

# Introduction

## Space – The Theoretical Frontier

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Even before game studies was a recognized research field, space has been a recurring, core topic of debate on the new cultural form of videogames. Digital games do share aspects of spatiality with other (audio-)visual forms – in particular film, as well as painting, photography, and literature – but due to the dynamic nature of simulations, space was acknowledged as a constitutive factor of designing and playing games; their sine-qua-non.

We coined the term ‘Ludotopia’ as an adequate expression for the dialectical entanglement of games and space. Here we hark back to the original Latin word *ludus*, meaning games and play in general, before Roger Caillois attempted to oppose it with the Greek *paidia* – the two words have more or less the same meaning. On the other hand, *topos* for ‘place’ stresses the fact that any experience of space, in games as well as in real life, is rooted in a relation to location(s) or an activity transforming places, whether in the sense of Martin Heidegger, who claims that “spaces receive their being from locations,” or in the sense of Michel de Certeau, who defines: “space is a practiced place.”

This volume is the result of two workshops that were held at the IT University Copenhagen and the University of Salford in Manchester, organized in cooperation with the Digital Games Research Center at the University of Potsdam. The participants at these workshops as well as additional authors were invited to contribute to this volume. Their contributions cover the three subtopics ‘spaces,’ ‘places’ and ‘territories,’ including the relevance of maps and cartographic representation for digital games.

The first section on ‘spaces’ begins with a contribution from Stephan Günzel, who calls for an understanding of “Computer Games as Spatial Concepts,” by arguing that a basic misunderstanding of representation can be diagnosed, by which videogames no longer need to be considered as denotations of an actual space, but rather are exemplifications of ideas about space. Stephan Schwingeler then, in his article “Construction of Perspective in Videogames” applies the art historian’s terminology of ‘artificial perspective’ to computer games, exploring the various ways in which the view of the virtual camera can become a consti-

tutive moment of gameplay. Karla *Teilhaber*, in her article, “Spatial Concepts in ‘Portal’ and ‘Echochrome,’” argues that previous approaches to digital games transgressed contemporary design conventions, which conceptualized three-dimensional game space as ‘natural,’ passive background; instead, in contemporary games, space itself becomes an active subject. By looking at “Artistic Practices of Presence in Narrative Media” from the standpoint of literary criticism, Teun *Dubbelman* reconstructs the complex debates in narrative theory to highlight the difference between the ‘implicit author’ and the character being present in the game world; in doing so, he argues that the concepts of presence and immersion are subject to the intended design of games. Following up on this, Sebastian *Domsch* in his contribution, “Space and Narrative in Computer Games,” argues that the narrative potential of videogames is still about to be discovered, whereby the potential lies particularly in their spatiality.

The section on ‘places’ starts off with Espen *Aarseth*’s chapter on what he terms “Ludoforming in Game Worlds,” which is a discussion of the strategies used and the resulting game landscapes when game designers are trying to use an existing, historical or fictional landscape for ludic purposes. Daniel *Vella*, in his contribution on “Dwelling and Being at Home in Digital Games” turns away from game studies’ typical focus of travel and movement, and towards ludic conceptions of the home, paying special attention to ‘Animal Crossing’ and ‘Minecraft.’ In “Videogame Wastelands as (Non-)Places and ‘Any-Space-Whatevers’” Souvik *Mukherjee* deploys Augé’s concept of a ‘non-place’ and Deleuze’s of the ‘any-space-what-ever’ to analyse the post-apocalyptic landscapes of ‘S.T.A.L.K.E.R.,’ ‘Fallout 3,’ and others. Bjarke *Liboriussen*, in “The Game and “The Stack” jumps off of Benjamin Bratton’s recent and influential internet-theory to augmented reality games, especially ‘Pokémon Go,’ and assesses its relevance to game studies. Finally, Michael *Nitsche* closes the section with “No End of Worlds,” an interface-related take on the dialectic between game space and real space; asking what happens when gameplay moves out of their digital ‘windows’ and into our living spaces?

The third and final section, on ‘territories,’ is opened by Mathias *Fuchs* in his contribution on “visual itineraries and written itineraries,” which links the ancient tradition of drawing and writing roadmaps to the ways in which traditional computer games, but also location-based games, support wayfinding and orientation by virtue of design features. In a unique approach to “Defining the Play Space” Sebastian *Möring* then uses the proxemic concept of ‘distance’ as well as the existentialist notion of ‘fear’ to look at games in the way that they confront users with the necessity to keep up the play space amidst the threats of the ‘game over.’ By using “Lotman’s Spatial Semantics as a Method for Analysing Videogames” Niklas *Schrape* analyses the serious game ‘Global Conflicts: Palestine’ with a narratological approach – almost forgotten by game studies – that essentially distinguishes between the topology and the topography of a semantised space.

Following up on this, Paul Martin describes the interconnection of “Morphology and Meaning in ‘Castle Wolfenstein 3D,’” by looking into the swastica-architecture of the respective game’s level 6-3 with the focus of spatial syntax as it has been developed in urban planning by Bill Hillier and Julianne Hanson. The closing entry of the book by Mark Wolf gives “A Brief History of Procedurally-Generated Space in Videogames,” from ‘Rogue’ to ‘Minecraft’ with special attention to the development of hardware, by which the spatiality of this particular genre turns out to be one of the most elucidating when it comes to the interdependency of a game’s territory and the means of design.

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