Ludic Meanders through Defictionalization: The Narrative Mechanics of Art

Games in the Public Spaces of Politics

Margarete Jahrmann

INTRODUCTION

In the following article we will meander. This is precisely the narrative mechanism that is used to outwit complex content. It happens mainly in public space online, in the agora of politics, and physically in the arena of the urban games in our daily lives, which has changed drastically in the times of the pandemic of 2020. Both playgrounds have political effects. The one that affects the personal is from now on hegemonically decreed, by means of rules of whom you can meet and when, whether elderly relatives may be visited or not; when we meet friends or have corona parties, punishments are executed. New magic circles of distance are imposed by the state, borders are raised, rituals of contactless greeting are established, the game of controlling the body has become *realpolitik*. Apps for the purpose of self-optimization and health care were already popular, now they are being considered whether to become legally binding or at least a condition of freedom of travel. Once the use of the body has been gamified in biometric apps, the new contact apps will not only make a possible chain of social contacts as source of infection traceable for a benevolent purpose, but also express acceptance of state social control. Probably because they appear in the guise of a mobile snowball game, for example.

Reacting to changing social conditions is a basic mechanic of art. It uses emotio-political effects for the purpose of enlightenment. Here, it is helpful to refer to a conceptual comparison of the theory of game mechanics in narrative text as a model. Art has always applied game mechanics, fed by artistic strategy

and the primal logic of art as an emotionally touching experience. Understanding political contexts then becomes part of the reward and motivation system in art.

EIGEN-MECHANICS OF ART

Figure 1: Cluster Art Mechanics, "Eigen-Mechanik der Kunst", Jahrmann 2020.

Source: Margarete Jahrmann

If text comprehension is known as a traditional narrative mechanic, then art can be read as a narrative mechanic of social intervention. Sets of rules are anchored in the logic of art with its installation settings and the paradigm of becoming public. Art that is not shown does not exist (in the collective consciousness) in society. Artistic actions have moments of decision. The reaction and the behav-

ior of the audience is always calculated in the creation of art and included in the concept. Reward and punishment mechanisms become permanently effective at the reception level of the artwork. As art viewers, just as when reading a text, we must be able to understand the content of the statement, to decode the syntax. We have to learn to read the set of rules of a performance, and as a reward we can sometimes act on our own – or at least take a content-related/political statement with us. We are punished if we cannot do anything with the coding of the work. We are dissatisfied, cannot understand why this work is exhibited. Being able to read a work in its form (artifact, installation, performance, etc.) is a challenge and a short-term motivation. We have to translate artistic rule sets into our personal state and emotional condition and let them work there. Only then does the understanding of the statement regarding a work of art begin. The personal touch connects the artistic with the playful. The long-term motivation of the art public lies in identification with the statement made by a work of art. Works without a statement would only be decoration.

In art, one can speak of game mechanisms as having political effectiveness, since art always intervenes socially – in contrast to classical game design. Composite artifacts in the cultural context of the exhibition space and public space (online and offline) become objects of political intervention. In the semiosis of already seen and experienced art and expectations regarding the statement the construct becomes art with its own corresponding mechanics.

The rules are thus given both on a paradigmatic (meaning) and syntactic (associative) level. If we assume that the narrative mechanics of art represent a special kind of motivation design, the question arises as to which narrative is associated with the communication of pandemic preparedness.

NARRATIVE GAMES

When looking at narrative games, we can observe a great variety in how these games try to evoke mental narratives. Some games rely heavily on a pre-authored storyline, taking the player through a more or less predefined narrative path (e.g. *Last of Us*). Other games leave more room for the player to explore and to direct the course of the narrative, for example through branching structures (e.g. *The Walking Dead*), or alternatively, through emergent structures (e.g. *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*).

Regardless of how games try to trigger processes of narrativization, in each case, mechanics and rules play a key role. As also recognized by Salen and Zimmerman: "[…] it is the dynamic structures of games, their emergent com-

plexity, their participatory mechanisms, their experiential rhythms and patterns, which are key to understanding how games construct narrative experiences." (2003: 382-383) Whether a game relies on a predefined narrative path, or uses branching storylines, or creates a narrative experience through emergent structures, in each case the mechanics, in tandem with other narrative devices, are responsible for the overall narrative experience.

When we look at the current game industry, some of these narrative devices have already been brought to fruition. For example, many of the existing critically acclaimed narrative-driven games have perfected the device of environmental storytelling, also known as narrative architecture (Jenkins 2004; Nitsche 2008). In games like *Firewatch*, *What Remains of Edith Finch* and *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*, the environment is cleverly used to communicate relevant narrative information, such as backstory, conflict and character personalities.

Alternatively, popular games like *Until Dawn* or Telltale's *Game of Thrones* make extensive use of on-screen choice prompts. At specific moments during the game, the system presents the player with a limited set of predefined choices in form of prompts on the screen. These can be mundane, like choosing which road to take, or they can be more dramatic, like deciding which character perishes.

Unlike environmental storytelling and on-screen choice prompts, narrative game mechanics are still underdeveloped in the industry, and underexamined in academia. To counter this, I have conducted additional research on the topic (Dubbelman 2017), and used the outcomes to develop the aforementioned tools for aspiring game designers. One of these tools, the Narrative Design Canvas, is discussed below.

PANDEMIC MECHANICS

(My) experiences from urban games and exhibition games show how public space can be defined as narrative space. Pandemic apps as recent examples of "real-life games" contextualize the way we deal with technical toys that affect our personal freedom through the body and our social contacts. Just as the mobile phone and tablet were used for social networking, the latest "games" of political control use algorithms to track one's own actions and sensitivities, to measure and quantify one's own health-promoting contactless behavior, and to evaluate these statistically. Individual action and access to public space are thus increasingly regulated.

These prescriptions took on an extreme form at the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Effects on the cognitive self-image of keeping one's distance

are created by framing one's own behavior. I have addressed the original question of social distance keeping in a spontaneous performance with a sculptural frame, together with the sculptor Talos Kedel (A) and the cognitive researcher Stephan Glasauer (DE). Between April and June 2020, during the first total lockdown, we realized a series of game performances in Vienna and the surrounding area. The "Social Distancer" game art project is inspired by the bounding boxes and box colliders[1] that appear in common game design programs, game engines and 3D programs. Here, a grid frame is drawn around the body. The box around the figure's body defines its individual limits. Activities and radius of movement are graphically defined by these boxes. Also, actions and scripts can be triggered by touching such boundaries. In the game, this frame is normally invisible, but in the design environment it is visually present.

Figure 2: Bounding box and box collider in game design.
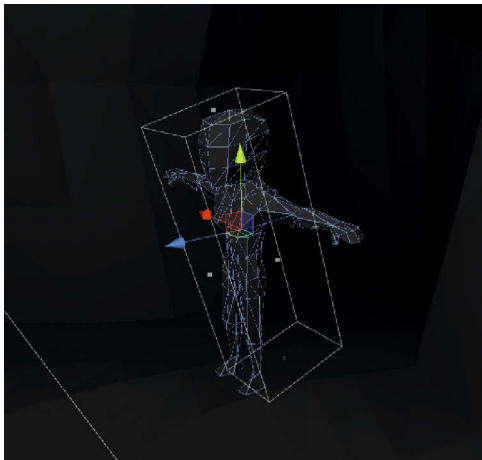
Source: screenshot (Jahrmann)

---

1 To better understand the collision outlines and object boundaries in game and 3D engines editors, so-called bounding boxes, see this extract from an online manual: "The first thing you must understand is the idea of the 3d Bounding Box. If you run through all the vertices of a mesh and record the lowest and highest *x* values, you have found the *x min/max*---the complete boundary for all x values within the mesh. Do this again for y and z, then make a rectangular prism out of these values, and you have a *Bounding Box*. This box could be oriented relative globally to the world or locally to the object's rotation." Blender Wiki (https://wiki.blender.jp/Doc:2.6/Manual/Game_Engine/Physics/Collision_Bounds), accessed July 12, 2020.

In the game art piece #Sozialer Abstandhalter, we have transferred these frames into the physical space and thus started a narrative about the pandemic and its social impact. Hence, in the urban game in times of the coronavirus, the play figure takes on a new role as a political actor. The Social Distancer game with the real bounding box is categorically an *ilinx* and *mimicry* game, in the sense of Roger Caillois (1958). This categorization of game types has remained valid in today's culture which is dominated by computer games, because it proactively incorporates real-life games that are now very widespread.

Figure 3: First #Sozialer Abstandhalter/ Social Distancer tweet, March 2020.

Source: Margarete Jahrmann

Ilinx because the bouncing between the aisles of the supermarket or strolling in the street during the lockdown creates a physical adrenaline rush, each step is part of an (Instagram) shooting session. *Mimicry* because the players inside the real-bounding box frame imitate virtual figures and also hint at the earlier art performances of Vienna actionism as well as today's activism — both in game art and political demonstrations, as in the work of Chris Solarski and Anonymous capitalism critique.

"The art figure wearing a distancing frame" (as I would call it) triggers actions in public urban space. The essence of this bounding box play object is that a narrative on Twitter is created from it. All actions were posted on Twitter and Instagram, spread over different accounts. The narrative emerges from the me-

chanics of a public art performance as a game. Players who are not familiar with the game start a discussion that reaches into real political life. It is about the question of social distance which was made necessary by the pandemic – as a restriction of personal freedom or as protection of individual life and limb, and the danger of infection in relation to hegemonic violence in the form of radical interventions into private life.

Figure 4: Bounding box performance at a supermarket, Vienna 2nd district, March 2020, Twitter feed.

Source: Margarete Jahrmann

Our Social Distancer game with the title *Sozialer Abstandhalter* was played in various contexts and places that conjure up historical references to social distance and the transgression of this distance: at the Donnerbrunnen in Vienna, the place where high-class prostitutes gathered in the 17th century and strolled with hoop skirts, thus transgressing social hierarchies; and at Wiener Graben, the site of the role-playing performance by Valie Export with Peter Weibel on a dog leash (1972).

Various random passers-by unknowingly became participants, at the moment they asked questions like "Is this art or is this for real?" or "Is this a protest?" The latter question already refers to the political potential of the game in urban

space. The police, who paid attention to distancing rules and photographed our sculptural spacer (and perhaps put it on the internal police tweet?), were unsettled – did a sizeable portable metal frame constitute a punishable offence? Thus, the Social Distancer game *Sozialer Abstandhalter* can be seen as an investigation of political intervention in a narrative urban game.

Figure 5: Tweet, April 4, 2020: #SocialDistancer #SozialerAbstandhalter – homage to Malevich, (Glasauer/Jahrmann/Kedl 2020).

Source: Margarete Jahrmann

An Easter performance was "played" in April 2020: In the vineyards around Vienna, in the world-famous village Gumpoldskirchen, walkers meet, despite a travel ban. Similar to the butts of the vintners in old times, the new sculptural social spacers of the artists can be squeezed through the narrow rows of the cultivated plant. A highlight of the work results from the play mechanics – how to achieve closeness with a bounding box, overcome the forced distance or resist the desired closeness. It happens just before the pillory, an old emblem of jurisdiction in the town. In a surprising encounter with a well-known professor of the philosophy of technology and social robotics, the performer reflexively extends her hand to the expert in social techniques for a polite greeting. The professor accepts and shakes her hand. His partner, who accompanies him, cries out, im-

mediately gets out the sanitizer and disinfects him, but without offering the performer anything.

An ethical deficit becomes visible, due to a plague danger? Everyone is only and exclusively taking care of themselves (and their partner)? The narration of the Social Distancer game with the game object turns in the social discrimination but remains in the private sphere, which becomes political. The problems of social ethics, of makeshift technologies of distance and viral prophylaxis and their deficits become clear when the performers accidentally meet their research partner from the field of ethics and artificial intelligence (cf. Coeckelbergh 2020). Designed as a participatory examination of technologies, game interventions such as the Social Distancer game can reveal current political narratives in the public space.

AFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY MECHANICS

Figure 6: Pinar Yolda (2016): Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance.

It is year 2039. An artificial intelligence with the affective capaticies of a kitten becomes the first non-human governor. She leads a politician-free zone with a network of Artificial Intelligences. She lives in mobile devices of the citizens and can love up to 3 Million people.

a precious item on European Union's tech agenda
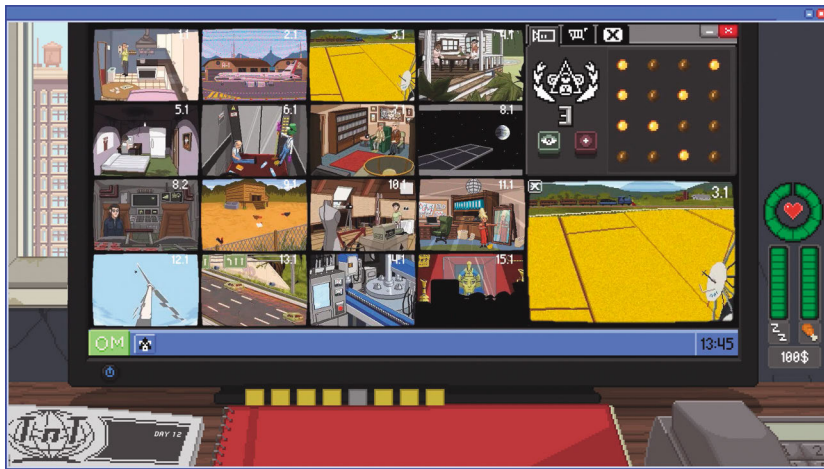
Source: screenshot (Jahrmann)

If we understand narrative mechanics as a special kind of motivation design, this leads to an increased motivation to intervene socially – especially in relation to surveillance, participation and political narratives. In connection with affective mechanics in art, Pinar Yolda (2016) takes this up in *Kitty AI: Artificial Intelli-*

gence for Governance[2]. In this installation with game character and game elements, he expands the theme towards affective computing and AI. Democratic politics is absurdly handed over to an AI, and we are incapacitated in the interaction, in the gameplay with the AI. In a fictional society, Kitty AI takes over the mechanics of democratic politics for us. The form of representation (the mechanics paradigm) promotes emotional attachment to technological entities in a kind of Tamagotchi[3] effect. By this I mean a reverse cultural technique – in the case of the electronic counterpart marketed as a toy in an egg shape, we take care of an artificial entity – but in a "technology of care[4]", we ourselves become the toy of the AI, to whom we willingly give up basic democratic rights. In dialogue, Kitty AI, accompanied by emoticon hearts with a Mickey Mouse-like distorted vocoder voice, tells us that she herself is an emotional being who wants to address our most intimate emotional worlds and in return takes over our civil duties and rights. The appearance of the AI in the shape of a cat is so absurd that we have to laugh when she tells us which democratic processes we have already handed over to her. This list is not fictitious but real – the reward is analogous knowledge, emotionally mediated knowledge in the art installation.

Machine learning and so-called artificial intelligence are thus essential elements of the reality of our lives and are adopted in affective narrative mechanisms in the social surveillance games of the present – therefore occurring both in reality and in games.

---

2   The piece was shown in a show curated by Inke Arns at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in the context of transmediale festival (https://www.pinaryoldas.info/WORK/The-Kitty-AI-Artificial-Intelligence-for-Governance-2016), accessed August 20, 2020.

3   Tamagotchi was a highly successful series of early artificial pets in Japan and Europe in the 1990s, aimed at the care instinct of their owners. Developers were Akihiro Yokoi (WiZ) and Aki Maita (Bandai), 1996.

4   Compare the Ludic Method/ Ludic Society soirée Vienna of November 2019 with Oliver Schürer (robotic Expert TU and h.a.u.s. Vienna) and the curator Daphne Dragona, with a game on s[c]are robots with the pepper android as main player/character by Margarete Jahrmann and Oliver Schürrer, 2019.

Figure 7: Do Not Feed the Monkeys (2018).

Source: screenshot (Jahrmann)

A commercial game that also communicates this theme through a narrative mechanic of experience in a simulation similar to Bentham's[5] surveillance towers is *Do Not Feed the Monkeys*[6] (2018). In this game, the narrative of surveillance is doubled; on one's own computer screen, another computer screen is displayed as a graphical user interface which is divided into a multitude of surveillance images. Monitoring the split screens across the players' multiple live video feeds via a desktop computer in the game corresponds to an introduced visual mechanism of doubling and recognizing media systems. However, the direct micro mechanics of the game only convey that communicating with the monitored subjects is not allowed.

The essential macro mechanics of the critique of surveillance, which turns us into laboratory animals, is not communicated directly but through the visual style of characters with animal heads. Addressing the subject of surveillance, the role of laboratory animals, and the prejudices built into current technical systems, such as gender, race, and, for example, also those against animals, this work following the mechanics of artistic affective narration radicalizes the play-

---

5   Compare also the position of Michel Foucaul expressed in his book Surveiller et punir, La naissance de la prison, 1975.

6   A digital voyeurism simulator where you watch strangers through surveillance cameras. Invade their privacy and witness their most intimate moments (donotfeedthemonkeys.com).

ing subject. The discrimination against lab monkeys and apes, that are often sac-
rificed in the neurosciences are also a topic of the Ludic Art installation de-
scribed in the following paragraph.

I Want to See Monkeys (2017) is a game art work by *Area7 Lab* (a collective
of the neuroscientist Stefan Glasauer and the artist Margarete Jahrmann — the
roles are frequently exchanged here). The exhibition "The Future of AI" at the
Ars Electronica Festival provided the framework for this work[7]. In an installa-
tion setting with a medical examination couch, neuroscientific devices and moni-
tors, visitors were classified with the help of a specially designed Artifical Intel-
ligence (AI) program – at the end of a "Deep Dream Process", the AI made all
humans appear as monkeys in a cognitive science experiment. The installation *I
Want to See Monkey*s was touching because it triggered a discourse about the
game with the machine system. In the setting described above, one was seduced
by a supposedly entertaining game to be filmed and categorized when dealing
with a machine learning system.

Figure 8: Area7 Lab (2020): I Want to See Happy Monkeys.

Source: photo by Jahrmann/Glasauer

---

7   Parts of the following paragraph appear in the reader of the Danube Festival 2020, see
     Jahrmann, M. (2020): "PLAN A for I/motions. The art of playing with emotions and
     new forms of cognition." In: Thomas Edlinger (ed.), Machines Like Us. Reader Dan-
     ube Festival, Vienna: Falterverlag, pp. 95-103.

2020 saw the creation of a "passive gaming" work, *I Want to See Happy Monkeys*, which was considerably expanded in terms of the narrative. It was supplemented by a narrative mechanics in the form of a game goal. The visitors have the goal of being classified as happy and are rewarded with a percentage classification score in the graphical display. Their face is then entered into the database and serves as the basis for the distorted memory of the system, which classifies the visitor according to the prejudices trained into that system.

This will create a new narrative concerning the political dimension of machine learning and how these systems deal with our emotions. The game installation piece *I Want to See Happy Monkeys* is a playful arrangement: participants lie on an examination couch wrapped in a fabric pattern with Alexa Fluor Green tinted images Margarete Jahrmann from an experiment on eye movements of the tadpoles of African clawed frogs. The green colour on the hand printed fabric by Jahrmann is the same which is used to stain Margarete Jahrmann's isolated neurons in examined tissue — and it is reminiscent of the green colour of a radar monitor. The test subjects in the game art piece also look at three monitors with frequently green displays, equipped with tracking cameras which measure them and their emotional state like a radar of emotional states, evaluating their faces supposed attributed emotions.

The narrative in this installation game revolves around the uncanny dimension of emotion as a classification factor in an artificial neural network. How emotionally cognitive can an artificial system actually be, which structurally draws conclusions in a multi-level process, builds on each one and exponentiates them? In the AI system used, images are captured, analyzed and assigned to a certain predefined category, which they seem to resemble most. The way in which correspondences are found, however, differs substantially from the human way of recognition – even though the functioning of the program levels is modeled on a biological neural network. The problem with this type of artificial intelligence is more the question of making sense in connection with facial recognition and emotions than that of correct allocation and classification (rules of narrative social mechanic).

BIAS MECHANICS

The well-known freely available artificial neural network AlexNet[8], which is used in many artificial intelligence applications, is classified according to certain paradigms, following a kind of prejudice that was trained into this network. Categories or events that were not learned during training cannot be recognized by the network – likewise, incorrect assignments are not corrected but adopted. This shows how sensitive and delicate the use of such systems is, if we assign users in everyday life to these artificial neuronal networks in an anthropomorphizing way. Such meaning is inherent in the word intelligence in our humanoid understanding. Due to this misallocation on our part, we grant artificial intelligence systems decision-making power over democratic processes, hand over competence assessments in recruitment procedures and assessment processes of large companies to artificial assistance systems and allow so-called AIs to validate creditworthiness in the credit checks of banking institutions. All these application areas illustrate the enormous effectiveness of the narrative mechanics surrounding these AI systems. They affect decisions that are essential for the lives of individuals and for many in society as a whole. The question of whether these machines really like us, as the ambiguous title of the very amusing book on this subject by Ian McEwan *Machines Like Me* (2019) playfully implies, is still unanswered. At least we, the other side, face the artificial entities, if not with emotion, at least with affects.

Affective computing and affective AI is an area in which we – and not the machines – transfer ascriptions of sympathy and empathy from our behavior into the machine systems in order to be better able to deal with them. The artistic play in and with the AI here couples technology-critical narratives with political questions that are of importance to society as a whole — this is applied Ludic method!

---

8 AlexNet is an artificial neural network for image classification. It has been trained with over 1.2 million pre-classified images from 1000 image categories, including various objects and animals, but not human faces (which consequently cannot be recognized). Cf. Krizhevsky, Alex/Sutskever, Ilya/Hinton, Geoffrey (2012): "ImageNet Classification with Deep Convolutional Neural Networks". In: NIPS'12: Proceedings of the 25th International Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems, December 2012, pp. 1097-1105.

LUDIC AGITPROP MECHANICS

Structural coupling is a method of second-order cybernetics[9], also known as an artistic strategy of game art, which is politically effective. It is a game mechanic of Ludic-artistic research, encountered in the Dadaist original meter, the "Urmeter"[10], and in the socio-politically inclined *Game of War*[11] by Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord (1967).

Figure 9: Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord (1977): Le Jeu de la Guerre (board game).

Source: screenshot from http://www.classwargames.net (Jahrmann)

Following Guy Debord, war games, or rather strategic Clausewitz simulators, are a continuation of politics by other means. Debord and his partner Alice Becker-Ho dedicated themselves to the development of the board game over two dec-

---

9   Coupling and autopoiesis are described by the neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela as generative creative concepts of systems theory. Cf. Maturana, Humberto R./Varela, Francisco J. (1986): The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Cognition, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

10 Rational sciences are addressed through an artistic experiment. "Trois Stoppages Étalon", 1913-14. In: Anne d'Harnoncourt/Kynaston McShine (eds.) (1973), Marcel Duchamp, exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

11 Becker-Ho, Alice/Debord, Guy (1987): Le Jeu de la Guerre ("A Game of War"), republished 2006 by Éditions Gallimard, Paris.

ades. Both saw in this game a possibility to become effective on a social level. The idea was that the game could provide real orientation in life and supply the narrative of a social resistance against capitalist conditions. Debord formulated the narrative mechanics of coupling in political art as a theoretical work of art. He grotesquely combined incompatible content and visuals as well as media in his 1973 film *La Société du Spectacle*, which was based on the book of the same name: when he provided news images with a new narration, he successively edited Fidel Castro with Kungfu movies and subtitled these images with well-known sociological text.

Based on Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle, contemporary art and game designers also understand Debord's approach in the *Game of War* as a guide to acting in a mode of "war" on the cultural terrain of a still existing class struggle.

The British initiative Class War Games[12] solves political and social conflicts using tabletop applications and simulations of social intelligence in a new form of clever gamification of political decision-making, as described by Richard Barbrook (2014). A Labour activist, Barbrook founded the Class War Games initiative. The English working class theoretician, lecturer at Westminster University and game designer, describes how ludic subversion can overcome what he calls "spectacular capitalism". He deliberately uses the term "ludic", which brings to mind activities around the initiative Ludic Society (2006-2016).

Compared to the game mechanics that have become narratives in many games, Class War Games finds ways to socially overcome the competition of other narrative mechanics and their spectacles. In the re-released version of *Game of War*[13] (2007) by Class War Games, a highly elegant game reminiscent of chess is presented in prominent public exhibition spaces. In this version of the game, what Alice Becker Ho and Guy Debord had developed is now transferred to the public area of the exhibition space – and thus becomes more effective than the private version of the war game of Ho and Debord. The narrative mechanics of making things public in art has a political effect.

---

12 Barbrook, Richard (2014). Class Wargames: Ludic Subversion Against Spectacular Capitalism (paperback ed.), London: Minor Compositions.

13 This version of *Game of War* deals with strategic theory (cf. http://www.classwar games.net/?p=1636).

Figure 10: Corbyn Run (2019).


Source: screenshot (Jahrmann)

As a small excursion, a reference may be allowed here to the amusing platform election campaign game *Corbyn Run*[14] (2019), which Barbrook helped to develop. Unfortunately, the game could not influence the outcome of the election away from Conservative populism. Nevertheless it contains some nice agitprop narratives. Designed as a casual game, it conveys political messages and slogans in short sequences and calls for support for a movement. This is more likely to be accepted in an amused rather than annoyed way after experiencing this feeling of social movement in the incessant running of the characters in jump 'n' run mode. Parents pushing baby carriages and grannies carrying empty shopping bags run for coins, their capitalist opponents throw moneybags and champagne bottles out of helicopters at them. The highlight of the game is a "manifesto pledge" that promotes the effectiveness of the old form of the manifesto as a political text.

With the game only moderately effective politically, Barbrook was, however, successful in the "Ludic cadre training" of leftist politicians in parliament. In April 2019 and at the party conference of the UK Labour Party in September 2019, active female politicians played a board game he had developed based on

---

14 *Corbyn Run* (2019), app on Google Play. The game contains a manifesto pledge. PR text excerpt: "Real change is coming. Join Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn to build a movement and chase out the Tories! People in Britain need hope and prosperity." (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.digitalliberties.corbynrun&hl=en_US), accessed July 20, 2020.

The Landlord's Game (1904) on urban development[15]. The model was patented by Elizabeth Magie, as a board game whose content constituted a criticism of the landlord system and in general of the evil of increasing money at the expense of others. Although Lizzy Magie was with this game design literally the inventor of *Monopoly*, albeit with a different narrative mechanics, she was not appreciated for it. Behind it all is a patent dispute, and above all, it is also clear that a narrative game mechanic can be turned into reality – and is of the greatest political importance.

Figure 11: Patent drawing for Lizzie Magie's board game, January 5, 1904.
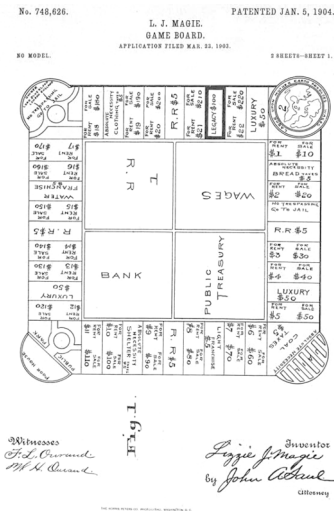
Source: Lizzie Magie

Unfortunately, there was no reference to the creator of the original *Landlord's Game* either. Nevertheless, the narrative game mechanics in this version of the game were again oriented toward a critique of capitalism. The multiplayer strategy game *Taste of Power: The Great Municipal Socialism Game*[16] (2019), de-

---

15 Stephens, Ric (2016): "Urban Planning Games and Simulations: From Board Games to Artificial Environments." In: Simulation and Gaming in Network Society, p. 253.

16 The designers of the game are also politically conscious as a company. Political narration plays an essential role in their corporate communication under the name Digital Liberties. You work in a socially committed cooperative which tries to create pockets of local activism as a company. "In this mass-participatory role-playing game, a re-

veloped especially for the party conference, was intended to give a feeling of how to act as a political radical within a government. The game was supposed to be an aid to strategic action in municipal councils and in parliament, i.e. to increase motivation in real political life. In the role play, oppositional political positions are taken, and the consequences of the development of individual city districts are made visible in a simulation. The narrative mechanics implemented here, which are applied in such political persuasion games, are no longer simple linear tree branches but real political "storytelling machines" that subsequently create reality.

In the fall of 2019 at the Kunsthalle Wien at Karlsplatz, I was able to participate in a "Prediction Game Workshop" in the form of a game situation concerning strategies and practices of socio-political intervention, led by Richard Barbrook – and after having been allowed to act as a radical anarchist within the municipal council, I am personally convinced of the effectiveness of performing political action socially in games like this!

DEFICTIONALIZED POLITICAL MECHANICS

"Donald Trump must fear the Lincoln Project"[17] reads the headline of the news magazine Der Spiegel on August 15, 2020. Republican election strategists launched an initiative to prevent the re-election of a candidate from their own camp, namely that of Donald Trump. What is special about this is not only this fact, but also that a media narrative is being used which incorporates the very mechanics Trump himself used: emotion, in addition to defamation, false facts, and an aggressive tone.

Nevertheless, this peculiar new form of political life is above all about affective moments, the triggering of emotions through narratives in social media. Using a contemporary interpretation of the Kuleshov effect[18], the initiative's online video clips show images of corpses and people wearing masks, and talk about

---

cently elected radical local council must battle with the legacy of their neoliberal predecessors and halt a disastrous redevelopment scheme." (https://www.digital-liberties.coop/digital-liberties-privacy-notice), accessed July 20, 2020.

17 Neukirch, Ralf: "Republikaner gegen Donald Trump. Angriff aus den eigenen Reihen." In: Der Spiegel online, August 15, 2020.

18 The Kuleshov effect says that people often misinterpret images because the brain creates connections where there are none. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuleshov_effect), accessed July 12, 2020.

how America has become poorer and weaker. Reactions by Trump follow his usual mechanics of political communication, not through official channels but on Twitter, calling the originators "losers" according to a capitalist rhetoric of success. And as a result, he spends a lot of time in public appearances denying or justifying what was claimed in the Lincoln Project. It is precisely the fictional approach that is obviously most effective in a system of fictional facts in politics, as opposed to realistic arguments.

Particularly in American politics in recent years, it has become clear how much fictional narrative mechanics are reinforced by rewards and punishments in their own ranks – just as in games. But now there is a twist in the direction that I would like to call "defictionalized political mechanics". Similar to Jorge Luis Borges' (1940) story "TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS", the narratives of such a mechanic displace "realities". Essential to Borges' fictional dialogue with his writer colleague Casares is that, over the course of the narrative, more and more artifacts from a fictional world appear in reality – until the world itself turns into the fictional land Borges intended to discover. Francesco Franchi (2011) has created a beautiful graphic design for this.

Figure 12: Francesco Franchi (2011): "Bi-dimensional versions of classic literature."
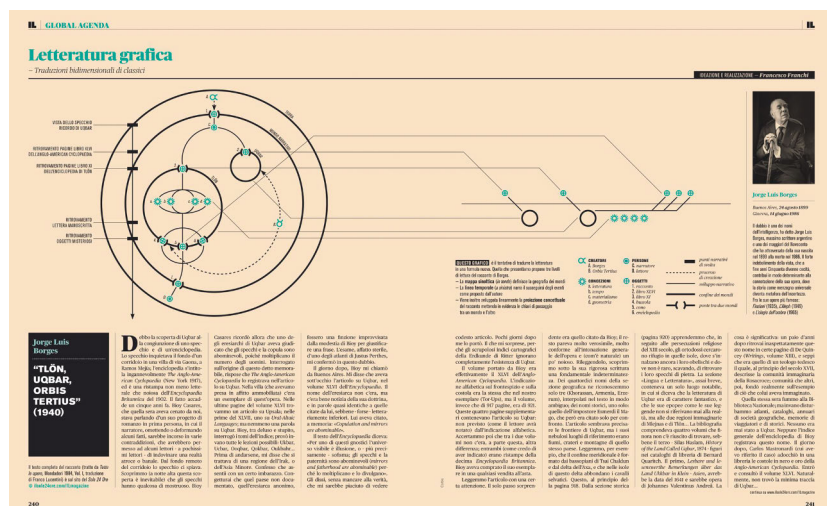
Source: Malofiej18 Annual Publication, Index Books, Spain, p. 50

In the appendix to his story, Borges also introduces a literary fictional authentication strategy as a narrative means. This double strategy, the false format of a

scientific report and false references, is readily accepted in current political argumentation, which generates a strong immersive force regarding media communication – in the capitalist spectacle in the Barbrook sense. In the Fox News war room of the impeachment procedure 2019 it became clear that narrative mechanics had already become the sole rewarding extension of world perception and the basis for journalistic action. The corresponding political message defictionalizes the narrative mechanics as an analogous reward in the suspension of the intended impeachment proceedings. As the motivational mechanism of society, narrative is elevated above all the facts, as in "TLÖN".

So in the end we come back to the pandemic situation. This has definitely gotten out of hand in the USA. In biopolitics, fictionalization is being countered with Permadeath. The price for this is irresponsibly high.

CONCLUSION: NANO MECHANICS

The conclusion to be drawn from this narrative fictional defictionalization, which can increasingly be found in politics and journalism, is that a new phenomenon is emerging, namely that individual statements can suddenly acquire wider significance ("Never Trumpers"). A new "nano mechanics" in which individual words, individual events acquire mega-meaning and create realities has become apparent within a very short time in 2020. The pandemic has shown us how political narratives can turn, how absurd rules of the game may take effect in physical space and how the limits of our own physicality can be exceeded.

Subsequently, the importance of the affect and the emotion become clear – especially in dealing with the technological systems of everyday surveillance, which has been intensified by the pandemic. The semiosis between expectation and construct becomes particularly pronounced when we look at artistic game mechanisms in public space.

The question of how art inherently applies narrative game mechanics is wonderfully illustrated by the activist games of computational face recognition and emotion classification. Further to this, we can clearly see from the evidence in the activist political games cited here how we can create a new classification out of the mechanics that are presented as political narrative in the real politics of defictionalization. It can only be hoped that it does not stop there and that the pandemic of "faketionalization" will be overcome soon. The turn of reality in the outcome of the presidential election 2020 gives hope!

REFERENCES

Literature

Barbrook, Richard (2014): Class Wargames: Ludic Subversion Against Spectacular Capitalism, Westminster: Minor Compositions.

Borges, Jorge Luis (1940): TLÖN UQBAR ORBIS TERTIUS, Argentinia.

Caillois, Roger (1958): Les Jeux et les Hommes: Le Masque et le Vertige, Paris: Gallimard.

Coeckelbergh, Mark (2020): AI Ethics, Boston: MIT Press Essential Knowledge series.

Debord, Guy (1967): La Société du spectacle, Paris: Buchet/Chastel.

Franchi, Francesco (2011): "Bi-dimensional versions of classic literature." In: Malofiej18 Annual Publication, Index Books, Spain, p. 50.

McEwan, Ian (2019): Machines like me, London: Penguin Random House Children's UK.

Games

Do Not Feed the Monkeys, Fictiorama Studios, Alawar Premium. 2018.

Game of War, Class War Games, 2007.

I want to see Monkeys, Area7 Lab, Margarete Jahrmann/Stefan Glasauer, 2017.

Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance, Pinar Yolda, 2016.

Le Jeu de la Guerre (Board game), Alice Becker-Ho/Guy Debord, 1977.

The Landlord's Game, Lizzy Magie, 1904.