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Beyond Play and Narration

Video Games as Simulations of Self-Action

During the last two decades the most significant and drastic changes in media aesthetics have been closely related to the emergence of the video game as a representational art form. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, video games have developed a new technology of representation allowing for graphic simulations of self-action. This new technology has challenged the established forms of experimental, playful, and narrative rehearsal by their hybridization or, as Lev Manovich has it, by their "deep remixability."

This historical upheaval can only be compared to the emergence of the cinema around 1900, when the screenic depiction of a viewpoint on natural movements seemed to duplicate life itself. Similarly, video games today seem to offer a "second life." Video games both include and outperform the cinematic depiction of natural movement.

However, the critical discourse has not come to terms with this new technology yet. Because of its similarities with cinematic codes of depiction, critics and scholars have treated it as a kind of cinematic narration plus interactivity.[1] Around 2000, the resistance against this reductionism led to the emergence of Game Studies as a new scholarly field (Aarseth). Inasmuch as the perspective of narrativity pointed negatively to the aesthetic realm it could not illuminate—namely the playful challenges that video games pose to their recipients—Game Studies scholars were inclined to stress the aspect of the gameness of video games. In some cases they stressed the aspect of gameness so starkly that the inappropriate narratological reduction was counteracted by an equally inappropriate essentialism.[2] Today, it is apparent that the so-called ludological perspective on video games—the emphasis on the gameness—cannot explain the aesthetic differences between ordinary games and video games because the concentration on gameness only highlights the gameness of any given artifact, be it a ritual, or a bodily competition, a code of practice attached to a set of materials, or a digital program that links the input and output devices of a computer-like machine. The gameness of video games is obviously not the feature that renders them unprecedented. Like the reduction to cinematic values, the essentialist contemplation of video games as games falls short of coming to terms with the aesthetical innovations video games provide.

Below, I want to introduce a perspective on video games that may enable us to consider the aesthetics of video games more properly. In my view, the

most interesting aesthetical phenomena of video games emerge in the interplay between the pictorial elements *on the screen* (situationally abstract) and the varying senso-motorical schemata the player has to enact *beyond the screen* (situationally concrete, without which the video game cannot be executed and perceived). These phenomena dwelling on the threshold of abstraction and concretion are hard to grasp. And even if we come to terms with these phenomena, we run the risk of perceiving just another essentialist reduction. So my first task in this article will be to establish a conceptual frame for the analysis of the aesthetic mode of video games, the general video game experience. Secondly, I want to stress the perspectivist thinking that grounds my proposition. When I consider video games as *simulations of self-action*, which means to stress the aspect of *remote control*, this does not rule out any other perspective from which video games can fruitfully be perceived. And it does not mean that every video game is suited to be a good example for simulation of self-action, or that every video game is adequately analyzed under the perspective of remote control.[3] It only assumes that the perspective of simulated self-action points to a distinctive feature of the vast majority of video games (the set of all avatar-based games, in which remote-controlled role-playing can be experienced) and that it may shed a light even on cases in which no navigable space, no avatar, and no figurative action is displayed, as in puzzle games like *Tetris* (SU 1984). In the last section of my article, using the example of *GTA San Andreas* (USA 2004), I want to demonstrate briefly and somewhat tentatively how the perspective of simulated self-action might contribute to an understanding of the aesthetics of a particular video game.

1   Video Games as Artifacts and/or Experiences

On a first glimpse, it seems quite obvious how to answer questions concerning the aesthetics of video games. Video games are technically well-defined artifacts. They are programs that check and control the input and output devices of a computer (devices such as keyboard, mouse, gamepad, screens, and speakers). Video games connect these devices in such a way that on the screen a challenge is displayed, which can be met by time-, event- and/or configuration-critical inputs (Pias). Pictorial elements have to be manipulated in a time-, event- and/or configuration-critical way to master a game, i.e., to win a competition, to solve a riddle or to adopt a skill. Thus it should be fairly easy to describe the aesthetics of video games; they observe the functionality of the algorithms that put the devices into relation with each other constituting a virtual playing field and the respective codes of practice.

Yet, notions of hardware, software, and codes of practice are only useful to describe the technical scope of video games. They do not contribute to an understanding of the gaming experience. And the gaming experience is crucial when we want to come to terms with the aesthetics of video games, because unlike other technical artifacts that fulfill purposes beyond their application, video games have no other rationale than just the experience of their application, the aesthetics of the gameplay. *Video games are technical artifacts that attain their aims in the experience of their use.* In other words: Video games are aesthetically motivated and have to be understood in this perspective. They are produced only for the sake of the experience of their execution, and if we want to understand the aesthetics of video games, we should concentrate not on the technical *scope* but on the technical *purpose* of video games, and that is the gaming experience. Devices, programs, and rules are only necessary but not sufficient conditions for the actuality of the gaming experience. A video game has to be played in order to produce that experience. And in the course of playing not the devices are in the focus of attention but the consistency of the aesthetical agency, the pictorial elements, diagrams, moving images, sounds, written and/or spoken texts, and last but not least the bodily felt performance of input activities like button mashing, the fine control of analog sticks, or the physical gesturing with motion-sensing controllers. The rationale of video games—the gaming experience—cannot be reduced to the logic and structure of devices, programs, and rules.

Yet, the gaming experience is not easy to observe because it is not a physical fact that can be gauged with measuring instruments. The gaming experience is a *gestalt* in the medium of situational self-awareness, and that means that it is subject to an infinite variety of singular situational circumstances, which cannot be reduced to a common denominator. The gaming experience is elusive, ambiguous and never the same. It changes drastically the more the player gets used to the gaming mechanics and adopts the requisite skills to master the game. Most video games provide different difficulty levels. These different difficulty levels and the use or non-use of cheats make up relatively different gaming experiences. Moreover, the gaming experience varies along with the different types of expertise. Casual gamers have different expectations and skills than heavy gamers. Thus, to talk of a general gaming experience in respect to a particular video game is nothing but a hypothetical construct. However, it is an inevitable one, because if we would not have any general expectations as to what the purpose of the given technical artifact is—namely, a certain kind of gaming experience—we would not have any situational framing and motive to use it. The general gaming experience (however vague and open to specification) is the *validity claim* of the artifact known as video game. It is a necessary idealization, one that should be treated as such.

The general gaming experience is a regulatory idea that shapes the design of video games as well as the expectations of gamers. It emerges historically on the basis of singular game experiences, technological innovations, empirical observations of consumer adoption behavior, and the public discourses in which game experiences are communicated (the discourse of advertising, the discourse of video game critique, the media violence debate, the discourse of Game Studies and others).

Thus it would stand to reason not to consider the aesthetics of video games but the logic and structure of their discoursive framing. And I do believe that this indeed is a fruitful option clarifying the discursive repertoires from which certain descriptors of video game experiences are drawn. It would show how the public discourses of the digital, the cinematic, and the strategic, the public discourses of addiction, violence, leisure time, education, adolescence, and so forth, shape our notion of the general gaming experience.

On the other hand, a discourse analysis does not exhaust the conditions of the possibilities of the general gaming experience because it points only to the momentum of its contingency and social constructedness. Beyond this contingency and constructedness, it has to have some sort of fitting with the individually perceived gameplay. The aesthetic experiences are not just epiphenomena of the public discourses. On the contrary, they are constraints to the discoursive drift. If our perceptions of our gameplay were only epiphenomena of the video game discourse, if we would only perceive the very properties of gameplay as they are addressed by the public notions of the gaming experience, then we could never experience anything that exceeds our expectations. Video games only could either fall short of our expectations or just barely meet them. And this is obviously not the case. Some video games set new standards of what a video game experience is all about and exceed all of our learned expectations. We may even perceive ourselves as not yet ready to appreciate the general gaming experience that a particular video game offers to us. Moreover, most gamers are convinced that public notions of general gaming experiences are inappropriate; hence, the motive to deconstruct these notions as contingent and socially constructed. So the general gaming experience in terms of the validity claim of a particular video game, hypothetical as it is, has to be more than just a discursive effect.

As a regulatory idea, the general gaming experience emerges on a historically changing background of particular notions that are open to debate and deconstruction, yet at the same time it transcends the realm of mere discursivity. At the risk of arguing slightly paradoxically, the general gaming experience could be described as a noumenal gameplay that cannot be actualized entirely in a singular gaming session.

The general gaming experience is the gaming experience as it is in itself independent from the individual gameplay. Like the Kantian *Ding an sich* ('the thing in itself'), the general gaming experience conceptualizes a negativity that we encounter by the impossibility to realize the general gaming experience as a whole. Although we perceive a kind of completeness in each gaming session, we still know at the same time that this is only a particular aspect of the general gaming experience, an aspect that is conditioned by our particular skills, needs and gaming knowledge in the very moment of playing.

If this is true, the aesthetics of the general gaming experience can only be a general assumption, maybe a tentative guess, but not a positive definite statement because we can only encounter aspects of this general experience but not the experience as a whole. An inquiry into the aesthetics of video games would then be an experiment with different perspectives rather than a methodologically secured routine. It would not result in the assertion of a structured whole and a logically closed functionality but in the disclosure of formerly undisclosed experiential perspectives.

2 Perspectives by Incongruity

A paradigm of this kind of perspectivist inquiry into the aesthetics of video games may be derived from the perspectivism of the American literary theorist and philosopher Kenneth Burke, who explicates the logic of perspectivism by the logic of metaphor:

> Metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms* of something else. It brings out the thisness of a that or the thatness of a this. If we employ the word "character" as a general term for whatever can be thought of as distinct (any thing, pattern, situation, structure, nature, person, object, act, rôle, process, event, etc.) then we could say that metaphor tells us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character. And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A.
> It is customary to think that objective reality is dissolved by such relativity of terms as we get through the shifting of perspectives (the perception of one character in terms of many diverse characters). But on the contrary, it is by the approach through a variety of perspectives that we establish a character's reality. If we are in doubt as to what an object is, for instance, we deliberately try to consider it in as many different terms as its nature permits: lifting, smelling, tasting, tapping, holding in different lights, subjecting to different pressures, dividing, matching, contrasting, etc. . . . .

> By deliberate coaching and criticism of the perspective process, characters can be considered tentatively, in terms of other characters, for experimental or heuristic purposes. Examples may be offered at random: for instance, human motivation may, with varying degrees of relevance and reward, be considered in terms of conditioned reflexes, or chemicals, or the class struggles, or the love of god, or neurosis, or pilgrimage, or power, or movements of the planets, or geography, or sun spots, etc. [I deal] with such perspectives as an "incongruity," because the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the "carrying-over" of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical. (Burke 503f.)

Along these lines of thought, an inquiry into the aesthetics of video games would begin with the question of choosing which incongruent perspective to apply in the process of perceiving the general gaming experience in terms of something else. Two of the most prominent incongruent perspectives in the Game Studies discourse would certainly be the perspectives of gameness and narrativity. Considered in the light of Burkean philosophy, the debate on whether video games are essentially games or narrations would instantly appear as pointless. We would have to acknowledge that video games are neither conventional games nor well-established narratives but that they reveal their gameness and their narrativity respectively when perceived under these perspectives, and it would be clear that this is not a mistake, that there is no such thing as the video game perceived in itself, that the general video game experience is just a regulatory idea that constitutes the intersection of incongruent perspectives by which the complexity of their aspects can be perceived.

The challenge of Game Studies then would be to put an existing perspective into perspective, not to argue against any particular perspective but to enrich the notion of the general gaming experience by the application of a series of incongruent perspectives.

3   Immersion and Remote Control

So far, to a large extent the public discourse on video games has revolved around the notion of *immersion*. For the time being, it seems to be the single most significant perspective on video games. And, indeed, if we compare video games with other representative arts and ask for their single most significant feature, the unique feature that marks the essential innovation of video games, most people point out the immersive character of video games. And so it is justifiably appropriate that in the Games Studies discourse the topic of immer-

sion may well be the most often described and theorized perspective on video games.

The almost classical reference, of course, is Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck*:

> The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content. We refer to this experience as immersion. *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. … [I]n a participatory medium, immersion implies learning to swim, to do the things that the new environment makes possible . . . the enjoyment of immersion as a participatory activity. (98f.)

Now this perspective, regardless of the conceptual critique it has attracted, is remarkably illuminative. No one would deny that video games enable experiences in which our remote-controlled acting with pictorial elements captures our attention in such an intense way that our whole notion of being-in-the-world is absorbed by the perceivable features of the virtual playing field. The absorption of our attention is so complete that we forget about the abstractness of the pictorial elements we are manipulating. The "here and now" of our situation facing the screen with our hands on the input devices and the situational abstract "there and then" of the pictorial elements we are manipulating becomes an integral fictitious "here and now," just like in sports activities or board games. And this is a fruitful perspective in so far as it highlights the difference of being immersed and standing, so to speak, outside the pool. The metaphor of immersion points to a main structure of the video game experience; namely, the dunking into it on the one hand, and the bobbing up out of it on the other. We then can compare the conditions of immersion (and emersion) in different media; we can compare the seductive surfaces that invite us to dive into the medium and we can compare the moments of aversion to jump right in. We would notice that the threshold of immersion corresponds with its intensity, and that video games have to deal with a much more complex *rite de passage* than most other media. We would have to acknowledge the importance of the seamless series of cinematic headings, tutorials, and actual gameplay to overcome the aversion of immersion. So the perspective of immersion is quite illuminating in terms of the structure and logic of the general gaming experience.

On the other hand, along the line of a perspectivist approach—the notion of the general gaming experience that is provided by the perspective of immersion—may be enriched by an incisive incongruent perspective on the same subject.

And if we consider the logical properties of immersion, we can deduce the logical properties of an incongruent perspective fairly easy. The perspective of immersion highlights the *loss* of frame-awareness. A counter-perspective then would point to an *increase* of frame-awareness, an increase of artificiality, abstractness and reflexivity. If video games can provide the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, could they as well, on the other hand, provide the sensation of being deprived of any reality, the sensation of being purely artificial? The sensation of remoteness to ourselves?

To my mind, the perspective of immersion points *ex negativo* to the incongruent perspective of *remote control*. In simulated action games, we experience ourselves not only immersed in the playing field but by the same token we are deprived of ourselves. We are deprived of our alter ego, the avatar. And this deprivation operates by the logic of remote control. If we concentrate on the aspect of remote control, we discover primarily the following:

In contrast to conventional games, video games separate the player from the playing field, and they translate bodily felt concrete actions (the button mashing, the fine control of analog sticks, the gesturing) into situational abstract cinematic depictions of totally different actions. This adds up to an alienated and situational abstract presentation of self-action experience. Our remote-controlled roleplaying lets us sense action; we experience self-action, but in an odd, somewhat stylized way. Along with Lambert Wiesing (who has emphasized the experiential remoteness of media content), one could argue that, just like pictorial media establish a situational abstract view and allow the direct communication of *pure visibility*, computer games establish an "artificial sameness" of general self-action experiences and allow the direct communication of *pure self-action*. If we play a first-person shooter, for example, we get immersed in the virtual reality of pictorial objects that behave in a certain way, but we do not get immersed in the action of shooting. On the contrary, we encounter the action of shooting in an alienated, stylized way allowing for the artificial presence and communication of a certain shooting experience.

By comprehending the incongruity of immersion and remote control, we gain a richer perspective on the general gaming experience, in so far as we can describe both the fascination of diving into a different reality and the artificiality of the gamic depiction of self-action experiences.

4   *GTA*: The Simulation of Mental Mapping

Grand Theft Auto (*GTA*) is one of the most popular video game series in the history of video games. It has attracted much critical and scholarly attention, mainly for reasons that have nothing to do with the simulation of self-action but with the cinematic depiction of its virtual world; the cities of Los Santos, San Fierro and Las Venturas in the State of San Andreas, a funny, stereotypical portrayal of the American West and its cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas. In the astonishing world of San Andreas, which is neatly caricatured from life, our avatar has such a broad range of options for action that he seems to be fairly "free," restricted only by the far limits of the navigable space. In San Andreas, we are invited—if not forced to—abandon all of our moral considerations and to steal, shoot, and mug as best as we can to accomplish the game's missions and to reveal the narrative plot. This somewhat unsettling content has contributed a lot to the massive hype around the game series and its installment *San Andreas* in particular. *GTA San Andreas* indeed both mirrors and serves very clearly the escapist and cynical motives that have been inculcated on most of us by the predominant neoliberal ideology of the last decades. But this does not explain sufficiently the classical status that the game series has gained over the years. Violence, cynicism, and satire are ingredients in many video games, not to speak of other popular media genres like movies, comics, and pop music.

Of course, most fans of the game would explain their fandom with the figurative content of the game. Indeed, even game critics and scholars argue that the merits of *GTA San Andreas* lie in the special mix of a freely explorable environment, a striking resemblance of the virtual metropolitan cities to their real-world archetypes, and the overwhelming multiplicity of allusions to pop cultural stereotypes. And certainly fans, critics and scholars have a point there.

However, as vivid and attractive the content of *GTA San Andreas* might be, it does not rule out the all-dominant relevance of the media forms by which the content is exposed. And if we concentrate on the perspective, opened by the incongruity of immersion and remote control, we can detect an overall presence of a very peculiar artificial self-action that serves as a framework for the multiplicity of aspects.

Beyond all satire, freedom, and overreaching realism, *GTA San Andreas* revolves around the artificial presence of *homecoming*. In the introductory cutscenes of the game, the topic of homecoming is addressed repeatedly. The first words which our avatar Carl "CJ" Johnson says are, "After five years on the East Coast, it was time to come home." The first words of his antagonist, the sinister Officer Tenpenny, are, "Welcome home, Carl." And at the end of the introductory tutorial, when CJ enters his neighborhood, he says, "Grove

Street. Home. At least it was before I fucked everything up." The last trailer, which advertised the game in early fall 2004, was entitled "Homecoming". And one of the last missions of the game is called "Homecoming" as well. Thematically, from the very beginning of the game the topic of homecoming is set and it prevails throughout the gameplay. In terms of challenge and in terms of CJ's world of excluded African Americans, it would be: "reclaiming the 'hood.'"

On the one hand, we, the players, get immersed in the virtual world as it is pictured on the screen. We have to accomplish the game's missions, mostly by stealing virtual cars, navigating them to the places where a mission takes place, shooting down non-player characters, finding hidden objects, and driving back again. In each mission, we get immersed in our dealings with virtual objects, virtual vehicles, weapons, and characters. But by the same token we experience ourselves as distanced from the events that take place in San Andreas, because we can only intervene by the means of remote control. But then again, the remotely controlled pictorial element is our avatar, the representation of our self in the virtual world. Thus, we encounter a performative paradox: we simultaneously feel ourselves remotely controlling and being remotely controlled. But not like in an oscillation of different states; rather, as an integral, holistic experience. And—as the physics of the virtual objects and events differ considerably from the physics of our behavior beyond the screen—we experience the physics of San Andreas as an ontology, as would a visitor from another possible world. We experience the ontology of San Andreas as a physical "style." The incongruity confronting our concrete situation at the input devices and the situational abstract world of San Andreas highlights not so much the *what* of our actions, but, more importantly, the *how* of their conduct. And in the course of the game, the gaming experience is primarily characterized by the recurrent forms of artificial conduct. The most prominent artificial self-action in *GTA San Andreas* is *driving to a particular place*, because all missions are introduced and connected by this activity. One could say that the missions are framed by a kind of meta-mission; namely, to master the maze of the metropolitan cities and the State of San Andreas.

So we might consider *GTA San Andreas* under the perspective of *artificial geographical pathfinding*, and we then immediately recognize that the structure of the game supports this notion significantly. Of course, in all virtual environments we have to develop cognitive maps to gain orientation, and every complex 3D action-game demands the process of becoming familiar with the topography of the virtual world. But *GTA San Andreas* is certainly unrivaled in how its design supports the building of a cognitive map of the State of San Andreas. In each city of San Andreas, there are unique districts, buildings, streets, coastlines, bridges, and natural covers of free space, as well as a fairly

dense net of ever-identical supply units (restaurants, boutiques, gun shops, garages, gyms), where we can furnish our avatar with all he needs both as a game figure and as a character.[4] And as we let him drive to the places where the missions take place, we remember certain spots where the unique spatial circumstances and some general supply functionalities add up to a specific place of interest. And the more we are into the game, the better we remember the cityscape and its specific places of interest respectively. And this process comes to the foreground inasmuch as it is iterated three times. Firstly, our missions take place in Los Santos, then we move to San Fierro, and the last third of the missions take place in Las Venturas. In each city we encounter the same procedure of getting acquainted with the cityscape. At last we return to Los Santos, to where the game started and, indeed, at last we experience the very homecoming the game had introduced as its main theme right at the beginning.

The academic field of Cognitive Geography has taught us that our living environment is structured by our spatial knowledge, and that we acquire this knowledge along the paths we follow in the conduct of our everyday life. According to the famous work of Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, wherein he presented the results of a study on how we perceive and organize spatial information, there are five distinctive elements that are of interest in this respect: *paths*, *edges*, *districts*, *nodes*, and *landmarks*.

With *GTA San Andreas*, this knowledge becomes an artificial presence of self-action experience. With the artificial presence of self-acted homecoming, the principles of cognitive (and emotional) geography can be articulated and communicated not only verbally but experientially, and we find that the categories mentioned by Lynch only make spatial sense in respect to circular motives and general functionalities enacted in a finite space.[5]

Experiential articulation seems to be one of the pivotal aesthetical innovations that have been introduced by video games, and the *GTA* game series is arguably the most convincing effort to date in designing complex experiences of simulated self-action such as the artificial homecoming we experience in San Andreas.

5 Media Analysis as Profiling

The discoursive enrichment of media perspectives is a process that can be traced back in media history. Whenever incisively new media technologies emerge, we get confronted with new structures and practices to differentiate between our "here and now" and a general, artificially specified "there and then" that is situationally abstract. And these new structures always have to be socially adopted. Lacking the adequate conceptual schemes in the first place,

the public discourse cannot differentiate between the portrayal of a practice and the practice portrayed. Particularly with regard to the portrayal of objectionable behavior, this must lead to hysterical reactions. Like the reading revolution in the late 18th and the film debate in the early 20th century, the video game controversy of the last decades indicates conceptual difficulties in grasping the nature of new media forms. By the coaching and criticism of an open series of perspectives, the aesthetics of the new media form that dwells on the threshold separating the space *on the screen* from the space *beyond the screen* becomes more and more distinct. There seems to be a new and unique type of iconic resonance, a mutual shaping of the empirical performance of the player and the virtual acting that is exposed on computer displays. The general gaming experience thus amounts to an artificial portrayal of the phenomenology of practices, an artificial presence of self-action. In respect to video games, we are but at the beginning of the historical process of socially adopting its aesthetics of mediatization. *Immersion* and *remote control* are only two of the possible perspectives to come to terms with the general video game experience that have to be coached and criticized by co- and counter-perspectives.

As Burke puts it, real facts "possess *degrees of being* in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived" (504). Thus, the general task of Games Studies may well be defined as a broadening and enrichment of the perspectives on video games so that they, too—like the above-mentioned suggestion—can become real facts as reflected and configurable realities.

Notes

1   Even to this day game design is often seen as the "challenge of balancing our competing desires for storytelling and interactivity," as Henry Jenkins puts it.

2   Cf. especially Juul and Eskelinen.

3   My thanks go to Fotis Jannidis and Noah Wardrip-Fruin for their questions on the scope of simulated self-action, which brought me to rethink the intension and extension of this concept and to stress its perspectivist framework.

4   For detailed analyses of the intersection of ludological tokens and narratological characters in video games cf. Klevjer; Sorg.

5   Ian Bogost and Dan Klainbaum have already pointed to the proximity between *GTA*'s gameplay and Kevin Lynch's Cognitive Geography (148). Yet, they do not quite exhaust the perspective of *this* incongruity, insofar

as they only concentrate on how the immersive state of "being in Los Santos" bears a resemblance to being in Los Angeles. They only take the perspective of immersion into account, which seems to justify exemplarily analyzing the first part of *GTA San Andreas* alone. Inasmuch as they do not consider the artificial coherence of *GTA San Andreas* as a general gaming experience (which is highlighted by the counter-perspective of re-mote control), their inquiry suppresses the dramaturgy of *GTA*'s game-play, which is purely ornamental and amplifies the abstract form of self-acted orientation rather than the figurative depiction of Los Angeles. Thus they miss the crucial point, in which our lived experience of simulated self-action in *GTA* exceeds the conceptual knowledge provided by Kevin Lynch's Cognitive Geography.

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