

MATERIALITIES OF THE MISE-EN-GAME

Playing with Cineludic Forms

Andreas Rauscher

ABSTRACT

The mise-en-game connects the analog game board and the digital playground within a network of cinematic playfulness. It provides a more expanded perspective on a transmedia history of cinema. This article discusses three contexts for the materialization of the mise-en-game that have been prominent since the late 1970s: the social space of arcade gaming, the material adaptations of board games and the emergence of hybrid world-projections initiated by role-playing systems.

Keywords: Board games, Arcade, Cinema, Transmedia

1. INTRODUCTION

It has become a kind of common trope for a certain generation of cinephiles that *JAWS* (1976) and *STAR WARS IV – A NEW HOPE* (1977) introduced the blockbuster age. Even though both films were directed by auteurs from the New Hollywood, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, they eventually turned into a swan song for this short-lived era. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, directors with a personal artistic profile and an individual cinematic style, such as Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, Robert Altman, Peter Bogdanovich, William Friedkin, Monte Hellman, Michael Cimino and others, took control over the devastated dream factory that had lost touch with the younger generation. Informed by international art house cinema, from Orson Welles and Ingmar Bergman to Federico Fellini and the European new waves, and with profound knowledge of the history

of the classic Hollywood genre, their work combined artistic integrity and commercial appeal.

With the surprising box-office success of *JAWS* and the first *STAR WARS* trilogy (1977-1983), merchandising and high-concept formulas and summarizing a film in one catchy sentence became the new standard for Hollywood. Even though Spielberg and Lucas were still inspired by their dedicated passion for cinema and their knowledge about film history, taking cues from directors like Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and Akira Kurosawa, they were also open to all kinds of attractions found in games and theme parks. The *STAR WARS* saga and their joint effort in the *INDIANA JONES* films relied on a tongue-in-cheek-playfulness found in the cheap series of their youth, such as *FLASH GORDON* and *BUCK ROGERS*. Spielberg and Lucas based their set pieces on obstacle runs through ancient ruins, mine car chases in the temple of doom and high-speed trench runs across the Imperial Death Star.

A rather conservative interpretation of this development would draw a line from the early days of blockbuster cinema in the mid-1970s to the digital disintegration of indexical realism in the early 1990s. Once again, the usual suspects Steven Spielberg and George Lucas were blamed for the supposed decline of cinema. This time the corpus delicti were the digital dinosaurs roaming across the multiplex screens in the *JURASSIC PARK* series (since 1993) and the second *STAR WARS* trilogy of prequel films (1999-2005).

Upon closer examination, however, there seems to be something wrong with this mono-causal narrative of commercial treason and digital decline. If the franchise era really resulted in a continuous move from physical sensations, even if they smelled of plastic, towards the migration to digital galaxies stored in a computer far, far away, then why did the board game based on Steven Spielberg's *JAWS* arrive with a delay of over forty years in 2019? It is made of paper clips and even includes a wooden shark. And why is the Force still obviously going strong with analog *STAR WARS* toys, even resulting in the 19xx reissue of a late 1970s *ESCAPE FROM DEATH STAR* board game?

Cultural critic Simon Reynolds offers a reasonable explanation in his book *RETROMANIA*. Popular culture has become so obsessed with its own past that people are stuck endlessly recycling memories of childhood past and nostalgia for an age that never existed. But beyond these self-contained retro-cycles, a more basic dynamic seems to be at hand that finds expression in gaming artifacts and practices of playfulness. The resilience of analog artifacts, from vinyl records to toys and board games, results from a larger process concerning the dialectics between phenomenological experiences of sensual sensations, on the one hand, and cognitive mind-mapping of transmedia story-worlds, on the other hand.

The cineludic forms that I have discussed in more detail in regard to video games in other contexts are not limited to digital forms of play (Rauscher 2015). They point to a deeper history of playful experiences across media that is yet to be discovered and put into context in regard to film history. For example, the *JAWS* board game released in 2019 combines cinematic genre traditions of the cycle of creature horror films with different forms of strategic game-play. The different goals are reminiscent of the best-selling board game *SCOTLAND YARD*. One player controls the shark and writes down its hidden moves. Just like the notorious Mister X in the *SCOTLAND YARD* board game, he has to avoid the other players that are in pursuit of him. Apart from the minor detail that Mr. X tries to escape via the London public transport system and the shark sneaks up on unsuspecting tourists for lunch, the game mechanics of *JAWS* and *SCOTLAND YARD* appear to be quite similar.

In contrast to the popular board game spy chase around London, however, *JAWS* moves to a second act on a new gaming board. After having mastered the first task on a separate board the action changes to another board continuing the game in another scenario adapted from the film. Comparable to the level structure of a video game, the players now have to defend their boat against a shark on the high seas. In contrast to purist positions that believe that a film's narrative can never be adapted to a game, the *JAWS* board game encompasses the whole story from Steven Spielberg's film. Its material realization resembles paper prototypes for testing video game concepts before they are implemented into digital

code. Unlike the popular narrative of the digital dematerialization and decline initiated by blockbuster cinema in the 1970s, the analog still prevails. The nostalgic longing for haptic board games is one reason for their lasting success. Taking cues from the material perspective in game studies as well as reconsiderations of classic film theory, the following paragraphs outline a few reasons for the persistence of analog play in a supposedly digital age. Furthermore, prospects of hybridization that combine digital and analog elements will also be discussed. After a short introduction to the concept of *mise-en-scène* and its application to ludic structures within cine-ludic forms of the *mise-en-game*, three different fields of study will be introduced. They apply to film as well as gaming history. The first case study considers the materiality of arcade gaming, the second one deals with board games based on films, and the third will consider role-playing games (RPG) and connected forms of gaming experiences as playful portals to transmedia imaginary worlds.

2. CUTSCENE INTERDIT? - THE PLAYFULNESS OF THE MISE-EN-GAME

A useful frame for locating and discussing the haptic attractions and cognitive mappings of toys and games related to films and cinematic tropes can be found in the concept of *mise-en-game*. It adapts and configures the concept of *mise-en-scène* from film studies that originated from directing actors and arranging props on a stage in order to add further layers of meaning. With regard to directing, a film the *mise-en-scène* relates to the composition of the frame and the relations within a scene. There is still disagreement about whether or not the camera must be included in the *mise-en-scène*, or if the term only relates to the objects recorded through its lens. Film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have suggested one of the most prevalent definitions of the term. In regard to the *mise-en-scène* they refer to “all of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and figure behavior” (Bordwell/Thompson 2008, 479).

But what does the *mise-en-scène* contribute to the analysis of games? The concept experienced its heyday in the mid-20th century. It established a more precise idea of cinema as an art form, which is unlike other audiovisual arts. It could also be understood as an indicator for the creative styles associated with modes of production and different genres. The materiality of the profilmic space became more important than the techniques of montage cinema assembling shots that could be taken out of context. The parallels between film theorist André Bazin's polemic instruction of *MONTAGE INTERDIT* and recurring debates around the use of cutscenes interrupting the flow of game performance are quite striking.

In his introduction to *VIDEO GAME SPACES*, media scholar Michael Nitsche comments on the illusions created by the framing of a film set through the eye of the camera:

“If a film audience were to step through the camera and onto the film set they would see a modern film studio. The diegetic film world would be deconstructed as the production studio replaces the fictional world. Instead of a ceiling there might be a battery of light; where one would expect the fourth wall, there would be cameras, sound equipment, and a number of technicians working to produce the illusion. This space is not the world of the story but that of the production of the film.”

(Nitsche 2008, 85).

The classic set-up of stepping through the camera is often used for comedic effects with characters breaking the fourth wall and suddenly ending up in front of the studio technicians. In contrast to this slapstick routine that has been employed by comedian Mel Brooks to meta-Marvel character Deadpool, video games based on 3D-engines promise the simulation of a continuous space that can be traversed by the avatar. Another crucial difference from the traditional backdrop sceneries on a theater or film stage lies in the emulation of material relations and physicality. Even exaggerated cartoon worlds and outer-space scenarios follow the parameters defined by the rules and the mechanics.

The relevance of the *mise-en-scène* emulated and extended to an interactive *mise-en-game* for the intersections between animation, feature

film and games can be explained in the following update to Nietzsche's example: If a film audience incidentally does not step onto an old-fashioned studio set, but instead enters an environment enhanced by huge LED screens and a game engine, they would experience the simulated movement through fascinating extraterrestrial worlds and emulate the interaction with objects. Technical equipment of this kind has been used to shoot the STAR WARS series THE MANDALORIAN (since 2019). The virtual sets take on a material quality. Now they are not simply added as an optical background in post-production, but like the digital scenes in James Cameron's AVATAR (2009) they can be put into storage and reanimated a few years later for further episodes and sequels.

Film scholar John Gibbs points out the connectivity between the several elements of the mise-en-scène:

"It is important to be able to describe the individual elements of mise-en-scène, and it is important to consider each element's potential for expression. But it is worth remembering from the outset that these elements are most productively thought of in terms of their interaction rather than individually – in practice, it is the interplay of elements that is significant. Additionally, we need to consider the significance acquired by the individual element by the virtue of *context*: the narrative situation, the 'world' of the film, the accumulating strategies that the filmmaker adopts."

(Gibbs 2002, 26)

The configuration of the ludic parameters by the player results in a change of the material state experienced sensually by their actions as well as an actualization of the mental image of the game-world. The mise-en-game also connects the analog game board and the digital playground within a network of cinematic playfulness. It provides a broader perspective on a transmedia history of cinema. The following paragraphs will discuss three contexts for the materialization of the mise-en-game that have been prominent since the late 1970s: the social space of arcade gaming, the material adaptations of board games and the emergence of hybrid concepts of world-projections initiated by role-playing systems.

3. REMEMBRANCE OF ARCADES PAST

One of the most prominent examples of early cineludic forms and their transmedia circulation can be found in the film *TRON* (1982) by Steven Lisberger and its accompanying arcade game released that the same year. The film envisions a story about heroic cyber gladiators living within a computer battling the evil Master Control Program. Flynn,¹ a young game designer played by Jeff Bridges, enters the virtual world behind the screen and supports the programs in their fight against the oppressive regime before returning to our world. The narrative tropes used by *TRON* can be traced back to Lewis Carroll's *ALICE* novels and films like *THE FANTASTIC VOYAGE* (1966) about a minimized team of scientists traveling through the veins of a patient.

Memorable set pieces from the film *TRON* include a light cycle race that was inspired by the 1970s video game *SNAKE*, and a duel on two platforms with electronic disks. Both scenes have been developed into arcade games, turning the *mise-en-scène* into a *mise-en-game*.

The ludic repetition cycle of the arcade games offers the same scene again and again as a challenge with rising difficulty. The traditional narrative structure of the film presents the scenes only once, and switches between different points of view to enhance the emotional involvement of the audience. In the game the players also become emotionally involved in the game by trying to master the game and not through empathy for the characters. The experience of playing the game is more like a sporting competition than a dramatic play. The *mise-en-game* remains in the arena instead of following the hero's journey through cyber-land, which is central to the film's *mise-en-scène*. The arcade game adaptation of *TRON* brought about the ironic twist that the fictional game from the film was turned into an actual object that still has a dedicated following almost forty years after the film's original release.

¹ Flynn is portrayed by pre-Big Lebowski Jeff Bridges without his significant beard. By the 2010 sequel *Tron – Legacy*, his alter ego has mysteriously grown one and turned into a kind of lovable but clumsy cyber-Lebowski.

The references to the iconic design of the film TRON can only partially be found in the game itself. The connections to the film that influenced most ideas about cyberspace (at least until the holodeck from STAR TREK – THE NEXT GENERATION emerged) results from the cabinet design of the arcade machine. The graphics on the arcade machine feature the main characters in their lucent costumes, the light cycles and the mysterious grid patterns that can be found in many early visualizations of virtual reality on the covers of early cyberpunk literature.

In comparison to research focusing on a single console platform or home computer platform, studies on arcade machines could provide a deeper understanding of the aesthetic attraction of the sensations of the arcade by including the design and visuals applied to individual games. Games based upon well-known film franchises in particular can offer an interesting perspective on early adaptations that focus more on material components, like the arcade cabinet and interfaces, than transmedia storytelling.

For example, one variation of the Atari STAR WARS video game cabinet (1982) consisted of an X-wing cockpit that allowed the players to be seated at the fighter's controls. The experience of playing the game was similar to the conditions the actors faced when shooting the first three STAR WARS films at London's Elstree studios. But in contrast to the hard-earned money the supporting cast of STAR WARS IV – A NEW HOPE got for looking exerted in front of a blue-screen, the players of the game experienced the sensation of the space fights without any delay. The death star battle was presented in front of them on the screen after inserting a coin. They did not have to wait until the visual effects were added in post-production. Sometimes the presentation of arcade games based upon films included special interfaces like light guns for TERMINATOR 2 and JURASSIC PARK. The special edition of the RACER game inspired by STAR WARS EPISODE I – THE PHANTOM MENACE (1999) even came with a complete replica of Young Anakin Skywalker's racing pod. Examples like these arcade machines show that the haptic controls and the physicality of the gaming experience are more important to the arcade situation than the cognitive pleasures of constructing mental world maps.

The immediate gratification of cineludic attractions shows strong parallels to the early days of film. The cinema of attractions located at fairgrounds presented non-narrative impressions of distant cities, exotic locations, vaudeville acts and magic tricks for a dime. The location of the arcade halls is reminiscent of these beginnings of pre-narrative cinema as well. The iconography of the arcades creates a point of entry to the memory spaces of physical as well as imaginary museums of video gaming culture. The arcade machines collected and exhibited by associations for retro gaming as well as museums preserve and convey the experience of visiting an arcade. The active analog practice of archiving the arcade has an ever-expanding counterpart in the virtual representation and integration of emulated mini-games within open-world games. From the SHENMUE series (since 1999) and later installments in the GRAND THEFT AUTO franchise (since 1997) to the YAKUZA series (since 2005), arcade halls are integral parts of the game environment that allow you to play classic games. An interesting aspect concerning the remediation of the arcade halls is that you have to move your avatar around the emulated space in order to activate the featured games. Like putting a needle on a record or inserting a film reel into a projector, approaching the arcade in real-time seems to be an important part of the collective memory reenacted in these gaming environments within a game.

The personal memories connected to arcade gaming can differ significantly in regard to the various cultural contexts. For example, in West Germany, the public exhibition of arcade machines was accompanied by strict youth protection regulations introduced in 1984. As a result, arcade gaming machines were banned to the secluded spaces of gambling halls next to slot machines and other games of chance.

4. BOARDING CINELUDIC GAMES

After the arcade video game machines were banished to the back halls of the gambling venues, the pedagogically sound alternative of the early 1980s were board game adaptations of successful video games like PAC-MAN, DONKEY KONG, and FROGGER. The board game adaptations of the

classic arcade games are more haptic and static than their virtual counterparts. The tokens featured in the games allow popular characters from the games like PAC-MAN and DONKEY KONG to take shape comparable to their incarnations as toys. You have to press down the arm of the Donkey Kong plastic gorilla to release a new barrel. The four Pac-Man tokens can actually swallow the beads spread across the board. The procedures from the video game had been adapted in a simple form to the analog gameplay. The cars in FROGGER and the barrels in DONKEY KONG move independently from the players by a roll of the dice.

In hindsight, my own personal experience is rather related to these peculiar analog replacement games than the highly stylized retro-scenarios of the 1980s arcade culture circulating in popular culture since the great success of STRANGER THINGS (since 2016). The images of the 1980s associated with Stephen King novels and Steven Spielberg films that entail bicycling to the arcade halls have been rather an experience on the cinema screen in films like E.T. – THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982) and THE GOONIES (1985). I remember that the first time I saw a DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS role-playing game (RPG) was in an early scene in Spielberg's E.T. when a group of friends gather around a table to play the seminal RPG.

Before German RPG DAS SCHWARZE AUGER arrived a few years later, my everyday playing experience had been dominated by board games and toys. But this rather analog upbringing also prevented me from the disappointment of the notorious Atari video game based on E.T. that is still considered to be unplayable and frustrating even today. Instead, I got the E.T. board game for Christmas in 1982. Compared to the video game it was fun to play, and replaying it provided an interesting counterpoint to radical ludological lore: Like several other board games based upon and inspired by films, it had a theme that corresponded with its source.

The criticism from ludologists that stories and visuals are only gift-wrappings to the game is highly accurate in regard to culturally well-established games from chess to scrabble. If you put characters from STAR WARS, THE SIMPSONS or HARRY POTTER onto a chess or a MONOPOLY board, it would not make any difference in regard to the game's mechanics or rules.

But this should not be taken as a reason to believe that games only exist in ideal Platonic forms that we glance at when we stumble out of the cavern dwellings of the arcade or after several rounds of RPGs in the basement. If a game, be it analog or digital, combines several mechanics within a *mise-en-game* and follows a dramatic structure in order to create a ludic adaptation of a film, a novel, a television series or a comic book, the result can very well be adjusted to the aesthetic experience and the themes of the source material.

The E.T. board game succeeded where the notorious video game failed: It created a detailed *mise-en-game* based upon the film that integrated several mechanics without being too complicated. Moving in concentric circles towards the landing ground of E.T.'s space shuttle, you have to solve several tasks inspired by the film. The players have to disguise the detailed E.T. token as a ghost for Halloween in order to avoid NASA agents. The intergalactic communication device built from scratch has to be assembled for E.T. to phone home and have his long-distance call. In the final round, the cardboard spacecraft is placed in the middle of the board and E.T. has to catch his flight home. The haptic gimmicks like the E.T. toy figure, the spaceship, the phone puzzle, and the ghost disguise provided additional value to the gaming experience. Drawing a cognitive mindgame of E.T.'s *mise-en-scène* on Christmas Eve 1982 would have been only a little more fun than playing the E.T. Atari video game.

The most promising intersection between films and their board game adaptations is obviously not to be found in transmedia storytelling, but rather in the affects and emotional patterns triggered by the *mise-en-scène* and recreated in the game. Table top games based on set pieces from the STAR WARS films recreating memorable battle scenes are based on the thrills of finding the right strategy before time runs out and the Imperial AT-AT-walkers reach the rebel base on the ice planet Hoth. A strategy game based on David Lynch's failed franchise DUNE begins with Paul Atreides and his mother Jessica in exile. Just like in the novel by Frank Herbert, they have to recapture control over the precious spice harvest. The opposing fractions of the Harkonnen and the Emperor have to take countermeasures.

The importance of audiovisual composition and animation can be observed in the board game based on *INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM* (1984). Out of all of the installments in the whole series, the second film about the adventures of the archeologist in search of unconventional third-party funds most obviously relies on the dynamics of a theme park attraction. The underground journey to the temple of doom is followed by a mine car chase and a duel on a rope bridge. In order to achieve the overwhelming attractions of a cinematic rollercoaster ride, the team supporting Lucas and Spielberg studied the exact movements of a theme park ride at Disneyland and recreated them at the ILM lab for visual effects. The continuous motion in the arcade game based on the film featuring the obstacle run through the temple of doom and the mine car chase give the slight impression of the experience on the cinema screen. The board game is devoid of any movement and relies on the simple mechanics of rolling the dice to move the characters and mine cars ahead. The experience of vertigo and dexterity that is to be expected from the cineludic form gets lost in translation.

In contrast to the *INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE* video adventure game (1989) that benefits from the included printed replica of Henry Jones Sen.'s grail diary that provides additional clues to solve the game's puzzle, the breathless circuit training of attractions of *INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM* depends on the dynamics of physical attractions. Elements of the sheer pleasure of momentum can be found in toys like the Aston Martin from *JAMES BOND - GOLDFINGER* (1964) with its ejector seat, or the speeder bike from *STAR WARS EPISODE VI - RETURN OF THE JEDI* (1983) that catapults its driver from their seat by pressing a hidden button. It is probably not coincidental that pinball machines based the *INDIANA JONES* and the *STAR WARS* films feature miniature video games based on the chase sequences displayed on a small screen and controlled by the paddles. Raising the stakes for ludological analysis the outcome of one analog round of pinball results in another game providing a digital bonus game instead of a conventional extra ball.

The compatibility between several game mechanics found in board games, and in some cases like the digitally enhanced pinball machines

even between analog and digital game formats, indicate the possibilities of ludic montage. Dramatic structures that are traditionally defining for RPGs and video games, like character development and plot twists, have become an integral part of board games in recent years. So-called LEGACY games like RISK LEGACY and PANDEMIC SEASON 1 and SEASON 2 build on the mechanics of the basic game. They introduce new characters, additional game mechanics creating a kind of sub-plot to the main storyline, and irreversible turning points.

A season consists of several gaming sessions that can provide thrills, fun and frustration for more than fifteen separate evenings. Dramatic events like a surprising dénouement regarding the power structures and allies in the originally science fiction-related, and since 2020 rather neo-realist, strategy game PANDEMIC SEASON 1 result in the destruction of player cards. Actions that were helpful in one round can turn out to be devastating in a later round due to game developments, resulting in changes to the rules. Tearing up a card of a character you cared for or marking a city that has definitely been destroyed by placing a sticker on the game board give more weight to the dramatic set-up. The situations and conflicts of the genre setting conjure up images and moods associated with films and literature, from Steven Soderbergh's CONTAGION (2011) to the MAD MAX series (since 1979). The concept of cooperative play that can be found in most RPG games, but is rather new to board games. This cooperative play creates additional personal interaction between the players that is reminiscent of team-building concepts as well as improvisational theater.

Connecting several mise-en-game set-ups to create a greater whole results in a dynamic experience. The board games discussed as examples in this paragraph are all located within stable genre settings. On entering an empty mansion, you can be sure that you will encounter supernatural events and would not be surprised by a domestic melodrama. The adventures of Indiana Jones and Lara Croft will not suddenly turn into an academic conference on archeological methods. If you have to solve a crime you can be sure that you will find out who committed the murder and why. The combination of different game mechanics and the forms of mise-en-

game applied are kept together within certain genre settings supporting the suspension of disbelief. When treason is committed within your own group, as it occurs in the board game to the *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA* series from the 2000s or in the cooperative horror mystery *BETRAYAL AT THE HOUSE ON THE HILL*, the structure of the game prevents foul play. The modification of rules after a certain series of conditions and events is already announced at the beginning of each game. Suspense is created by the fact that at the beginning, no one knows if they will turn out to be the rotten apple within the group when faced with the lurking horror.

The knowledge about genres, their rules and tropes create connections across media that help to define the rules of the board games. The networks between films and games can cross over from analog to digital formats and back again. They can even result in combinations of narrative, ludic and audiovisual elements.

Hybrid concepts between analog board and digital video games have improved significantly through the introduction of app-assisted devices that can be launched on a mobile phone or computer during the board game session. These programs can provide soundtracks, initiate a dramatic countdown or map the navigation through dangerous territory. The pirate adventure board game *FORGOTTEN WATERS* (2020) features storylines and navigational charts displayed by the app. It organizes the situations the characters find themselves in on the game board.

The Lovecraft inspired *MANSIONS OF MADNESS* originally featured a complicated set of rules and mechanics that has been remediated for its second edition within an app-program. With the algorithms for moving the monsters being calculated by the app, the players can focus on the atmosphere of the uncanny. The process of table-top-gaming does not suffer any longer from the horrors of mental arithmetic.

5. RECONFIGURING THE FRAME - PORTALS OF PLAYFULNESS

The transmedia processes of genre discourses are only one example of larger structures that continually create gateways to worldbuilding constructions (see the study on *mythos*, *ethos*, and *topos* in transmedia worlds by Susana Tosca and Lisbeth Klastrup, and the instructive expansion of the concept in regard to atmosphere and *chronos* by media and game scholar Hanns Christian Schmidt). Games open portals of playfulness to larger environments. They reconfigure the frame that limits the view within the *mise-en-scène* of traditional film theory. In contrast to the almost non-narrative attractions and immediate sensations of the arcade games and the confined genre passages of board games, the idea of game systems contributing to a larger media ecology of imaginary worlds is an aspect that appeals to the practices of cognitive models and mind-mapping. In the cinema, the off-screen space is constructed by the information given in the *mise-en-scène* and the dialogues.

A traditional position from film theory compares the screen to a window to the world that is created by the camera and the editing. In a video game, especially in open-world games, you can just step outside the frame presented in the cut-scene and discover what can be found outside the main plotline. In regard to the materials of analog gaming practices, the artifacts included in a game themselves become the objects of a larger world.

Early examples of implying a complex world beyond the screen and enhancing the aesthetic experience of story-orientated, text-based adventure video games can be found in the titles designed and published by the label Infocom in the early 1980s. Standardized packages like adventure video games based on the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien offered the pocket book edition of *THE HOBBIT* and the first book in *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* trilogy *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* as a bonus item. Infocom games like *THE LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS* came with an accompanying comic book and a card featuring several smells. In games like *PLANETFALL*, *STATIONFALL* and *DEADLINE*, the material items included in the game box like

maps, newspapers, and navigational charts proved to be crucial to solving the computer game.

In 2013, director and author J.J. Abrams published the book *S. / THE SHIP OF THESEUS* (2013) that felt like an Infocom adventure without a video game. The hardcover edition of an old lending-library book featured several supposedly hand-written commentaries that pointed out a complicated conspiracy that was covered up by the fictional author of the book. In order to reconstruct the background story to the several fragments of plotlines, several items reminiscent of the Infocom game boxes were included. Postcards, notes on a napkin, clips from newspapers and other material clues inserted between the pages of the lending-library book revealed important information about the background story and comprehensive material for future narratological analysis.

The idea of material fragments from a larger story-world have become increasingly popular since the introduction of RPGs with *DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS* in the early 1970s. Instead of being limited to a singular game board, the worlds of pen-and-paper RPGs consist of basic rules that regulate fights, exploration and individual skills, leaving the rest open to the players' imagination. The characters the players assume can be developed over successive game sessions, sometimes over the course of several years or even decades. Maps and miniatures become regular tools and favored items to add material dimensions to the RPG campaigns that combine strategic challenges and collaborative storytelling.

The gradual levels of cineludic world-projections and constructions could provide an interesting topic for future studies. Theme park rides and attractions based on popular films from *JAWS* and *STAR WARS* to *INDIANA JONES* and *JURASSIC PARK* are almost too obvious as candidates for case studies. It would be more interesting to analyze how they contribute to a certain paradigm shift in the presentation of theme park attractions. Since Disney acquired the galaxy far, far away with the purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012, they have produced new series formats and the remaining *EPISODES VII to IX* that George Lucas announced around 1980. The pioneers of theme park-related world-building also constructed *GALAXY'S EDGE*, a section of Disneyland that operates more like live action RPGs (LARPs) than

the traditional rollercoaster ride. The visitors take on the role of characters boarding the Millennium Falcon, visiting an outpost threatened by the Imperialist next generation of the New Order, and build their own laser sword. Additional background stories to the setting are available in books providing a kind of traveler's guide to the latest attraction of the imaginary galaxy far, far away.

Another practice of world-making beyond the touristic gaze that is defining for a visit to Disneyland can be found in cosplaying roles from your favorite franchise and appropriating them. One of the very popular examples in the history of STAR WARS fan activities is the internationally organized cosplay of the 501st Imperial legion. Besides organizing charity events and accompanying George Lucas as a guest of honor at the parade of roses in Los Angeles, they have even become integrated as characters in the novels by Timothy Zahn, one of the most successful and defining authors of the STAR WARS expanded universe.

LARP events that create episodes and campaigns within a continuing story-world take on the event character of a live concert weekend. In contrast to the several comic conventions, the fans do not only dress up as different characters, but they act out their roles in prepared and decorated real-live locations during a certain time frame.

The hybrid forms discussed in regard to app-assisted board games can also be found in mobile supported AlternateRealityGames (ARGs). Games like POKÉMON GO that turn urban spaces into a hunting ground for cute little creatures are among the best-known games of this type. ARGs can even be produced as tie-ins to films like JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM (2018) and to television series like THE WALKING DEAD (since 2010). At the end of the fifth dinosaur blockbuster of the JURASSIC PARK series, the cloned prehistoric creatures escape the confines of their park. They spread across the globe, waiting to be found in the alternate reality projected onto real urban spaces by the mobile game (that is, if those spaces are not already overcrowded with players searching for Pokémons).

A more avant-garde orientated approach to material transmedia arts can be found in the multi-media project THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES (since 2003) by postmodernist director Peter Greenaway; the project combines

art performances, films, exhibitions and websites. The idea of psycho-geographic discoveries originating from the situationists in Paris of the 1960s informs different types of urban games that include variants from playful participation in public life and improvisational genre settings to artistic political interventions. They can be regarded as crucial to the question of games being played as artistic activities as discussed by John Sharp in his book *WORKS OF GAME*. Using the example of chess, he explains how games can become material for art: “For game-minded communities, chess is a thing unto itself, whereas for art-minded communities, chess is an idea space and a material from which art can be made” (Sharp 2015, 8).

The adaptations and transformations of games and cineludic forms as material in the different contexts of artifacts, board games, RPGs and urban art demand further research and differentiation. The category of mise-en-game can be used as a point of entry for media comparative endeavors. The idea of playfulness that is transmitted through transmedia configurations beyond the screen and back again can be regarded as a popular update of processes originally restricted to the cultural fields and ivory towers of high art. The supposed demise of New Hollywood therefore resulted in a new beginning of creative networks built around genre concepts and cinematic worldbuilding. Spielberg and Lucas brought cinema into the arcade halls and inspired the analog extension of cineludic forms into board games. Instead of giving up cinema, cineludic forms rather indicate traces of a para-cinema that continues to the present day and must still be further explored, in digital and analog places, in playing on the screen as well as on the game board.

REFERENCES

- Bordwell, David/Thompson, Kristin (2008): *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edition, New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Gibbs, John (2002): *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Klastrup, Lisbeth/Tosca, Susana (2004): *Transmedial Worlds: Rethinking Cyberworld Design.*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/4109310_Transmedial_worlds_-_Rethinking_cyberworld_design [Accessed on 21.05.2021].
- Nitsche, Michael (2008): *Video Game Spaces*, Cambridge (Ma.): The MIT Press..
- Rauscher, Andreas (2015): *The Ludic Screen or: The Video Game in the Age of Cinematic Reproduction*. In: Deutsches Filminstitut/Lenhardt, Eva/Rauscher, Andreas: *Film & Games. Interactions*, Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 96-105.
- Rauscher, Andreas (2019): *From Cineludic Form to Mise-en-Game: The Ludification of Cinematic Storyworlds in the Star Wars Video Games*. In: Fleury, James/Hartzheim, Bryan Hikari/Mamber, Stephen (Ed.): *The Franchise Era. Managing Media in the Digital Economy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 119-140.
- Reynolds, Simon (2011): *Retromania. Pop culture's addiction to its own past*, London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Schmidt, Hanns Christian (2020): *Transmediale Topoi. Medienübergreifende Erzählwelten in seriellen Narrativen*, Marburg: Büchner-Verlag
- Sharp, John (2015): *Works of Game. On the Aesthetic of Games and Art*, Cambridge (Ma.): The MIT Press.

GAMES

BETRAYAL AT THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

DAS SCHWARZE AUGE

DEADLINE

DONKEY KONG

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

ESCAPE FROM DEATH STAR

FORGOTTEN WATERS (2020)

FROGGER

GRAND THEFT AUTO franchise (since 1997)

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE (1989)

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM (2018)

LEGACY

MANSIONS OF MADNESS

MONOPOLY

PAC-MAN

PLANETFALL, STATIONFALL

POKÉMON GO

RISK LEGACY and PANDEMIC Season 1 and Season 2

SCOTLAND YARD

SHENMUE series (since 1999)

STAR WARS video game cabinet (1982)

THE LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS

YAKUZA (since 2005)

BOOKS

THE LORD OF THE RINGS TRILOGY

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

S. / THE SHIP OF THESEUS (2013)

FILMS

CONTAGION (2011)

DUNE

E.T. – THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982)

HARRY POTTER

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM (1984)

JAMES BOND – GOLDFINGER (1964)

JAWS (1976)

JURASSIC PARK series (since 1993)

MAD MAX series (since 1979)

STAR WARS trilogy of prequel films (1999-2005)

STAR WARS IV – A NEW HOPE (1977)

STAR WARS EPISODE VI – RETURN OF THE JEDI (1983)

STAR WARS EPISODE I – THE PHANTOM MENACE (1999)

TERMINATOR 2

THE FANTASTIC VOYAGE (1966)

THE GOONIES (1985)

TRON (1982)

SERIES

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

STAR TREK – THE NEXT GENERATION

STRANGER THINGS (since 2016)

THE MANDALORIAN (since 2019)

THE SIMPSONS

THE WALKING DEAD (since 2010)

MULTIMEDIA PROJECTS

THE TULSE LUPER SUITCASES (since 2003)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andreas Rauscher (Dr. habil.) – Visiting Professor for media culture studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg im Breisgau. Formerly Senior Lecturer at the department for media studies at the University of Siegen. Visiting professor of media studies at the Christian Albrechts-Universität Kiel, at the Johannes-Gutenberg-University Mainz and the Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg. Journalist for several magazines on film and popular culture. Scientific curator for the German Film Museum at Frankfurt am Main (Exhibition *Film & Games - Interactions*. International catalogue available from Bertz Verlag, Berlin 2015).

His research deals with film, game, comic, and cultural studies, transmedia aesthetics and genre theory. Among his book publications as an author and co-editor are volumes on Film and Games, the Simpsons, superhero movies, Comics and Games, David Lynch, John Carpenter, Star Wars, the James Bond series and the Czechoslovakian *Nová Vlna* as well as introductions to game studies and to comic studies. In 2002 he received his Ph.D. for a dissertation on the cultural and cinematic aspects of the Star Trek phenomenon and in 2011 he got his post-doctoral lecturing qualification (Habilitation) from the Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz for a study on *Ludic Fictions - Genre Concepts in Video Games* (Marburg 2012).