Conspiracy For Good wove together the story of an evil corporation Blackwell Briggs and the global benevolent conspiracy organisation that rose to oppose its actions. The players were recruited to save the Zambian village of Chataika, threatened by a Blackwell Briggs oil pipeline. Their task was to help a local Zambian teacher to travel to London and uncover proof about the illegal actions of the corporation. The game was intended as a serious game, one where participants would not only think about various charitable goals and organisations, but concretely act to support them. This was particularly apparent in the live events, where some of the tasks involved contributing to actual London-based volunteer organisations.

STUDYING *CONSPIRACY FOR GOOD*

As *CFG* was a long, distributed and complex project with numerous play modes, a number of methods were used for data gathering. The strategy of using several complementary methods is usually necessary in the holistic study of pervasive play (Stenros et al, in press). Our study employed the following methods of data acquisition:

Discussions with the production crew. During the design phase, two researchers repeatedly met with designers to discuss the emerging game design and the motivations behind it. After each live event, they also participated in the production debriefing.

Participatory observation. Three researchers participated in live events as players and participant observers.

Semi-structured player interviews. The observers recruited players for interviews, which were conducted either on the spot after the game, or a few days later by phone. We conducted 12 interviews with a total of 16 respondents. Interview transcriptions were cut into 1120 separate items, each corresponding to a single statement. The items were

analyzed by affinity diagramming method (Holtzblatt et al., 2004). 25 themes emerged from the analysis, forming the backbone of this study.

Monitoring online discussion forums during and after the events. The *Unforum*, a popular site for dedicated ARG players, was monitored to get a better understanding of the game events from the online players' point of view.

Online survey. An online survey was distributed four weeks after the game. The participants were recruited through a targeted mail, sent by Nokia, to all registered *CFG* participants. 168 persons, 113 men and 49 women, responded to the survey and 96 completed the full survey. The average respondent was around 30 years old. Of the survey respondents, 64% had not attended any of the live events. This makes the survey a useful complement to the interviews, as these were done only with live participants.

Overall evaluation

Before going into the core issues of this paper, we will summarize how the game was perceived by players.

The online survey paints a positive picture of the experience. Overall, participants rated the production quality as good to excellent (see Image 3). Participants that had attended live events were more positive than participants that only participated online.

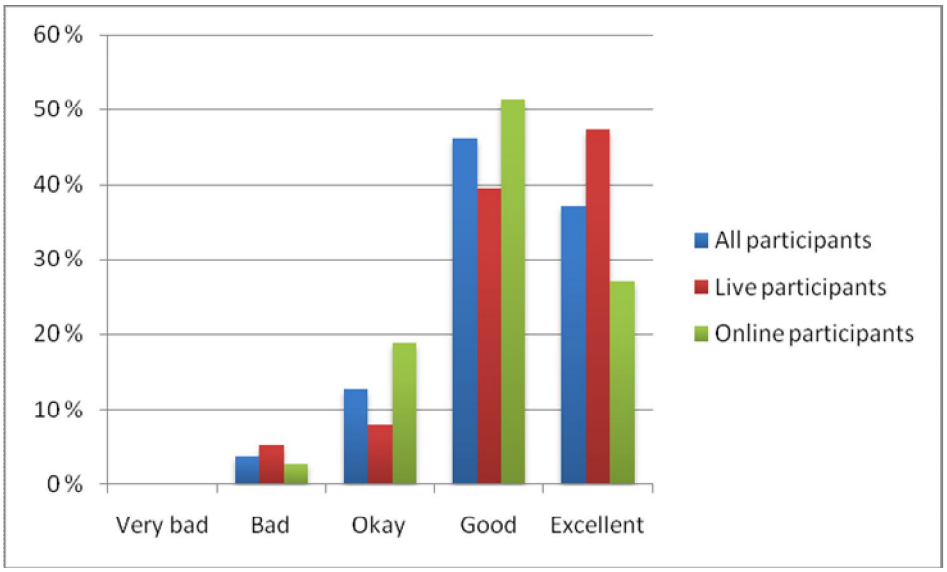

Image 3. Production quality, as rated by all participants, online only participants, and participants who also participated in live events (78 respondents).

Pervasive games that offer live participation tend to generate very positive comments from participants (see e.g. McGonigal, 2003 and Stenros et al, 2007), and *Conspiracy For Good* was no exception. As answers to the survey question "Please summarise your general impressions of the game" we find answers such as

> It is one of the largest pervasive experiences I believe anyone has ever participated in. I sincerely hope that the amount of effort can one day be duplicated and surpassed.

> Something that I will never forget. My friends on Facebook were all intrigued and asking "what was that about!"

The semi-structured interviews offer a more nuanced – and critical – view of the game. Though most interviewees had an overall positive attitude towards *CFG*, they voiced certain reservations.

The respondents had fairly sophisticated game literacy, as 80% of the participants reported playing computer or video games and two thirds mobile games. Surprisingly, two thirds had played pervasive games before, and one third had played role-playing games. Hence, most players had clear preconceptions of what kind of game they were to take part in.

NARRATIVE FRICTION

Conspiracy For Good aimed at creating a coherent storytelling path, weaving together online and live participation. While the game was positively received, there were issues of *narrative friction*, and these were largely related to how the story beats were communicated in different media. Below, we discuss these as a) friction between online and live play, b) between narrative and gameplay, c) between genre expectations and actual play, d) between collective and competitive play, and finally e) between the perception of a game world and the presence of a production team.

A. Friction between online play and live play

The influence of online content to the live experience varied tremendously. Some reported that online content, especially the videos, enhanced the immersion in the storyline:

> The online content really padded out the rest of the game between the Saturdays. With so much to explore, read, investigate and solve it made the conspiracy so much bigger and personal. (online survey).

However, both the interviews and the online survey show surprisingly low involvement with background story and online content prior to events. This comes up in the online survey. In response to the question "Describe your online involvement with the game a bit" we received, for example, the following answers:

> Nothing much to describe – for me it's all about the live experience. (online survey, live participant)

> I just used the site for getting details on the live events. (online survey, live participant)

A major cause of the problem was the clear division between online players and street players – they were not the same people.[3] The online parts of the game could be played from around the world, and many of the players that took it up had previous experiences with alternate reality games, whereas the live players had to be physically present in London and were primarily recruited locally. Many of the latter saw the game more as a treasure hunt or a *smart street sport* (Montola et al., 2009). In the online survey, we find these players comparing the experience to the kind of games that are featured at urban game festivals such as *Come Out & Play*[4] and *Hide&Seek*[5]. A common denominator for such games is that they play out over a limited time period (less than a day) and although they may require intense efforts during the event, they require very little preparation. With this in mind, it is not surprising that such participants were not motivated to read up

on the storyline in advance. Several of the interviewed live participants had at times problems remembering the main characters, and they could not describe their goals and motivations.

This was obviously a problem, as *CFG* was intended as a transmedial participatory *drama*, where the storyline would be directly meaningful for the individual player who could take part in some of the action. With the story unknown to so many of the live players, the meaning and motivations of their actions in the larger context of the game world was lost (see Image 4).

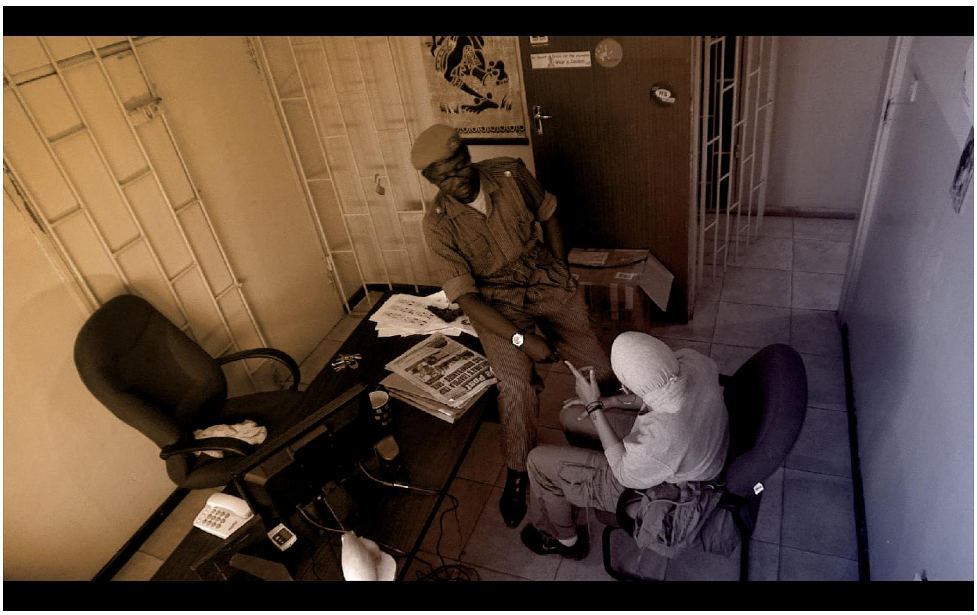

Image 4. Many street players knew little of the backstory. When they met Nadirah, pictured here being interrogated before making her way to Europe, they did not know what she had gone through.

In order to address this, the organizers planted actors and arranged events that would bring more exposition of past events in the storyline into the live events. They also recruited expert players to act as ambassadors explaining crucial plot points to new players. However, for aesthetic reasons information about the backstory, motivations of major characters and even gaming instructions were given *diegetically* – by fictional characters and within the narrative – in order to preserve coherence between the game world and the play experience. The effect was that such retellings took up a lot of playtime, while still being difficult to comprehend.

It would only be a small exaggeration to suggest that *CFG*, was, in practice, two games for two audiences.

> Overall, what was sorely lacking was an integration of live event content with online components. The online community was essentially given the shaft the moment the live events were on the horizon, which led to even more hardcore players giving up. (online survey, answer by a participant that participated both online and live)

As noted by this respondent, it is more than likely that some of the online participants felt that they were excluded from the game if unable to attend the live events.

B. Friction between narrative and gameplay

In order to guarantee that a satisfying narrative unfolds, the game organizers need to plan events beforehand. However, if the players feel that they have no agency, that their actions have no effect on the story, this is discouraging and makes the interactive game part feel superfluous. Games rely on *aesthetics of action*.

Game studies has discussed the friction between narrative and gameplay in digital games (e.g. Murray, 2004; Mateas, 2004; Jenkins, 2004). *Conspiracy For Good* was an event game spilling into the physical world, played only once with run-time gamemasters. This means that the there was no possibility save and replay, no need for an AI and no limitations in material constraints (affordances), all usually relevant for the construction of narrative-rich digital games.

CFG had a set story, where the players' actions did not influence the grand narrative. The interviewees differ in their opinion on the experience of this. Some felt that the balance between game and drama worked better and was more interactive than in similar projects they had attended in the past. Even in cases where the outcome of a task had been determined months ahead, these players felt that it was them who determined the end result.

> Even though it was a game and stuff, you felt closer to the reality they were creating than the previous one I went to. (Interview 12)

> This is definitely more interactive, because normally it's more following people around and watching them, but with this for certain parts you got to take part as well. (Interview 8)

Other players, and even the same players in other situations, had the opposite experience: that their actions had no impact on the events. *Railroading*, forcing the sequence of events in a certain direction, was mentioned as a criticism.

> So of course I felt more, being just a follower rather than being in the middle of doing, but of course that was a bold attempt to create something that would make people feel like they're in the midst of doing something themselves rather than just following. Yeah, well, it was sort of, bit difficult to perceive it as a game. (Interview 2)

The fixed story structure was not the only thing that influenced the players' sense of agency. A complaint that arose several times during the interviews was that all important choices were done by actors – except that sometimes the interviewees mistook *other players* for actors. Hence, the problem may be related to more general problem with a collaborative play design. Several interviewees also complained that there was no point in trying to push oneself to solve puzzles, since there were so many other players who would solve them quicker. Social scientists call this phenomenon *social loafing* (Karau & Williams, 1993): people making less of an effort to achieve a goal when they work in a group than when they work alone.

> You didn't feel like you had to get involved in order for the game to progress, because someone else was gonna do it. (Interview 1)

Although the main plot was set, several subplots could be influenced by the players both online and physically in London, the latter primarily in between the organised events. However, as the live events were scripted sites of play many players missed this opportunity.

Some interview participants as well as survey respondents comment on a lack of dramatic sophistication in the production. The setup with an evil corporation with no redeeming features on one side, and the players as the good guys, helping poor people, standing up to corruption, and setting up a conspiracy for good provided little basis for engagement to these players. Some players demanded more shades of grey, in particular wanting to play the bad guys.

> And I guess, an, more interesting idea for the whole game mechanic and storyline would have been that some of the participants would've played for the evil guys. So, now the screenwriters and producers seemed to have such a good idea that we all have to be on the side of the good, but you know, people aren't that simple and easy, so some people might have wanted to play on the side of the bad, especially when you know that they're purely fiction. [...] But now it was sort of too clear from the outset that we're all on the side of the good and that's a bit boring. (Interview 2)

Despite the fact that *CFG* did not require players to actively role-play, there are occasional reports of deep immersion into a plot event. In these moments the friction between playing a game and partaking in a (prescripted) narrative fell away:

> As captured in the online video (much to my surprise!) ... instinctively – without any thought or planning – I took a stand in the safe house, when all other participants had left (on demand!). It's an instinct as well as a principle – in life and in any game – that I remain as a witness, ready to step in if something 'bad' was going to happen to our leader! It was certainly an unscripted moment that played out really well for the actors. Yes. They did well. A best and a redeeming moment, for us and the game! (Survey response to "Tell us about your best game moment!")

C. Friction between genre expectations and actual play

Even though the majority of players had earlier experience with pervasive and alternate reality games, many of them struggled to find comparable experiences afterwards. Some mentioned TV series (*24*, *Lost*) as similar concepts; others discussed tabletop role-playing games or experimental participatory theatre. Even the players that had the most similar experiences came from two backgrounds: Some were fans of The company P, with previous experience of pervasive larps, others were London-based street game enthusiasts with a history of attending *Hide&Seek* events.

Hence, the players arrived with conflicting expectations. We have already touched upon the dissimilar genre expectations between online and live participants, but there were also conflicting expectations within the live player group.

First, there was confusion on the *genre of the story*. Some thought that *CFG* was a *24*-style action thriller, whereas others considered it to be much more "realistic". This confusion is understandable. The production quality was very high, creating friction between "realism" and "Hollywood realism". Genres influence story logics, which is particularly relevant for co-creative performances including pretence and role taking, as every participant contributes to the whole, based on their own genre expectations (e.g. Stenros, 2004). Some respondents complained that the production values of the videos

and the merchandise given to the players were too professional, and felt that that clashed with the “realism” of the story.

> I normally know what is real or not real, I felt like I don't really believe that could actually happen. (Interview 10)

> They weren’t what somebody, as much as the realism here with the conspiracy was great, the realism wasn’t there with the Blackwell Briggs people. It was kind of lacking, they were a bit wishy-washy. You couldn’t get yourself into it with them. (interview 5)

Secondly, there were differing expectations regarding the *genre of play*. The relative novelty of the live events primarily caused confusion and a lack of player initiative. Players reported on several occasions in which they simply did not know how to proceed in the game.

> At the beginning I felt a bit lost but then I came to event 4 and didn't know enough about the whole thing.

> [W]e got lost, missed the point of the game and therefore ended up last pretty much!

> There was some time in the final event when we weren't sure what to do, though in general that event was well planned.

> (Survey responses to: ”Tell us about the most boring or bad moment of the game.”)

Even experienced ARG participants encountered some friction. The online experience was a fairly typical ARG, in which participants collaborate to solve puzzles and push the story forwards. During the live events, players were split into teams, and the teams had differing experiences. For example, during the last event some players met the main villain, others were recruited into the evil corporation, and some were captured by Blackwell Briggs guards. Such designs encourage players to discuss the game afterwards, as a way of enriching the experience for all. However, the live players were not expecting such big differences between the team experiences, and some felt that they missed out on the good parts.

> When it was obvious that the recruitment tests were obviously arbitrary, and being unlucky our team ended up being the last to be interviewed, which meant that I, being last, got a 30 second interview and obviously no chance to progress. (Survey answer to: ”Tell us about the most boring or bad moment of the game”)

D. Friction between collective and competitive play

Generally, there was a tension regarding the intended play style. The online part was constructed as a puzzle for a hive mind (McGonigal, 2003b), meaning in effect that the player group played as a single entity to uncover and piece together the distributed narrative. But when players were divided into teams in live events, it generated an expectation of competition between teams.

> [T]here usually seems to be some kind of a time limit and some kind of a score kind of a thing, and in this case it was a bit difficult to understand whether there is a score and whether there is a time limit and whether we are sort of gaming against our peers or with them. (Interview, 2-25)

The quotation illustrates how the expectation of a competition increases the need for clear rules and instructions.

> … there was not really interaction between the front teams apart from trying to ask for help, when the people were about finding the clues. But apart from that, it could have been something that they could have done, interactions between the different teams, or kind of a competition to find a clue or something like that, with two teams. That could have been nice. (Interview 6)

In the final event, players also had to at times work as individuals, introducing yet another mode to the experience.

This created a conflict with the expected style of playing. In an ARG, it is very important to play along with the intended design, and avoid getting accidental glimpses behind the curtain (which would expose the diegetic story content as fiction) (McGonigal, 2006). The live events, with their focus on team play, inspired a more open attitude towards cheating. The reaction may have to do with the fact that there were plenty of external rewards for players showing up in the live events; they received t-shirts, compasses, binoculars, flashlights and so forth. This created a false expectation of a "big prize":

> I got a phone as did my wife but I would like to know what the winning group got as a Grand Prize. (Survey response)

The problem was aggravated by the fact that during the live events, not only the backstory but also the rules for were explained diegetically. Some informants felt that both the background and the gaming instructions should have been relayed outside the game[6]. Although this would break the flow of the game momentarily, it helps to make the game goals and limitations clear to players, and this in turn enables them to get the most out of the event.

The main motivation for adhering to rules seems to be the expectation that this will lead to the best experience. In multi-player games cheating is considered as an option when a particular experience turns out less well designed than expected (Consalvo, 2007).

> In the last one there were some boring 'aptitude tests' that took most of the afternoon and no time for actually solving anything. I gather from someone else we should have just cheated, but we didn't really understand the boundaries or anything.
>
> (Survey answer to: "Tell us about the most boring or bad moment of the game")

The experience of playing in a team was highly appreciated as such. Teams could pool skills and divide labour. For example, a number of players commented that they were happy that they did not have to carry out any "awkward" social tasks (talking to bystanders, role-playing with ractors) as others in their team loved doing that. Similarly, teamwork alleviated accessibility issues of physical tasks. Division into teams helped navigate those design issues by *pooling talent*. Yet, as mentioned, players craved clear instructions for whether they were expected to compete between teams or within teams.

E. Friction between fiction and production

The prevailing design ideal for alternate reality games is that the production team should stay hidden in order to maintain the illusion of alternate reality. In practice, upholding the illusion often requires a huge effort by the team and may limit feasible designs especially

in live events. In *CFG*, the players perceived numerous disjunctions between the fiction and the production. Especially during the first live event the players could spot members of the production crew lounging halfway into the game, or just hanging around the players checking out how the game was progressing. Filming the events caused a major break of the illusion. As all live events were filmed to produce the webisodes, camera crews constantly followed the players. Many complained about this, as the filming also disclosed to the players that they were going in the right direction.

> Once a cameraman asked us where are you going next. We said we don't know, sorry [laughs]. (Interview 3)

Some uses of game technology also lead to incongruence in which the activities performed did match their diegetic meaning (Waern et al., 2009). For example, in the third event the players were told to hack nearby security cameras to receive video feeds to their phones. In reality, what they did was to scan barcodes with their smartphones. In general, some of the actions that players had to perform in order to progress in the game felt unnatural or even contrived.

> [T]he camera seemed to be a sort of a pretext just to get us out there, and to.. It was sort of a narrative element that you know, the, you know, the big brother is watching us and the, whatever the company was called (interview 2)

Finally, there was a mismatch between the fictional level of threat, which was high, and the actual danger players were experiencing during events, which was very low. The players were cast as courageous activists, who were in constant danger. The live participants also had to sign a waiver that essentially said that the game organizers would not take any responsibility if something happened to the players. This raised the expectations about the intensity of the game and the actions the players would perform, but in practice the game was very safe. In the last live event, even running on grass was prohibited.

As a result, some players felt that the game was *too* safe. Although a few mention minor safety concerns (such as feelings of danger in relation to taking a rusty ladder down on to the beach by the river Thames), others expressed a wish to do much more dangerous things.

> Safety...No - if anything CFG played it too safe, physically and creatively.
>
> (Survey answer to: "Were you ever concerned regarding the safety or ethics of the game?")

The players, who did perceive the game as dangerous, reported excitement, feeling the thrill of immediacy and tangibility (Montola et al. 2009 have identified these as significant sources of enjoyment in pervasive games).

The singular most successful immersion-inducing and "dangerous" part of the game was the Blackwell Briggs security team. Both in the online survey and in the player interviews these guards were mentioned numerous times.

> Getting shoved up against the handrail of Millennium bridge by a BB goon "Do you think this some sort of game".

> Running away from the Blackwell Briggs agents. Totally caught up in the moment like a child!
>
> (Survey answers to: "Tell us about your best game moment")

It seems that players who attended street games expected to be doing thrilling things for real, while the online players reported no such disappointment. However, there was also a marked difference in aesthetics between online content and live events. The online campaign featured serious themes and a high level of reality-fiction blur. The aesthetics of live events were based on playfulness, exemplified by a Bollywood flash dance mob distracting guards during the second event (see Image 5). The playful style of the live events was not a coincidence, but a deliberate design aiming to create a sense of safety, as well as to avoid scaring an outside audience. (For the problems related to outsider experiences in pervasive games see Montola et al., 2009). However, the trade-off is diluting the thrill of the experience.

Image 5. At the second live event a Bollywood flash dance mob performed to distract the bad guys enabling the unmembers to sneak into their new headquarters.

DESIGN TAKEAWAYS

By analysing the problems encountered in *CFG*, it is possible to tease out design insights for future productions.

Aesthetics of Action. As discussed earlier, the *CFG* production had close ties with the film media. But the aesthetics of action are different from the aesthetics of spectating, and knowledge transfer from cinema production to ARG production is far from direct. For instance, the players do not expect to have an uninterrupted and slick experience.

One of the most problematic and yet prevalent design ideals, shared between live role-playing and alternate reality games alike, is the desire to create a full 360° illusion of a game world (Waern et al., 2009; Koljonen, 2007). It emerges over and over again,

especially when designers arrive fresh and perceive this to be the significant feature of these genres. It is also often what the players' desire: the design ideal is closely related to the *Pinocchio effect* (McGonigal, 2003a) of players preferring to stay constantly in the game world, ignoring the fact that they are playing a game. However, it is just a design ideal, and seldom fully realised. Despite the expertise of the organising team, even the *CFG* team fell prey to this ideal.

In particular, giving out the instructions on how to play and recapitulating the story so far in a diegetic fashion caused major problems. However attractive the ideal was, it was slow, inefficient, imprecise and muddled. It is much preferable to communicate the rules, goals and setting outside the fiction and in a clear and concise manner. Seemingly, this violates the coherence of the game, but in actual practise, confusion over the setting and the rules is much more damaging to the experience. As noted by Jonsson et al. (2007) in an earlier unsuccessful attempt of a similar solution, the "problem was that there was no *agreement* on how to play and what to play". As we can see from *CFG*, this may be particularly problematic in productions where there is an apparent element of competition.

In ARGs, the *this is not a game* -aesthetic (McGonigal, 2003b) is just that, an aesthetic. Players do not *actually* think that the game is not a game, or that there is no distinction between game and reality. Like actors rehearsing a play, they are quite capable of separating the diegetic "reality" from the non-diegetic mechanics of play. They want to ensure that they play it right, and will seek to repair any gaps in the fiction by themselves if given the opportunity.

Sanctions. Related to the previous point, even though the live events did have multiple opportunities for in-game rewards, achievements, and penalties (getting to meet Sir Ian Briggs or being taken down to the basement for questioning), many players felt that there was no clear sense of achievement or failure. This resulted in players losing their sense of *dramatic agency* (Murray, 2004) in the game; the consequences of actions were felt to be meaningless. Making the possible winning and losing conditions more explicit would have made the live events more gamelike and engaging. This is related to that the sense of threat that seems to be an important motivating factor in many playful activities (Apter, 2007).

Exposition. Exposition is a literary technique used to provide the audience with background about the plot, characters, setting, and the theme of the story. In *CFG*, it was expected that the live participants would have been somewhat familiar with the background story provided on the website – especially the webisodes that reported the story so far. In practice, live and online players participate for very different reasons and in very different ways, as was the case in *CFG*. The consequence was that few live players bothered to read up, and even fewer participated in the online puzzle solving activities.

Although the problem could have been fairly easily addressed in *CFG* (e.g. by handing out background leaflets during live events), this highlights a more general issue with the idea of tiered participation (Dena, 2008); combining various modes of participation in the same game. The different modes of gameplay are very likely going to engage different types of players. This can lead to a weak incitement for communicating between the different groups, and this, in turn, can weaken the game experience for all.

Through its inclusion of downloadable mobile phone games, *CFG* actually recruited a third group of players. However, the survey depicts these players as being very confused about *CFG* as a whole. We could not find a single example of an online or street player recruited through the mobile games.

Inappropriate Symbolic Actions. Games like *CFG* rely on players making physical actions (with or without the aid of technology), which have consequences in the game world. In a game which aims towards a 360° illusion and a seamless fictional world, a tight coupling between the physical action and its in-game meaning is preferable (Waern et al., 2009). The level of representation should not fluctuate too much. If you take a photo of a security camera in the physical world, the interpretation of that physical action should be similar in the diegetic game world. However, the *consequences* of the action can be drastically different in the game world.

Management of Expectations. *CFG* ran into some problems in managing the expectations for the live players. In general, understanding and managing the expectations that a production arises is crucial in shaping player engagement in live events, as these are fast paced and allow much less overview than the online participation does. In a participatory piece the expectations may also turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.

Lack of Shared Debrief. In Nordic larps it is customary to have a general debrief, where participants get to compare experiences, swap stories and reflect on the experience in an organized manner. These events serve as a site where a shared understanding of narrative and the meaning of a game is forged (Stenros & Montola, 2011). Though the live *CFG* live events were followed by parties, those did not serve as debriefing sessions. With separate debriefs after each event, the live players could potentially have developed a shared understanding of the unfolding narrative (or a *unity of action*, see e.g. Mateas, 2004) and preferred play style, and helped shape their expectations for upcoming events.

Team Play. Although the team structure created some misunderstandings in *CFG*, overall it seems to be a good strategy. From interviews and surveys, we can see that *CFG* worked well as a community-building and team-building experience. The game mechanics emphasized teamwork with separate but dynamic functional roles (Bichard & Waern, 2008) for the team members. A team allows the players to communicate what they know to each other, to get more inexperienced players into the game. However, when teams are used it is important to also communicate what is the team objective, such as, if they are competing against other teams.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the very professional production of *Conspiracy For Good* was, for most participants, a fantastic experience. However, the integration of playful and at times competitive street events situated in a fictional story-world and punctuated by prescripted story beats, with the more narrative-driven, serious-minded and collaborative online participation created friction between narrative and gameplay that has not been reported for traditional ARG productions. Integrating narrative and gameplay is always a challenge for game design, and especially difficult one for novel forms of games.

In this article, we have reported in particular on how the playful and competitive play style of live participants created friction with story as well as with online play. For several reasons, such as playful style, division of players into teams, and direct

recruitment of players for live events, live players did not engage with the storyline as expected. This despite the fact that *Conspiracy For Good* was a story-driven production.

None of these challenges of participatory drama seem impossible to overcome, and this analysis offers some design directions to move past them. A main design takeaway is that many of these problems can be avoided with better and clearer communication regarding the structure of play, on site as well as online.

ENDNOTES

[1] http://pointandfind.nokia.com/

[2] The player headquarters proved to be the least used part of the game. Between events a handful of players dropped in very sporadically. Most of the time the HQ was empty.

[3] Although we cannot be sure that this is correct, one of our survey respondents claims that there were only three players total that followed the production from start to finish.

[4] www.comeoutandplay.org

[5] www.hideandseek.net

[6] Incidentally, the designers had similar problems in their first major pervasive game production *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*, leading to a different approach in the sequel, *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (see Jonsson et al. 2007).

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Between Game Facilitation and Performance:

Interactive Actors and Non-Player Characters in Larps

Popular Abstract - The challenge of combining narrative and gameplay in live action role-playing games (larps) has been successfully negotiated with the use of runtime game mastering and interactive actors (ractors) performing non-player characters (NPC). Based on expert interviews six functions for the interactive actors (facilitating, content creation, character portrayal, entertaining, playing, safeguarding) are identified and explored. The paper also reviews existing literature on NPCs in larps, and goes on to offer design insights for runtime game mastering. In addition, certain practical aspects of separating non-player characters from the actors who perform them in pervasive games are considered.

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1.INTRODUCTION

Larps are a form of embodied and physical role-play, one where the participants pretend to be characters within a predefined context which is different from the everyday life.[2] There is a power structure in place that helps determine what is true within the fiction of the larp. Usually the larp organizers and their game masters have more control over the diegetic world. (Montola, 2012; Harviainen, 2012b; Brenne, 2005; Stenros, 2010; Mackay, 2001; Hakkarainen & Stenros, 2003).

Live action role-playing games (larps) combine narratives with gameplay. In these events the participants want to feel that they have an effect on how the events (i.e. the "story") unfold, yet they also want the resulting sequence of events to form a satisfying narrative. For the game designers, there is friction between crafting a satisfactory plot and ensuring player agency in narrative participatory fiction as the more closely a production follows pre-planned story structure, the less agency the player has (Peinado & Gervás, 2004; Jonsson et al., 2007; Jonsson & Waern, 2008). Although so called non-player character and interactive actors are common in larps, usually they are only discussed in passing in existing research literature. This study hopes to shed light on the matter.

In this paper the narrative challenges particular to larp are reviewed, and the possibilities offered by the use of interactive actors who perform non-player characters as part of runtime game

mastering are explored. The paper is primarily an interview study with interactive actors who have participated in one of two works of the Sweden-based The Company P that specializes in "participatory dramas". The paper offers possible design solutions based on the interviews, as well as observation, design evaluation and related literature. Six functions for the interactive actors are identified and explored. In addition, certain practical aspects of separating non-player characters from the actors who perform them in pervasive games are considered.

Janet H. Murray (1997, p.151) has postulated that "[p]erhaps the most successful model of combining player agency with narrative coherence is a well-run larp game." The analysis in this paper on the functions of ractors is not just documentation of a particular genre, but it has implications and relevance for helping to untangle some of the design challenges of narrative ludic events by exploring ways of negotiating story and game play, charting the experience of interactive actors, and helping understand how players negotiate the boundary between play and non-play by viewing events simultaneously as both.

First, previous research on this and closely related topics are discussed in order to frame the study. This is followed by a description of the methods and data used in the interview study. The heart of the article is the analysis of the functions of interactive actors based on the interviews, followed by an exploration of the boundary between the interactive actor and the non-player character performed. In the discussion section, the implications of the study are debated and contextualized to larps and games in general. Finally, the conclusions summarize the findings.

2. BACKGROUND

A common way to negotiate the challenge of balancing player agency and satisfactory narrative coherence is by limiting the options available to the players, and by fostering a false sense of agency. In digital games this is sometimes achieved through the use of a *forking path* the player may take through the game, or by providing an *open world* where the player can either pick her way through the forking paths of the plot by selecting missions, or explore the game world.[2] The problem with adapting the forking path approach to larps is that there is more than one player. Creating a net of interconnected forking paths for each player is extremely difficult – unless the players are effectively treated as a single hive mind progressing though the game, as is common in alternate reality games (McGonigal, 2003), i.e ARGs (e.g. Martin et al., 2006; Montola et al., 2009, pp. 37-40), or by removing the interlinking of the forking paths and sacrificing game world coherence, as is common in MMORPGs.

Navigating the task of leaving certain events up to the players (either as a group or as interlinked individuals) and fostering a sense of agency in larp is slightly different. One way to overcome the challenge is to use *fate play* (Fatland, 2005). In fate play the player is instructed on how to act at one or a few specific times (e.g. after the dinner you confront your father, or declare your love to your fiancée when the woman in the blue dress leaves the room) and these fates form a net that drives the plot. Outside of them the character can do as she pleases, in the confines of the setting, the rules, and the character itself.

Weaving a web of fates is a complicated task, and it makes the structure partially visible to the players. It also means that the number of characters is set; if a character is removed the web may collapse and additional characters not tied to the web may feel disconnected from the game. Goals written into pre-created characters, even if they are not absolute commands in the form of fates, also form a net and thus any larp where characters have been created by the game organizers can be seen as a lighter version of fate play.

The challenge with the open world approach is more nuanced. A digital game is colloquially termed an open world or a sandbox fairly liberally; providing a little bit more world to explore and giving the players the freedom of choice regarding the order of carrying out missions is sometimes called a sandbox, whereas from the point of view of larps this just seems like a thematic amusement park. As said, in a larp the players can do anything not prohibited by the rules, setting, or character, and thus have much more affordances than in digital games, where all but the social inter-player affordances need to be implemented through code. In digital games open worlds tend to be just elaborate forking paths, whereas even non-pervasive larps require limitations for a coherent designer-initiated narrative to emerge. Thus if the game organizers do not want to use fate play or

pre-create characters, the alternative is very work intensive: *runtime game mastering*.

> "In order to perform runtime game mastering, three things are needed: a system for tracking and monitoring player activities and the events in their vicinity, a processing system which helps the game masters keep track of the input information and construct an overall picture of the ongoing event, and an actuating system which enables them to influence player activity." (Jonsson et al., 2006)

Though it is possible to use technology to aid with these tasks, it is usually much easier, faster, and robust for the game masters to use human agents (see e.g. Jonsson et al, 2006; 2007; Montola et al., 2009, Stenros et al., 2007a; Bichard & Waern, 2008).[3] In addition to the three requirements listed above, some form of narrative structure is also needed to help guide the situation. Even in special cases where a narrative is not the aim, rules that create a coherent world are needed.

2.1 NPCs and Ractors

The human agents that interact with players as part of runtime game mastering have been called non-player characters, instructed players, actors and interactive actors. All of the terms are problematic: Actor refers not just to one who does, but also to a person performing for an audience; non-player character refers to a diegetic role not inhabited by a player, yet they are usually portrayed by players – though with less agency; interactive actor and instructed player are both tautologous, as all actors are interactive and all players receive some instructions. These terms are understandable only in relation to an unnamed standard, an implied player or a normal actor.

NPC is thus, especially in larp, a relational term. All player characters receive instructions from the game organizers and unless the NPC is played by a game master there is player influence in its portrayal.

The term non-player character originates in tabletop role-playing games. There it is used to refer to characters portrayed by the game master. It has since migrated to both digital games, where it denoted characters controlled by the game program,[4] and to larp, where it is used to refer to characters with less agency (i.e. controlled more by the game masters) than characters portrayed by average players.

NPC is thus, especially in larp, a relational term. All player characters receive instructions from the game organizers and unless the NPC is played by a game master there is player influence in its portrayal. The specific meaning of the term also varies between different larp cultures. For example some UK larpers consider all characters not created by the player herself as NPCs.[5] Often the distinction between a player character and an NPC is economic; playing an NPC can be cheaper than playing a PC. At times players also need to put in hours as an NPC; they play their primary character for most of the larp, but take a break at some point to play an adversarial NPC for the benefit of other players (cf. Stark, 2012).

Poor though these terms are, in this article I shall use the terms *ractor* (short for interactive actor) to refer to the person performing the function and playing, and *non-player character* (NPC) when referring to the position they hold within the diegesis on the game world. The term ractor was used by the production team at The Company P, and probably originates in Neal Stephenson's cyberpunk novel *The Diamond Age* (Murray, 1997, p.121)

2.2 Different aesthetics

Runtime game masters are a subset of game *facilitators*, which are common in numerous, especially non-digital, games (see Björk & Holopainen, 2005, pp.23-24; Stenros & Sotamaa, 2009). From the person who acts as the bank in *Monopoly* to croupiers and referees, maintaining the game system is an important task. Also, in simulations and simulation-like games there are people who are responsible for running the event (sometimes called *operators*, see Crookall et al., 1987). However, the ractor's job is different from these two facilitator functions in two ways: First, the ractor is not just following a set on instructions. Reducing her job to a simple flow chart would miss central elements, mostly because the ractor needs to respond to unexpected player contributions in a way that is logical and believable within the diegetic frame, and that keeps the game on the

right track. Second, the ractor is not only responsible for maintaining the game system and responding in a set way to the players' action, but she is supposed to provide believability, coherence and colour as well. The facilitator function is thus hidden inside a character, an independent part of the game world. In many cases there is also an aesthetic dimension to this, as the facilitating is made in a way that is invisible to the players, or in a way that the players can easily explain within the diegetic frame without having to resort to extra-diegetic motivations.

Similarly *actors* and *performers* are an integral part of participatory performances and theatre. A particularly relevant point of comparison can be found from the "cultural performances" staged in "living history" museums, such as Plimoth Plantation, where actor/historians portray historical figures (the "pilgrims" who escaped religious persecution in Europe and settled in what would one day become Massachusetts) in an everyday setting for the education and entertainment of museum visitors (Snow, 1993; also Schechner, 1985, pp.79-91). However, there is a difference in comparison to the portrayal of non-player characters in larps, as in most performances there is an implicit assumption that it is *for* an audience. Even participatory theatre usually has severe limitations on what forms the player/viewer contributions can take. There is a major aesthetic difference between viewing the performance of the actors as the main thing – and awarding the players that status in a participatory experience (cf. Lancaster, 1999, pp.106-110; Stenros, 2010).[6] Even the pilgrims at Plimoth Plantation, whose portrayal involves a strong role-play component, are performed for an audience that is not part of the staged fiction.

The interview lengths varied from 30 to 100 minutes, averaging just below the 60 minute mark.

In a rough way it is possible to differentiate between the core of a performance (what is represented and how skilfully), a narrative (the partially pre-planned sequence of events that form a satisfying whole) and play (the activity of playing, competing, collaborating and co-creating). Though these are crude caricatures, they do communicate some of the expectations a participant has towards her experience.

Though conflicting, *Nordic larps* (Stenros & Montola, 2010) have found ways to successfully combine these three aesthetics, using for example first person audience to marry immersion, inter-immersion and performances that are partly only enacted for the self (Stenros, 2010), by using fate play and strong themes to guide plots (Fatland, 2005), by framing both winning and losing as successful play, for example though positive negative experiences (Montola, 2010; Hopeametsä, 2008) and so on. Managing player expectations and knowledge of the tradition help negotiate the friction between the varying expectations of performance, narrative and game. However, these techniques require that the player-participant is actively involved in the negotiation process. When a work is aimed at a more general audience, as is the case with the games analyzed below, audience members often have an expectation that more of the work is carried by the event organizers. Managing these expectations is part of what the ractors do.

3. METHODS AND DATA

This paper is primarily based on interviews with six people who have performed as interactive actors in larp/ARG hybrid *Conspiracy For Good*. These expert-interviews were conducted in four face-to-face settings. The interview lengths varied from 30 to 100 minutes, averaging just below the 60 minute mark.

The interviewees were chosen by the researcher based on their visibility to the players (the seven most prominent ractors were targeted, and all but one were interviewed successfully) and their self-identified expert backgrounds (two from each: larp/role-play, theatre, and neither). Two of the interviewees were women, four were men, and they hailed from the United States, United Kingdom, Jamaica and Sweden.

In addition, one ractor interview from larp/ARG hybrid *Sanningen om Marika* (Denward, 2011) was included in the sample (interview 7, female, Swedish). This interview, conducted for previous research (Stenros & Montola, 2011a) first via email and later in person, acted as the original impetus for this line of questioning. *Sanningen om Marika* was co-created by The Company P, which has a

history of using Nordic larp derived methods in works aimed at a larger audience. Once they announced a new project using similar ractor techniques, *Conspiracy For Good*, ractors were identified as a topic of interest in the its research. This paper concentrates on this one aspect of *CFG*, others have been explores previously elsewhere (Stenros et al., 2011; also Stenros & Montola, 2010b).

All interviews, aside from the one email interview, were semi-structured, and later transcribed by a professional agency. The interview topics, as well as the interpretation of the interviews, were influenced by the researcher's long-term experiences with participatory studies of pervasive larps. For example *CFG* was studied by a team that followed the production and running of the game, conducted participatory observation, played the game, and conducted interviews and an online survey with the players (Stenros et al., 2011). The author has also previously participated in a pervasive larp called *Momentum* as a character that helped runtime game mastering (see Stenros et al., 2007a).

This study is exploratory in nature. Mentions relating to interactive acting and game mastering were identified in the resulting text documents, and these mentions were sorted with open coding. The interviews, rich in data partially due to the variance in the tasks performed, are analyzed qualitatively to produce a picture of how ractors are used by this particular production company and in this particular gaming culture. Seven interviews and two productions are not enough to make sweeping general claims. However, when data from other sources support the findings, this is pointed out. It should be noted that as an ARG/larp hybrid *CFG* is *not* a typical larp in terms of, for example, production, financing, player base, employed technology, or advertising. Most importantly for the current discussion, it targeted a more mainstream audience and employed ractors with no background in role-playing. While this makes it a particularly interesting target for this kind of investigation due to the spectrum it provides (how different approaches employed by ractors worked, how to manage player expectations when numerous players are unfamiliar with the game genre etc.), these very differences mark it apart from, for example, a more typical Nordic larp production.

4. FUNCTIONS OF AN INTERACTIVE ACTOR

Ractors who perform non-player characters may be called upon to carry out numerous different tasks as demanded by the actions of the live, co-present group of players who contribute and even co-create – and as demanded by the game design and the runtime game mastering. The core of their work is to portray a character (or at least a caricature or a role) that serves a narrative or ludic purpose, and that task cannot be completely disconnected from facilitating, content creation, entertaining and playing. Not all ractors perform all of these functions, but this is the scope of their possible functions.

> "The big difference between being a ractor and being just a normal stage or movie actor is that you are constantly exposed to your audience, and they are always going to push and pull the story in directions that you can never fully control. Nor should you control them: A great part of the charm of interactive drama is that the players feel like they are making the decisions - even when they are not. So being a ractor on the field is actually a lot more like being a table top game master, softly trying to manipulate the players to follow the adventure track you have laid out for them." (Ractor 7, email interview)

In the following these different facets of the work the ractor may be asked to perform are identified. The division presented here emerged in the coding. Some of the functions have been discussed elsewhere previously, while others are less typical in literature. Notice how the functions of a ractor as a content creator, entertainer and as a safeguard are grounded in the division between performers and an audience, whereas the functions of playing and facilitating are more grounded in a view of playing together. Character portrayal is torn between the two.

4.1 Facilitating

A major function of the ractor is to facilitate playing through *runtime game mastering*. They do their best to ensure that players find the relevant clues, stay on track, do not get bogged down with irrelevant details, keep the time-table, do not start fighting amongst themselves (more than is entertainingly dramatic), ensure that relevant

technology is working, and come up with workarounds if it is not, stay in contact with the game mastering headquarters and so on.

> [I]f you have 85 to 100 people on the roof of a building and you're trying to tell a story that everybody can understand but also participate in, you need to have people on the ground floor saying this isn't working, this is working, here's how fast we can get people from point A to point B. And if nothing else, you have timing. It's more of a choreographer than it is game mastering. (Ractor 2)

Runtime game mastering, at least for a large group of players, is usually carried on by a team, and task division is important. *Pacing*, timing the game events, came up as an important facet of the ractors task list in the interviews, confirming earlier research (e.g. Bichard & Waern, 2008; Jonsson et al., 2007). The ractor is the eyes, ears and hands of the game mastering team, but she usually lacks the bird's eye view. When the playing is at its most active, the ractor usually cannot contact the headquarters (due to e.g. lack of time or restriction on breaking character); she is on her own and must make the relevant decision based on the game design (cf. Crabtree et al., 2004).

However, at times incorporating player initiatives simply is not feasible. Rejecting those ideas while maintaining believability is one of the hardest challenges a ractor meets

NPCs often *mentor* the players. They teach game mechanics, facts about the game world, and exemplify the story logic relevant for the experience, and lead by example. In essence the mentor characters show instead of just telling. They set the tone of the game, established the limits of expected and tolerated behaviour, and provide a social alibi by doing possibly embarrassing tasks as an example.[7]

> "[The ractor character] was doing the same journey as the participants, but he knew slightly more, so if someone didn't follow the story completely, he would be there to help them. (Ractor 1)

> Remember that most people are really, really genuinely afraid of behaving weird in public places, and in the presence of strangers […]. So you need to lead by example. What you do is usually what they perceive is the "limit" of allowed behavior in game. The more you do, the more they dare to do. But don't take over. Find some excuse to leave as soon as you think them competent to handle the situation." (Ractor 7, email)

Kurt Lancaster (1999, pp.33-41) has documented that in a US-based larp from 1990 the game master could, in addition to using NPCs, narrate events and mentor extra-diegetically. In *CFG* all mentoring and example setting were done diegetically, even the instructions on how to play the game and how the game mechanics functioned were given by NPCs in accordance with the diegetic world.

> "Know your mythos, and know your character inside and out. When you're in the field, there is no one there to give you your line if your mind goes blank when someone asks you what your mother's maiden name was, or in what psychiatric clinic your friend was locked up, or whatever it is that people might think to ask you. But keep in mind that you only need to know the stuff that your character *would* know, and that most of that stuff isn't important, as long as you stick to the same story every time you tell it. Don't be afraid to improvise, leave stuff open so you can fill it in as you go." (Ractor 7, email, emphasis in original)

Knowing the game design thoroughly (the mythos, the plot, the character, the mechanics, the timetable etc.) is imperative, if the ractor is portraying a central character (cf. Snow, 1993, pp.124-132). A well-prepared ractor may even change element of the game design on the fly, if unforeseen player actions prompt her. However, this is hardly a requirement for all NPCs; some NPCs are more like functions. They only carry out tasks given by the game masters, like pointing the player-characters in the right direction.

One of the challenges is unforeseen player ideas. The ractor needs to be able to think on her feet and steer the game. Sometimes this means coaxing the players towards certain outcomes, teaching how to

use certain hardware, or even making sly changes in the overall story.

> "The hardest part has been answering up to questioning, when people come up with a greater plan than the one you had already. And you can't really let them go through with it." (Ractor 1)

Sometimes when a player presents an unforeseen elegant solution to a problem, the ractor can adopt it and act accordingly. However, at times incorporating player initiatives simply is not feasible. Rejecting those ideas while maintaining believability is one of the hardest challenges a ractor meets.

Managing expectations and communicating the logic of the game and its genre are also key issues in guiding player contributions towards ideas that are easier to incorporate. However, if a work welcomes player contributions there is a risk of getting some contributions that do not fit the whole.

Ractors may also be *undercover*. Though usually the non-player characters are relatively easy to spot even if they are not announced in any way, it is also possible to use ractors as *plants*, to have ractors who pretend to be just "normal players" and use them to steer the game. Finally, ractors perform seemingly menial *supporting tasks* (repair the technology, cook food) that are important for the running of the game and the well-being of the players. Also, sometimes ractors simply report what the players are doing to the game mastering headquarters (Stenros et al., 2007a). Though not proper ractors unless they portray characters, such members of the support staff do share the facilitation function on the ground level.

4.2 Content creator

In production terms the ractor *creates content* for the participants. Portraying a character online is very much a performance in *writing*, however in face-to-face real-time interactions the ractor is usually not performing her character based on a strict script with pre-written dialogue. *Improvisation* takes over. Even when the same person is portraying the same character both online and offline (i.e. produces both the character's bodily presence and her textual output) these are very different functions.

> "In the game design, I consider that it's about realizing what will take people time, what will let people have fun, what makes it dynamic and pervasive, what can you interact with and just not consume. As a writer, you're good at writing stuff that people can read afterwards that is slightly less interactive, I think." (Ractor 1)

Though some games have used a relatively strict pre-written scrip also for the live action events (e.g. Bichard & Waern, 2008), *CFG* opted for a less structured approach. Script can be helpful even when there is less structure; it is possible to write pieces of dialogue, standard utterances for a character, or monologues that hopefully can be delivered organically when a moment arises. However, the importance of listening and reacting to player action is paramount.

> "As far as interacting with other people, improvisation becomes hard when you don't listen and when you don't hear what's being said to you, because then, if you're busy trying to think about what you're going to say back. You can't write a conversation that's happening. You need to have the conversation." (Ractor 2)

> "Even if it's scripted it's still freestyling." (Ractor 6)

A central factor is the choice of media, or rather, stage. Online the NPCs can have blogs and videoblogs, use various web forums, Twitter, Facebook and IRC, be available through email, instant messenger and Skype.[8] Some of these are asynchronous channels, others work in real-time. If the portrayal of a character is divided, it is not uncommon to do it along the line of synchronous/asynchronous – and it is possible to have a team that puts together a character's responses (cf. Stenros & Montola, 2011a). However, in live street events (and video calls) the ractor must improvise. When a ractor performs a character without the safety net of the rest of the production team, the work changes:

> "It has been very different though when I've been at the events and when I've been online. Online I've felt a lot more that I've been game mastering and trying to keep the continuity of everything. But at the events I've very much been feeling that I've been playing as much as I have been game mastering." (Ractor 1)

It must also be stressed, that the sheer physicality of the ractors in a live situation adds an element not present online. Online play is more cerebral, centring on mental or social puzzles, and although there is a physical element for example in mastering a digital game such as the mobile phone games used in *CFG*, the difference to interacting with an intimidating representative of a security team is different.

> "As a gaming experience for them, I think there's something really exciting for [the players] to be involved in a game where they're actually having a physical duel with a performer in a way, rather than an intellectual one." (Ractor 3)

Some of the ractors reported witnessing visceral player reactions (e.g. sweating, shaking). A game does not need to be physical to have a physical effect on its player (see Montola, 2010), but visceral gameplay and perceived physical threat certainly can help achieve it. The co-presence of another human being has an effect in itself. The players seem less distances and less critical when faced with an actual human being.

4.3 Character

The interviewed ractors also drive the narrative. Facilitation, content creation and character portrayal are all part of the narrative project, but the character – due to its diegetic nature – sits at the core. The character a ractor portrays is built around the functional needs identifies by the game masters.

The ractors in *CFG* can roughly be divided into two groups based on how they constructed their experiences: those who had an acting background and those who had a background in (live action) role-playing games.[9] Role-players approached the character as a totality with an inner life, goals, hopes and personal quirks. Inhabiting the character was seen as important and the character was usually built (or tailored) around the ractor's own personality. For them, understanding the fictional world, its history, and logic (i.e. the mythos) was also important, as that helps them improvise in a situation as they will be able to understand and anticipate how their actions fit in the larger picture.

> "Yeah, I mean it is kind of blurry in the sense that I think you spend hours with people, and you'd be online or then now in person, that no matter how much of a character you are, you're not going to stop being you. It could be a layer on a layer on a layer, but there's still the core of who you are." (Ractor 2)

> "The only way to deal with [players coming up with unexpected ideas] is to really know your mythos like the back of your hand, so that you feel free to improvise and invent new stuff at the drop of a hat." (Ractor 7, email interview)

The theatre ractors emphasized methods of acting and built a performance conceived of as judged by the player-audience. A consistent portrayal of a character, or its inner life was not important. Too much knowledge – even about the character they are portraying – will hinder the improvisation.

> "I think it's important that we don't get briefed too much. If you become briefed too much, then when you're confronted with an improvised scenario, it becomes very difficult to break out of the brief. […S]ome of it's part-scripted, some of it's part-improvised, and often the improvised bits are more liberating in some way, as long as you're disciplined within the scenario." (Ractor 3)

The ractors with an improvisation background tended to consider themselves as performing tasks and fulfilling functions. Ractor 3 noted: "We were given a brief, and we just follow it as though it's an order from the boss." Role-players are more accustomed to thinking about the game design, whereas improvisational actors are more focused on the experience of the player-audience present in that moment. For them it is not a problem that the character they portray is one thing for one viewer and another for someone else, as long as the resulting scenes are good. From a role-playing point of view this is abhorrent, as it is possible that the players will discuss the character and discover a discontinuity. Indeed, larpwright Eirik Fatland (2012) has noted that one of the fundamentals of larp is that "[p]layers can be separated from each other, and still maintain the same fiction when they meet again."

Also, the role is important for the role-player. It can be tweaked on the fly, but the essence should not change.[10] For the improviser a strict character is a

hindrance which may prevent ideas from being used. Obviously even the ractors with an improvisation background had structure ("the scenario").

There was a third group of ractors as well; those who had neither a background in role-playing nor in improvisational theatre. They played characters that were basically fictionalized versions of their everyday personas. See below for more on this group.

As finding a person who is both an accomplished improvisational actor and has an eye towards game mastering is difficult, a division of NPC types and the matching ractor profiles developed. The role-players were cast in roles that required game mastering skills, understand what can and cannot be done, what can and cannot be changed on the fly, whereas the improvisational actors were cast in roles that sought to entertain.

> "You need a large (-) and extensive improvisation acting background, I think. Also, it would have been very hard to do if I hadn't been so deeply involved in the project and in the creation of the project that I always had the mandate to change things on the fly. I couldn't really have, even if I hired an actor who could do the job, that actor couldn't have had the mandate at the time to change the things that I've been changing continuously throughout the process." (Ractor 1)

> "And we tried to look for another actress, but then eventually we realized that there's nobody else who can do this, there's nobody else who is so much, I mean, tuned into this whole story." (Ractor 7)

Understanding the production, its limits, genre, scope and logic, is very important. Bringing in an actor not familiar with the project to play a role that requires game mastering is difficult and requires a lot of briefing. This has a tendency to lead to a number of the game designers playing pivotal NPC roles.

> "And more importantly it saved us time, because we didn't have to brief somebody on the in-depth back story on who they are and why they know things, and why they don't know certain things." (Ractor 2)

The downside is that using people who are already involved in the project add to the already large workload, these people are rarely trained actors and they cannot be chosen for a specific character (e.g. have the correct accent), but it is more common to build a character around them.

Finally, there is the issue of breaking character. Though most ractors perform non-player characters continuously and do not address game participants as anything other than as their characters, players – especially if they do not have clear characters to play – may attempt to move the ractor from the diegetic *frame* (Goffman, 1974, pp. 40-82; Fine, 1983, pp.181-204; Stenros et al., 2007b) to the frame of gameplay. Sometimes this is done just to test the ractor, to see if she is able to maintain character (cf. Snow, 1993, p.71), but it can also be done accidentally. After all, the characters fill numerous functions, and these functions operate on different levels (e.g. within the diegesis, on the level on game facilitation).

In some cases the ractors have made a conscious choice to not know too much about the missions they are on, in order to be on equal footing with the players – and in order to play

> "Yeah, they tried to break character, quite a few people tried to do that. If it was on a low level, I would usually just stay in character, and I would try to ignore out-of-character comments or out of game comments. And that worked really well, people caught on to that very fast and they stopped using out of character things. But at the same time, when people had serious questions that my character couldn't answer and I realized it was important, then I would tell them, I would tell people things that was out of my character. Like for example where should I leave my phone back or whatever." (Ractor 1)

> "In game time, the players, really hardcore players stay in-game the whole time, in character. But there are some people who are new to this, realize this is a game, and will snap in and out of character. And they'll come up to you and ask you a question that's a very much out of

> character question. But the brilliant thing is we can give this broad answer that fits for both our real life and for our character. The characters are modelled after us. We don't have to break game to talk to people who do break game." (Ractor 6)

The design ideal is that a ractor never breaks character. If the only way to address a character is by doing so with the fictional framework, this contributes to the shared pretend play:[11]

> "As a game character: *Never go off game in front of players*. If there is a need to explain that this is just a game, let someone else explain it. Don't ever do it yourself as this will present the opportunity to "off game" with you at any moment. Being completely in game all the time will encourage them to take the world you've built seriously, force them to interact with you in game - as that is the *only* way to interact with you." (Ractor 7, email, emphasis in original)

In practice ractors do sometimes break character, or experience moments where they are unsure if they have broken character (cf. Snow, 1993, p.223, note 3). Lack of clear, articulated boundaries of play can make this particularly difficult.

4.4 Entertainer

The ractor entertains the players. By playing parts that would not be enjoyable or meaningful for a player, and parts required by the game design but which cannot be given to players, she provides structure. The supporting roles are usually mostly functional, but portraying key characters, e.g. the antagonists, provides a site for outrageous performances. In the production meetings it was noted again and again that players love a good villain.

As *CFG* was aimed at a relatively general audience, many participants (especially in the earlier live events) did not so much role-play than just play a game. For those participants the ractors were very much like the aforementioned actor/historians at Plimoth Plantation (Snow, 1993), performers who facilitated their playing and entertained them. Such participants embraced a position more as an audience than as fully participating players.

In addition, if there are breaks in the game in some way, for example a story beat needs to be pushed back, or the technology breaks down, someone needs to keep the players engaged and entertained. The goal is to foster the community of players, with possibly providing new content or add simple game design elements.

> "[T]here was like two weeks when I didn't have much story to tell, so I basically attempted to maintain the people we had hooked from the beginning with, simple leads in the chat room, videos and telling little bits of stories and giving clues, which people I think are just now starting to be like oh, you actually said something that was pertinent." (Ractor 2)

4.5 Player

The ractor employs dual vision while playing and performing (cf. Fine 1983; Mackay 2001, pp.63-118). She is aware both of the events within the diegesis, but also considers the implications of the events of the game design and the project overall.

> "So, during most of the time I was just, you know, in [character] mode. Of course I mean, I was a game master too, so I did all of that stuff. But I was still in that mindspace where I interpreted everything that came to me in the way that [the character] would've." (Ractor 7)

The players, especially the ones who understand this type of games and have played them before, also have this kind of a dual vision, viewing events both as part of a game and from an external point of view. However, the ractor is attempting to not just see the situation in two lights, but to construct it on two levels.

The game mastering part is covered above, but the element of play within the diegesis should not be forgotten either. Though ractors are mostly concerned with facilitating the experience of others, they also get (and should get) carried away by the playing.

> "[Performing my character is] like the most fun game of dress-up you can imagine. It's, I mean, the only thing that's cooler than that is actually I guess going undercover and being somebody else, and having nobody know you're somebody and just

> believing you, because this gives you the caveat where people, you get a little bit of leeway." (Ractor 2)

In some cases the ractors have made a conscious choice to not know too much about the missions they are on, in order to be on equal footing with the players – and in order to play. Obviously there are cases where such an attitude does not work, but in a large production not everyone needs to know the intricacies of each task.

> "And he says "The whole time we were trying to figure out the puzzle, you knew, didn't you? You were standing there and you knew." […] Half the time I'm like yeah, I was just waiting for you guys to find it. Or the version where I'm like actually it was just true some of the time, actually I make it a point to not know some of the things as far the answers. I know what the puzzles are going to going to be, I don't know how they're solved. So if I actually get involved and they say can you help, I most certainly will try to help." (Ractor 2)

This has parallels with how researchers participate in games as players. If a researcher has access to the game production, she can easily have deeper knowledge about a game's design than a player. Staying silent and trying not to guide the playing in any relevant way is important, as a participant observer is not researching her own play (see Stenros et al., 2012). Yet the experience of play can be very important for her in understanding not just the game but also the experiences reported by the players. Thus choosing to not know everything in advance can be a relevant course of action also for a researcher.

4.6 Safeguard

The questions of authenticity and believability are complex when dealing with a piece of genre fiction played physically in a public space. The ractors need to track numerous variables in all interactions with the players: Does the interaction feel authentic? Does it fit the expectations of the genre? Does it serve the game? Is the character I am portraying internally consistent? However, these game experience questions need to be weighted against issues of safety. Is the activity safe for the participants? How will the interaction be perceived by the bystanders? How to stop situations from escalating out of control?

> "There were certain boundaries put in place obviously, and talk of escalation, because it's a public arena. On one level you prepare as you would any kind of performance work, but it's got to be more open-ended. You can't start asking yourself psychological questions, like, well, this guy comes to me, my character would do that, stuff like that. That cannot happen. So, preparation is more preparing yourself as a human being rather than as a character. […Y]ou make your own decisions based on safety and appropriate behaviour. […] So what we do, because we have a background in martial arts as well, so there was a confluence between what we can do physically and appropriate behaviour for those particular young people. So we dealt with them physically, safely but also in an exciting way." (Ractor 3)

The organizers of pervasive larps cannot guarantee the safety of the players (Montola et al., 2009), but that does not mean that they should ignore safety either. Especially in commercial productions such as *CFG* there is also the ever looming issue of liability, usually negotiated with wordy legal waivers players must sign before play commences.

> "Depends what city you're in, but some towns have higher restrictions of health and safety. And health and safety can kill a project like this." (Ractor 3)

In *CFG* the ractors with a background in improvisation de-prioritized the internal coherence of their characters, but that still left numerous other interconnected and conflicting considerations. The players wanted a believable experience, but a safe one. It is possible to stage a situation where a security guard threatens players in a way that is believable on the surface, but where no actual threat to the players exists. However, doing that in a way that communicates the lack of threat also to the bystanders is very hard, at least unless the game is not marked clearly as a game or a performance. This was not done is *CFG*, and many bystanders mistook the fictional security guards for real ones.

> "And I found the perception of us [private security guard characters], especially over the last two events, their perception actually became us. So all the security guards around here thought we were security guards. The drug dealers thought we were undercover police. [My co-ractor] and I apprehended one of the players, he was an Asian guy, started looking through his bag. And several of the Asian restaurant owners came, come and search us, don't you dare, they thought we were undercover police. "(Ractor 4)

At one point in the game actual police did show up. The security guard ractors took off their mirror shades and walked up to the police. They explained the situation (the production had all the relevant permissions for putting on a game-performance in that area), but in a way that for those who did not hear their discussion, it seemed like a standard situation of guards chatting with cops (cf. Goffman, 1963, esp. p.91, 178). This they did in order to ensure authenticity – also, they did not want to look like clownish pretend-rent-a-cops in the eyes of the bystanders who mistook them for real security personnel.

The ractors were also conscious of the trapping of the power they pretended to have and mention this as yet another thing one need to be mindful of. In one of the events bystanders had complained to actual security guards about the number of security personnel in the area.

> "What they were complaining about, and what they weren't pleased about was they didn't like the police presence in the area. They found it intimidating, the police presence, which was us. Not one person said there's two guys running around upsetting people. They said they don't like these police presence, we don't know who these people are, but it's making us all feel very uncomfortable. So we really were whatever we were supposed to be, which is very shady as it is, for the whole time we were around here." (Ractor 4)

On the one hand this shows, as Ractor 3 noted in the interview, that pervasive games highlight the frictions and problems in a society. On the other hand it can be questioned if it is acceptable to stage these kinds of games in a public setting if it upsets the bystanders. As *CFG* was produced by Nokia, everything was done in adherence to laws and regulations, and the bystanders were not harassed in any direct way, but the game did seem to make numerous bystanders uneasy. Striking the correct balance is a challenge.

5. CHARACTERS AND ACTORS

Two additional issues relating to the boundary between ractors and the NPCs they perform emerged in the interviews. These boundary issues do not fit under general functions of ractors, but relate to the specific situation of portraying a character inspired by the actor and to the ownership of the NPC. For a game designer NPCs are design tools, created to fill functional needs.

> "My character came about I think just maybe three weeks before the launch […] when we realized that we needed one of us that could always be online. […] And it was, (-) realized that it would be impossible to hire someone from the outside to work on those basis." (Ractor 1)

The game designer identifies the functions a character needs to fill and, with perhaps an eye towards who will play the character, fleshes out the NPC. Role-player ractors use detailed characters whereas improvisational ractors prefer character sketches. Although the persona of a character may be just filling to keep the functional parts together, as play takes over, these parts may acquire a larger importance. It is in play that the character becomes.

5.1 Playing yourself

In pervasive games that blur the line between the fictional story world and the real world, it is not uncommon to create characters based on their actors, to the point that the characters and the actors have the same name and background. In *CFG* there were two such characters and in *Sanningen om Marika* there was one (Stenros & Montola, 2011a; 2011b). The reasoning behind this design choice is believability and the resulting seamless experience. Though seemingly these actors are playing themselves, they are always fictionalized versions with characteristics added that their players do not associate with themselves (e.g. braver, more outgoing, able to code, single).

> "It's definitely a separate character. My character's a lot bolder and a lot more confrontational and not as careful as my

> real-life character is. […] But my character, I definitely feel there's more of a different (-) here that's between my character and my actual self. For example, my character definitely wouldn't be married. She never mentions a husband and travels much." (Ractor 6)

Having "fictionalized real people" adds an interesting flavour to a production. It does enhance the seamlessness when it is possible for a player to go online and read up on a character on a "real" website. However, playing yourself means you need to be more mindful of setting limits for the playing, as the limits created by a character are missing in some senses.

> "Know what the goal is, know what the limits are, I mean what are you willing to do, what are you not willing to do. Decide that beforehand. And most importantly, know when it ends. I mean, set the boundaries beforehand. Because once you get sucked into it, it's very easy to just let everything go." (Ractor 7)

A further complication is created if the gameplay is recorded. Whilst the participants who are present at an event are aware that a game is played and thus regular rules and norms are transformed, once the proceedings are filmed, they can become recontextualized in a way that the original playful framing is lost.

> "I was just playing me and I refused to change [laughs]. I was like no way am I doing this scene like this, no. I wouldn't do it, and the character [has my name]. You know what I mean? And my friends will watch this. It's hard to follow the story obviously just in these blogs and they're like "What are you doing?"" (Ractor 5)

In addition to having fictionalized real people, these games also feature fictional characters one can have a real relationship with. All these *simulacrum people* make parasocial relationship more complex and possibly more interesting (cf. Stenros & Montola, 2011a).

5.2 Character ownership

It is not uncommon for a simulacrum person to not be controlled by a single person. The character's actions can be plotted by game designers and the asynchronous communication written by a writer, while video messages and live events are handled by an actor. However, sometimes key characters are given to specific persons, mostly to ensure that someone is intimately familiar with that character's backstory – and everything that has happened to her – even if that means that the character cannot be available 24 hours a day.

> "It was finding the balance between the cool thing in interacting with a character at the same time as keeping up the availability of the character." (Ractor 1)

As the online part of *CFG* started to gather more players from around the world, characters owned and portrayed by Europe-based ractors were not enough. Ractors needed to be recruited from other time zones as well. In *CFG* numerous key characters were handled by specific performers, as that was perceived as a cool feature, one that fosters the believability and authenticity of the experience. Indeed, when players who have interacted with a character online first meet a character face-to-face, it is not uncommon for the players to 'test' actors, to find out if the seams of the production show.

> "It's like when certain people first meet you, like the ones that I've been seeing online, they test you a little bit. They give you that little side-eye, and when they talk to you and you respond in character, they all sort of start to smile. And so you know they're kind, and then they'll ask you some questions, but they won't do it in character, they'll test you to see if you know, kind of thing." (Ractor 2)

Ensuring character ownership can be cumbersome, yet it does help in fostering parasocial relationship between player and characters. Although fostering individual connections between NPCs and players can be time-consuming, it is a key aspect of the form of pervasive larp. Obviously such connections cannot be established with all players. However, the players pulled in by the game can be harnessed as sort of *ambassadors*, expert players who navigate between new incoming player and the game organizers.

6. DISCUSSION

Players are aware that they are playing a game and that they are interacting with actors (to the point

that they sometimes mistake other players for interactive actors, see Stenros et al., 2011). They may not comprehend the total game design, but they are willing to play not just the game, but with the design and the game organizers, trying the limits of the game and the ractors. Trying to pinpoint the boundaries of a game can become a game in itself.

The players are aware of the friction between narrative and agency. Part of learning to play these kinds of games is to understand what parts the players can influence and what they cannot. Yet some players want to push those boundaries – and the game organizers often also wish to craft an experience that gives players a much larger sense of agency than what they actually have. The task of the ractor – and the runtime game masters – is usually to take the player from story point A to story point B in a way that seems organic, logical, and unforced – while keeping the game moving, the player entertained, the world coherent and the player safe.

However, the task of negotiating the friction between narrative and agency does not rest on just the ractors' shoulders. The players do their part. A central consideration in larps and similar embodied, participatory and co-creative endeavours is the difference between *aesthetics of spectating* and *aesthetics of action* (Stenros, 2010; MacDonald, 2012). As participants are not just an audience expecting to be entertained, the dynamic between the event creator and the participant changes. In doing the participant becomes co-creator, and what she appreciates is not just what she perceive as being performed, but what she herself contributes. And as has been shown repeatedly, many players actively try to work towards fostering a coherent, shared encounter – even when there are obvious discontinuities or technological problems (e.g. Drozd et al., 2001; see also Aylett & Louchart, 2003). However, the participant needs to understand her role in the proceedings for this to work. Clear rules and clearly articulated line between play and non-play help (cf. Murray, 1997, p.106). Otherwise the player can be confused – or preoccupied with finding the border.

Part of learning to play these kinds of games is to understand what parts the players can influence and what they cannot.

As *CFG* was not targeted on role-players, as typical larps are, but on a more general audience, participants adopted positions in relation to the ractors. Some approached the ractors as actors who entertained and performed for them, but avoiding direct interaction as that was expected to happen in accordance with the fiction, while others adopted a more ludic position, challenging the game, addressing the NPCs in a diegetically coherent fashion, and even role-playing (cf. Stenros et al., 2011b). Though the ractors were instructed to treat all participants in the same manner, the participants' option of partaking as an audience member who also plays, or as a player-contributor effectively positions *CFG* in an interesting intersection between participatory theatre and larping (cf. Snow, 1993).

The friction between player agency to affect the story and the game organizer goal of creating a satisfactory narrative in larps can be addressed in practice with interactive actors and the non-player characters that they perform. The ractor functions identified in this paper, especially if they can be further confirmed in other, more typical, larps, can help understand not only gameplay/story dilemma, but help in making the continuum of co-creation more visible.

The friction between player agency to affect the story and the game organizer goal of creating a satisfactory narrative in larps can be addressed in practice with interactive actors and the non-player characters that they perform.

Players and game organizers both wield power to determine what takes place in a role-playing game, how the co-creation works, but this power in not evenly distributed. For example Montola (2012) and Mackay (2001) have offered theoretical models on this power structure. The functions identified in this paper as belonging to the ractors offer a concrete view of how that power is used in practise. The ractors are one of the concrete ways in which the runtime game masters direct larps (cf. Jonsson et al., 2006). However, the players – especially more experienced players – can also

employ all of these functions while participating. Instead of highlighting the difference between player participants and ractors we can look at this as a continuum. The player participants also are aware of the larp on number of levels (i.e. see it in different frames), can see how a storyline is developing and guess how it could be improved, improvise their character portrayals and new plots, entertain fellow players and are aware of safety considerations (e.g. Hansen 2010; Harviainen 2012a; Pohjola, 2011). By concentrating on ractors, who de-prioritize the playing of the game to facilitating it, strategies that all players can use have been rendered visible.

Larps are different from many other types of story-oriented games in that they offer more agency to the player. The human controlled facilitation of playing that runtime game mastering offers enables dynamic story changes. Though the findings in this paper relate to larp, they can help in contextualizing similar challenges in other types of role-playing games, MMOGs, and other story-oriented games.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored using interactive actors in non-player character roles in a live action role-playing game as a solution to negotiating the friction between crafting a satisfactory, pre-designed dramatic arc, and the agency of the co-creative player-participant. The functions a ractor needs to be able to fill and some of the challenges of performing and playing an NPC were explored through a qualitative interview study of interactive actors.

Six types of functions were identified: facilitation, content creation, character work, entertaining, playing and safeguarding. All ractors need not perform all of these roles, and indeed characters are tailored not just for the tasks needed, but also with an eye towards the performer. These functions can be broken down to sub-classes; for example facilitation includes runtime game mastering, mentoring and support work. The background of a ractor has a big impact on the way these functions are filled: ractors with a role-playing background for example tend to do their character work in a role-play paradigm, whereas ractors with a background in improvisational theatre see the character more as a shell and a vessel than a fully-fledged persona. Role-playing paradigm is also associated with the game mastering function, whereas theatre background is a good fit for entertaining. The context where a character is performed is also important; content creation for a character online is a writing task whereas similar work in a live physical game event is based on improvising.

Finally, the article discussed the border between play and non-play by considering the relationship between the ractor and the character she plays. It was noted that the players also contribute to upholding the coherence of the game world and their experience.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Often the context, or setting, is fantastic, speculative or historical. Even larps that take place in the here and now differ in that within the diegetic setting the participants are not who they usually are.

[2] For a discussion of digital games and narratives, and the procedurality thereof, see Murray (1997, pp.65-94).

[3] In digital theatre runtime game masters have been called *drama managers* (Lancaster, 1999, p.117; Aylett & Louchart, 2003).

[4] When discussing digital games the functions of NPCs can be similar to embodied and performed NPCs (cf. Pinchbeck, 2009; Bartle, 2003; Lankoski & Björk, 2007; Lankoski, 2010), but it is more common that it is the technical implementation of NPCs (such as models of behaviour and artificial intelligence) that is scrutinized (e.g. Johansson et al., 2011).

[5] I am indebted to Nathan Hook for this observation.

[6] Grotowski's paratheatre (cf. Schechner, 1985) and certain types of applied theatre (cf. Blatner & Wiener, 2007), such as fully participatory murder mysteries (Curtis & Hensley, 2007), are an exception. They have been staged just for the participants.

[7] See Mackay (2001, pp.92-98) for an analysis of how game masters wield power in tabletop role-playing games. It is not directly applicable to larp/ARG hybrids as Mackay is aware (Note 57), but provides an interesting perspective.

[8] Obviously there are numerous other channels on the internet as well, but sticking to the more official ones and shying away from sites such as the anonymous imageboard 4chan lowers the risk of *game-jacking*.

[9] Obviously there are numerous traditions of role-playing and acting, and this is a broad generalization. The role-players interviewed mostly had a background in Nordic larp and the actors were London-based and schooled in a particular strand of improvisation. Other acting traditions, such as the actor/historians at Plimoth Plantation, would probably adopt a strategy closer to the role-players (cf. Snow, 1993), as might Stanislavskian method actors.

[10] There are schools of though on how important the absolute coherence of a character is (for an extreme view, see Pohjola 2000). Even with the role-player rhetoric the NPC is primarily a game design tool and seemingly incongruous behaviour can usually be rationalized and explained later.

[11] It is interesting to compare this to the ideal in classic theatre to not to acknowledge the audience in any way (e.g. Howell, 2000).

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