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1   Gundolf S. Freyermuth *Games/ Game Design/ Game Studies: An Introduction*

2   Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, Germany 2015. Pp. 290. ISBN: 978-3-8376-2983-5.

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4   *Games, Game Design, Game Studies: An Introduction* scrutinizes the developments in game production from analog to digital technology, Game Design theories, and, finally, the newly formed academic discipline of Game Studies. It attempts a critical assessment of the interdisciplinarity in media studies that accounts for, according to its writer Gundolf S. Freyermuth, the lack of disciplinarity in Game Studies. Freyermuth is Professor of Media and Games Studies as well as founding director of the Cologne Game Lab at TH Koln —University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany. In this study, he offers a historic overview of the technological and aesthetic qualities of computer games, investigating the stepping stones that led to the establishment of Game Studies, a discipline still very much influenced by approaches generating both from the Humanities and Social Sciences. He traces the origins of digital games initially in the mechanization and then in the industrialization of human culture, proposing interesting bonds with other cultural emanations, like storytelling in theatre, TV, and film, as well as epic, lyric, and dramatic narrations. The important contribution of the book lies in that it seeks to clearly define the object of Game Studies. Yet, the writer expresses the need for mapping out clearer boundaries and creating solid ground for Game Studies to evolve and mature as a consequence of an ongoing academization of game design theories and game production practices.

5   As the book title suggests, *Games, Game Design, Game Studies: An Introduction* examines three different aspects that make up the main discussion points about Games. One of the most important problems and main reasons for the inconsistency in the discipline, Freyermuth points out in Part I, is the inability for a clear definition of the object of study of Games. After his assessment of previous (pre-analog/ analog/ digital) game definitions,[1] Freyermuth defines digital games as the "specific other of analog games" (40), on the one

hand, and, on the other, as "the specific other of linear audiovisions (41), like cinema and TV. This idea of the "double alterity of digital games" (91) in relation to older audiovisual media is justified on account of two basic developments: the industrial transition of visual representations from painting to photography and the audiovisual transition from theatre to film. This realization allows him to contribute with further categorizations about Games, useful to those interested in Games and Game Studies.

6   The categorical taxonomy that is proposed by Freyermuth is based upon Harry Pross's *Media Forschung: Film, Funk, Fernsehen,* published in 1972. Games are classified according to their mediality that also affects the changing roles of the players. Pross's early classification of Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Mediality takes into account relations to space and time as we move away from linearity and chronology towards interactivity, while Manfred Fassler's proposed Quaternary mediality of digitality in 1997 allows for the element of interaction to be taken into serious account. Looking at the complex network of production, consumption, and distribution of digital games, the writer of the present study informs existing research with information about latest technological advances (like mobile broadband networking), new models of financing and subscription, the flourishing of indie markets, and a more general tendency towards gamification in social interactions.

7   The historic overview that Freyermuth provides, which takes up a great part of the book, constitutes a great information bank about the basic technical intricacies that have led to digitization. In systematizing the different turns in game development he bases his portrayal of the history of digital games on works by Tristan Donovan, Steve L. Kent, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Frans MÄyrÄ. In the "procedural turn," "procedurability" is a special quality of digital narration that "capture[s] experience as systems of interrelated actions."[2] It is "this ability to execute a series of rules [that] fundamentally separates computers from other media,"[3] a markedly distinct way of representing realities, different from analog or linear representations (66). Freyermuth provides actual examples of the first instances of Artificial Intelligence appearing in competitive games against human players, such as the games of CHESS and NOUGHTS AND CROSSES in the 1950s. Developments in game production are later used in military training in the 1960s, and in the 1970s in business, in management, and at universities while in the 1980s, they are "in fact remediated, or 'disguised' versions of non-digital ones."[4]

8   The end of procedural narration marks the beginning of new unplanned storylines. With this realization Freyermuth begins a thread for new discussions about the potentialities of evolving narrative forms to begin. He continues with the "hyperepic turn," characterized by more complex story structures, in accord with industrialization pressures and convergences with Hollywood practices that began in the 1980s and 1990s. Devotees to the discipline will enjoy reading about a gradual audiovisual turn to storytelling, the immergence of interactivity in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), the first instance of role-playing gaming, the first networked online game in 1981, or the introduction of characters with Pac-Man as the predecessor of characters like Mario, Sonic, and Lara Croft. Through this "hyperepic turn," the new narrative possibilities of digital games are emphasized as he witnesses their break from text-based origins.

9   The next stage in the technical and aesthetic development of games is the "hyperrealistic turn," which stresses the fusion of game and film aesthetics through the example of George Lucas' emblematic film *Star Wars: Rebel Assault* (1993). "Hyperrealism" found its realization in the new digital software and gaming practices that are characterized by

distinct "operativity" (87). While sketching out the transition from live action performances to active participation in games, he proposes the final "hyperimmersive turn," which networked gaming and latest mobile hardware make possible.

10   In the Intermezzo that follows, Freyermuth underscores the growing aesthetic and economic interdependences between movies and games. There the reader can appreciate reading about valuable connections between non-linear games and linear films, adaptations of games into films and vice versa, aesthetic adaptations and useful technical elements that they both share.

11   In Part I, Freyermuth brings in knowledge from many disciplines and bridges works by the most important scholars and critics in media and literary studies, such as Janet Murray, Lev Manovic, and Marie-Laure Ryan (to name only a few), inviting readers from Media Studies and the Humanities. By contrast, in the much shorter Part II, he begins a quest for a break from other disciplines. He focuses on new divisions of labor as a result of digitality, with the example of the game designer posing as any director in audiovisual media. Emphasis is placed on game designers' different roles as they do not work towards the representation of a storyline but facilitate storytelling procedures with the aim of gameplay. In a similar fashion to Part I, he provides an informative historic overview of Game Design that again builds bridges with other disciplines. He traces its origins in theories of art, communication, and media since the 19th century while it has grown to encompass not only the design of pattern but also the attribution of meaning and problem solving. According to Freyermuth, great importance lies in the contribution of game designers towards the establishment of a separate academic Game Studies discipline. Still, he makes connections with the writings of film practitioners and film theoreticians in the early 20th century. He sees the establishment of Game Studies as an academic discipline taking shape through the processes of "*[s]edimentation, exaptation,* and *adaptation*" of the film studies (189, italics in original). He also establishes connections with Game theories that take us back to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Friedrich Schiller, and Friedrich Nietzsche (192).

12   Although Freyermuth spends the first two parts of his book examining the "double alterity" (91) of games and the connections of game theories with the Humanities and Social Studies, in the last part of his book, he is overwhelmed by his desire to stress the schisms of Game Design theories and Game Studies from related disciplines. As the main reasons for the absence of theoretical analyses in Game Studies, an obvious theoretical "backwardness" (203) as he calls it, he correctly recognizes the lack in theorizing and theoriticization due to emphasis on production practices and reflections on Games. As a solution, he proposes "[t]he *mechanics* of a digital game [that can] demarcate its inherent borders" (217, italics in original). Yet, he also proposes categorization of games in terms of their "story," "aesthetics," "technology," and their "transmedia" qualities "in the context of serious games" (226), which somehow brings to mind the older debate between Narratologists and Ludologists about the narrative and aesthetic value of games, which, at this point, gives to the reader a sense of going back in circles.

13   Cultural acceptance of Games has been gradual as was the case with film and television when they first entered human consciousness and everyday practice. In Part III, according to Freyermuth, the establishment of degree programs at universities and technical schools affirms the acceptance of Games and Game Studies in the academic canon. In his effort to demarcate the clear boundaries in academic studies, he insists on overemphasizing the divide from analog and digital games and other audiovisual media

starting from theatre to film to TV to videogames. Which makes one wonder why not accept Games' nature as "the specific other" of analog games, of cinema, and TV that he initially proposed in the very beginning of the book (40)? His insistence on a deliberate schism inevitably makes him fall back into the same loops that he is so desperately trying to break from.

14 Despite this emphasis on marking off the boundaries of Game Studies, no one can dispute that industrial tendencies are suggesting new ways of recombining diverse media on the basis of their audiovisual qualities with renewed emphasis on transmediation practices. Developments in medial qualities and technological complexities of games are certain proof that games, like all cultural emanations, affect and are affected by the changing ways of perceiving the world around us. Similarly, our perception of games and Game Studies is changing and will eventually come of age. Undoubtedly, this work offers a lot in systematizing information about the nature and origins of the discipline. As Game Studies are still moving towards their maturity, it has contributed a lot in this direction. Bearing in mind that scholarship is like a game as MÄyrÄ suggests (213), or very much like a game of constant negotiation and power relations, scholars and students of the discipline can appreciate gameplay while experiencing academic power politics.

NOTES

1. According to Chris Crawford in "The Phylogeny of Play" (2010), games are older than mankind. The online contribution is available at http://www.erasmatazz.com/library/science/the-phylogeny-of-play.html.

2. See in Janet Murray's 1997 monumental *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, p. 274.

3. See in Ian Bogost's 2007 *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, (Kindle edition) loc. 125.

4. See in Frans MÄyrÄ *An Introduction to Game Studies,* (Kindle edition) loc. 811.