

Anna Sivula & Jaakko Suominen

Playing electronic games and the culture of history

Electronic games are usually seen as a part of new media and technology which is considered a future-oriented cultural phenomenon. The past, however, is strikingly present in electronic games e.g. numerous games are set in historical surroundings and nostalgic uses of games, such as collecting and playing retro computer games, are popular activities.

In this article Anna Sivula and Jaakko Suominen consider if playing electronic games has implications for the culture of history and what these implications might be. The culture of history is defined as a general concept, covering a variety of ideas, meanings, practices and products concerning the past: the concept includes all forms of making history present in contemporary culture. Sivula and Suominen discuss the culture of history in electronic games by analysing historical representations in games, nostalgia and playing retro games, and remediation. This analysis is suggested as a starting point for further studies of electronic games and the culture of history.

Special attention is given to contrafactual representations of history in electronic games. What is notable in these representations is the possibility of producing a non-actualised historical change – e.g. the player can test the consequences of choosing different so-

lutions to actual historical problems represented in a game. The writers suggest that these kinds of contrafactual representations could be useful for educational purposes.

Tanja Sihvonen

Once upon a...game? Digital games, narration, and the time-space-continuum of gaming

Playing computer games has usually been thought of as an active mode of agency. In this respect games have been opposed to narratives, which have been thought of as a pre-structured, self-regulating and thus passive form of cultural representation. In my article I propose that this is due to a narrow understanding of narration based on outdated literary theory. A theory of audiovisual narration could bring new energy into the study of games and narratives

Narration in the fiction film, as developed by David Bordwell, is based on a different kind of understanding of the spectator's participation in the meaning-making practices than the theory of a reader or a spectator positioned by the text. Bordwell distinguishes between the *fabula* and the *syuzhet*. The former is the spectator's inner mental processes that generate the story based on "cues" provided by the audiovisual representation. The latter term, on the other hand, denotes the actual (re)presentation on the screen, which functions as the arena for the spec-

tator to continually test her hypotheses. Thus, in the study of the narrative, focus shifts constantly between the text itself and the interaction between the spectator's (or the "agent's") mental representations and the narrative material in question.

My main objective in this article is to propose a way to analyse playing games as a "relating-to" activity. My approach is based on a constructivist understanding of narration as a wide, cultural principle of ordering events that take place in a time-space-continuum. It can be regarded as an overall "strategy", with which we react and which is based on our individual capacities or tactics. In the study of an environment that provides us with endless amount of possibilities for narrative *events*, games could provide us with fruitful source material.

Rika Nakamura & Hanna Wirman

Michel de Certeau's strategy and tactics as tools for computer game studies

The primary aim of this article is to demonstrate how Michel de Certeau's theory of strategy and tactics can be used as a starting point for studying computer games. De Certeau's sociological apparatus makes it possible to divide game playing into the game itself (the strategy) and the player's actions inside the game world (the tactics).

"The strategy" includes not only the ready-made mechanics of the game and its structure of rules,

but also the possible restrictions the player imposes on the game. E.g. the player can attempt to play non-violently although the use of force is possible in a game. The concept tactics refers to all the means the player exploits in order to achieve her goals. On the whole, de Certeau's theory helps analyse the relationship between a game and a player.

This article uses the research material of our earlier study "Opportunities and disadvantages of feminine strategies". In the study we document how feminine ways of playing may limit and enable the player's choices in computer games. With the concept "feminine players" we refer to all players who use strategies considered "feminine" in our reference material. The references were collected from earlier studies of computer games and female players. They introduced assumptions such as "girls prefer co-operation in computer games". In our study we tested these assumptions by playing three computer games using the assumptions as starting points. The outcome revealed how suitable the tested computer games are for feminine players – assuming feminine players resemble the ones described in our reference studies. One of these feminine strategies, playing at one's own pace, is further introduced as an example of the uses of de Certeau's theory. The advantages and disadvantages of this strategy are also discussed.

Sonja Kangas & Perttu Hämäläinen

The utility games genre and user interface realism

The electronic games industry has expanded rapidly due to the great variety of play contexts, interfaces and styles available. The delivery of information in experiential or affective ways and the participation in producing content have been seen both as crucial needs and as mediacultural trends. The needs grow from the pressure of living in a media rich environment. Attempts have been made to overcome the so-called information overload by means of entertaining media applications. The appeal to affections has been seen as a way to motivate users and learners.

The study of electronic games has for a long time focused on the psychological effects and economical development of games industry. As a part of media culture electronic games have changed stereotypical views of game players as well as of interaction and the modes of participation. Expectations have been geared toward new contexts, needs and ways of use. Throughout this development it has been pointed out that pervasive and utility games are potential future challenges for game developers and interaction researchers. New interface innovations, especially camera tracking and sensory platforms bring entertainment closer to the requirements of communication and advertising.

A more general trend

has been the rise of social and participatory design issues. How does the role of the user and her relation change towards the content when interfaces support new ways of interacting e.g. via Internet and digital television? The users are increasingly thought of as active users. This has advanced the development of bodily, sensorimotoric, haptic interfaces. Nevertheless, in the Western world practical applications are seen mostly as the opposite of entertainment. In this paper we discuss the possibilities of combining these uses. We also propose preliminary genres of utility games. We will put up ideas of interface reality in order to envisage possible future growth areas of electronic games. We approach these issues through Benjamin Bloom's goal taxonomy and genre theory.

Jussi Parikka

Three critiques of interactivity

Immanuel Kant expressed a key theme of modern thought in his trilogy of *Critiques* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* 1781, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* 1788, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* 1790). According to Michel Foucault, what is particularly noteworthy in these works is the way of questioning Kant poses: what does the contemporary historical period mean? What is the way of being, the ontology of our time?

In this article, Jussi Parikka outlines three critiques of interactivity: the social critiques, the

historical critique and, what he argues has been so far neglected in academic discourse, the ontological critique. As Espen Aarseth has noted, interactivity as a key word of digital culture has become a floating signifier, connoting several ideas of personalized media and freedom of use, while denoting nothing. The social and historical critiques emphasize non-technical and in general contextualizing notions of analysis of interactivity. According to those views, interactivity is not solely a phenomenon of digital culture but has longer roots in media history and different social practices.

Parikka's main point is to argue, that while these critiques have been necessary, they have not addressed the philosophical question of "what is the way of being, the ontology of our media"? The article asserts that contemporary notions of interactivity act as discursive technologies of the self that are to be understood as the key subjectification processes of media culture. Via interactive media technologies, i.e. games, users are activated to become consumers, and thus subjects. Interactive media products express the working of the society of communication.

The article also maps elements towards an alternative ontology and conceptual base of media. With the concept of "reactivity", borrowed from Hannu Eerikäinen and David Cronenberg's film *Existenz* (Canada 1999), Parikka argues that the experience of game playing is to be understood as

a simulacra that captures the player within the game.